

The Chairman's Notes

Working in the morning and then again in the evening after an enforced siesta is I find rather restrictive and tends to curtail ones social activities. However I'm taking a holiday soon so it is almost certain that we will revert to the proper weather for August of an overcast sky, strong winds and rain.

In the mean time we as a club have not allowed the heat to stop our activities. We entertained thirteen visiting locos, which ran despite the heat. Thanks to all who helped organise this event in particular Sue and Brian Apthorpe for making the day a success.

I am pleased to say that the Council concurs with the Track Committee's decision of a trial replacement of our raised track rail with a new system using the same flat bottom rail as the ground level railway. We all expect this trial to be successful and that over a period of time we shall see the whole raised track converted to this new system. In the mean time the Council have agreed to pay half the costs from central society fund with half being raised by the Loco Section. I personally think that the standardisation of the track system used at Colney Heath is an excellent idea.

Next year is our club's sixtieth anniversary and plans are already being made for a celebratory event. At present we are looking to some kind of event involving the whole Club and using the Colney Heath site, perhaps similar in style to the Curly Bowl event that we held ten years ago. We plan to hold this celebration over the weekend of the 4th and 5th September 2004 and rather than a formal dinner we are thinking along the lines of an evening buffet or barbecue for members and their families on the Saturday evening at Colney Heath. With this in mind we are looking for caterers to provide the food so if any members have any contacts who could provide such a service please let me know. Similarly if any members have any ideas or suggestions as to how we should celebrate our sixtieth please, please let me know, as we need all support and input we can get from you all, as you are the club.

A good start has been made at clearing the outside of weeds at HQ. However gardening in the nineties is above and beyond reasonable expectation. Once the weather has returned to a proper pattern we will be out there in our wellies finishing the job.

I must congratulate the team who have been working on the coach exterior. It has been many years since I have seen it looking so smart and tidy.

John Squire

Secretary's Snippets

The Society has received notification of the 15th National Locomotive Rally to be held at Solihull, organised by the Birmingham SME on 13/14 September 2003.

Notification has also been received concerning the Autumn Rally of the Southern Federation of Model Engineering Societies to be held at Saffron Walden on 20/21 September 2003.

These notices are displayed in the carriage at Colney Heath.

I have outlined my plans for a 2004 Year Planner, showing as far as is possible, all the various Section activities. These will include Birthday Parties, General Meetings, Locomotive Section and other Section meetings, Workshop Meetings, and Special Events. Planning for some of these activities has already started, but the Society must plan ahead as far as 31 December 2004 for this Year Planner to be of use.

Planning for one very special event has already started. The weekend of the 4/5 September 2004, has been set aside for our Diamond Jubilee Anniversary celebrations. An Action Committee under the leadership of Donal Corcoran has been formed to get the preliminary planning under way.

A celebration dinner, to be held in the Autumn of 2004, is also being planned. Ideas on a suitable venue capable of serving 300 people would be welcome. Tell me or John Squire.

The Council asks for all Society members to give these events their full support. It is going to be a great year for NLSME!!!

I received as a birthday present a £25 book token from my sister. With it I decided to purchase *LBSC – His Life and Locomotives* by Brian Hollingsworth, published by Camden Miniature Steam Services. A quick look through and snatch reading, reveals it to be a most interesting book. I shall devote more time to it when there is some to spare!!

David Harris

Treasurer Twittering

All is still quiet on the financial front. We are beginning to spend some money on Section activities this year which is in sharp contrast to last year's lack of spend.

Bernard Lambert



*September General Meeting
Friday 12th September. 6.00pm Onwards*

An Evening with Gauge 1 at Colney Heath.

Come and see the delights of this relaxing branch of modelling which combines the pleasures of live steam with the sights of realistic scale trains

From the Membership Secretary

Membership

Membership now stands at 233 comprising 151 Full, 40 OAP, 14 Junior, 17 Country and 11 Honorary Members.

New Members

This month we welcome two new members.

John Dean, David Metcalf

Bernard Lambert

Marine Mutterings By Bernard Lambert

Our July Regatta is reported in this News Sheet by John whose organization made it a great success.

