

# Red Rattlers

by Philippa Werry



*Ready  
to Read*

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On page 7, there is a basic diagram of how  
the old cable cars worked. Note that each  
time that a car went back down the track,  
the engineer had to change the direction  
of the moving cable.

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Ministry of Education

For over a hundred years, people have been riding on the Wellington cable cars.

The old cable cars were very noisy. They trundled and rattled along the tracks. Now the cable cars move quietly and smoothly.



**The tracks were opened on 22 February 1902.**



Each year, the cable cars make 31,000 trips and carry more than a million passengers.

Many of these passengers are visitors to Wellington, but local people also use the cable cars to get to and from the city. Students use the cable cars to get to university.



## Why were the cable cars built?

The cable cars and track were built so that people could easily get up the steep hill from the middle of the city. The cars climb 120 metres and pass through three tunnels.

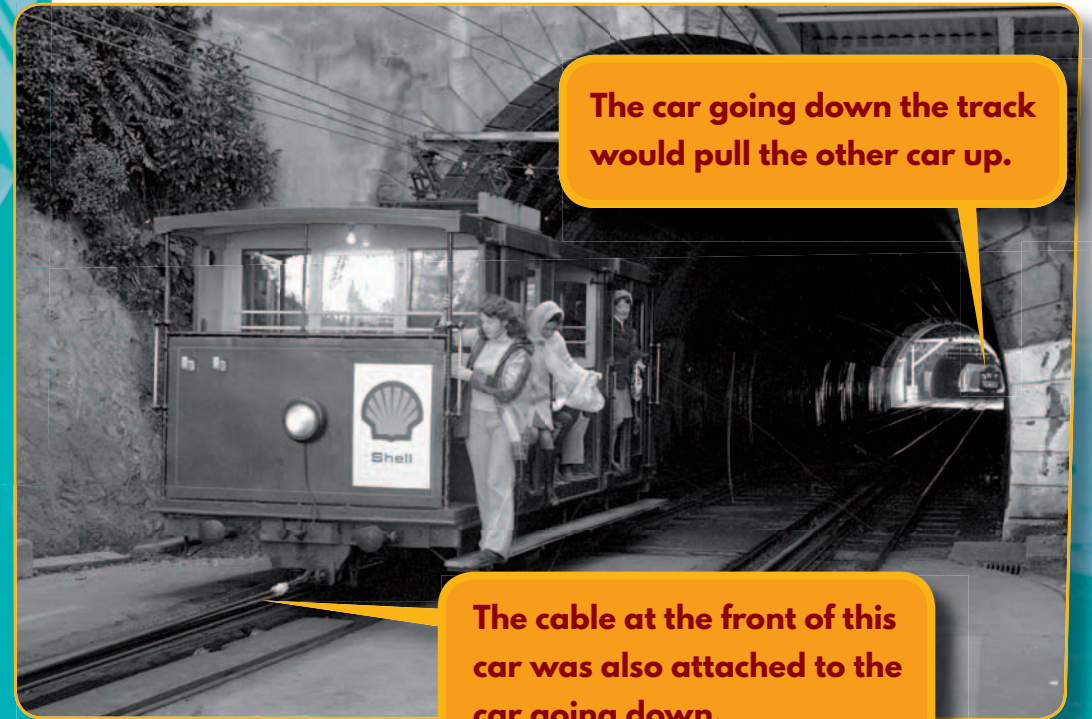
Before they were built, people had to use a winding, muddy track.



## How did the old cable cars work?

The old cable cars ran on a set of tracks, like train tracks. The two cable cars were attached to each other by a **cable** (wire rope). As one car went down, it pulled the other car up.

**There is a diagram of this on page 7.**



**The car going down the track would pull the other car up.**

**The cable at the front of this car was also attached to the car going down.**



The driver pulled a heavy lever.  
(This model is on display in a museum.)



moving cable



moving cable

steel jaws

The steel jaws of the gripper were clamped onto the moving cable.

