

# THE WHITE PINE ROUTE QUARTERLY

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## From 'Hack' to Home Tom Burg Visits Caboose 991603 on Whidbey Island

On a recent visit to Seattle, our hosts announced that the next day would include a trip to Whidbey Island. My WI&M alarm went off – I knew Whidbey Island was home to Milwaukee Road caboose number 1603/991603 that spent the late 1960's and much of the early 1970's in dedicated service on the WI&M. I knew that the roster I included in *White Pine Route* contained further information, and fortunately our hosts possessed a copy of that book. It showed that the caboose was located somewhere near the town of Freeland, WA. The quest was on.

The next day, after our major business was conducted, we motored to Freeland, a small vacation community. After several false starts that included well-meaning folks referring us to the private railroad car of President Taft instead, I finally scored; "That's Jim Freeman's house." Jim was listed in the telephone directory and I gave him a call. He promptly gave directions to his home, of which the caboose is part. Jim is a local newspaper columnist, railfan (his column's title is "All Aboard"), and island character who refers to himself as "conductor of fun." His caboose, which sits on a single length of track on top of a hill, bears a sign "The Loose Caboose Studio," and inside is his writing studio.



When I explained the reason for my interest, Jim became excited. "I never knew much about the history of my caboose, and always hoped the day would come when someone would explain in," he exclaimed. Hopefully, that day was here, and I gave him the caboose's railroad background as I knew it. Jim explained that his grandfather had been an engineer on the Frisco, and he had always been interested in trains. When the opportunity arose for him to purchase this caboose, he jumped at the chance. He is the caboose's third owner.

The first owners, who brought the caboose to the island, were Robert and Nancy Denigris. The *South Whidbey Record*, of Tuesday, Aug. 24, 1982 contained

*The non-profit WI&M Ry. History Preservation Group, Inc has been organized for railroad historians, enthusiasts, and modelers interested in gathering and sharing information on the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway, from its origins in 1905 through it's operations of today.*