

US Patent & Trademark Office

Patent Public Search | Text View

United States Patent Application Publication

20250256325

Kind Code

A1

Publication Date

August 14, 2025

Inventor(s)

Teaford; Mike E. et al.

WEDGE DRIVER AND METHOD THEREFOR

Abstract

A wedge driver and method therefor is presented. A wedge driver can be operably coupled to different ends of a link joiner to drive a wedge therebetween to form a single link. The wedge driver can also drive the wedge out of the link joiner. The present disclosure provides the benefit of allowing the safe and effective removal of the link joiner by preventing violent or forceful decoupling of a link joiner. The wedge driver can include a trunk, a first prong, a second prong, a bolt, and a driver. The driver can be spring enabled, such that the driver can recede into the trunk as the bolt egresses the trunk. A bolt of the wedge driver can push a driver out of the trunk to axially drive the wedge into (or out of) a link joiner without rotating the wedge.

Inventors: Teaford; Mike E. (Topeka, KS), Kimberlin; Ryan L. (Meriden, KS), Valentine; Larry C. (Berryton, KS)

Applicant: BNSF Railway Company (Fort Worth, TX)

Family ID: 80933863

Assignee: BNSF Railway Company (Fort Worth, TX)

Appl. No.: 19/193033

Filed: April 29, 2025

Related U.S. Application Data

parent US continuation 18390619 20231220 parent-grant-document US 12285796 child US 19193033

parent US continuation 18065235 20221213 parent-grant-document US 11850656 child US 18390619

parent US continuation 17301121 20210325 parent-grant-document US 11607720 child US 18065235

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.: B21L1/00 (20060101); B21L21/00 (20060101)

U.S. Cl.:

CPC B21L1/00 (20130101); B21L21/00 (20130101);

Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] The present application is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18,390,619, filed Dec. 20, 2023, which is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18,065,235, filed Dec. 13, 2022, which is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/301,121, filed Mar. 25, 2021, the entirety of which is herein incorporated by reference for all purposes.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates generally to driving wedges used in link joiners. More specifically, in certain embodiments, the present disclosure relates to the installation or removal of link joiners in locomotive handbrake chains.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Coupling links, or links, are used in a wide variety of industries. Hammer links, such as hammerlock coupling links, are often used to splice chain segments together, repair broken chains, or attach chains to other components. Generally, hammer links are operable to open and receive, e.g., a chain link and another component (such as another chain link), and subsequently securely close to couple the elements together. Some hammer links utilize wedges that can be driven into the links to facilitate the secure coupling of the link to a given component. These types of hammer links, sometimes referred to as “link joiners,” are often used in the railroad industry, such as in locomotive handbraking systems.

[0004] Locomotives are generally affixed with the equivalent of a parking brake, and these brakes can be referred to as handbrakes. As the name suggests, locomotive handbrakes are operable by hand, and when a locomotive is “parked,” the handbrake is engaged to prevent unwanted movement of the locomotive on the tracks. Locomotive handbrake systems generally include several components, such as the handle, brake lever, brake shoes/pads, and brake cylinders. A handle can be located on the walkway of a locomotive to be accessible to the conductor, and the handle can be in operable connection with a brake lever or levers located under the train. The brake lever, when engaged, causes the brake shoes and/or pads to contact the wheels of the locomotive, facilitating the braking of the train. The brake cylinder, in operable connection with the brake lever and brake shoes, can hydraulically supplement the force that the shoes apply to the wheels. To enable the handle on the walkway to engage the brake shoes, a chain often connects the handle to the brake lever; the chain is tensioned between the handle and lever. When the handle is engaged, the chain can be tightened further, which engages the brake lever and ultimately causes the brake shoes to contact the wheels of the train.

[0005] As with all other mechanical ingenuities, locomotives and their handbraking systems can require maintenance. For example, components will rust or break and need repair, and with respect to handbraking systems, the chains connecting the brake handle to the brake lever are no exception. If these chains break, need to be extended, or simply need to be replaced/removed to enable maintenance to be performed on other handbrake system components, installation and/or removal of link joiners incorporated into the chains can be required. For example, link joiners can serve as a

chain link, such as when new lengths of chain are spliced in; in another example, link joiners can facilitate connection of the chain to the handle or lever. In any event, link joiners will often need to be installed on a brake chain or taken off of a brake chain when handbrake system maintenance is performed. Such tasks can be arduous and dangerous even on slackened brake chains—the wedges of link joiners require significant force to be inserted and removed, and using a hammer or other device on the wedge can be dangerous to personnel performing these tasks. These problems are then greatly compounded when the brake chains are tensioned by hand, because removal of the link joiner can release the tension in the chain, sometimes violently, which can injure personnel or damage property.

[0006] Because of these issues, two people are often needed to remove a link joiner from a tensioned brake chain—one person to tension the chain by hand such that the link joiner is relieved of strain, and one person to open the link joiner. However, even working in pairs, this job can be dangerous, as human error is inevitable; further, it can be onerous to attempt to, for example, hammer a wedge out of a link joiner while the link joiner is suspended in a length of chain. As such, railroad personnel will oftentimes be required to detach the chain from the handbrake system to enable the attachment or removal of a link joiner, increasing the time and expense of maintenance operations on the locomotive.

