

# The Mount Tamalpais Kissel, the Gravity Car, and the Greatest One-Day Trip in America

Lynn Kissel  
June 20, 2009



Bugsby  
1924 Kissel 6-55 Speedster at the 2008 Los Angeles Concours d'Elegance

A very special thanks to Mt Tam railroad historian Fred Runner who contributed much of the material in this presentation

## We've made a lot of progress and the “serious freshening” of Bugsby is almost complete



Bugsby and Lynn at the 100-year anniversary celebration of the Kissel Motor Car Company (Hartford, WI – June 17, 2006)

Stripped to the frame in 2005, we had only a running chassis in 2006.



Bugsby and Lynn on the tour with the Marin-Sonoma Concours d'Elegance (Sausalito, CA – May 16, 2009)

The 97-mile route will take us over the Mt. Tamalpais summit this day, testing the mettle of car, driver *and* navigator.

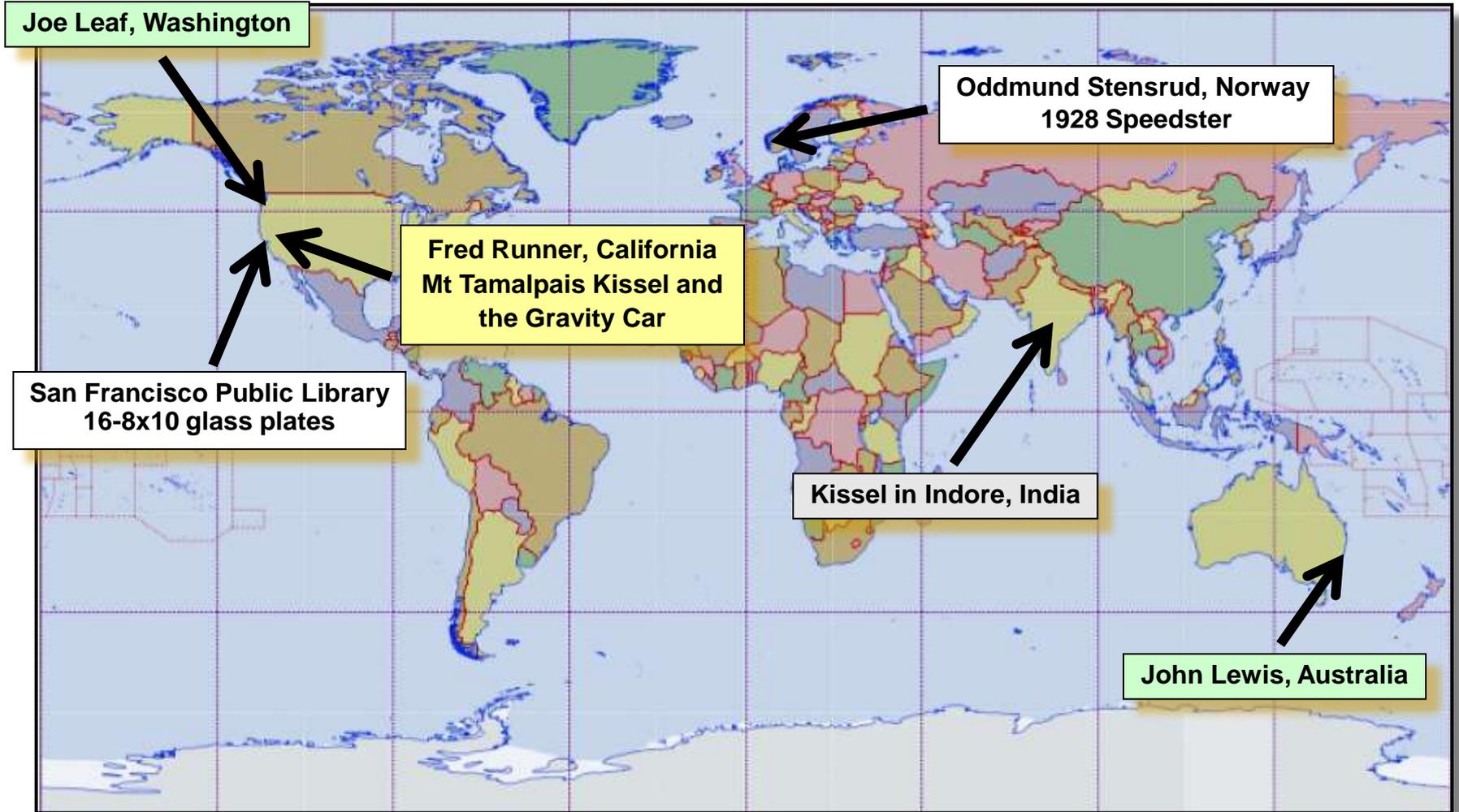
## Bugsby is recognized as a “Forgotten Treasure”!



