

# 2007 Experience Redefines State-Of-The-Art

## Arkansas Companies Combine For Unforgettable Field Trip

Every year people who attend the annual Railway Tie Association (RTA) Field Trip come away saying, “What a great association activity,” or “Everyone should come to this event!” And this year was no exception. Organized by Thompson Industries, the field trip took attendees all over Arkansas to visit several state-of-the-art facilities representing the finest the tie industry has to offer in manufacturing excellence. The red carpet was rolled out by each host plant and, once again, the following photographic essay seeks to capture the flavor of this special industry gathering. So, starting in Little Rock, join the group for a memorable trek around The Natural State—Arkansas.



### Sunday Evening

Although hosted by the Manufacturing and Safety Committee, the annual RTA Field Trip is open to all association members. The pre-tour events include a variety of committee meetings and a welcoming reception the evening prior for those registered.

## DAY 1

**The first stop along the way is at Koppers Inc.'s North Little Rock plant.**

Here, plant manager Brad Maxey (far right) starts part of the group on a walking tour of the facility.



Maxey explains the stacking operation and the incising and end-planting operation prior to a visit to the switch tie and tie grading stations.



Below, Kevin Yancy explains how the grading process works and the orders for specific sets of longer switch ties are filled.



The lift driver for the treating plant, Lee Scroggins, greets the guests. Everyone here was very interested in making the trip the best possible.

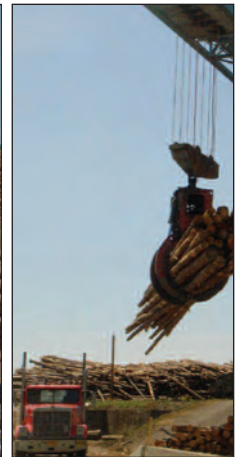


The next stop is the off-loading area for creosote at the treating plant. This facility utilizes about a tank carload of creosote daily, according to Treating Plant Manager Charles Paul.





Koppers operates four 146-foot-long treating cylinders with a capacity of 800 nine-foot ties per charge for more than 1.5 million ties per year. Maxey (center) and Paul (right) explain how automation of each of the plant's treating cylinders maximizes efficiency.



The next tour stop is Bibler Brothers Lumber Company in Russellville. Bibler is a softwood mill under contract to produce lumber for Weyerhaeuser. Matt Hagenlocker (foreground right) talks about the log unloading process.

The log crane operator is in constant contact with every driver, and the crane can off-load up to 60,000 pounds in a single lift. Bibler off-loads up to 180 trucks a day.

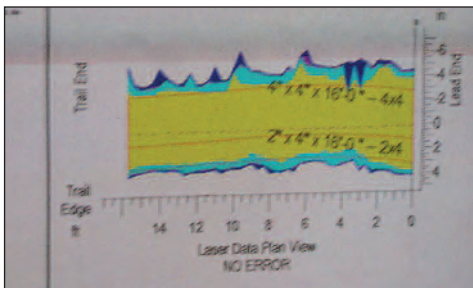


One of the newest additions to the Bibler plant is the computer-controlled saw sharpening system by Vollmer. This state-of-the-art machine can sharpen an average of 12 saws per hour with incredible precision.

Hagenlocker (second from right) also explains that Bibler produces the equivalent of 60 3,000-square-foot houses a day in framing lumber.



Lumber graders have an incentive-based pay scale and are some of the most efficient in the business.



Bibler also boasts a USNR Comact curved saw that maximizes yield by being able to cut with the grain along curved lines.



Then it is off to our next stop where everyone was treated to a fantastic lunch compliments of Thompson Industries.



Trip organizer, Thompson's Jeff Broadfoot (right), gathers the group to explain a little about the history of the operation. Thompson was started in 1981 and is located on 156 contiguous acres.





Broadfoot explains that we will see Thompson's new end-planting operation and that the plant has recently expanded to be able to produce 1.4 million ties annually.



The visit includes a look at one of the newly installed treating cylinders.



Here, Thompson Industries' Tony Helms (right), an RTA past president, explains some of the upgrades to the facility to Rusty Pfeiffer and Phil McDonald of Koppers Inc.



The most recent upgrade is the installation of the new dual siding, which allows for as many as 16 cars at a time to be loaded with outbound ties everyday.



On the way out, the last stop of the day is for a group photo opportunity at the entrance to the Thompson complex.

# DAY 2

The next morning, it's time to visit some hardwood mills.



The first is WLS Sawmill. And, as impressive as this log deck is, W.L. Sorrells tells us it is only about a two-week supply!



A hardwood mill of this size has many parts. There's the pallet operation, which includes a significant amount of outgoing material.



Committee Chairman Harry Bressler and Koppers' Gary Williams share a few moments together during the tour.



At this mill, they cut for ties first, then re-saw the remaining material. Many people might think it can't be done this way, but this is a very efficient operation, and they do it that way every time.



The newest addition, which Sorrells (left) takes pride in explaining, is the new optimizer resaw. After a tie is cut, the slabs pass through the optimizer's scanner, which looks for the best way to resaw the material.





