

COVER STORY

LAS PLUMAS by NORMAN HOLMES

Prior to the time Western Pacific's car ferry "LAS PLUMAS" was placed in service, WP operated two steam tug boats to barge freight cars between Oakland and San Francisco. The tug and barge operation not only served 25th Street yard, but also delivered cars to the State Belt Railroad near Fisherman's Wharf and serviced Alameda Belt's slip in Alameda. Due to their age and limited capacity (11 cars on a barge), management arranged for construction of a new self propelled car ferry.

The new LAS PLUMAS passed under the Golden Gate bridge at 11 PM on July 10, 1957, on its way down from Portland, Oregon. It was believed this was the first train ferry to operate on the Pacific Ocean. The new ferry was built by the Albina Engine and Machinery Works at Portland at a cost of \$1.3 million and is powered by direct diesel propulsion. She is 375 feet long and can carry 28 loaded freight cars.

The LAS PLUMAS remained in service until November, 1978 when traffic enroute to and from San Francisco was rerouted over Southern Pacific's Dumbarton bridge. Heavy grain shipments to San Francisco and the need of a major overhaul of the 20 year old car ferry were cited as reasons for its retirement. SP handled WP's traffic between Fremont and San Francisco first via Dumbarton bridge then via Santa Clara when that bridge line was closed. WP's business in San Francisco gradually dried up and the entire yard and industry trackage has been abandoned.

The LAS PLUMAS remained tied up to WP's 25th Street ferry slip for two years waiting for a buyer. It was then moved to WP's Oakland Yard slip due to the high amount of vandalism at the San Francisco site. Here it remained along side the deteriorating ferry slip and sugar dock facilities until sold to Sea-Link Marine Services, Ltd. of Vancouver, BC Canada in 1988.

Sea-Link removed the bridge and engines and converted the ferry to a barge to haul truck trailers, without tractors, between Vancouver and Swartz Bay on Vancouver Island. The service started in July, 1988. It's changed appearance would make it difficult to recognize today.

One of the two WP tug boats, the HERCULES, has been preserved at the National Maritime Museum in San Francisco. Located at the Hyde Street Pier, she is undergoing restoration by volunteers who hope to once again place her into operating condition.

Information for this article was gleaned from Pacific News, Western Railroader, WP Mileposts and the National Maritime Museum news letter. Thanks to George Comer for assistance.



The former Western Pacific car ferry LAS PLUMAS, extensively modified, is now in service hauling truck trailers between Vancouver, B.C. and Vancouver Island. Now simply known as LINK 100, the ferry is only a barge that must be pushed by a tug. Photo is by Frank A. Clapp, taken at Vancouver August 17, 1988. The photo was sent to us by George Comer.