



Before semi-trucks, highways, and airplanes, the circus traveled around the country by railroad. Organizing a circus train was an important job. Train masters were responsible for making sure the circus arrived at the right town, at the right time, and with the right cargo. One little hiccup and the circus would be canceled!

The circus would arrive into town in 3 sets of trains. The first, known as the flying squadron, would bring the cooking tents and other daily essentials. A few hours later the second section would arrive bringing most of the tents including

the big top, seating, and props. The third and final section carried most of the people and animals. When John Ringling traveled with the circus sections, his car would have been in the third section. The circus master would coordinate the train schedule, oversee the order the rail cars were hitched, and supervise the unloading and loading of the cars. When do you suppose the train master had time to take a break and catch some sleep?

Pullman Company, *Wisconsin*, 1904. Steel, iron, wood, glass.
Gift of the North Carolina Transportation Museum Foundation.

THE WISCONSIN

The train in the photo above is the *Wisconsin*, and it was John and Mable Ringling's private train car. John would travel in luxury as he oversaw the day-to-day operations of the circus.

When looking at the *Wisconsin*, ask yourself:

- How many people could sleep on this train?
- What would it be like to travel in luxury on this train?
- How would John and Mable's experience on the train be different from the circus workers experience?

STANDARDS:

SS.5.G.4.2

SS.3.G.1.1

ACTIVITY

CIRCUS ROUTE

MATERIALS:
THE MAP BELOW AND A MARKER

DIFFICULTY LEVEL:
MODERATE

The Ringling brothers used railroads to move their circus from town to town.

Use the map below to determine the most efficient path for the circus to travel. The circus must begin its season in Chicago, Illinois, and end in Sarasota, Florida. What route will reach each city, but travel the least distance?

Trace your route with a marker.