SUMMARY

[0007] The present disclosure teaches technical advantages as a wedge driver and method therefor. The disclosure provides for the installation or removal of link joiners or hammer links on chains or other components. In one embodiment, a wedge driver can be operably coupled to different ends of a link joiner to drive a wedge therebetween to form a single link. The wedge driver can also drive the wedge out of the link joiner. The present disclosure provides the benefit of allowing the safe and effective removal of the link joiner by preventing violent or forceful decoupling of a link joiner, such that the link joiner does not have to be under strain. In another embodiment, the present disclosure can facilitate the driving of a wedge in a link joiner that is not under strain, such as a link joiner that is incorporated into a non-tensioned brake chain on a locomotive. In another embodiment, the present disclosure can enable a single person to safely remove a link joiner that is not under strain, such as from a non-tensioned chain, and such as by preventing forceful decoupling of the link joiner. In another example, the present disclosure can provide a driver that can be mechanically mobilized up and down a longitudinal axis, which can increase safety in link joiner wedge driving. For example, a spring-enabled driver can extend out of a wedge driver trunk opening by rotatable insertion of a bolt not the trunk opening, thereby mitigating the need for a person to place their hand or finger into the mouth of the wedge driver to adjust the driver.

[0008] In another embodiment, the present disclosure can provide for axial and stabilized driving of a wedge without the use of, e.g., a hammer. For example, the present disclosure can provide for the conversion of torque, such as can be applied to a bolt with a standard wrench head via a impact driver, wrench, or other mechanism, to axial pressure that can be focused on and directed to a wedge. In one embodiment, application of torque to a bolt can longitudinally drive the bolt via threads of the bolt; however, in another embodiment, such rotation of bolt during the driving, unmitigated, could cause unstable driving of a wedge, because rotation of the bolt could interfere with, e.g., the axial driving of the wedge at the point of contact between the bolt and wedge. In another embodiment, engaging the bolt with a driver in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure can enable the driver to similarly be driven longitudinally while mitigating rotational movement of the driver around a longitudinal axis of the driver, thereby providing for stabilized axial driving of a wedge by the driver.

[0009] An object of the present disclosure is to provide a wedge driver for inserting or removing a wedge from a link joiner. Another object of the present disclosure is to provide a method of operating a link wedge. Another object of the present disclosure is to provide a safe method of installing or removing link joiners on tensioned chains.

[0010] In another embodiment, the present disclosure can include a wedge driver. The wedge driver can include a trunk having a first trunk end, a second trunk end, and a trunk opening disposed through the trunk from the first trunk end to the second trunk end; a first prong extending from a first side of the second trunk end; a second prong extending from a second side the second trunk end; a driver having a first driver end, a second driver end, a channel disposed along at least a portion of the driver, a driver cap coupled to the first driver end, and an adapter coupled to the second driver end; a spring disposed around at least a portion of the driver; a bolt having a first bolt end and a second bolt end; and a trunk cap removably coupled to the first end of the trunk, the trunk cap having a threaded bolt opening aligned with the trunk opening and configured to receive the bolt. In one embodiment, the driver can be disposed within the trunk opening. In another embodiment, the first prong and the second prong can include a retention member disposed thereon to retain a link joiner. In another embodiment, the driver cap can prevent the driver from exiting the trunk opening through the threaded bolt opening. In another embodiment, the bolt can push at least a portion of the driver out of the second trunk end through the trunk opening. In another embodiment, the trunk opening can include a ledge proximate the second trunk end. In another embodiment, the spring can compress between the driver cap and the ledge when the bolt pushes at least a portion of the driver out of the second trunk end through the trunk opening. In another embodiment, the spring can push the driver cap through the trunk opening toward the first trunk end to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the trunk opening after spring compression. In another embodiment, a set member can engage the channel to prevent the driver from rotating around a longitudinal axis of the driver member. In another embodiment, the adapter can include a groove for receiving at least a portion of a wedge. In another embodiment, a length between the first prong and the second prong can be sized to receive a link joiner or hammer link.

[0011] In another embodiment, the present disclosure can include a method of operating a link wedge. The method can include the steps of receiving a link joiner between a first prong and a second prong of a wedge driver; positioning a wedge first end in a groove of a driver; positioning a wedge second end in a wedge opening of a link joiner; applying torque to a bolt in a first direction to extend at least a portion of the driver out of the wedge driver to push the wedge into the wedge opening without rotating the wedge; and applying torque to a bolt in a second direction to allow a spring disposed within the wedge driver to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the wedge driver. In another embodiment, the wedge driver can include a trunk having a first trunk end, a second trunk end, and a trunk opening disposed through the trunk from the first trunk end to the second trunk end. In another embodiment, the wedge driver can include a trunk cap removably coupled to the first end of the trunk, the trunk cap having a threaded bolt opening aligned with the trunk opening and configured to receive the bolt. In another embodiment, the driver can include: a first driver end, a second driver end, a channel disposed along at least a portion of the driver, a driver cap coupled to the first driver end, and an adapter coupled to the second driver end. In another embodiment, a spring can be disposed around at least a portion of the driver. In another embodiment, the driver cap can prevent the driver from exiting the trunk opening through the threaded bolt opening. In another embodiment, the trunk opening can include a ledge proximate the second trunk end. In another embodiment, the spring can push the cap through the trunk opening toward the first trunk end to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the trunk opening after spring compression. In another embodiment, a set member can engage the channel to prevent the driver from rotating around a longitudinal axis of the driver member.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] The present disclosure will be readily understood by the following detailed description,

taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings that illustrate, by way of example, the principles of the present disclosure. The drawings illustrate the design and utility of one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure, in which like elements are referred to by like reference numbers or symbols. The objects and elements in the drawings are not necessarily drawn to scale, proportion, or precise positional relationship. Instead, emphasis is focused on illustrating the principles of the present disclosure.

