



Preserving "THE FEATHER RIVER ROUTE"



The Train Sheet

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News from the Feather River Rail Society and the Portola Railroad Museum

FRRS Participates in Truckee Railroad Days

By Doug Morgan

The locomotive engineer on the Western Pacific GP-7 707, pressed the tone button on his radio and waited for a response. A moment or so later a voice crackled back from the radio, "Dispatcher". Next the engineer pressed the mike of his radio and said clearly, "this is WP 707 east requesting clearance to enter the main line at Portola from the west pass and proceed east, over". The dispatcher responded, in a moment or so, with an air of old pride "Western Pacific 707,..... you have authority to enter the main line at Portola and proceed east". The time, September 2, 1977..... or was it? No, it was September 2, 2000. The WP 707 was on its first outing on the mainline of the Union Pacific under its own power since 1983 and leading a strange consist of 12 other pieces of equipment from the Portola Railroad Museum. The destination was Sparks and then Truckee for the 3rd annual Truckee Railroad Days. What made this all so amazing was the fact the train was under its own power provided by the 707 and the SP 4404 and crewed by active members of the Museum.

How did this amazing event occur? The adventure started back in April of this year with a wild proposal by the Truckee Downtown Merchants Association to use the



Displaying her California Zephyr heritage proudly FRRS FP7 805-A sparkles in the warm Truckee sun to the delight of visitors.

photo by Vic Neves

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Portola Railroad Museum's equipment as the center piece display for Railroad Days 2000 in Truckee. The idea was received with cautious enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, many factors played a role in the project not being pursued by the Truckee Railroad Days Committee with due diligence until the last moment. Within two weeks of the movement of the equipment to Truckee, our participation in the event was still very much in the air. Finally, all obstacles to an agreement were resolved and the museum volunteers jumped to the task.

In the history of the Feather River Rail Society, there have been but a few opportunities to take the museum or a semblance of it to some other venue even on a temporary basis. For four years, a locomotive and some freight cars were shipped the few miles from Portola to Loyalton to participate in the Loyalton annual Logging Days celebration.

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Truckee Railroad Days

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Looking from trailing unit 4404 WP 707 East pulls past the Portola Yard Office towards the main and Reno.

photo by Vic Neves

Once PRM shipped the GP-7 WP 707 to Railfair '91 held in Sacramento, CA, to represent the museum's collection and the museum sent the GP-20 WP 2001 to Sacramento for Railfair '99. It was a great hit and helped to galvanize some positive emotions about the notion of sharing the museum's collection at places other than Portola.

Comes now the third annual Truckee Railroad Days 2000 held on September 9th and 10th. The FRRS sent not just one piece of equipment to this celebration; it sent 14. The gathering of so much equipment, moving it to Truckee, displaying and returning it to Portola was without a doubt the single biggest accomplishment this organization has ever done. Moreover, all preparation and movement to Truckee was accomplished in the short time frame of two weeks.

The train that was selected and sent included the WP locomotive 707, prime motive power for the move and lead unit, followed by SP SD-9 4404 as trailing power unit, followed by WP CZ FP7 805A, WP(FRRS) F9B 925C, WP SW-1 501, the first diesel electric purchased by the WP, the Yreka Western MRS-1 244, the California Zephyr Dome lounge car 832, Silver Hostel, VIA lounge 754, VIA sleeping car "Edenwold" 1112, and UP business car 105. Completing the consist were three cabooses, SP 4107, UP 903005, and at the back of the train WP 484, replete with red marker. Included in the celebration as well was FRRS GP-20 WP 2001, which came from the Yolo Shortline where it has been stored since its presentation at Railfair 99. The 2001 was brought over the hill from Roseville to Truckee by the new UP locomotive SD-70M 4167 along with an SP flanger, also included in the displays.

Several days prior to the move, Portola was a beehive of activity. The friction bearing locomotives were our big worry. We did not want any failures on the road. WP 501

received a repack to four out of its eight journal boxes. YW 244 needed very little as all its journals looked great. All the locomotives received traction motor inspections with crater grease compound added as necessary. Journal oil was added to all oil bath roller bearing boxes on all roller bearing equipped locomotives while all cars received inspections for safety device defects.

The entire train was assembled by FRRS Yard Master and UP locomotive engineer, Steve Habeck and FRRS Train Master Jim Gidley. It took approximately 2 days to dig out the equipment, spot them for inspection and repairs, and spot them in such a way that they could be set over to the west passing track when required by the UP. By sunset on September 1, all was in readiness.

