



SOUNDS OF STEAM LOCOMOTIVES NO. 3

COLORADO NARROW GAUGE STACK MUSIC

"A RIDE ON THE TRAIN TO YESTERDAY"
"THREE LITTLE ENGINES AND 33 CARS"

Recorded and with notes by VINTON WIGHT

FX 6154 • FOLKWAYS RECORDS, N. Y. • SCIENCE SERIES

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

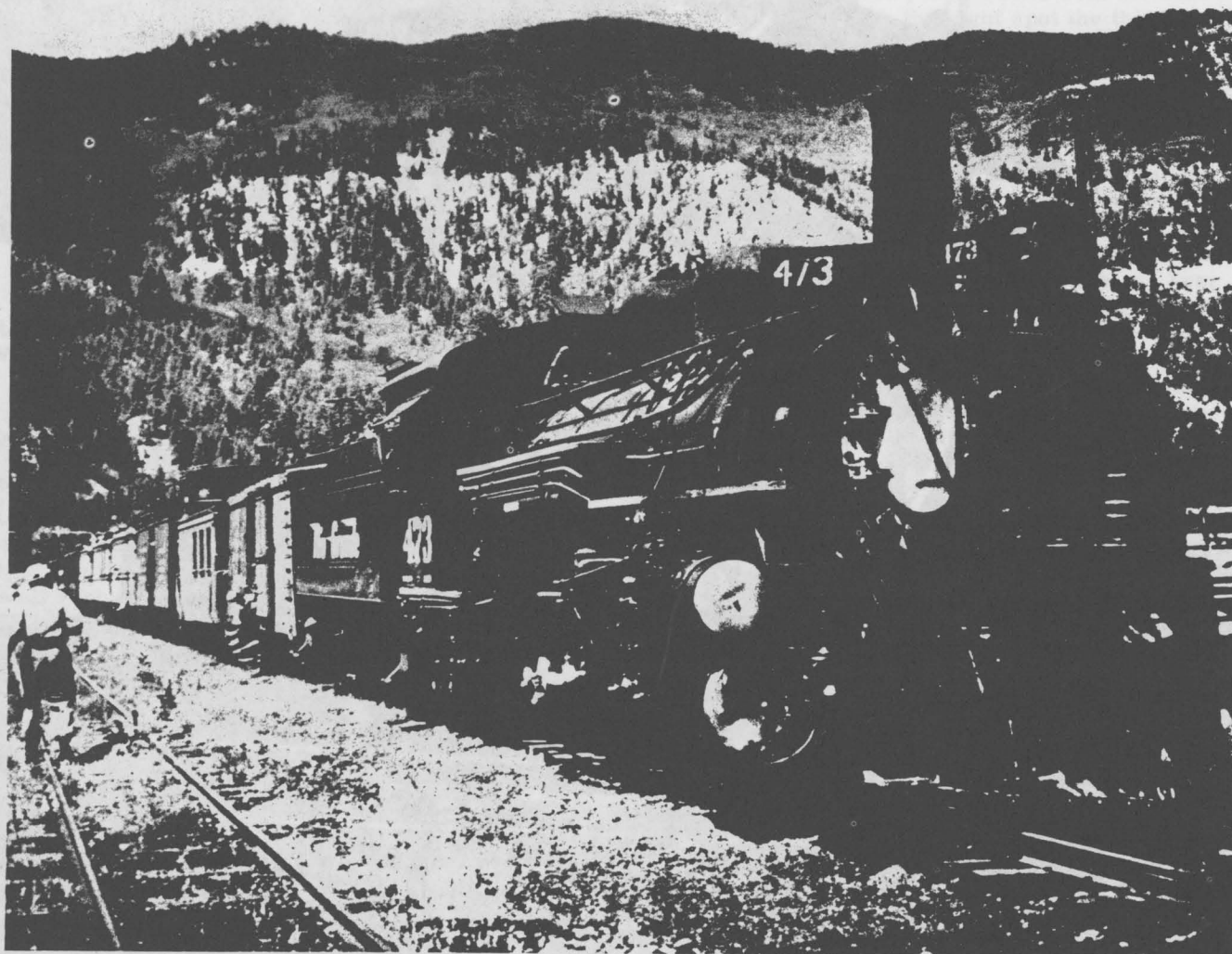
SOUNDS OF STEAM LOCOMOTIVES NO. 3

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R-58 -30
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17 W. 60th St. , NYC

