

Feather River & Western

July 4th Celebration

MILEPOSTS

SUMMER-FALL 1976

On July 4th, 1976, Western Pacific Engineer Norman Holmes, fulfilled a life's ambition. He had his own railroad.

It was in February that Norman took delivery of his first standard gauge railroad cars—a 1917 flat car, a 1918 box car and a 1916 (rebuilt in 1943) bay window caboose—all retired equipment from the WP. Two switches and some rail were bought from the Quincy RR, some of it originally from the Central Pacific RR dated 1881. Later more rail was acquired from the Feather River Lumber Co. at Loyalton. The switches and some rail were laid and the right of way graded for nearly a quarter of a mile on his 15 acre Portola property.

A need for a locomotive was now evident and a steam engine was most desirable, but they are very scarce now—20 years ago it would have been different. A gasoline powered 35 ton 4 wheel Plymouth Locomotive was located on the White City Terminal Co., near Medford, Oregon. It was trucked to Portola and unloaded November 1975. As soon as weather permitted track work was begun. On Memorial Day weekend a dozen railfan friends showed up to lay track. 450 feet of track was laid in two days. Norman's wife Barbara provided the meals and some of the help slept in the caboose overnight.

As it was decided to go for a July 4th gold spike ceremony as his part of the nation's bicentennial celebration,

work was pushed to complete the railroad track and to paint the locomotive red, white and blue. The track was completed by the end of June and the final paint was put on the engine July 3rd.

On July 4th at 2:20 p.m. a silver spike was driven by retired Engr. Cal Dorothy, a simulated gold spike by Condr. Chris Skow, another silver spike by Safety Supervisor Mel Graham and the final gold spike by Engr. Norman Holmes. Passes were issued and everyone was invited for a ride in the caboose. Six trips were made, hauling some 100 people. (N. H.)