[0013] FIG. 1A illustrates a perspective view of a spring-loaded wedge driver, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0014] FIG. 1B illustrates a bottom perspective view of a spring-loaded wedge driver, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0015] FIG. 1C illustrates a top perspective view of a non-spring-loaded wedge driver, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0016] FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic view of the components of a wedge driver having a spring-enabled driver, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0017] FIG. 3A illustrates a schematic view of some of the components of a non-spring-loaded wedge driver, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0018] FIG. 3B illustrates another schematic view of some of the components of a wedge driver, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0019] FIG. 4A illustrates a wedge being driven into a link using a wedge driver when the link is under strain, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0020] FIG. 4B illustrates a wedge being driven out of a link using a wedge driver when the link is not under strain, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0021] FIG. 5A illustrates a prior art wedge including ears and pins, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure; and

[0022] FIG. 5B illustrates a prior art link joiner including a driven wedge, in accordance with one or more exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] The preferred version of the disclosure presented in the following written description and the various features and advantageous details thereof, are explained more fully with reference to the non-limiting examples included in the accompanying drawings and as detailed in the description, which follows. Descriptions of well-known components have been omitted so to not unnecessarily obscure the principal features described herein. The examples used in the following description are intended to facilitate an understanding of the ways in which the disclosure can be implemented and practiced. Accordingly, these examples should not be construed as limiting the scope of the claims.

[0024] FIGS. 1A-1B illustrate a wedge driver **100** in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure. In one embodiment, the apparatus **100** can include a trunk **102** and a handle (handle member) **104**. In another embodiment, the trunk can include a first trunk end **136**, a second trunk end **138**, a first side **140**, and a second side **142**. In one embodiment, the wedge driver **100** can include a first prong **144** that can extend from the first side **140** of the second trunk end **138**. In another embodiment, the wedge driver **100** can include a second prong **146** that can extend from a second side **142** of the second trunk end **138**. In another embodiment, the first and second prong **144**, **146** can form a mouth **128** therebetween. In one embodiment, the trunk **102** and the first and second prongs **144**, **146** can be made of a unitary body. In such a case, the unitary body can collectively be referred to as the main body or can be referred to by its individual components, the trunk **102** and the first and second prongs **144**, **146**. In one example, the first and second prongs **144**, **146** can each include a retention member **148**. For example, the retention member **148** can be a protrusion or lip that can retain a link joiner. In another embodiment, the wedge driver **100** can include a trunk cap (trunk cap member) **106** coupled to the first trunk end of the trunk **102**. In one embodiment, the trunk cap **106** can be removably coupled to the trunk **102**. In another

embodiment, the trunk cap **106** can include a threaded bolt opening; in one example, the threaded bolt opening of the trunk cap **106** can be aligned with a trunk opening. In another embodiment, the threaded bolt opening can be configured to receive a bolt (such as bolt **112**).

[0025] In another embodiment, the wedge driver **100** can include a bolt (bolt member) **112**. In another embodiment, the bolt **112** can be coupled to the trunk **102** via threads disposed within at least a portion of the trunk opening. In another embodiment, the bolt **112** can be coupled to the trunk **102** via threads disposed within at least a portion of the trunk cap **106**. In another example, application of torque to the bolt **112** can cause the bolt **112** to travel longitudinally within at least a portion of the wedge driver **100** or trunk **102**. In one embodiment, the wedge driver **100** or trunk **102** can include a trunk opening (not shown in FIGS. 1A-1B). For example, the bolt **112** can travel within the trunk opening of the apparatus **100**. In another embodiment, the apparatus **100** can include a driver (driver member) **110**. For example, the driver **110** can travel longitudinally within the trunk opening of the trunk **102**. In one embodiment, the application of torque to the bolt **112** can cause the driver **110** to travel within the trunk opening to contact and move the driver (e.g., the bolt **112** can push the driver **110** through at least a portion of the trunk opening). In another embodiment, the apparatus **100** can include a set member **108**. In another embodiment, the set member **108** can selectively extend into a hole in the trunk **102** and travel therein, such as to abut the driver **110**. In one embodiment, the set member **108** can engage within a channel **132** of the driver **110**. For example, in this manner, the apparatus **100** can be configured to prevent the driver **110** from rotating and can allow longitudinal travel through the trunk opening. In one example, the set member **108** can prevent the driver **110** from rotating around a longitudinal axis of the trunk **102**, and also keep driver **110** retained in trunk **102**. In another embodiment, the set member **108** can be a pin, corrugation, embossing, a nub, or any other suitable component. In one embodiment, the bolt **112** can push at least a portion of the driver **110** out of the second trunk end **138** through the trunk opening.

[0026] In one embodiment, the apparatus **100**, the trunk **102**, and/or the driver **110** can be configured to receive a link (e.g., coupling link, chain link, etc.), a wedge, and/or a link and wedge, such as a hammer link or link joiner utilizing a wedge like those known in the art with respect to locomotive handbrakes. For example, the trunk **102** can include a mouth **128** between the first and second prongs **144**, **146** that can be sized to receive a link. In another example, the mouth **128** can include a retention member **148**. In one embodiment, the retention member **148** can be configured to retain a link joiner. For example, each retention member **148** can include a lip configured to receive and/or retain a link. In another example, the mouth **128** can be sized to allow the apparatus **102** to receive a link and further receive a loose wedge, such that the wedge can be aligned with the link within the mouth **128** and driven into the link by the driver **110** of the apparatus **102**. In another example, the mouth **128** can include imprinting, embossing, corrugations, or any other elements suitable to facilitate the receiving or securing of a link within the mouth **128**. Preferably, in another embodiment, the driver **110** can be configured to recede into the trunk **102**, such as when the bolt **112** is loosened. For example, the driver **110** can be spring enabled, such that the driver **110** can recede out of the mouth **128** and into the apparatus **100** or trunk **102** (e.g., when the bolt **112** is loosened), such as to provide room for a link or link and wedge to be received within the mouth **128**. In another example, the driver **110** can be configured to contact a wedge within the mouth **128** of the apparatus **100**, such as to drive the wedge. For example, the driver **110** can include a notch **134** or groove **134** that can fit with a wedge. In another example, the driver **110** can include an adapter **134** coupled to an end of the driver **110** that can receive a wedge. In one embodiment, the adapter can include a groove **134** that can receive a portion of a wedge. In another embodiment, the groove **134** can be disposed on the second driver end directly, without any adapter. For example, the groove **134** can be sized to receive a wedge, such that the wedge can be stabilized against rotation or otherwise secured by the groove **112** of the driver **110**, such as when the wedge is being driven into a link.