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FX 6154

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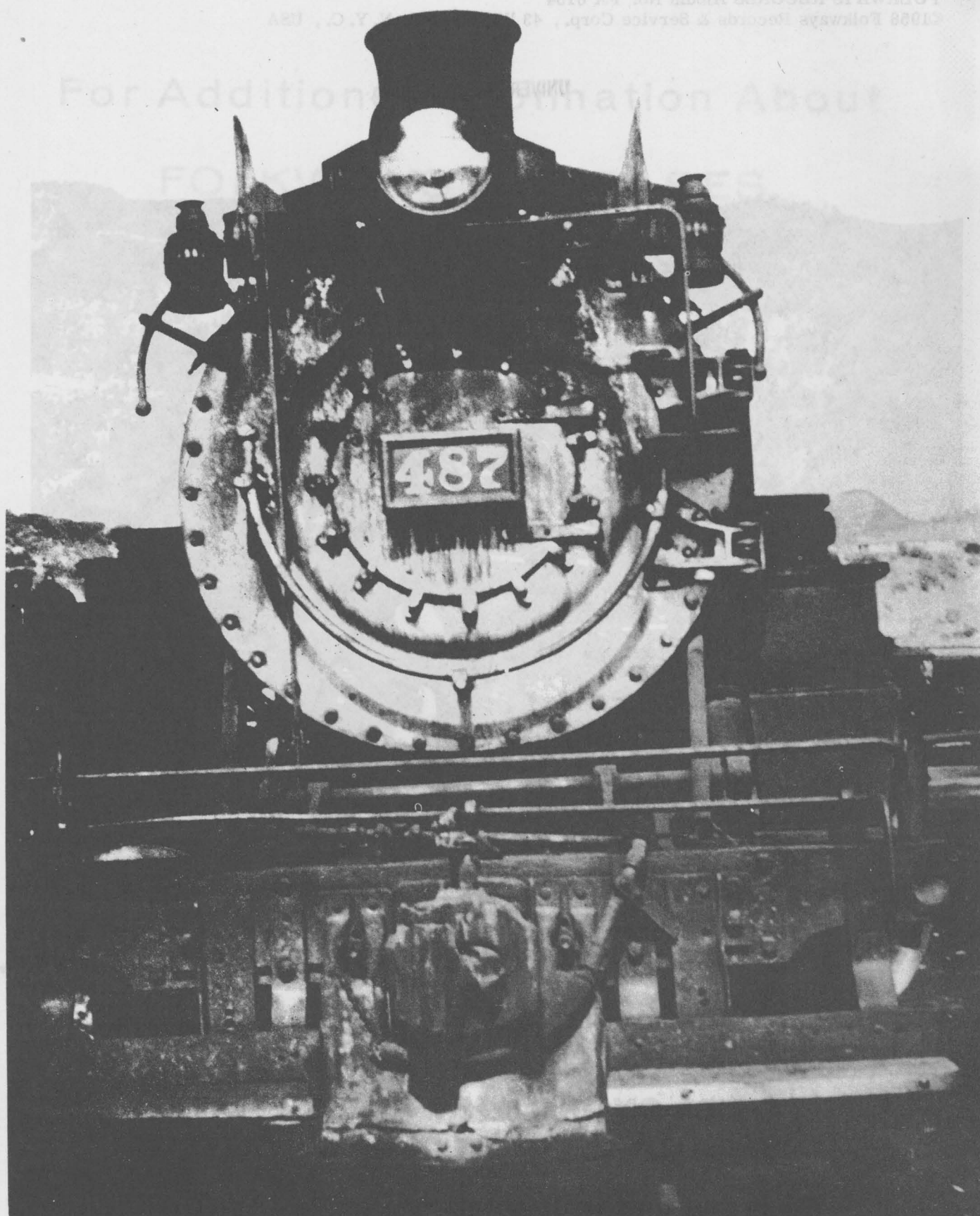
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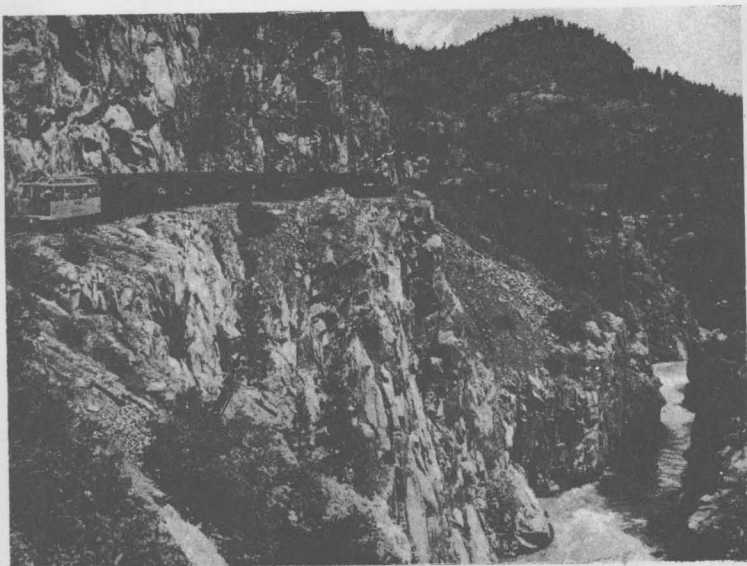
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Recordings and notes by
Vinton Wight