We also had an excellent August meeting on the Lake with a good turn out of steam driven boats including two newly acquired vessels one of which had good running lights! I hope that our last meeting in September will be equally well-supported and blessed with clement weather.

October sees the start of both the indoor season and the working season. As you will see from the Diary the subject of the first indoor meeting is 'Do we want winter meetings at H.Q.?' I would be sorry to see these meetings abandoned but unless enough of you are prepared to turn up and possibly make a contribution we have no other choice. It would be nice if we could invite the occasional outside speaker but we need a decent turnout to justify this. So come to the first H.Q. Meeting and make your views known.

The working parties will not be abandoned because if they were the Lake and its surroundings would soon degenerate.

Enjoy the boating.

Understanding Engineers

An occasional series of lessons supplied by Mike Avery

Two engineering students were walking across the campus when one said, "Where did you get such a great bike?"

The second engineer replied, "Well, I was walking along yesterday minding my own business when a beautiful woman rode up on this bike. She threw the bike to the ground, took off all her clothes and said, 'Take what you want'."

The second engineer nodded approvingly, "Good choice; the clothes probably wouldn't have fitted."

News from the Tyttenhanger Committee

The August Tyttenhanger Committee meeting took place on the 5th of August right in the middle of the hot spell, which continues as I write this and it therefore requires a couple of reminders:

1. Be on the look out for fires; they have happened in the past and can be dealt with efficiently if members are vigilant and keep an eye out for them.
2. Drivers should watch out for kinks in the rail, which may be caused by the hot weather we are currently (enjoying?) having.

At our August meeting it was decided that we will try out flat bottom rail (of the same cross section as that on the Ground Level Track) on the Main Line in the area of the Dingley Dell loop, this will be our main area of maintenance on the Main Line during the forthcoming winter work parties.

If this trial is deemed to be successful the aim is to replace the entire Main Line in a similar manner in future winter work parties, so watch this space during next year's running season for further details.

Lastly the Society held an invitation day for visiting clubs and societies on the 9th August and all present had a pleasant day, so may I take this opportunity to thank all those who gave up their time to help prepare and run this successful day.

Donal Corcoran

Workshop Evenings By Mike Hodgson

While enjoying this superb summer weather, I find myself compelled by our good Editor to think of workshop evenings, which are a winter thing. Since starting to run these meetings we have had two "Things to Build" - the gauge one Project loco, and

Hobnoblin the 36R sailing yacht. I am very pleased to see that at least one of each of these has been finished.

So far no great ideas have come to the surface for this winter's build (all ideas gratefully received). The meetings will continue to support both Project and Hobnoblin. I am sure that there are some out there awaiting completion. For myself I have finally realised that all other work must stop while I finish the full size Morgan car.

During this wonderful summer there have been some superb rallies and steam shows, where the most amazing things in the way of tools, fittings and fixtures turn up and some times are for sale. I know I am very pleased with some of the things that have turned up. So come along and show us what you have found. The first evening of the winter season is on Friday 26th September starting at 8.00pm at Headquarters.

Marine Section Open Day, 27th July 2003 **by John Morgan.**

A few weeks before the day, during a hot spell of weather, blanket weed struck the lake and spread surprisingly quickly. I had not seen this before, but was put in the picture by the old hands. Seems as though the chemical applied before I joined the Club had worn out. A search of the Internet for a supplier did not prove helpful for the quantity that we required, Bernard was on holiday: it was his treasurers hat we needed to find the source used previously. Upon his return the files were examined and fortunately the invoice was found (of course it was!).

Bernard then swapped hats (to P.I.C. Marine) to be consulted on what we should do. After much debate both hats came to an agreement; we could purchase the gue.

We have enough for 3 doses (years) and the first was applied. After a couple of weeks the weed was definitely dead, but still in view, so there was nothing else to do but wade in and fetch the stuff out. This was done by Bernard and myself over two weekends and one Thursday. The timing was fortunate in that we did have usable water for our guests to use on this, our special day.