[0027] In operation, in one exemplary embodiment the wedge driver **100** can receive a link wedge via the insertion of the link joiner between the first and second prongs **144**, **146** through the mouth **128**. In another embodiment, the wedge first end can be positioned in a groove of a driver and the second wedge end can be positioned in a wedge opening of the link joiner. In another embodiment, the application of torque to a bolt in a first direction (e.g., clockwise or counterclockwise) can extend at least a portion of the driver out of the wedge driver to push the wedge into the wedge opening of the link joiner without rotating the wedge. For example, the link joiner can rest on the retention member **148** of the first and second prongs **144**, **146** to retain the link joiner in place while the wedge driver pushes the wedge into the wedge opening. In another embodiment, applying torque to the bolt in a second direction (e.g., counterclockwise or clockwise) to allow a spring disposed within the wedge driver to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the wedge driver. For example, the link joiner can rest on the retention member **148** of the first and second prongs **144**, **146** to retain the link joiner in place while the wedge driver pushes the wedge out of the wedge opening and through the mouth **128**.

[0028] FIG. **1C** depicts another embodiment of the present disclosure. A wedge driver **116** can be similar to apparatus **100**. For example, the apparatus **116** can include a trunk **118**, a handle **120**, a driver-stabilizing set member **124**, a mouth **130**, a bolt **132**, and a driver **126**. In one embodiment, the apparatus **116** can vary from apparatus **100**, in that apparatus **116** can include a hollow shaft **122** through which the bolt **132** can extend. In one example, the apparatus **116** can have the shaft **122** instead of a trunk cap **106**. For example, the shaft **122** can include threads configured to engage the threads of the bolt **132**, such that application of torque to the bolt **132** can cause the bolt **132** to travel longitudinally within the shaft **122** and apparatus **116**. In another embodiment, the shaft **122** can provide an attachment point for the handle **120**. In another embodiment, the shaft **122** can have threads only at the top of the shaft **122**, such that a substantial portion of the shaft **122** can be smooth and act as a trunk opening for the bolt **132** and driver **126**. In another embodiment, a trunk cap (such as trunk cap **106**) can be sized to fit the shaft **122** and coupled or removably coupled to the shaft **122**, and the bolt **132** can be screwably engaged to the trunk cap. For example, a trunk cap can act as a cap to the shaft **122**, such that a bolt can extend through and contact the cap via threads on either the cap, the bolt, or both, and the shaft **122** can have a smooth trunk opening therein to house the bolt and/or the driver.

[0029] FIG. **2** illustrates another embodiment of the present disclosure. A wedge driver apparatus (wedge driver) (wedge driving system) **200** can be similar to apparatus **100** and apparatus **116**. In one embodiment, the apparatus **200** can include a trunk **202** and a handle **204**. In another embodiment, the apparatus **200** can include a trunk cap **206** coupled or removably coupled with the trunk **102**; for example, a screw **214** or screws **214** can secure the trunk cap **206** to the trunk **202**. In another embodiment the trunk **202** can include a trunk cap **206** to access, assemble, and replace components disposed within the trunk. In another embodiment, the trunk **202** and trunk cap. In one embodiment, the apparatus **200** can include a bolt **212**. In one embodiment, the bolt **212** can be configured to travel longitudinally within the apparatus **200**. For example, the bolt **212** can include threads that can correspond to threads of the trunk cap **206** or trunk **202**, such that application of torque to the bolt **212** (such as to a head of the bolt **212**) can cause the bolt to travel longitudinally within the apparatus **200**. In one embodiment, the bolt **212** can be configured to engage a torque-generating mechanism, such as a wrench, drill, impact driver, human hand, or any other suitable torque-generating mechanism, such as a mechanism that can activate threads of the bolt **212** by turning the bolt **212**. In another embodiment, the handle **204** can be secured to the trunk **202** via welding; in another embodiment, the handle **204** can be fabricated as part of the trunk **202**. In another embodiment, the handle can be attached to the trunk **202** via adhesive, screws, latches, or any other mechanism suitable to attach the handle **204** to the trunk **202** such that the trunk **202** can be supported by handle **204**, such as when an operator of the apparatus **200** is utilizing the apparatus **200**.

[0030] In another embodiment, the apparatus **200** can include a driver **210**. For example, the driver **210** can be similar to driver **110**. In one embodiment, the driver **210** can include a first end **224** and a second end **226**. In one example, the first end **224** can be configured to contact the bolt **212**. For example, the first end **224** can include a recess configured to receive a protrusion, such as a protrusion at a tip of the bolt **212**. In another embodiment, the first end **224** can be flat, such that the bolt **212** can contact the first end **224** and exert force on the driver **210**. For example, the driver **210** can include a driver cap **228**. In one embodiment, the driver cap **228** can be coupled to the first end **224** of the driver **210**. In another embodiment, the driver cap **228** can prevent the driver **210** from exiting the trunk **202** through a threaded bolt opening of the trunk cap **206**. In another embodiment, the first end **224** can be of any suitable design or configuration to allow the bolt **212** to contact the driver **210** such that the bolt can rotate against the first end **224** (such as when torque is applied to the bolt **212**) and exert force against the driver **210** (such as to cause the driver **210** to travel within the trunk opening **216**). In one embodiment, the driver **210** can be spring enabled, such as via a spring **218** that can compress and expand within the trunk opening. In another embodiment, the driver **210** can include a spring **218** disposed around at least a portion of the driver **210**. For example, the first end **224** can include a head (e.g., a driver cap **228**). For example, the head can have a larger diameter than the spring **218**, such that the spring can abut the head when the spring **218** is compressed between the driver cap **228** and the ledge **230**. In another embodiment, the first end **224** can include a pin, nubs, embossing, or any other design or mechanism suitable to abut the spring **218** and allow the spring **218** to compress thereagainst. In another embodiment, the driver **210** can include a channel **220** extending longitudinally on the surface of the driver **210**. In one embodiment, the channel **220** can be configured to engage a set member **208** of the apparatus that can extend through the trunk **202**. In this manner, for example, the driver **210** can be configured to be stabilized against rotation along a longitudinal axis of the driver **210**. In another embodiment, the second end **226** of the driver **210** can be configured to contact a wedge. For example, the second end **226** can include a groove adapted to receive a top of a wedge and facilitate stable driving of the wedge, such as into a link. The second end **226** can have a groove similar to groove **134** in FIGS. 1A-1B.