Outline of material on Narrow Gauge Stack
Music

Record opens with sound of the locomotive pump working. Conductor gives a highball - they whistle and start to leave Durango. This is all recorded on the train in the cupola of the caboose, second car back of the locomotive. They whistle as they pass the main street then you can hear the train go over a bridge. They whistle for the station of Hermosa but do not stop. Then the train picks up speed as they approach the stiffest grade. Soon the train is on this grade and winds around some tight curves. The wheels screech on these curves. The next stop is at Rockwood. The conductor hurries the passengers and they take off. Immediately the train can be heard on the most spectacular part of the trip, as it maneuvers the track laid on a shelf high above the river in the canyon. They move very cautiously here. The curves are very sharp and the wheels screech most of the time. If you listen carefully you can hear the engineer apply the brakes occasionally.

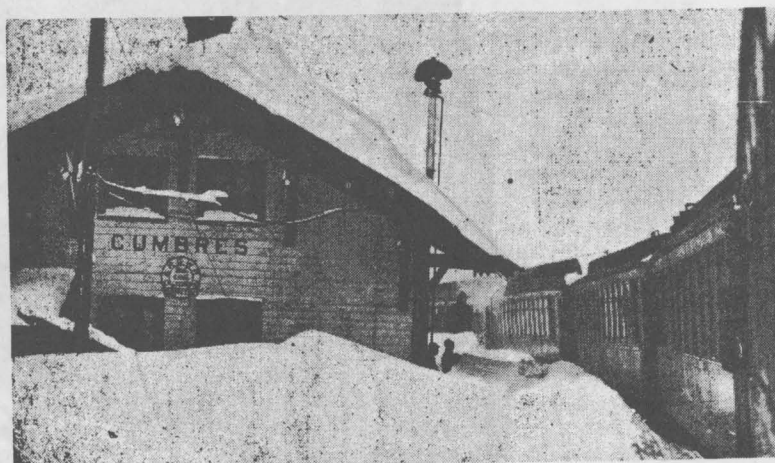
Next stop is at Tacoma. After they leave Tacoma highlites of the remainder of the trip are compiled into one continuous sequence. Bridges are crossed, they pull on a grade, they go faster, wheels scream on curves, they glide along effortlessly--then with a mighty blast on the whistle they arrive at Silverton, and come to a dramatic stop.

This is a three hour trip condensed to twenty minutes, but has all the high spots of the trip.

SIDE II

This is the story of three little locomotives and 33 cars climbing Cumbres Pass, on the Colorado-New Mexico border. The train starts from Durango with two locomotives and 57 cars. They pull up a grade. Second sequence records them at a crossing. Next they are ready to leave Chama, New Mexico the two lead locomotives pull forward with the cars. When they reach the right spot the third locomotive whistles, they stop while the third couples onto the rear of the train. Then they all whistle off and start out. Fourth sequence finds them at a crossing making a run for the heavy grade ahead. The last sequence finds them near the top of the pass pulling for all they are worth. At times you can hear all three locomotives. They whistle for a crossing and pass; first the two engines ahead and last the one on the rear. Here one can hear the wheels screeching as the flanges protest on the curves.

Cumbres pass is where trains become snow bound nearly every winter. Last winter about 5 or 6 locomotives and two snow plows were tied up for several days here. They had to fly food in for the crews.