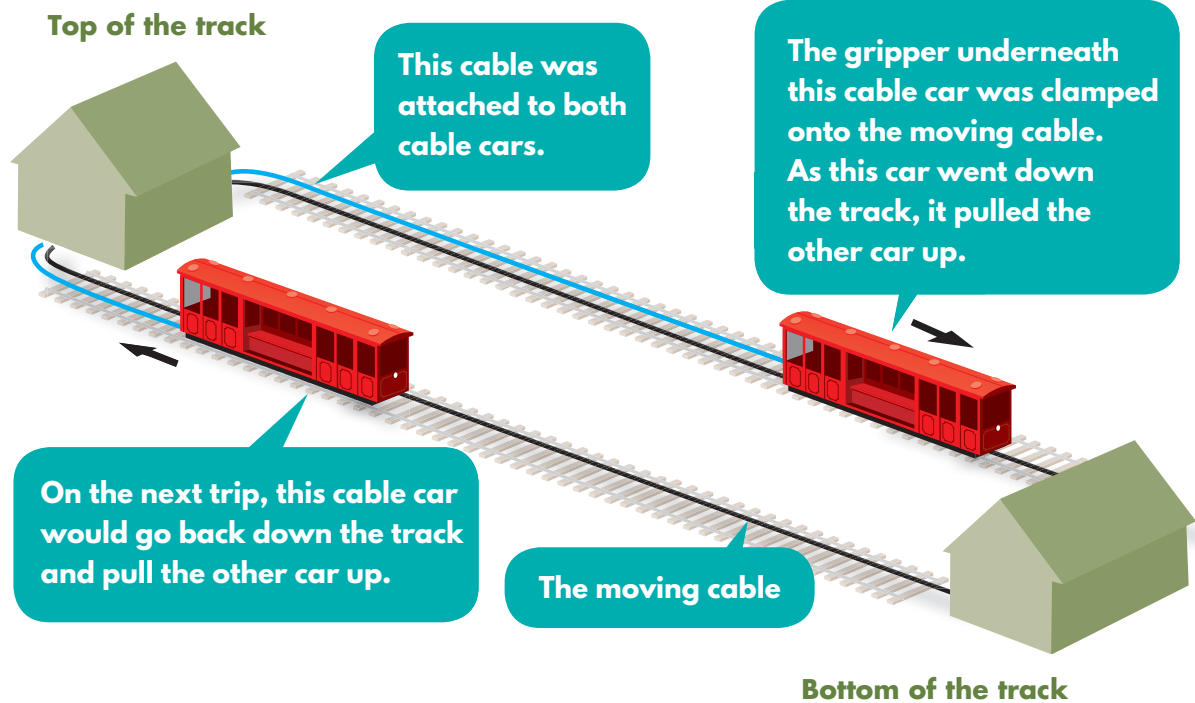
The cable cars didn't have engines. Their power came from another cable in the middle of each track. This cable kept moving all the time.

Underneath each cable car, there was a **gripper** with steel jaws that could be clamped onto the moving cable.

When the cable car at the top of the track was ready to go back down, the driver pulled a heavy lever to lower the top jaw of the gripper onto the moving cable.

Then the moving cable pulled the cable car down.

## How the old cable cars worked



Top of the track

This cable was attached to both cable cars.

The gripper underneath this cable car was clamped onto the moving cable. As this car went down the track, it pulled the other car up.

On the next trip, this cable car would go back down the track and pull the other car up.

The moving cable

Bottom of the track



## What was it like to ride on the old cable cars?

People could sit inside or outside. The outside seats were stepped so people didn't slide into each other. There were also straps to hang onto. School children liked to sit outside and kick the sides of the tunnels as they went through. Trailers were attached to the cars to take extra passengers.



**The old cars are now in a museum.**

The “red rattlers” trundled and rattled up and down the track for more than seventy years.

Thousands of people came into town for a last ride on the old cable cars when they were replaced in 1974.



## The new cable cars

Now, for most of the way, there is only one track, which both cars travel on. There is a loop in the middle, where the cars pass each other.

The cable cars still don't have engines. There is only one cable, and it is attached to each car. An electric motor makes the cable move. As the cable moves, both cable cars glide along the track.

They both stop when the cable stops.

The new cars are bigger than the old ones, and passengers can sit only inside the cars.

Cable car drivers don't have to steer, because the cable cars follow the tracks. The drivers don't have to control the speed or work out where to stop, because a computer does that for them. The drivers don't have to pull heavy levers. Instead, they drive the cable car by pushing buttons.





## Talking to a cable car driver



Nigel Harbrow has been working as a cable car driver for about two years.

### **How do you train to be a cable car driver?**

You learn with an instructor. It's not like driving a bus, where you have to watch out for traffic, traffic lights, and pedestrians.

### **What do you like best about your job?**

I like looking at the view and meeting lots of different people from all around the world. It's a friendly way to travel. And you end up in a lot of photographs.

### **Do you mind people talking to you?**

Not at all! Usually we keep the driver's door open. Lots of people like to stand up the front and have a chat.





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