



Preserving "The Feather River Route"

The Train Sheet

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California Zephyr Celebrates 40th Anniversary



The eastbound California Zephyr unloads passengers for the Keddie Resort at Keddie, California on Easter Weekend, April 1968. Photo by Wayne Monger

On March 20, 1949, Western Pacific, along with the Denver and Rio Grande Western and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroads inaugurated a new train called *The California Zephyr*. The train became an instant success due to its fine equipment, innovative advertising and scheduling which allowed operation through the Feather River Canyon and Rocky Mountains during the Daylight hours.

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Brian Challander and Hank Stiles recently replaced all the hoses on GE No. 80's No. 1 engine. We were losing precious antifreeze due to leaks in the aging hoses.

No. 80 was used on Saturday March 18th to set up the CZ train. Dean Hill was the engineer, Norm Holmes the conductor and Gordon Wollesen the brakeman. No. 921 was spotted for water and started, only to find a leaking flashcock on the engine. Brian Challander spotted the problem and replaced the faulty unit.

Last fall we received an inquiry to see if we were interested in buying some engine parts for our GE 80 ton locomotives. The price was reasonable and as parts are rare and expensive for the Cummins Model L engines, we said yes. The parts were located in Pittsburgh, PA. Member Phillip Wyche, who lives in the area, inspected the parts and said they were as they had been represented. Arrangements were made to have the parts loaded on two pallets and be shipped by truck to the Bay Area. Ervin Hartung, who works for a trucking company, was able to obtain free transportation which would have cost a considerable amount because of the nearly one ton weight. Ervin then hauled the parts to Portola in two trips in his pickup truck.

California Zephyr's 40th Birthday

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Competition from airlines and the interstate highway system spelled doom for this fine train. The last California Zephyr operated through Portola on March 21, 1970. It was a sad day. Western Pacific sold its streamlined stainless steel passenger equipment to Auto Train, Mexico and private parties. Except for an occasional Amtrak detour and officer specials, the canyon would see only freight trains on its rails.

Plans were made to celebrate the train's 40th anniversary by operating a train of former CZ equipment now owned by private parties. However, the former route's railroad declined to allow its operation and the plan was dropped.

Feeling that some recognition of the anniversary would be appropriate, members of the Rail Society planned an event to be held on Sunday March 19th. County Supervisors, City Councilmen and railroad officials were among the fifty guests invited to participate in a celebration using our WP F7 No. 921, power car, diner and caboose. It was not exactly a California Zephyr, but the best we could do. The diner was set with CZ table cloths and vases with carnations. CZ signs and posters were placed on the walls. Hors d'oeuvres and drinks were served to the 25 people that attended the 2 hour event. The train was operated twice around the museum's balloon track to the delight of the celebrants. A champagne toast was made to the memory of the California Zephyr.

Rail Society members who made the event a success were: Norm Holmes, organizer of the event, Barbara Holmes, cook and coffee brewer, and Doug Jensen, bartender and drink supplier. The train crew consisted of Dave McClain, engineer, Ken Roller, fireman, Gordon Wollesen, conductor and Sam Burton, brakeman. Funding for the food and drinks was from profits made at the snack bar last year.

We hope that when the 50th Anniversary comes along ten years from now, we can have a bigger celebration and perhaps run an Oakland to Chicago train.

-Norman Holmes

Feather River Railroad Days

at

The Portola Railroad Museum

August 16-27, 1989