CUMBRES. Four feet of new snow lies on the ground in below-zero temperatures as the last train puffs into Cumbres, the station atop 10,015-foot Cumbres pass on the Colorado-New Mexico line. Rio Grande officials announced the little narrow-gauge had been operating at a loss.

PHOTOGRAPHS : credit-
Vinton Wight

The Denver Post - Fe. 4, 1951

State of Colorado

H. L. Norris, U.S. Forest Service,

Durango, Colorado

"The Grand Imperial", Silverton, Colo.

The Denver & Rio Grande Western.



COLORADO NARROW GAUGE STACK MUSIC

SIDE I: A RIDE ON THE TRAIN TO YESTERDAY

During the 1870's and 80's many railroads were built with their rails three feet apart. Later most of these were converted to standard gauge or abandoned.

Colorado is famous for its rugged mountains. This rugged terrain made the building of standard width tracks difficult. On the other hand the narrow gauge railroads could twist through the narrow canyons or scale the highest peaks. The narrow roadbed and the smaller cars were much cheaper to build too. Thus in Colorado the narrow gauge came into being and here today a few hundred miles of the diminutive track survives.

Durango is the narrow gauge capital of the world. Slim rails once radiated from this city in four directions. Here is the home of the "Train to Yesterday." This is the train that has traveled between Durango and Silverton since 1882. It was not until after World War Two, however, that it was discovered by the traveling public. They discovered it just as the Rio Grande had decided to abandon the rails between these two cities. Railfans and tourists have converged upon Durango in such numbers that every available piece of equipment has had to be placed into service. Much of this equipment is the same that was used back in 1882. All plans for abandonment have been forgotten, for the present at least.

From the middle of June to mid-September the little train leaves Durango every morning at 9:15 for the leisurely 45 mile trip up the canyon. It does not arrive in Silverton till 12:40 p.m. This is less than 15 miles an hour, but who cares? With the Las Animas river always near, and the lofty San Juan mountains stretching high above, who wants to hurry?

Now for the actual trip, as recorded: After the pumps have filled the air tanks, the conductor shouts, "All Aboard", the engineer blows the whistle, and we are off. First we travel slowly through the Durango yards; next the train whistles for the main street as we cross; then we thump over a bridge and head for open country.

The going is easy as we travel up a broad valley filled with green fields and lush pastures. The whistle blows for a lonely station, but we do not stop. Soon the valley narrows and the train starts to climb and wind its way high above the valley below. This is the most difficult climb on the trip. Durango lies at an altitude of 6520 feet, but to reach Silverton we must climb to 9300 feet above sea level.

As we climb and wind our way we learn a little about our locomotive. Number 476 is a Mikado type, having a 2-8-2 wheel arrangement. She was built for passenger service in 1926. This makes her much younger than any of the nine coaches she pulls. The youngest coach was built in 1886, but they have all been rebuilt many times. Now we begin to realize why it is called the "Train to Yesterday."

The engine, although small, is built just like larger steam locomotives. She is really very modern, if a steam locomotive can be considered modern. She makes that same delightful stack music that so many of us like to hear. Black smoke issues from the stack as she climbs higher and higher, but the light windless air carries the smoke straight up, rather than trailing it back over the cars. Even with the windows open the train remains clean.

There is a whistle as we steam into the old lumber town of Rockwood. Many people drive here to watch the train, because this is where the railroad leaves the highway. We do not see the highway again until we reach Silverton.

The spectacular part of the trip starts at Rockwood. "Let's go", shouts the conductor and the train moves slowly and cautiously out onto a rock shelf where the roadbed has been blasted out of a cliff high above the river. The curves are sharp and the wheel flanges screech as the cars twist along the cliff. Very slowly and carefully the train moves here. Listen carefully and you can hear the hiss of the brakes, as the engineer holds the train back on the slight descending grade. Far below and nearly straight down is the river.

