

SNOWBOUND!

After seven years of drought, the snows came!

Portola received a foot of snow before Christmas, then the following Monday four feet fell. The roof on Portola's only full service grocery store collapsed Wednesday morning before the store opened. This prompted many of the town's residents to shovel snow from their roofs. The supply of snow shovels was soon exhausted and if you left one out where someone could steal it, it was gone. Our museum was completely closed as the access roads were impassable. Norm Holmes finally pushed himself through the snow and reached the shop building, and using our Payloader, he reached the front gate after two days of plowing. Additional plowing by Steve Habeck and Bruce Cooper started to clear No. 1 track and the lead east of the building so we could begin to open a track to our UP snow plow. After several years of light snowfall we really did not expect this much snow and our equipment was not in position to deal with it. Finally when we had enough snow to use the plow we could not get to it because of too much snow!

The storm didn't stop with the initial four feet, but six inches to a foot continued to fall on a number of days over the next three weeks, although the total accumulation never exceeded the four feet due to melting and settling. On the weekend of Jan. 16-17-18, 1993, Bill Evans came up from Palmdale to help clean up. With his help along with Bruce Cooper, Norm Holmes, Doug Morgan, Ken Roller, Hank Stiles and Ed Warren, the east track from the shop building was cleared and the UP Business car was brought inside. The 2-3 feet of snow was shoveled from the business car roof before it was brought inside. We were having difficulty starting Alco S-1 512, so the new battery set that we bought for it was installed by John Ryczkowski and Norm Holmes. However, the very cold nights and daytime temperatures that only occasionally reached above freezing still kept the Alco from starting.

More snow fell during the week, but the following weekend the tracks leading to our snowplow were uncovered. With the track to the plow open, we got the Alco started

again and shoved the business car out onto the lead, pulled it by the No. 1 track with the loader, ran the 512 out onto the lead and aced the four passenger cars onto the No. 1 track. This gave us access to the plow with the engine. We needed to try the plow through the snow and there was no problem with 512 pushing it. Chris Skow was called to bring his camcorder so we could record this historic event. With Bruce Cooper at the throttle, Chris and Norm taking video and still pictures, 512 pushed the plow up the lead and around the balloon track and around to the No. 4 track at the diesel house. This is the way the switches were lined, so this is the way we went! Backing out, several of the switches had to be dug out so we could plow some of the other tracks.

Snow removal with our loader continued through the efforts of Bruce, Gordon and Norm. Hap and Ken shoveled snow from the north side of the building to try to keep water from the rooms when the snow melts. (It didn't work as water still comes in through the doors. Wish WP hadn't built the building so low.)

The build up of snow was still in place as this is being written in mid February and another heavy snow is still falling.

Damage to our facilities (as far as we know) has been limited to the snow breaking off the now unused heater vent pipes on the roof and when the heavy snow and ice slid off the main roof a number of window panes were broken. As Plumas County has been declared a disaster area, we applied to FEMA to see if some disaster relief is available to our facility.

Union Pacific sent one of their three remaining rotary snow plows from Cheyenne to Portola arriving January 10, 1993. Steve Lee was in charge of the unit en route and during its use in cleaning Portola yard and the Highline between Keddie and Bieber. This is the first time a rotary has been used in Portola since the winter of 1970-71.



Union Pacific sent one of their three remaining rotaries from Cheyenne to Portola. It is shown here clearing the UP Portola yard, which is the first time a rotary has been used in Portola since the winter of 1970-71.



Our own plow train is shown here on FRRS trackage westbound on the south lead with the inside balloon track in the background at left.