Unusually, as the day approached the weather turned wet. Previous years have seen a heat wave around this time. I was expecting a mud bath but was surprised and not a little relieved to find just three puddles in the car park; the rest was almost dry. When launching the harbour I could not understand why the anchor points in the bank were too low. Then I noticed that the buoys were under water. The water level was the highest I'd seen it in my 3 years at Colney Heath. An unscheduled paddle had to be done to sort things out.

It was obvious that the uncertain dawn had persuaded many not to turn out this year, they missed a good day as the temperature slowly climbed and the sky cleared. It was not until lunchtime that bodies really started to arrive. One strange phenomenon: many visitors did not bring their boats. Answers on a post card please! Before lunch I

counted 15 visitors with a dozen boats and after, more than 24 but without the corresponding increase in models.

We really missed George Case who has in the past brought the refreshments to the poolside: bad timing, he was on holiday. Never mind - next year? (Hint for you, George!!!).

Nine captains went round the course and for once the “professionals” from the Welwyn G. City M.E. failed to make the running, not enough practice this year? Stanborough lakes have also been hit by the dreaded weed. Members of the Hertford Model Boat Club came first and second, Malcolm Willmott and Dave Metcalf with freelance Harold Barrow coming third. Harold is a member of both North London and Welwyn and I (deliberately) did not ask him who he was representing!

I found the day to be for the most part relaxing so hopefully, then, so did our guests.

Must say thanks to Harold Barrow who set his alarm and joined us early to help the last minute preparations and stayed with Bernard and myself afterwards to clear up. That was much appreciated.

I will not be organising another day this year, though if anyone else wishes to, feel free...

As a sign of appreciation the Hertford club invited us to their evening sail and BBQ mid August.

Locomotive Section Meetings at Headquarters.

Autumn and Spring 2003-2004.

The Locomotive Section Friday meetings have been arranged. Please come along to them, because we are sure you will find them interesting and entertaining. If you have not been to a Locomotive Section meeting before then you are assured of a friendly welcome.

The meetings for the period are as below: -

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| Friday 12 th September. | A Potpourri of Model Engineering for your Delectation.
By the gang from the North Herts. Area. |
| Friday 10 th October. | ‘On and Off the Footplate’ by Bill Davies.
Bill served his time in steam and is now a
Driver/Instructor for Thameslink. |
| Friday 14 th November. | ‘End of the Line’ by Martin C Dawes.
Martin has published a book titled ‘ <i>End of the Line</i> ’. It
has been extensively researched and is about the rail |

service from Kings Cross to the Great Northern Cemetery at Southgate.

- Friday 12th December. 'An evening with Brendan.'
Our very own Brendan and perhaps his? friends will fill you with an evening of pre-Christmas model engineering pudding!
- Friday 9th January.2004 'Bring along your own favourite video night'. If there is a large number of videos we will have to arrange a voting system to see which ones are shown. But there are some London Transport videos made by club members that **should** be seen.
- Friday 13th February. 'George Case and Les Brimson'.
George will continue with his memories of life at Kings Cross in his youth. It is a must for those who heard the first part a little while ago. Les will, with the use of a Power Point Presentation entertain us for the rest of the evening.
- Friday 12th March. 'Work in Progress'. This is the evening where everyone in the Club can join in. Please bring something along and be prepared to talk for only a few minutes about it. Remember you are amongst friends and fellow sufferers.
- Friday 9th April. and Friday 14th May.

Any suggestions welcome, including someone to help run the meetings if you feel inclined to assist this wonderful Society. The meetings start at 8 pm.

Ian Johnston.

Wilmington-on-Sea Advances on the Low Countries

By Steve Francis

In June, with permission granted for a weekend pass from the other halves we set out on our campaign in the EEC series, this time to the home of the Mini Racing Team in Uden, Holland for their eight-hour race. When we got to Mark's house he was waiting forlornly head bowed surrounded by his goods and chattels on the street corner. "Here look, he's been thrown out," said Bob thinking that he had trouble getting his weekend pass. Fortunately he was all present and correct waiting for us and just asleep standing up. These Harwoods could sleep for England. So, suitably settled in our landing craft for the trip across the channel we headed off and promptly missed our shuttle. We then had to wait 3 hours in the terminal before a space became available. The D -Day invasion would have to wait so we had to do what any sensible platoon would do and

have breakfast. Then Mark fell asleep. John and myself read Autosport and Bob did some logic puzzles from a quiz book. Question 1, What is logical in four grown men sitting in the shuttle terminal at 8 o'clock in the morning waiting to travel over 300 miles to play with model cars? We never did work that one out.