[0031] In another embodiment, the driver **210** can move longitudinally within a trunk opening **216** of the apparatus **200**. For example, the trunk **202** can include a trunk opening **216** configured to house the driver **210** and spring **218**, such as by having a larger diameter than the driver **210** such that the driver can travel longitudinally therein. Preferably, the driver **210** can be a spring-enabled driver **210**. For example, a spring (such as spring **218**) can exert pressure against the driver **210**, such that as the bolt **212** progresses out of the trunk opening **216** and therefore relieves pressure on the driver **210**, the driver **210** can recede into the trunk **202** via force exerted by the spring **218**. In another embodiment, driver **210** can be pushed by the bolt **212** when torque is applied to the bolt **212** that causes the bolt **212** to progress further into the trunk **202** via threads of the bolt **212**. In another example, the driver **210** can move longitudinally such that it extrudes into a mouth **222** of the trunk **202**. In one embodiment, the trunk opening **216** can have a uniform diameter; in another embodiment, the diameter of the trunk opening **216** can have a wider portion and a narrower portion. For example, the trunk opening **216** can have a portion with a diameter configured to accommodate the driver **210** and spring **218** disposed thereon. In one embodiment, the trunk opening **216** can include a ledge (lip) **230** therein that the spring **218** can compress against, such as when the spring **218** is compressed by first end **224** of the driver **210**.

[0032] In another embodiment, the trunk opening **216** can include a ledge **230** proximate a second trunk end (such as second trunk end **138**). In one example, the spring **218** can compresses between the driver cap **228** and the ledge **230** of the trunk opening **216** when the bolt **212** pushes at least a portion of the driver **210** out of the second trunk end through the trunk opening **216**. In another embodiment, the spring **218** can push the driver cap **228** through the trunk opening **216** toward a first end of the trunk **202** to retract at least a portion of the driver **210** back into the trunk opening

216 after spring **218** compression. In one embodiment, the lip **230** can have a diameter larger than that of the driver **210**, such that the driver **210** can travel through the lip **230** and into a narrower portion of the trunk opening (and out into the mouth **222**) while the spring **218** can be compressed against the lip **230**. In another embodiment, the trunk opening can include embossing, ridges, a pin, or any other mechanism suitable to provide a compression surface for the spring **218** to compress against. In this manner, the trunk opening **216** can be configured to house the driver **210** or spring-enabled driver member **210**. In another example, and in this manner, the apparatus **200** can include a spring-enabled driver.

[0033] FIGS. 3A-3B depict another embodiment of the present disclosure and preferred dimensions thereof. In one embodiment, a wedge driver **300** can include a trunk member **302**, a handle member **304**, and a shaft member **306**. In another embodiment, a trunk opening **308** can extend through the shaft **306** and the trunk **302** and into a mouth **332** of the trunk **302**. In one example, the mouth **332** of the trunk can have a height of 5.3 inches, a width of 5.5 inches, and an opening of 3.5 inches. In another example, the trunk **302** can have a width of 8.0 inches, a height of 9.375 inches, and a thickness of 3.0 inches. In one example, the mouth **332** of the trunk can have a height of 2.625 inches, a width of 2.75 inches, and an opening of 1.75 inches. In another example, the trunk **302** can have a width of 4.0 inches, a height of 4.6875 inches, and a thickness of 1.5 inches. In one embodiment, edges and/or corners of the trunk **302** can be beveled. In another embodiment, the shaft **306** can have a length of 3.0 inches and a thickness of 1.2 inches. In one example, the handle **304** can be secured to the trunk **302** and the shaft **306**. For example, the handle **304** can extend 4.15 inches from the shaft **306**, and 2.75 inches from the trunk **302**. In one embodiment, the handle **304** can have a maximum inner diameter of 5.0 inches. In another embodiment, a trunk opening **308** can extend through the shaft **306** and trunk **302** and be accessible at the mouth **332** of the trunk **302** and top of the shaft **306**. In one example, the trunk opening **308** can be threaded. In another example, the trunk opening can be 4.25 inches long. In another embodiment, the trunk opening can have inner threads $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch-18 and outer threads of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-16. In one embodiment, the trunk **302** can include a hole **334**; in one example, the hole **334** can be configured to receive a set member or set screw, such as set member **316**. In another embodiment, a length between a first prong and second prong of the trunk **302** can be sized to receive a link joiner or hammer link.