Bugsby and Lynn receive the “Forgotten Treasure” award at the Marin-Sonoma Concours d’Elegance (San Rafael, CA – May 17, 2009).

**Martin Swig**, the chief judge tells Lynn... *“Over the years there have been numerous significant cars. There are waves of fashion than sweep over various cars; [we] see them featured in magazine articles and recognized by various commentators. But very few car buffs are serious historians. As a result, many truly significant cars get overlooked. We had several examples at this weekend's show, and it was not easy to select the recipient of the Forgotten Treasure award. But your Kissel meets the criteria to a ‘T’, and I was very happy to make the award to you.”*

# A funny thing happened on the way to the show/website/ ebay ... Kissel owners and stories are finding me!



# From 1896 to 1930, the Mount Tamalpais railway transported people to a grand lodge in the clouds, high above SF Bay



- At the Marin-Sonoma Concours d'Elegance on May 17, 2009, railroad historian Fred Runner unexpectedly encounters Bugsby and tells Lynn a fantastic story about...

The **Mount Tamalpais & Muir Woods Scenic Railway** and the tourist industry that flourished here a century ago

The grand **Mount Tamalpais Tavern**, a place with spectacular views of San Francisco, the Bay and the Pacific Ocean; a place of elegant food and dancing

Unique **Gravity Cars** which provided a thrilling ride that whisked patrons down the mountain

The **Lee Street Local** that delivered regular commuter service in Blithedale Canyon above Mill Valley

A **KisselKar** rail motor, the “Pullman” of the system

- Known as the “Crookedest Railway in the World”

8.2 miles from Mill Valley to East Peak

Climbed to nearly 2750 feet above San Francisco Bay

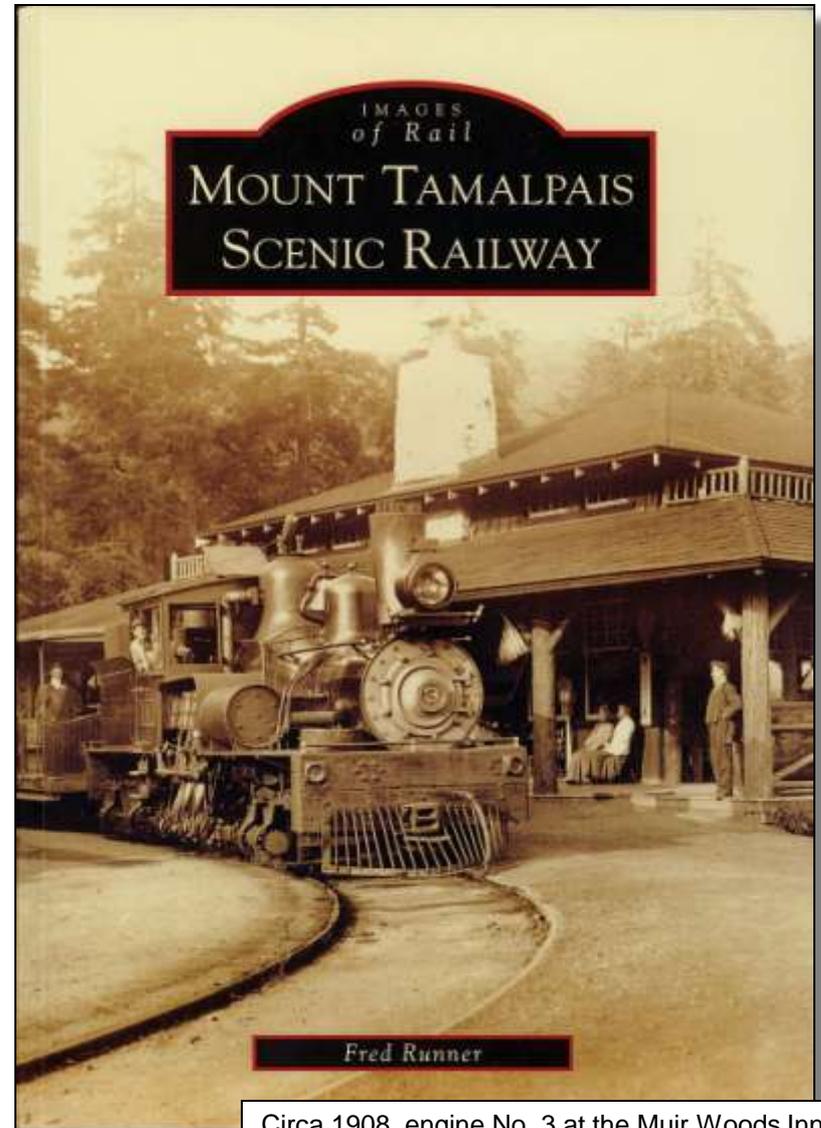
281 curves (42 circles if connected), “Double Bow Knot”