Finally we got across and in no time it was beer and sandwiches time in the car. Normally at this point we would have a leisurely lunch playfully swatting away the Eurobugs but we were now running very late and in danger of missing practise. John decided to pour beer all over himself and the rest of us drunk ours instead. Belgium passed by in a flash and in no time at all we were in Holland. (If only that was true.) With a 1995 map of Europe and a set of instructions from the RAC website we got lost. At least when we got to Holland it would be easier. It wasn't. We got lost again. It gave us time to reflect on the fact that everyone in Holland does ride around on pushbikes and even when they are in their cars they have bikes strapped to the roof and probably do not get lost, even with the totally confusing road signs. Maybe they moved them round because they knew we were coming. Eventually with the hindrance of the map, the RAC and the position of the sun we rolled into the beautiful parkland that surrounds the clubroom at Uden. Fortunately for us practise was extended and it gave us enough time to get the hang of the track, prepare the racecar and admire their excellent facilities. John brought one of Bob's old Tottenham cars for him to try on the King track at the club. It was the first time in over 30 years that Bob, the car and a King track had been reunited. John asked what he thought of this auspicious event and Bob replied in his usual fashion "Not a lot".

It was now qualifying time and John stuck it on pole in a shade over 4 seconds, from Mark. A nice touch was provided by the French, fortunately after qualifying: a selection of cheeses and plenty of wine for us all to try and try we did. John decided to drink his this time and not throw it over himself. Our hotel was in the town square above a bar and a very peaceful place it looked too. If only we knew. As is usual when Walmington go on these sorties abroad the evening meal always prove eventful. This trip was no exception. Not understanding the Dutch menu we had to resort to a lot of pointing and John speaking in English with his best foreign accent. This was gradually descending into a scene from 'Ello Ello'. "What's that?" asked John pointing at a plate flying past our noses. The waitress tried her best to explain and then asked a passer by to help.

"Its zee bird vot stix is ed in zee ground.

"Ostrich," we all cried, or is it Emu with the inevitable jokes about Rod Hull? "No, its Ostrich," and with a look of horror around the table at the thought of eating a 6 foot chicken we settled for the mixed grill. The place was really starting to liven up with a young girl dressed as a nurse and all her friends with sticking plasters on their faces getting drunk. Obviously a hen night. Or should it be an Ostrich night. Half an hour later it was -confirmed that Elvis doesn't work in a chip shop but is alive and well and living in Uden, out for the night with his mates before he marries the nurse. I would love to see their wedding photos. The town was now very noisy and our hotel rooms were right above the noise. This was going to be a very long night.

We didn't realise it but right underneath our window was a giant wheelie bin and in the middle of the night the European bottle mountain was emptied into it. Twice.

"That was the worst night's sleep I have ever had," came a little voice from the other side of the room. "You should try spending a night with the Harwoods at Wildfields, Bob."