[0034] In one embodiment, a driver **310** can include a channel, such as a channel **312**, that can engage with a driver-stabilizing set member (e.g., set member **316**) of a trunk **302**. For example, the driver **310** can be 7.12 inches long; in another example, a driver **310** can be 1.124 inches thick. In one embodiment, a channel **312** on the driver **310** can be around 5.0 inches long; in another embodiment, the channel **312** can be 0.375 inches wide. For example, the driver **310** can be 3.56 inches long; in another example, a driver **310** can be 0.562 inches thick. In one embodiment, a channel **312** on the driver **310** can be around 2.687 inches long; in another embodiment, the channel **312** can be 0.1875 inches wide. In one example, the channel can have rounded ends, such that the ends of the channel **312** can accommodate a round set member or pin engaged within the channel **312** (such as set member **316**). In another embodiment, the channel **312** can have a depth of approximately 0.19 inches. In another embodiment, the channel **312** can have a depth of approximately 0.0935 inches. In another embodiment, the driver **310** can include a first end **330** and a second end **314**. In one embodiment, the first end **330** can be configured to contact a bolt, such as bolt **318**. For example, the first end **330** can include a recess configured to receive a protrusion of the bolt **318**, such as protrusion **324** of bolt **318**. In one embodiment, the recess of the first end **330** can have a diameter of 0.75 inches. In one embodiment, the recess of the first end **330** can have a diameter of 0.375 inches; in another embodiment, the recess can have a rounded bottom, such as to accommodate a rounded protrusion (such as protrusion **324**). In another embodiment, the recess of the first end **330** can have a depth of 0.5 inches, and a radius of curvature of approximately 0.375 inches. In another embodiment, the recess of the first end **330** can have a depth of 0.25 inches, and a radius of curvature of approximately 0.1875 inches. In another

embodiment, the driver **310** can have a second end **314** configure to contact a wedge. For example, the second end **314** can have a groove. In another example, the groove can be a recess, such as a rectangular recess, in the second end **314**, and can have a depth of approximately 0.125 inches. In another embodiment, the recess can have a width of approximately 0.685 inches. In another example, the groove can be a recess or rectangular recess in the second end **314** and can have a depth of approximately 0.0625 inches. In another embodiment, the recess can have a width of approximately 0.3425 inches.

[0035] In one embodiment, a wedge driving system can include a bolt **318**, such as a bolt that can couple with the trunk **302**. In one example, the bolt **318** can include a head **320**, a shaft **322**, and a protrusion **324**. In another embodiment, the bolt **318** can include a first bolt end **320** and a second bolt end **324**. In one embodiment, the head can be a standard wrench head, such as a hexagonal wrench head; in another embodiment, the head **320** can be a flat head, Philips head, or any other head suitable to facilitate the application of torque to the bolt **318**. In one embodiment, the head **320** can be 1.875 inches wide. In one embodiment, the head **320** can be 0.9375 inches wide. In another embodiment, the shaft **322** can be 6.899 inches long. In another embodiment, the shaft **322** can include 6.75 inches of length that is uniform, and at the end of the shaft **322** nearest the protrusion **324**, the shaft **322** can taper for a longitudinal distance of approximately 0.244 inches. In another embodiment, the shaft **322** can be 3.4495 inches long. In another embodiment, the shaft **322** can include 3.3875 inches of length that is uniform, and at the end of the shaft **322** nearest the protrusion **324**, the shaft **322** can taper for a longitudinal distance of approximately 0.0620 inches. For example, the end of the bolt **318** can taper at an angle of approximately 60°. In another example, the end of the bolt **318** can taper at an angle of approximately 30°. In one example, the protrusion **324** can be 0.736 inches wide; in another embodiment, the protrusion **324** can have a height of approximately 0.51 inches as measured from the bottom of the protrusion **324** to a center point of the curvature of the protrusion **324**. In another example, the protrusion can have a radius of curvature of approximately 0.368 inches. In one example, the protrusion **324** can be 0.3680 inches wide; in another embodiment, the protrusion **324** can have a height of approximately 0.2505 inches as measured from the bottom of the protrusion **324** to a center point of the curvature of the protrusion **324**. In another example, the protrusion can have a radius of curvature of approximately 0.1840 inches. For example, the protrusion **324**, as described with respect to FIGS. 3A-3B, can have dimensions allowing the protrusion **324** to fit within the recess at the first end **330** of the driver **310**, and in this manner, the bolt **318** can be configured to contact the driver **310**. In one embodiment, the bolt **318** can include threads on the shaft **322**; in one example, the threads can be 5/8-inch-18 threads. In another example, the bolt **318** can be a 5/8-18 GR8 bolt with threads running the length of the shaft **322**. In one embodiment, the threads of the shaft **322** can be configured to engage the threads of the trunk opening **308**.

[0036] In another embodiment, the system can include a set member **316** or set screw **316**, such as can be engaged within the hole **334** on the trunk **302**. In one example, the hole **334** can include a thread or threads that can correspond to a thread or threads on the set member **316**. In one embodiment, the set member **316** can include a first end **326** and a second end **328**. In one example, the first end **326** can include a standard wrench head, such as a hex wrench, Philips head, flat head, or any other head suitable to facilitate the application of torque to the set member **316**. In one example, the set member **316** can be a set screw, such that a wrench head of the set member **316** can be recessed or indented into the first end **326** of the set member **316**. In another embodiment, the second end **328** of the set member **316** can include a nib; in one embodiment, the nib of the second end **328** of the set member **316** can be configured to engage the channel **312** of the driver **310**. For example, the nib can have a diameter of 0.360 inches; in another example, the nib can have a height of 0.180 inches. In another embodiment, the set member **316** can have a diameter of 0.5 inches. In one embodiment, the first end **326** can be approximately 0.32 inches long. For example, the nib can have a diameter of 0.180 inches; in another example, the nib can

have a height of 0.09 inches. In another embodiment, the set member **316** can have a diameter of 0.25 inches. In one embodiment, the first end **326** can be approximately 0.156 inches long. In another embodiment, the set member **316** can be a ¼-inch-20 screw. In one embodiment, the nib can be configured to engage within a channel **312**, such as via the dimensions of the nib and channel **312** like those discussed herein.