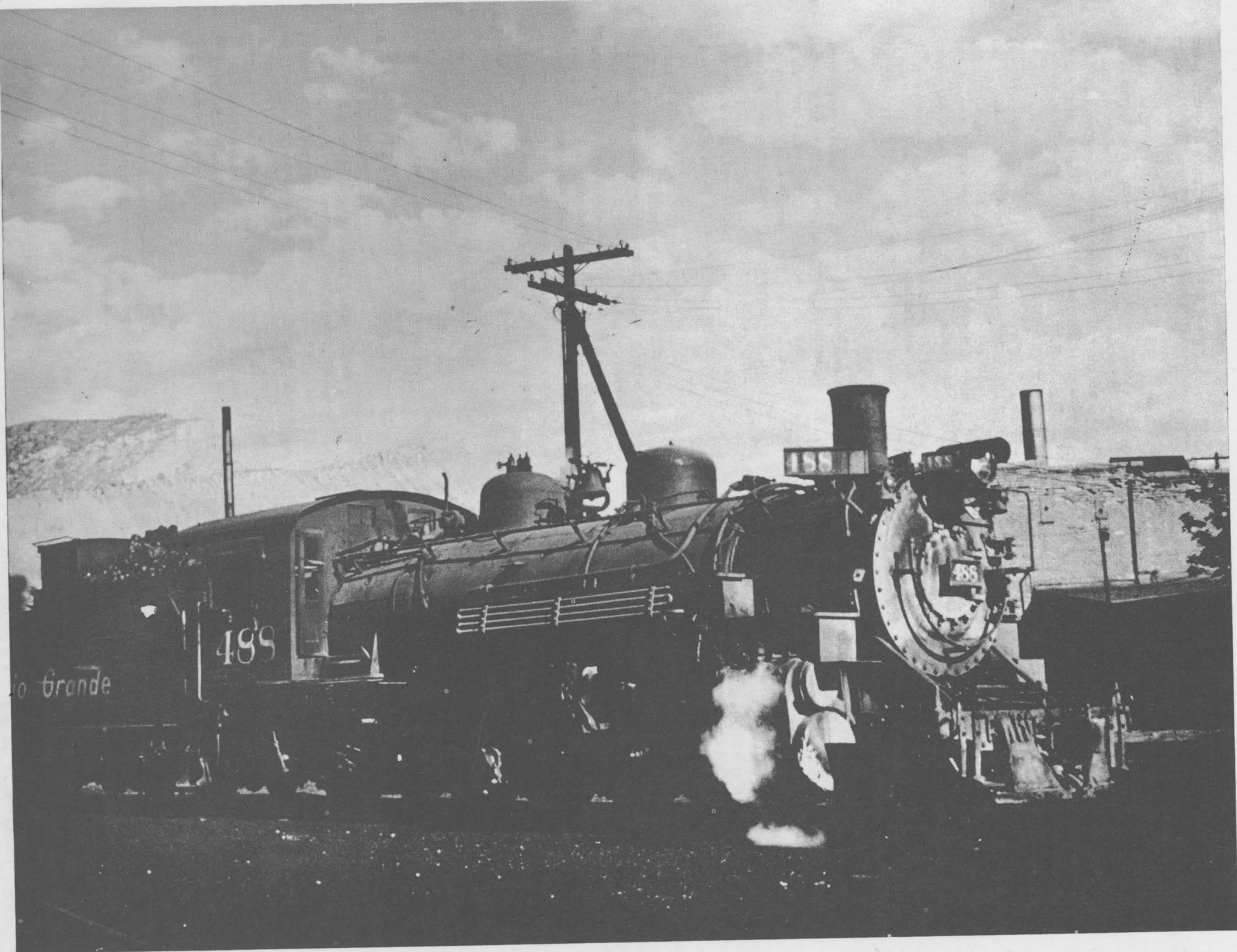
Next stop is Tacoma. We just hesitate here. The engineer toots the whistle and away we go again. The remainder of the trip, as recorded, is made up of high points as we travel along. We run fast for awhile, then glide effortlessly on a descending grade, cross a bridge, puff and pull, and finally with a mighty blast on the whistle --- there is Silverton. We stop at the station and with a tired gasp, the trip is over. We have had our ride on the "Train to Yesterday."

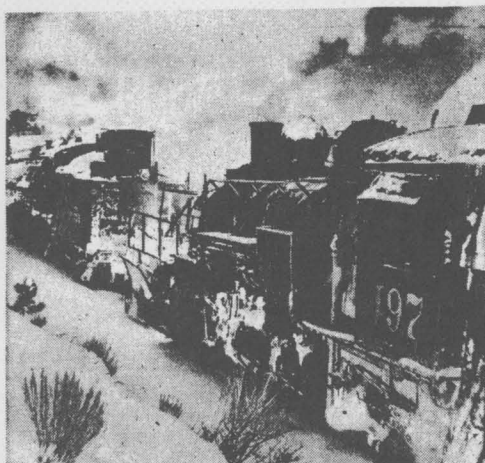
Actually the whole three hour trip can not be put on one side of a 12 inch record. But, we have tried to give you only the high points, edited and put together as if it were one continuous trip. We could not give you the many times the train stopped to drop off or pick up fishermen, the several stops made to take on water, or the train crew serving, real caboose brewed, coffee to the passengers. And, how could we bring you the "out of this world" scenery?