It was bright and sunny in the Dutch countryside as we made our bleary eyed way back to the track for the 9 am. start. Mark started and was soon in the lead. After the first hour we were three laps up on the French team, MMT. By the end of the second hour our main rivals this year, another French team - Grand Marmauze Team (GMT), were up to second, 20 laps behind us. Then they hit big trouble. We were 65 laps ahead before they returned from their very long pit stop. We were also hitting big trouble as well in the shape of a green car driven by a young local team. This car was to plague us throughout the race and cost us a lot of time. A controller was also parked on our lane twice in two minutes and we managed to hit it both times. After 2 1/2 hours we had a 100-lap lead and MMT came back up to second. We lost 25 laps after a long pit stop and at the 3 hour mark our lead was down to 60 laps from MMT. It was now halfway through the race and GMT had sorted out their problem and were gaining fast. The MMT car started suffering and a long pit stop put them out of contention. From the earlier coming together with the controller our car started to go off and our lead over GMT was now down to 8 laps. A stop to fix a broken guide cost us 25 laps and GMT hit the front. After 6 hours we had a big accident and broke another guide. We were now 78 laps down on the French. The GMT car was really flying and we went 140 laps behind with 2 hours to go. GMT started to slow a bit and they started to spray their motor with whatever the French spray their motors with and this normally means it's about to cough. All that happened this time meant it went faster. Going into the last hour the gap was down to 117 laps but we didn't have enough time to make up the deficit and GMT ended up beating us by 67 laps. We are still leading the championship because away goals count double but the next race is the big one at Merlijn in September and anything can happen in a game of two halves - or should it be three thirds?

A North American Railway

By Clive Winter

Knowlton is a village in the eastern townships of Quebec. Such is the influence of the Francophones that the signposts from the autoroute now call it Lac Brome. Along the backroads were imaginative road signs in the European style (well the Quebecois couldn't possibly have the same signage as the rest of North America now, could they?). I'd worked out "No Camping", "No Snowmobiles", "Do Not Feed the Ducks", and even "No Quadbikes". Quebec still has over one hundred covered bridges so there was a special one for them. But why one with a turtle on it? Passing the next lake I found out. A turtle was making it's way across the road, and drivers were taking avoiding action, avoiding a turtle the size of a Cornish pastie.

All this on the way to Township Toy Trains, not a promising name for a serious North American Model Railway shop I grant you, but the website I'd discovered was promising, and bi-lingual. A Canadian Pacific Railway crossing sign in Knowlton lead me to the shop; the branchline itself had closed 25 years ago. A garden railway ran around the forecourt. Philippe, the proprietor was serving another customer, yet he

welcomed me in. He was a teacher for whom running the shop was a hobby! The shop lived up to its website rather than its name. We talked Canadian trains and New England trains; we were after all less than 20km from the U S border, he regularly went railfanning in New England, and recommended the Mount Washington Cog Railway in New Hampshire, about 2 hours drive away, as long as the weather was reasonable. My purchases came to 470 Canadian dollars, and it was pointed out that if I spent 500 dollars I'd qualify for a 10% discount, I spent the extra, paid less than the original 470, and came away with more. I like that kind of shop.

Behind the motel at Lennoxville just south of Sherbrooke, was Canadian Pacific's route from Montreal to Saint John, across the road the Canadian National / Grand Trunk route from Montreal to Portland, Maine. In town a microbrewery and a steakhouse – so the trains did not disturb my sleep. Saturday morning dawned fine, showers likely later. I'd chance my luck.

At the border Autoroute 55 becomes Interstate 91 ending in New Haven, Connecticut. There was of course some irritating tax to pay just for entering the US. I wondered (to myself) if Americans arriving in Britain by ship or train are similarly taxed. Derby Line, Vermont, the U S border community was picture postcard attractive, an old brick Post Office, and bank, white clapboard houses, manicured lawns. And flags. The highway was good and easy driving on into The White Mountains, a turn at Bretton Woods, by a steel truss bridge and ahead at the other end of a long avenue of trees was a pall of smoke.

We forget now just how distinctive is the smell of coal fired locomotives, it permeated the wooden depot buildings. It wafted into the ticket office; my fare USD49. Even the sign beside the wildlife display "Please do not feed the BEARS They're already stuffed" had its layer of fine sooty dust. Two trains stood alongside the depot, and another just downhill towards the white(ish) clapboard engine house. About 300 yards up the hill on the single track there was another, it proved to be the work train descending.