Longest straight section was only 431 feet

Appeared on cover of Scientific American (July 16, 1898)

By 1907 had a branch line to Muir Woods

Averaged 700 passengers a day (mid 1915)



Circa 1908, engine No. 3 at the Muir Woods Inn

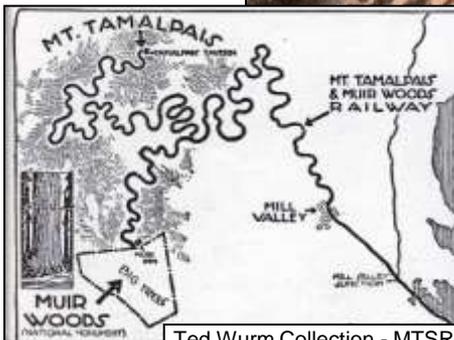
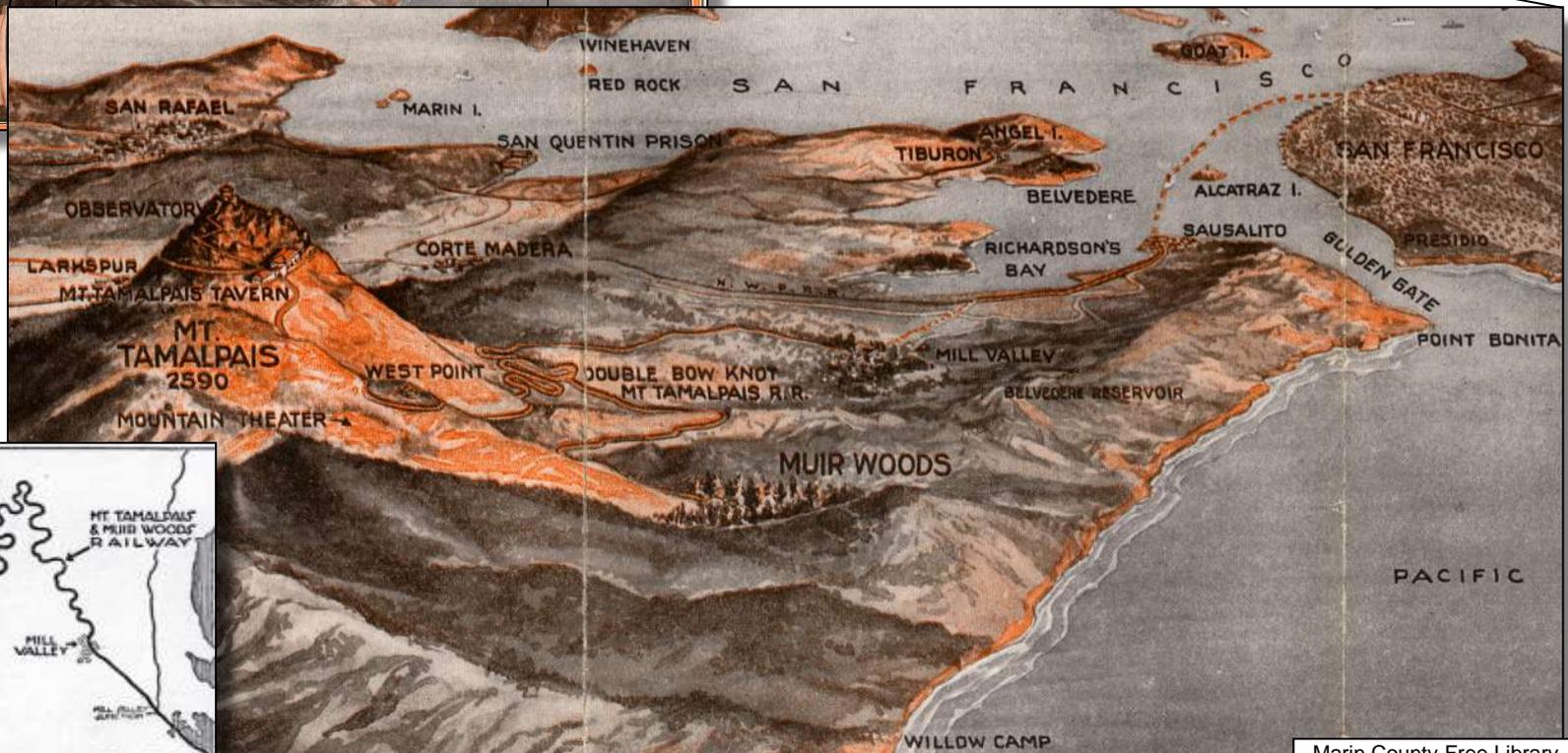
# At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, railways were major vehicles of mass entertainment, bringing people to special places