[0037] FIGS. **4A-4B** depict another embodiment **400** of the present disclosure. In one embodiment, a method of operating a link wedge can include a wedge driver apparatus **402**. For example, the apparatus **402** can be similar to wedge driver **100**, **200**, and/or that depicted in FIGS. **3A-3B**. The apparatus **402** can receive a link **404** (e.g., hammer link, link joiner, etc.). In one embodiment, a mouth of the apparatus **402** can be configured to receive the link **404** such that the retention member (lips) of the trunk of the apparatus **402** can support the link **404** in the mouth of the trunk, such as between a first prong and a second prong of the apparatus **402**. In another embodiment, the apparatus **402** can be configured to receive a link **404** and a wedge **406** to be driven therein. In one example, the driver **412** of the apparatus **402** can be withdrawn into the trunk, such that there can be adequate space in the mouth of the trunk for the link **404** and wedge **406** to fit. Preferably, in one example, with the link **404** in position within the trunk, and the wedge **406** primed to be driven into the link **404**, the driver **412** of the apparatus **402** can contact the wedge **406** in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure. In one embodiment, a bolt **414** of the apparatus **402** can exert force on the driver **412** and cause the driver **412** to push the wedge **406** into the link **404**. In one embodiment, driving the wedge **406** into the link **404** can secure and/or close the link **404**. In another embodiment, the method **400** can be performed while a chain **408** is coupled to a brake handle and/or lever of a locomotive handbrake system.

[0038] In another embodiment, a method of driving a wedge **410** out of a link **404** can similarly include receiving a link **404** with a secured wedge **406** within a mouth of a trunk of a wedge driving apparatus **402**. Similar to method **400**, the driver **412** of the apparatus **402** can contact the wedge **406** and move via application of torque to the bolt **414**. In this manner, the method **410** can drive a wedge **406** out a link **404**, such as to remove the link from a chain **408**. In one embodiment, receiving the link **404** within the mouth of the trunk can prevent separation of the link **404** components when the wedge **406** is removed from the link **404**. For example, when the method **410** is applied to a link **404** and wedge **406** that is connect to a tensioned chain **408**, removal of the wedge **406** can lead to separation of the link **404** components, facilitating the removal of the link **404** from the chain **408**. In one embodiment, application of the removing a wedge from a link can be dangerous, because once the wedge **406** is removed, the link **404** components can come apart with significant force, potentially injuring personnel. In one example, the trunk, having received the link **404**, can prevent violent separation, such that the link **404** can be kept closed when the wedge **406** is removed, such that the link **404** can be safely detached after, e.g., the operator of the apparatus **402** has removed the wedge **406** from the link **404**. Preferably, in one embodiment, methods **400**, **410** can include the use of an electric drill **416** or electric impact driver **416** that can apply torque to the bolt **414**, such as to drive the wedge **406** into or out of the link **404**. In another embodiment, a manual wrench can be used; in another example, the bolt **414** can be configured to be turned by hand, such as by incorporating a lever, a wheel, or any other mechanism suitable to enable the bolt **414** to be turned by hand.

[0039] FIG. **5A-5B** depict another embodiment of the present disclosure. A wedge (link wedge) **500** can be similar to wedges known in the art, such as those used with links or link joiners in locomotive handbrake systems. The wedge **500** can include ears **502** and pins **504**. In another embodiment, the wedge **500** can include a wedge first end **502** and a second wedge end **504**. In one embodiment, at least a portion of the wedge **500** between the ears **502** can fit within or contact a groove of a driver of a wedge driver apparatus in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure. In another embodiment, the ears **502** can prevent the wedge from being overdriven within a link or hammer link or link joiner. In another embodiment, the pin **504** or pins **504** can

guide the wedge **500** into grooves of a link or a wedge opening of a link joiner, such as when the wedge **500** is being driving into a link. In one example, a link (link joiner) **506** can include a wedge **500**, a first stirrup **508**, and a second stirrup **510**. In one embodiment, the first and second stirrups **508**, **510** can couple to one another, such as can be seen in FIG. 5B. For example, each of the stirrups **508**, **510** can be configured to correspond to the other, such as by including a cavity **512** capable of receiving a spur **514** of the other stirrup. In another example, each of the stirrups **508**, **510** can be configured to receive the wedge **500** via a wedge opening.

[0040] In one embodiment, each of the stirrups **508**, **510** can include a pair of furrows configured to align with furrows on the other stirrup. For example, a stirrup **508**, **510** can include a furrow traversing the cavity **512** on the inner circumference of the link joiner **506**; in one embodiment, a longitudinal axis of the furrow can be substantially perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the link joiner **506**. In another example, the stirrup **508**, **510** can include or further include a furrow traversing the spur **514** on the inner circumference of the link joiner **506**; in one embodiment, a longitudinal axis of the furrow can be substantially perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the link joiner **506**. Preferably, each of the stirrups **508**, **510** can include a pair of furrows, and in one embodiment, the each of stirrups **508**, **510** can be configured such that each of their furrows align with furrows on the other stirrup **508**, **510**. In this manner, when the stirrups **508**, **510** are coupled to one another, their furrows can form two grooves on the inner circumference of the link joiner **506**. Preferably, the grooves can each be located at the points of coupling between the cavities **512** and spurs **514** of the stirrups **508**, **510**. In another embodiment, these grooves can be configured to receive the wedge **500**. For example, the wedge **500** can be driven into the grooves of the stirrups **508**, **510** in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure. In one embodiment, the force exerted by the wedge **500** on the stirrups **508**, **510** can secure the stirrups **508**, **510** together. In another embodiment, the ears **502** of the wedge **500** can prevent the wedge **500** from being over-driven through the stirrups **508**, **510** of the link joiner.