The morning train(s) were due to leave, so clearly there were to be some interesting manoeuvres to get around the work train. The cog wheel engaging the rack between the rails has a greater diameter than the driving wheels on the same axle. In smaller scales the big pink 0-5-0 may come in handy but this is 12 inches to the foot scale and the gauge is 4' 7 1/2", and no that's not a typographical error. Then I saw the solution - it looked like a cross between a traverser and an ash pit. Later in the journey the conductor / brakemen explained the whole routine while we paused by another siding, this one mounted on trestles somewhere near the tree line. It takes 17 separate manual operations to change the switch, and anyone doing so is required to wear safety boots, as well as having had several hours of intense training and then only under close supervision. Some rails have seriously heavy-duty piano hinges: others are lifted right out. Only in high season do trains cross anywhere out on the line.

The work train locomotive bore the name Agiocochook, name, number and full railway title in yellow letters on a large red panel on the side of a green cab and green tender. Whatever was the signwriter smoking when he chose that combination? The sharply inclined boiler was black and the seriously scorched smokebox and diamond stack evidently had been black, once.

Inevitably (this being America) passengers were treated to the call “All Abo-oard” and as our tickets were inspected we were directed to either the orange car with engine no. 6, Kancamagus, or in my case the second train, the turquoise car with no. 4, Chocorua. The painters funny fags must have worn off by the time they got to these two – they were ‘any colour you like as long as its black’ black. The passenger cars were entered from the front open vestibule; the seats were threes on one side, twos on the other. I was someway down the car near the engine, and I sank into my seat, on this incline you don’t really have much option.

No messing about, lurch, we were off, the two conductor / brakemen / guides explaining the built in safety – very large handbrake wheel at the back of the car – and some of the sights. The trees have been cleared back from the track to reduce the fire risk. The locomotive was working hard and one soon accustomed to the noise level from the meshing of cog and rack, and the wonderful old symphony of steam locomotive working hard. Some of the track is at ground level, and the trestles cross the uneven ground to sustain a reasonably constant gradient.

Passengers started walking up and down the car, leaning well forward to allow for the slope, grinning madly at their friends, and fairly quickly learning that the only way to go down to the rear of the car was backwards. The two South Africans behind me were reminiscing about the smell “It’s just like I remember the station at Jo’burg when we went down to the Cape on the train”. The vestibule was open for anybody to sit on or to crouch down on. The conductor very quickly reminding the occupants of it not to stand as they’re not transparent and everyone’s paid the same price to see the views.

About halfway up we come to Jacob’s Ladder the steepest part of the route: 37½% in American terms, that’s slightly steeper than 1 in 3 to you and me. By now the trees are very low and - we are near the tree line. The track is on trestles, some of them recently renewed. Chocorua was still snorting away, a pall of coal smoke wafting out behind us. The Bretton Woods resort has become a small red-topped white blob in the green of the forests way behind and below. I’d re-acclimatised to the lovely old familiar sound of steam engine working hard, perhaps a Britannia or a B1 between Liverpool Street and Ipswich, somehow the speed didn’t quite match. The horizon was getting further and further away. After a time about as long as a Britannia took to get The Norfolkman to Ipswich we laboured onto the summit. The cloud base looked to be about 300 feet and descending. Part of the track there is flat – next to the car park. This is America after all. Here we were at the highest point in the U S east of the Mississippi and there’s a road right to the top. The lead train was on the flat bit which bearing in mind the steeply inclined boiler must have taken some deft work to keep the crown sheet covered. Closer inspection revealed that the tender was unsprung. The widely spaced locomotive wheels are merely carrying wheels, the cylinders drive beyond the carrying wheels via a reducing gear to the cogs (and if this is incorrect terminology I apologise - I’ve never had any engineering training.)

Naturally the descent was quieter. At one point the brakemen let the locomotive get away. Looking back up from Jacob’s Ladder the cloud was now covering the summit. I had indeed been fortunate with the weather.

What else did I find? A school car to bring classes to the children in the wilds of northern Ontario. More familiar to many of us: no. 60010 'Dominion of Canada' in the Canadian Railway Museum just south of Montreal. On the adjacent track Canada's last standard gauge locomotive a semi-streamlined 2-10-4 to take 1000 ton trains over the Selkirks. Ahead one of Canadian National's 4-6-4s with a 14,000-gallon tender. On the other side an 1883 built 0-6-0 from CF Ouest in France. Further along a 4-8-4, a 2-10-2 and Canadian Pacific no 2850, the Hudson that earned the class the epithet 'Royal Hudson'. Virtually impossible to photograph inside the four track building, but the A4 did not look as diminutive as one is lead to believe, and most visitors are completely bemused by the squeeze through the corridor tender.