If you have never made this trip, by all means do so some time. If you have made the trip, we hope that this record has helped you re-live one of the most pleasant experiences that one can have.

CELEBRATING NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD

As the first and only one of its kind in the world





TRAIL-BLAZER. A two-engine snowplow ran ahead of the final westbound narrow-gauge train over Cumbres pass

SIDE II THREE LITTLE ENGINES AND 33 CARS

It takes three little engines to tote 33 cars up the four percent grade to Cumbres Pass. These engines are little only when they are compared to today's standard gauge locomotives. They are giants when we consider them in relation to the narrow gauge rails on which they operate. Some of them actually are small standard gauge engines rebuilt to fit the closer rail spacing.

Westbound, the builders of the Rio Grande were able to hold their grade over Cumbres Pass to 1.42 percent, but eastbound it is a backbreaking four percent. This 10,015 foot pass practically straddles the Colorado-New Mexico border. At its foot to the west lies Chama, New Mexico. Here is where they make short trains out of long ones so they can be pulled the 14 miles to the top of the pass. But, our story does not begin here.

The main line of the narrow gauge Denver and Rio Grande Western lines lies between Alamosa and Durango. To the railroad this is the fourth division. Westbound they haul pipe and supplies to the oil fields. Eastbound goes oil, lumber, and other produces of the San Juan.

Our story begins about noon in Durango as two "Little Giants" lock couplers with 57 of the "pint size" freight cars and start east.

The first locomotive is number 488, one of ten built by Baldwin in 1925. Coupled behind 488 is number 491, one of ten very similar engines, built by Rio Grande from standard gauge locomotives in 1928. Both are Mikado type with 2-8-2 wheel arrangements.

They are first heard on a grade near Carbon Junction 2-1/2 miles south of Durango. They whistle for the highway crossing as they drag their consist up the grade.

About five miles further they again cross the highway. This time the going is easier. No-

tice the lightweight clicks as the cars move over the rail joints.

Next the scene shifts to Chama, New Mexico. It is the following morning. Time is 9:00 a.m. The train has been serviced and almost half the cars left in the yards. They are ready now for the trip to the top of Cumbres Pass. The two head engines, 488 and 491, pull forward as each in turn blows out the moisture that has accumulated in its vital parts. When they have pulled ahead far enough a whistle blast from a third locomotive is heard. This is the signal that the last car is in the clear, so they stop while number 492 and the caboose couple onto the rear of the train.

The train is now complete again and ready to attack the mountain. We now have two locomotives ahead, then 33 cars, and finally number 492 pushing on the rear followed by the caboose. When they are ready the pusher gives a high-ball (two blasts of the whistle). Then the two other engines answer in quick succession. This is the signal to start.

The sound of the start is cut short while the recordist hurries ahead about a quarter mile to record the stack music as they pass the first highway crossing. Here they come blasting away making a run for the tough going ahead. Notice the slight wheeze of pusher 492.

The final sequence takes place high up on the pass as they struggle ever higher on the four percent. As they approach in the distance you can hear each of the three locomotives in turn as they wind in and out of ear shot. Then again you can hear all three at once. They come closer and closer till the lead locomotive whistles for the crossing. First they are in step, then they are out of step. The wheel flanges scream in protest on the sharp curve. Finally the pusher lopes into the scene, pushing for all she is worth.

Here is truly a page out of the past. As they struggle you can close your eyes and see the locomotives that preceded them in years gone by. You can see years of hardship as trains were stalled time after time in the deep snow that accumulates on the pass. What tales these mountains could tell.

How many more years will this drama of Man against the Mountain continue? You suddenly realize that these are the last narrow gauge steam locomotives that will ever "sound off" in these hills. Who knows, they are probably the last narrow gauge locomotives the Rio Grande will ever own. The Diesels may find their way here in this isolated country, but the chances are that the present lush traffic will soon decline and the narrow gauge will be no more. So, as we listen to these beloved sounds we realize that the days of the "Little Giants" are few. Only on these recordings will they live on and on.