In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, railways were very efficient and coordinated at moving people

Leaving from the summit at 7:20a, one could connect with a commuter train and arrive at 9:05a in San Francisco, including 30 minute ferry ride

Three (3) minute connections between the Mt Tam and interurban trains was common



Ted Wurm Collection - MTSR

# A KisselKar was used to transport people and materiel on Mount Tamalpais, north of San Francisco, 1916-1930



Ted Wurm Collection

*“Motor No. 3’ Kissel arrived on a flatcar in 1916 for service on the Lee Street Local and to ferry special groups to the Tavern and Muir Woods.”*  
(Image from the Dec. 1916 issue of ***Railroad Man's Magazine***; Ted Wurm photo notes.)

## Motor No. 3 appears to be a KisselKar truck chassis to which rail wheel carriages have been adapted



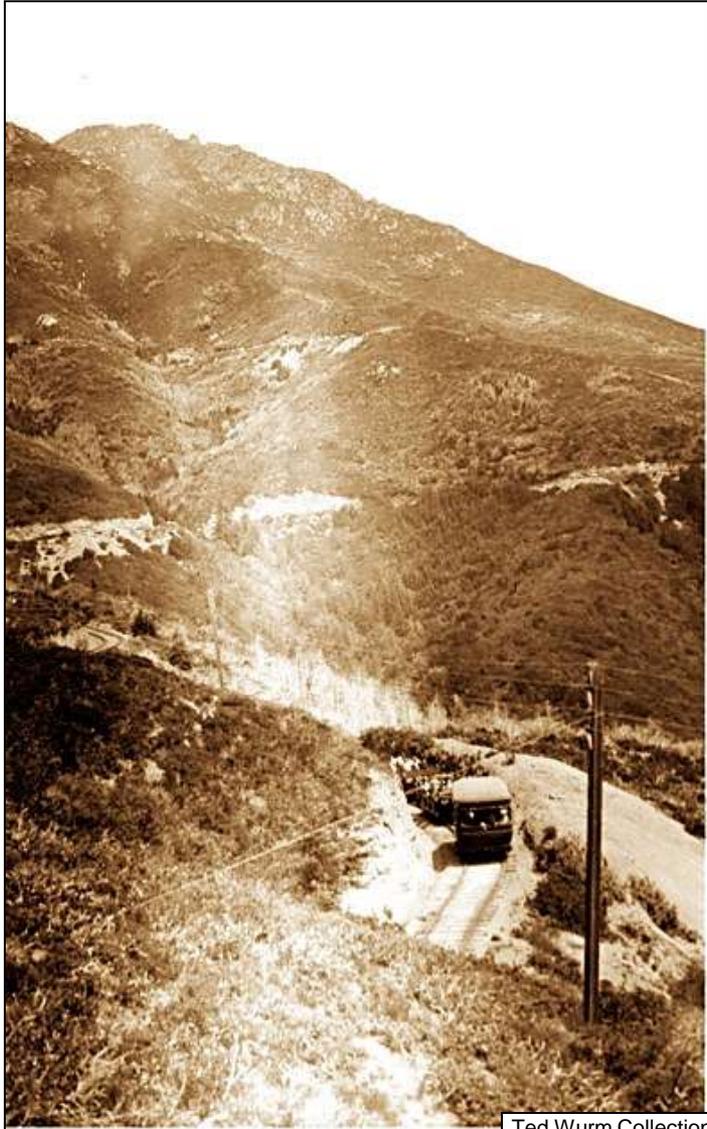
Ted Wurm Collection - MTSR