Crew call was 4 AM, Saturday, September 2nd. Associate Train Master Kerry Cochran and TM Jim Gidley got the locomotive fired up and did some initial moves in preparation for setting the train over to the west pass in sections. Our hostess from Truckee, Siobhan Smart, arrived about 5 AM with trophy sized pastries with which to fend off the early morning sleepies. Member and locomotive engineer for the UP, Marty Anderson, helped with the set over to the pass.

It was not until the last minute that the Union Pacific announced that they had no motive power to spare to haul our train to Sparks. Quickly, Steve Habeck and I decided that the 707 had to go because it was in good working order. By departure eve, UP had selected PRM Chief



Signal indications confirmed the dispatchers intention to put us in the siding at Hawley and allow faster revenue trains to pass by.

photo by Vic Neves

Mechanical Officer, Hank Stiles to be the conductor on the train and chose our Yardmaster, Steve Habeck to be the locomotive engineer. It was the perfect compliment of competency, in both the mechanical and operational areas along with a strong bias towards making sure we got the job done without any, or at least with as few, hitches as possible. By 8 AM the "Train of Odyssey" was ready to roll. With the 707, the 4404, flagship locomotives, and a menagerie of passenger cars and cabooses, it was a strange sight not to be forgotten.

Track warrants in hand, the Manager of Train Operations (MTO) for the UP, Marv Dunn, gathered all around those that were going with the train and explained the rules and procedures. Jim Gidley and I were assigned the rear caboose while Hank was assigned the head end. The passengers, who included a small contingency from Truckee, were assigned to the 105 or the three passenger cars, all of which were en suite.

Union Pacific selected a route to Truckee that was the shortest and one that would afford the least possibility of tying up their mainline tracks. The train was to proceed to Reno Jct via the former WP, then down the ex WP branch to Reno where it would proceed to Sparks yard on the former SP. From Sparks, it was planned to turn the entire train on the Sparks wye and then head to Truckee. From the beginning, it was apparent that the Sparks to Truckee leg wouldn't happen until later so Sparks was our destination for the day.

At 8:05 AM, Steve blew two longs on the 707's five chime horns, exclaimed into the radio, "Here we go" and the adventure was under way. Blistering the ballast at 10 to 15 mph, our train proceeded eastward via Rocky Point, past the remains of B & L junction (Boca & Loyaltan), and then through Hawley, where we stopped long enough for the journals of the two friction bearing engines to be checked. They were running cool and normal. Then we moved on to Vinton and Chilcoot and then through the tunnel at Beckworth pass. At Reno Jct we halted to once again to check the bearings on the 244 and the 501. Everything appeared cool and normal.

Once on the Reno Branch, the train progressed following the course of the old narrow gauge, the Nevada California Oregon Railroad, towards Reno. Up Peavine Hill, the 707 and 4404 rumbled and roared, now being chased by photographers eager to catch a frame of the action of the passing of this bizarre train. Many of the passengers in the 105 had now abandoned the plush environment of the business car for the "windy seats" of the Silver Hostel so named by engineer Habeck because there is not a sheet of glass in the car.

Twisting and turning down the branch, the view from the back of the "Train of Odyssey" towards the head end was to say the least, unique. WP & SP locomotives, fully blue carded, were operating on a class one railroad after being off the main line for fifteen to twenty years. The train slipped past Panther Valley and Parr yard, wound its way through the University of Nevada, Reno campus and finally past the old but



Taking the siding at Hawley allowed for inspection of the train to ensure the well being of our equipment during the move.

photo by Vic Neves

beautifully maintained NCO depot to the interchange point with the SP not far from the Amtrak station.

The UP had been planning to realign the curve at the SP/UP interchange for some time. Moreover, the railroad had scheduled the installation of concrete ties and continuous welded rail from SP Reno Jct. all the way up the hill to Parr yard. We did not know it at the time but we were the last train over the old track and alignment. The track

approached the SP from the north and swing around to the west then the east via a pair of very radical double 20 degree curves, first to the right and then to the left. Our train approached this with extreme trepidation. Several of us were on the ground, with our two-way radios on the alert, monitoring the very slow advancement of the units and the cars around these curves. Inch by inch we made our way safely to the tangent track without mishap except for some minor damage to the buffer on the A end of the UP 105. Once we cleared the junction switch, we headed through the crossover switches and on to the yard at Sparks where we were routed into the rip track area. Here we tied down our train, removed horns, locked up the cars and went to dinner at the Nugget as the guest of Siophan Smart. At dinner, all agreed that the day had been one for the memory book. Nevertheless, more work and movement uncertainties lay ahead before we reached our ultimate destination of Truckee. And, time was running out.....

Next time: The movement of the train to Truckee, setup, Railroad Days and coming home. Stay tuned.



An impressive and colorful train, our movement of equipment recieved many second looks from all who witnessed it.

photo by Vic Neves