

# San Francisco's Cable Cars

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The habitat of the cable car is the northeast section of San Francisco. Here the little vehicles run a criss-cross pattern up and down the hills. Starting from four points on Market Street they tap the financial district and Chinatown, the shopping, hotel, and theater district, the heights of Nob and Russian Hills, the Western Addition, and the North Beach district out to Fishermen's Wharf.

San Franciscans regard the little cars with affection. They find them charming and festive in their roller-coaster journeys over the hills. Riding them one sees appealing views of the city, the bay, and the surrounding hills.

Out-of-town visitors are always to be seen at the Market Street end of the Powell Street line, watching the little cars being turned around on a turntable there by their crews, frequently with the aid of jovial bystanders, for the return journey to the top of Nob Hill, eight blocks to the north, and beyond. There are two lines out Powell Street. One goes to Alta Plaza, the other to Fishermen's Wharf.

These cars pass Union Square, half way to the top of the hill. Here the cable-car bells and the coachlike vehicles add gay notes to a brilliant scene. In surrounding store windows one will see reflections of the appeal of the cable cars in pictures, ceramics, novelties, and books.

The cable car was invented in San Francisco. One rainy night in 1869 Andrew S. Hallidie, a local manufacturer of wire rope, was walking up the Jackson Street hill when he saw five horses struggling to pull a crowded horse car up the grade. One of the horses fell. The driver applied the brake. A chain snapped. All five horses soon were down. Luckily, the driver brought the whole mass to a stop on a level at a street intersection. Hallidie resolved to find a better way to negotiate the hills. He invented the cable car. His first car went into operation on the Clay Street hill in August of 1873.

In the early gay 90's there were 112½ miles of cable-car tracks in San Francisco, in use by seven companies. Today there are 25.32 miles of such tracks, in use by two systems and about equally divided between them.

When the cable car first went into operation, San Francisco had a population of about 150,000. Today it has about 830,000. Meanwhile, the traffic problem has increased. A few years ago the then mayor said, "Junk the cable cars." The citizens gasped, then went into action. By a three-to-one vote, in the 1947 election, they made it mandatory for the municipality to maintain and operate the Powell Street lines. The other system is privately owned.

For many San Franciscans the cable cars symbolize an age of remembered tranquillity, with Sunday picnic trips on the little cars to Golden Gate Park, or hill-climbing expeditions on them to new residential heights. Always they have been safe. In the 75 years of their operation they have not recorded a single passenger fatality. Gaily painted and traveling at a rate of nine miles an hour, their bells ringing, they are reminders of a glowing past in this city that cherishes tradition in all its merry life.

