

## News of the "FEATHER RIVER ROUTE"

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## FEBRUARY FLOODS KNOCK-OUT MAINLINE

As most of all our members have heard, or even unfortunately experienced in one way or another, the massive storms that hit Northern California and Nevada between Feb 12 and 21st caused severe damage to both public and private property. And of all the railroads in N Calif., the former WP mainline through the Feather River Canyon was the hardest hit. Between Feb 17 and 28th, not a single train was able to traverse the entire length of the mainline from Oroville to Portola due to more than 25 places where the railroad was washed out, or buried under mud and rock slides. From Feb 12th until Feb 17th, the MofW forces were able to keep up with the damage caused by the relentless rains, but the storm of Feb 17th was bigger than any two previous ones combined. The last train to successfully make it through the Canyon was the westbound Overland Mail West, coming through Oroville in the early morning hours of the 17th. Trapped in the Canyon were 4 trains, two westbound North Platte to Stockton drags, a westbound Bieber to Stockton train, and the VERY important westbound American President Lines double-stack container train. The crew on this train, which has the symbol APOAD, was able to get the train as far west as Camp Rogers before being stopped due to washouts ahead. Upon inspecting the train at Camp Rogers, the crew noticed a wash out occurring under the middle of their train. Quickly, the power was taken to the other end, and the train pulled back as far as Rich Bar. Which was as far as this train went for another week. The other three trains were stuck at MP 249 (Rock Creek), at Paxton and at Keddie. Between these trains and the work trains already in the Canyon there was plenty of power on hand to use to help put the Railroad back together again. Meanwhile on the 17th there was a westbound USW steel train stranded at Portola due to being closed and four eastbounds at Oroville, WPX, an empty steel train, STB train and the Stockton to Salt Lake SSL drag.

Of the washouts and slides that closed the mainline in the Canyon all but five were relatively minor in size and were either cleared or filled in within a few days. Of the five major washouts three occurred in the stretch known as Serpentine Canyon (called this due to the type rock in the area) between Rich Bar and Virgilia. About 2 miles east of Rich Bar about 400 ft of track was undercut to about the middle of the ties with no room to shift the track closer to the canyon wall. Two more miles farther east about 600 feet of track was left dangling by the raging waters swinging about 50 ft above the normal river level. And the largest one was just west of the west switch at Virgilia, where about 1100 ft of track slipped off the roadbed and into the river bed. Just west of Portola at the east switch of Blairsden siding the 200 ft long, 75 ft high fill at that point gave way leaving a large gap. The UP MofW forces reported that this single gap required 21,000 cubic yards of fill. The other major wash-out occurred just east of the east switch at Pulga. This one was at MP 240 and was about 900 feet long and 35 ft deep.

Even though the railroad through the Feather River Canyon was hit hard and was out of service until Feb 28th, the Feather River Highway (70) incurred damage that was several magnitudes greater! Cal Trans expects the highway will finally reopen to public travel about July 1st. When it does open there will be many, many places where the road will only be one lane. We have heard reports that restoring the entire highway back to the standard two lanes may take as long as two years. Because of this coming summer anyone that is planning on coming to the museum at Portola should plan on traveling from Sacramento over Donner then north on Highway 89. Please pass it on.....

The mainline through the Feather River was not the only part of the exWP that was put out of service by high water, washouts, etc....

In the Bay Area, the line through Niles Canyon between Fremont and Plesanton was closed for a few days due to mud slides, and two feet of water running through the 4320 foot Tunnel #1. To the east on Altamont Pass there were some minor mud slides, but not enough to close the line. The biggest problem that the railroad had west of the Canyon was located at the town of Thornton, 20 miles north of Stockton. There on Feb 18th the swollen Mokelumne River broke through three levees, the last one being the one on which the mainline runs. By the time the river got finished the town of Thornton was under water along with the nearby Interstate 5 and almost a mile of track had been washed away. North of Sacramento at Del Paso, there was about 8 miles of mainline that was covered with up to 3 feet of water in places, with the associated damage to the tracks once the water receded days later.

To the east of Portola along the main, there were some small mud slides and washouts that had the line closed from Reno Jct to Doyle for several days. The Reno Branch was closed due to high water and a few washouts. They got it opened and it was washed out again and out of service for another five days. Across Nevada in Palisade Canyon west of Elko the Humbolt River rose up and began washing out ballast in several areas. One bridge at the east end of the SP's Carlin Yard began to wash out but was saved by the MofW crews.