The Nuclear Picnic

The following is a condensation of an article by Dave Parry of the Boston Globe Magazine (25/6/95) and is presented by Mike Hodgson.

Today's culinary topic is how to light a charcoal fire. Everybody likes a backyard barbecue. For some reason, food just seems to taste better when it has been cooked outdoors but there's nothing worse than trying to set fire to a pile of balky charcoal.

The average back-yard chef, wishing to cook hamburgers tries to ignite the charcoal via the "squirt, light & wait method" whereby you squirt lighter fuel onto a pile of briquettes, light the pile, then wait until they have turned a uniform grey colour. When I say, "They have turned a uniform grey colour", I am referring to the hamburgers. The briquettes will remain as cold & lifeless as Leonard Nimoy. The back-yard chef will keep this up - squirting, lighting, waiting; squirting, lighting, waiting, - until the potato salad rises up from its bowl, blob like, and attempts to mate with the corn. This is the signal that it is time to order the Chinese take-away.

The problem is that modern charcoal, manufactured under strict consumer-safety guidelines, is one of the least-flammable substances on Earth. On more than one occasion, quick-thinking individuals have extinguished a raging house fire by throwing charcoal on it. Your back-yard chef would be just as successful trying to ignite a pile of rocks.

Is there a solution? Yes! There happens to be a technique that is garneted 'to get your charcoal burning very, very quickly, although you should not attempt this technique unless you meet the following criterion: You are a complete idiot!

The answer was found on a page on the Internet, (address: <http://ghg.ecn.purdue.edu/>). A guy named George Goble, a computer person in the Purdue University engineering department, created this "page". Each year, Goble and a bunch of other engineers hold a picnic in West Lafayette, Indiana, at which they cook hamburgers on a big grill. (A bit like the SARC Barbecue. eds). Being engineers, they began looking for practical ways to speed-up the charcoal-lighting process. "We started by blowing the charcoal with a hair dryer," Goble told me in a telephone interview. "Then we figured out that it would light faster if we used a vacuum cleaner."

If you know anything about 1) engineers and 2) guys in general, you know what happened next: the purpose of the charcoal lighting shifted from cooking hamburgers to seeing how fast they could light the charcoal. From the vacuum cleaner, they escalated to using a propane torch, then an acetylene torch. Then Goble started using compressed pure oxygen, which caused the charcoal to burn much faster, because as you recall from chemistry class, fire is essentially the rapid combination of oxygen with the cosine to form the Tigris & Euphrates rivers (or something along those lines).

By this point, Goble was getting pretty good times. But in the world of competitive charcoal lighting, “pretty good” does not cut the mustard. Thus, Goble hit upon the idea of using liquid oxygen! This is the form of oxygen used in rocket engines. It is 2950 degrees below zero and 600 times as dense as regular oxygen. In terms of releasing energy, pouring liquid oxygen on to charcoal is the equivalent of throwing a live squirrel into a room containing 50 million Labrador retrievers. On Gobel’s web page, you can see actual photographs and a video of Goble using a bucket attached to a 10 foot long wooden handle to dump 3 gallons of liquid oxygen (not sold in your local store) onto a grill containing 60 lbs. of charcoal and a lit cigarette for ignition.

What follows is the most impressive charcoal lighting I have ever seen, featuring a large fireball that, according to Goble, reached 10,000 Fahrenheit. The charcoal was ready for cooking in (this has to be a world record) 3 seconds.

Will the 3 second barrier ever be broken? Will engineers come up with new, more powerful charcoal-lighting technology? It’s something for all of us to ponder this summer as we sit outside, chewing our hamburgers, every now and then glancing in the direction of West Lafayette, Indiana, looking for a mushroom cloud!

The views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily
those of the Chairman or Council of the NLSME