Before we leave the Sorrells mill, we get to see how it all started in this rare old photo. From these humble beginnings to 150,000 ties per month, W.L. Sorrells, a recipient of RTA's Silver Saw Award, has created one of the most unique hardwood tie mills in the country.



Next stop is Hot Spring County Tie & Timber. Here, Billy McKa (center), starts the tour with a little history. He says there has been a mill on this site off and on for more than 125 years.



Pictured here is a small portion of the working log deck before it is prepared for the debarking operation and then makes its way to the sawyer to be sawn into ties.

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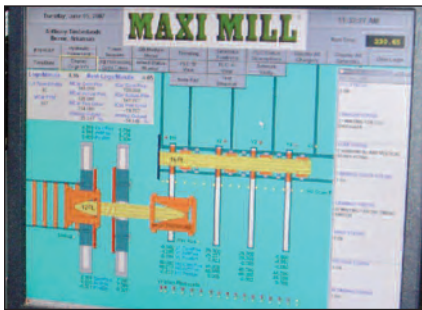
Ree Ellis of Crossties of Virginia helps explain the typical flow of material to RTA's Carol Sue Ray.



Then, it's off to Anthony Timberlands where, once again, a host company goes all out to make everyone feel at home by sponsoring another fine lunch.



After lunch, Mike McQueen, vice president of hardwood operations, gives a virtual tour of the plant by explaining material flow through the operation.



Lighting made some things hard to photograph, but Anthony Timberlands has a state-of-the-art Maxi-Mill, which is reported to be one of only a few in hardwood operation. This mill is a fully automated, high-yield log sawing system incorporating accurate scanning value-driven optimization with precision set works and a patented overhead end-dogging carriage.



And what impressive drying/conditioning operations for hardwood lumber! The airflow through this warehouse pre-dryer alone pulls out up to 10,000 gallons of water per day. They can condition 2.5 million board feet in this location at one time.



Before we leave, Chad Rolstad of BNSF and Cliff Jones of Osiose discuss the day's events

At this point, the tour travels to Sheridan to visit Anthony Hardwood Composites. Here, John Ed Anthony, the owner of all the Anthony Timberlands companies, explains how they produce a competitive engineered wood solution for crane mats at this facility.



By gluing up mixed hardwood lumber in precision patterns, stronger and more lightweight laminated beams for heavy equipment mats can be produced in sizes ranging from four to eight inches thick and from four to 70 feet long.



The technology was developed at the University of Maine. Many will remember the visit to the engineered wood facility there on another RTA field trip in 1997.



Then, steel dowl rods are inserted and bolted in place before loading onto trucks for shipment. ▶



# DAY 3



Talk about the royal treatment! The folks at Arkansas Steel had this banner made to welcome the tour on Day 3.



And the president, Ted Nakanishi, provided a heartfelt welcome.



Vice President of Sales Joe Reardon (center) explains the operation and how the tour will be conducted. Arkansas Steel is the primary North American tie plate manufacturer turning out in excess of 150,000 tons of plates annually in approximately 20 different patterns.



The process starts with melting scrap steel in an electric furnace. When they do this, Arkansas Steel becomes the largest power user in the entire county.



At the continuous cast, molten steel is formed into billets which are then reheated, rolled...



...and punched into tie plates. Arkansas Steel is in the process of replacing their old 500-ton presses with three new 1,100-ton presses that will provide a 15-20 percent production capacity increase annually.

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**RTA** and all the field trip attendees would like to thank this year's organizer, Thompson Industries' Jeff Broadfoot, for the terrific job of detailed coordination that made this trip so memorable and educational. RTA would also like to express its thanks to the trip's sponsors, Thompson Industries and Anthony Timberlands for sponsoring lunch, and to MiTek Industries for sponsoring breaks on the bus daily.

**ATTENDEES** Bruce Allen of TXU; Bob Bradley, Phil McDonald, Rusty Pfeiffer and Gary Williams of Koppers Inc.; Harry Bressler, Doug Gentry and Wayne Kusmierczyk of Burke-Parsons-Bowlby; Jeff Broadfoot, Tony Helms, Mike Poor, Ken Renfro and Harry Scott of Thompson Industries; Kevin Conkright and Junior Flowers of Missouri Tie & Timber, Inc.; Will Cumberland of North America Tie & Timber; Billy Davis of Tight Spike; Ree Ellis of Cross-Ties Inc.; John Falstrom and Jeff Jack of iLevel/Trus Joist; Jim Gauntt and Carol Sue Ray of the Railway Tie Association; Bernie Gierschke of Robbins Engineering; Tommy Harris of Gross & Janes; Clif Jones of Osmose, Inc.; Walt King of Norfolk Southern; Gene Mall of BioPreserve; Brad Martin of Stella-Jones; Billy McKa of Hot Spring County Tie & Timber Company; Bill and Jane Moss of MiTek Industries; Jeff Parrett of Wheeler Lumber; Guy Richard of Sumitomo Canada; Chad Rolstad of BNSF; Jimmy and Brenda Watt of The Crosstie Connection; and David Whitted of Stella-Jones.