As soon as the Feather River Canyon was closed the UP began to detour their trains. I don't have the exact number of trains that were detoured during this entire period, but they numbered in the dozens taking several different routes. About the time that the UP canyon line closed the preferred detour route over Donner Pass by the way of SP's main was also closed due to weather damage and a massive rock slide east of Truckee. For about four days all trains were being routed between Stockton and Salt Lake City by way of the Santa Fe's line between Stockton and Barstow, over Tehachapi Pass, and then north over the UP mainline to SLC. When the SP finally reopened one track over Donner the UP began to run all of the "HOT" trains over this shorter route. All of the lower priority trains, plus the double-stack trains that can't make the clearances over Donner were forced to continue the southern detour over Tehachapi Pass until the Feather River Canyon mainline was opened on Feb 28th. From Feb 28 until March 15th the top priority

trains such as the eastbound MINP, WPX and OACSV and the westbound OMW, NMI and SLOAT continued to use Donner to miss the massive slow orders in the Canyon. The only exception to this was when one of these trains had double-stack cars in it and thus went by way of the Feather River.

There were some other quite interesting and unusual detours for trains. With the mainline under water north of Sacramento and the parallel SP east valley main running north from Roseville closed for a week due to the wash out at Bear River Bridge north of Lincoln, another route had to be found. Both the SP and UP began to run trains on Feb 20th over the lightly used SP west valley line north of Davis once the high water damage on this line was repaired. In order to get the trains to and from the BN at K Falls, Oregon the UP was forced to detour these HIGHLINE trains onto the SP at Stockton,

and then north to Sacramento over the SP, west to Davis and then north over the west valley line, and to Tehama, the junction with the east valley line, and then on north past Mt Shasta to the BN's yard at Klamath Falls. It should be pointed out that all detour trains heading out of Stockton for Sac went by way of the SP line. Half way through all of these detours when trains were really beginning to pile up in Stockton the SP-UP interchange track was badly torn up by a derailment. With this all important track out of service the trains were now forced to make another detour to the new UP-SP interchange track 8 miles south of Stockton at Lathrop. One of our members caught a unique meet near Lathrop one day between the westbound USW steel train running eastbound and the hot eastbound WPX running westbound.

One of the most out-of-the-way detours that occurred happened when the WPX we mentioned earlier got stranded in Oroville. After sitting in Oroville for a few days, it finally

began its eastward journey by going back to Marysville over the UP main, getting onto the SP's east valley line for the run north through Chico to Tehama, then south over the SP's west valley line to Davis, then over Donner Pass on the SP's line.

Another wild detour involved a few trains out of Oakland during the time Niles Canyon was closed. This detour involved trains backing out of Oakland yard, and then running north over the street trackage of the Oakland Terminal Railway through the slums of West Oakland to reach the Santa Fe interchange. Upon reaching the Santa Fe tracks in Oakland the trains proceeded north to Richmond using the Santa Fe trackage right over the SP and then the SF line to Stockton. At Stockton these trains just changed crews and continued south over Tehachapi to the UP main connection near Barstow.

To help restore the roadbed and the railroad itself the UP called upon several sources of rock and ballast. Besides local sources the UP sent at least two full trains of nothing but loaded ballast hoppers from the Midwest, one of these reportedly coming from the MoPac's Gads Hill, Missouri ballast quarry. To help restore the track in the Thornton area the trackage into the Lone Star quarry at the end of the seldom used Tracy Branch west of Stockton was repaired and reopened. Two shuttle trains were run continuously on a 24 hour basis for over a week between the Lone Star and Thornton each bring 20 loaded side-dump cars at a time to the washout area. Deep within the Feather River Canyon at Tobin the railroad received special permission from the Forest Service to reopen the rock quarry that has been inactive for some time. To get the rock needed to fill in the gaps caused by the river the railroad blasted 80 feet into the side of the granite mountain at this point. Also during this time the controversial

ballast pit in the side of Table Mt east of Oroville at Elsey was opened and was used to supply ballast for both the lower part of the Feather River Canyon as well as the washout at Thornton. The railroad's ballast pit at Pardo, just east of the Elko, Nevada yard was also in service during the repair work. Rock and ballast from Pardo was being used on the Reno, the upper end of the Feather River Canyon, plus by a ballast shuttle train powered by GP-30 UP 80( working the washouts in Palisade Canyon. This is the first time in over a year that the increasingly rare GP-30 has shown up anywhere on former WP rails.

Thanks to several FRRS members that contributed to putting this overview of the problems from the storms together. They include Roy Lopez, Roger Hepkema, Ken Meeker, Dale Sanders, Steve Milward, John Walker, and of course "Vinnie Ventosa".

The current issue of the March 1986 CTC BOARD has a good article with photos that covers the storm damage Wayne and Norm reported...Editor

In other news about the former Western Pacific we have learned that the UP is piecing together the "true" merger locomotive at the Salt Lake City shops. The locomotive involved is GP-35 WP 3020 which was wrecked in the great Reno Runaway of July 1982. In Feb, 84 this locomotive received the long hood off of retired GP-35 UP 763. Now in March 86 the cab and short hood of the 3020 has now been replaced by the cab and short hood from recently wrecked GP-38-2 MoPac 2031. Just hope someone gets a photo of this thing once it is repaired and before it gets into the paint shop.....

We will try once again next issue to bring you a complete run-down as to the location and status of all of the WP steel bay-window cabs..