[0041] In one embodiment, the wedge driver apparatuses and systems disclosed herein can be made of any suitable material. Preferably, the trunk, trunk cap, bolt, driver, spring, screw, and other components and members discussed herein can be made of a metal, such as aluminum, steel, iron, copper, bronze, or any other metal or alloy thereof. In another embodiment, the apparatuses and systems herein can be made of polymers, plastics, or any other non-metallic material suitable to enable the driving of a wedge, such as a wedge in a link joiner. In another embodiment, the components discussed herein can be made of the same material or different material. In another embodiment, a wedge driver apparatus or system can be configured to be as light as possible while maintaining the strength and structural integrity necessary to drive wedges. For example, the trunk can be made of aluminum while the trunk cap, bolt, and driver can be made of steel.

[0042] The present disclosure achieves at least the following advantages: [0043] 1. Increasing safety of wedge driving in hammer link installation; [0044] 2. Facilitating the installation and repair of chains or chain segments, such as in locomotive handbrake systems; [0045] 3. Providing an apparatus and method for chain repair; [0046] 4. Facilitating the repair of locomotive handbrake systems without removing the chain from the system; [0047] 5. Providing a wedge driver with a driver member that is stabilized against rotation around a longitudinal axis of the driver member; [0048] 6. Providing a method of removing a wedge from a link joiner that maintains the link joiner in an attached state immediately after removal of the wedge, such that violent separation of the link joiner components is mitigated or prevented; and [0049] 7. Facilitating axial driving of wedges in link joiners while preventing unwanted rotational movement at the point of contact between the driver and wedge.

[0050] The description in this patent document should not be read as implying that any particular element, step, or function can be an essential or critical element that must be included in the claim scope. Also, none of the claims can be intended to invoke 35 U.S.C. § 112(f) with respect to any of the appended claims or claim elements unless the exact words “means for” or “step for” are

explicitly used in the particular claim, followed by a participle phrase identifying a function. Use of terms such as (but not limited to) “mechanism,” “module,” “device,” “unit,” “component,” “element,” “member,” “apparatus,” “machine,” “system,” “processor,” “processing device,” or “controller” within a claim can be understood and intended to refer to structures known to those skilled in the relevant art, as further modified or enhanced by the features of the claims themselves, and can be not intended to invoke 35 U.S.C. § 112(f).

[0051] The disclosure may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. For example, each of the new structures described herein, may be modified to suit particular local variations or requirements while retaining their basic configurations or structural relationships with each other or while performing the same or similar functions described herein. The present embodiments are therefore to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive. Accordingly, the scope of the inventions can be established by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein. Further, the individual elements of the claims are not well-understood, routine, or conventional. Instead, the claims are directed to the unconventional inventive concept described in the specification.

Claims

1. A wedge driver, comprising: a trunk having a first trunk end, a second trunk end, and a trunk opening disposed through the trunk from the first trunk end to the second trunk end; a first prong extending from a first side of the second trunk end; a second prong extending from a second side of the second trunk end; a driver having a first driver end, a second driver end, a channel disposed along at least a portion of the driver, a driver cap coupled to the first driver end, and an adapter coupled to the second driver end; a spring disposed around at least a portion of the driver; a bolt having a first bolt end and a second bolt end, the bolt configured to travel longitudinally within the trunk opening; a trunk cap removably coupled to the first end of the trunk, the trunk cap having a threaded bolt opening aligned with the trunk opening and configured to receive the bolt; and a handle operably coupled to the trunk.
2. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the driver is disposed within the trunk opening.
3. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the first prong and the second prong include a retention member disposed thereon to retain a link joiner.
4. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the driver cap prevents the driver from exiting the trunk opening through the threaded bolt opening.
5. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the bolt pushes at least a portion of the driver out of the second trunk end through the trunk opening.
6. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the trunk opening includes a ledge proximate the second trunk end.
7. The wedge driver of claim 6, wherein the spring compresses between the driver cap and the ledge when the bolt pushes at least a portion of the driver out of the second trunk end through the trunk opening.
8. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the spring pushes the driver cap through the trunk opening toward the first trunk end to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the trunk opening after spring compression.
9. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein a set member can engage the channel to prevent the driver from rotating around a longitudinal axis of the driver member.
10. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein the adapter includes a groove for receiving at least a portion of a wedge.
11. The wedge driver of claim 1, wherein a length between the first prong and the second prong is

sized to receive a link joiner or hammer link.

12. A method of operating a link wedge, comprising: receiving a link joiner between a first prong and a second prong of a wedge driver; positioning a wedge first end in a groove of a driver; positioning a wedge second end in a wedge opening of the link joiner; and rotating the bolt through threads of a threaded bolt opening to exert force against the driver to cause the driver to travel within the trunk opening.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the wedge driver includes: a trunk having a first trunk end, a second trunk end, and a trunk opening disposed through the trunk from the first trunk end to the second trunk end.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the wedge driver includes a trunk cap removably coupled to the first end of the trunk, the trunk cap having the threaded bolt opening aligned with the trunk opening and configured to receive the bolt.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein the driver includes: a first driver end, a second driver end, a channel disposed along at least a portion of the driver, a driver cap coupled to the first driver end, and an adapter coupled to the second driver end.

16. The method of claim 12, wherein a spring is disposed around at least a portion of the driver.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the driver cap prevents the driver from exiting the trunk opening through the threaded bolt opening.

18. The method of claim 13, further comprising applying torque to the bolt in a second direction to allow the spring to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the wedge driver.

19. The method of claim 12, wherein the spring pushes the cap through the trunk opening toward the first trunk end to retract at least a portion of the driver back into the trunk opening after spring compression.

20. The method of claim 15, wherein a set member can engage the channel to prevent the driver from rotating around a longitudinal axis of the driver member.
