

Railroad car unearthed in restoration project

By Natalie Storey
The Enterprise

Evidence that Livingston was literally built by the railroad was pulled from the ground under H Street last week by contractors working on the Fleshman Creek Restoration project.

Cole Ypma of Sime Construction said contractors were surprised to unearth an old railroad tank car that had been used as a culvert. The car, made from 1/2-inch steel, weighed at least 10,000 pounds, Ypma said. Contractors removed it from the ground with a large excavator.

"We were like, 'Where did they find this lying around?'" Ypma said.

The rusted tank car is wide enough for a 5 foot 6 inch tall reporter to walk through without stooping. Over the years, the creek deposited silt, rocks and branches on the bottom, creating a pretty good habitat for fish, said Scott Opitz, a fisheries biologist for Fish, Wildlife and Parks who is helping with the Fleshman Creek project. Someone welded the old opening of the car shut so that water couldn't escape.

Park County began construction on the Fleshman Creek Restoration project in September. The \$3 million project includes replacing the culverts at Main, H, C, E, F and Geyser streets. Funding for the project came largely from grants, including FEMA



Damian Harris, with Sime Construction walks past a section of a culvert made from a railroad tank car that was dug up on H Street as part of the ongoing Fleshman Creek restoration project, Wednesday.

Enterprise photo by Shawn Raecke

flood mitigation money. In addition to flood mitigation, the project aims to improve stream quality and trout habitat.

The story of how the tank car got repurposed as a culvert at H Street is unknown, but county officials say it's likely, because of the car's size and the value of the steel, that it was bought, not borrowed or stolen. The tank car culvert might have been put into the ground sometime after 1955, when the county conducted a

study on mitigating flood problems associated with Fleshman Creek, according to information in the Fleshman Creek project plan provided by Kristen Galbraith of Nittany Grantworks. Galbraith helped the county secure funding for the project. The report produced in 1955 suggested the Fleshman Creek channel had been significantly altered beginning in 1934, when flooding hazards became a problem for area landowners.

Jerry Brekke, Park County historian, said repurposing railroad parts has been common in Livingston since the town's birth in the late 1800s. Local contractors and plumbers often tell stories of finding old parts rigged for new uses, he said.

"It's not only culverts," Brekke said. "This went into individual use. There are a lot of water valves that are actually steam valves that are actually from the Northern Pacific Storeroom and ended

up in houses."

Other counties and cities have also used tank cars as culverts.

A report by the University of Kansas Transportation Center for Road and Bridge Agencies found one county in Kansas that has 16 tank car culverts. A company in Illinois called D & K Tanks sells retired railroad tank cars. The company's website reads, "You might want to consider using a railroad tank car shell. They make excellent culverts for farm and county road crossings over all types of creeks and ravines." A retired tank car of up to 40 feet long costs \$8,000, according to the website. A tank of more than 45 feet costs \$9,500, not including delivery.

The tank car pulled from H Street sits at a lot behind St. Mary's School. Galbraith said the county might be able to sell it, but for now its fate is unknown.

Next week H Street will be closed between Butte and View Vista, according to a Fleshman Creek project update. Gravity sewer and water line crossing work will take place on View Vista Drive behind East Side School. Contractors will also begin road preparation of View Vista drive for paving. In coming weeks, the county will begin stream restoration planning activities near Main Street. Weekly updates about the project are held at the Pickle Barrel on Thursdays at 2 p.m.