### Motor No. 3 – the KisselKar

It's primary duty was as the Lee Street Local, a streetcar-type service that carried the residents of Blithedale Canyon to and from the depot, making 5 stops along the way, 18 scheduled roundtrips every day in 1916. (Notice the Gravity Car it tows. Probably being towed to the siding track at the Lee Street Station and later up the mountain to make another run from the Tavern at East Peak.)

*“The gas-powered KisselKar was the most elegantly appointed vehicle on the line, sometimes taking private parties to the Tavern. She was also temperamental, burning through three unreliable engines in nine years and often refusing to start on cold mornings. The KisselKar’s engineer was also the conductor. A small turntable was added at Lee Street to turn her around. She could carry 20 passengers.”* (From **Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway**, by Fred Runner)

# The KisselKar is caught in a rare operation pushing loaded gravity cars up the mountain



Ted Wurm Collection

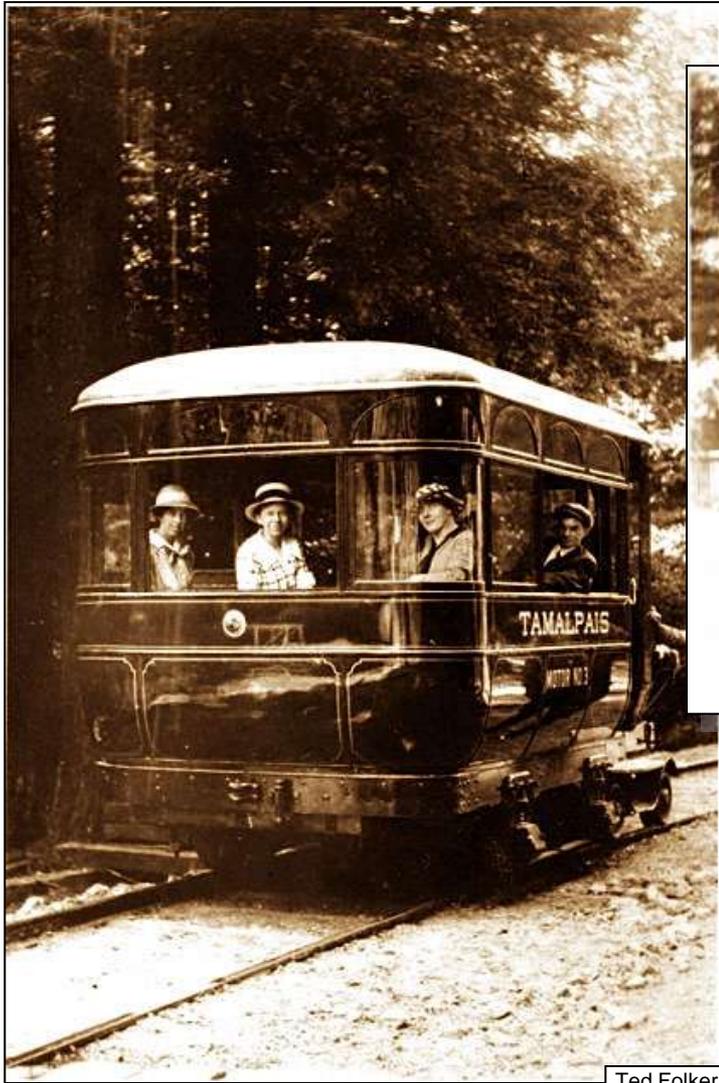
**From a large multi-fold 1917 brochure...**

