

The Missing Wheels

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Russel car is a short flat car 20 feet in length used primarily for shipping 16-foot pine logs. The Alger Smith logging railroad had hundreds of these types of cars for their logging operations. The Duluth & Iron Range Ry likewise had some 350 Russel cars for rent to anyone logging along its lines. Since ore was shipped only in the summer, the sets of wheels (called trucks) were taken off of the ore cars and used on the log cars during the winter. When the shipping season started again the trucks were switched back to the ore car bodies.

One winter a freight train from Duluth to Two Harbors had several empty Russel cars in it that were being returned to the woods. The trip was made without incident and the train was set out in the yard. The car inspector began to routinely examine each car until he came to one of the Russel cars, which stopped him in his tracks. There were wheels on only one end of the car with the other end being held up only by the coupling knuckle! The entire truck and all four wheels were missing. A man was sent out on a motorcar and finally found the missing truck parked neatly in the ditch near Palmers. Somehow it had gotten out from under the car and completely off of the track without derailing any other cars. Nor did it draw the attention of the crew in the caboose. It was a pretty slick escape worthy of Harry Houdini. How it happened remains a mystery to this day.