*"If you have a small party and wish a special train, you will be taken to the summit in a **60-horsepower gasoline motor train**. It is run on the railroad track on standard railroad trucks, is **electrically equipped** and has an **air whistle** and **compressed air brakes**."*

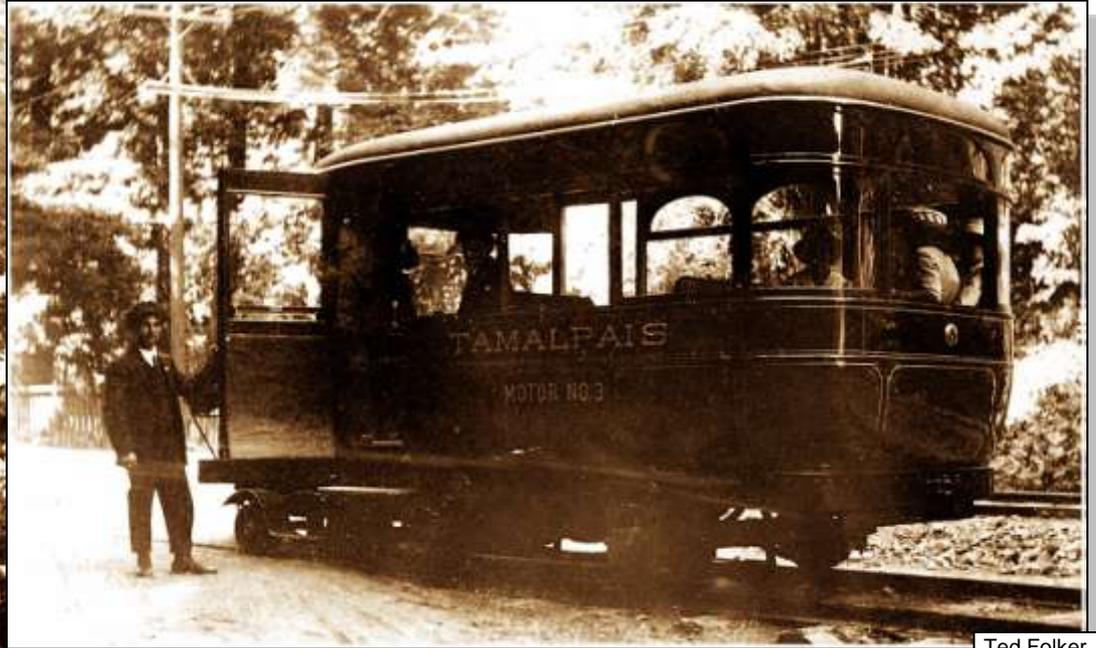
Each Gravity Car had an empty weight of about 4000 lbs. In this photo, the KisselKar is likely pushing about 10,000 lbs (5 tons) uphill.

The KisselKar pushes gravity cars from Muir Woods toward Mesa Station, a very unusual operation. Steam locomotive would normally do this job. A "big" 60 HP engine allowed the KisselKar to push loaded Gravity Cars upgrade from Muir Woods. (Private communication from Fred Runner)

# Welcome aboard the Mount Tamalpais Kisse!Kar!



Ted Folker



Ted Folker

Fred Runner tells Lynn that the round disk in the middle-rear of the body in these images resembles the Kisse!Mercury radiator emblem. The Mercury radiator emblem would not generally appear on other Kisse! vehicles until c1918.

# The KisselKar, train passenger cars, and gravity cars were scrapped in 1930



Ted Wurm Collection

The son of railroad inventor Ted Folker tells Fred Runner that he well remembers the time that the cars and Kissel were scrapped. He watched as the wooden passenger cars and gravity cars were unsentimentally burned. He says that “they burned for a month.”

It appears that by 1930, the emblem on the back of the KisselKar had been replaced by a spotlight.



Ted Wurm Collection

# Do you have any additional information about the Mount Tamalpais Kissel or other Kissel railroad connections?



## Mt Tam Railroad



This 9m 29s video clip was provided by the San Rafael High School (special thanks to Christine Morgan). The video is from the 1976 film "The Crookedest Railroad in the World." It was produced by San Rafael High School teacher David Swingle and his students for the Marin County American Revolution Bicentennial Commission.