

Reflections of the Western Pacific (Part 3)

—Jack Palmer, Member

In the early hours of August 14, 1979, I left my home in South San Francisco prepared for a full week of shooting photos of WP action in the canyon.

While enjoying my drive up the canyon there were no trains to be seen until shortly after crossing the Williams Loop and found a train in the hole at Spring Garden.

I parked on the service road over-looking the area and discovered I was approximately 50 feet above the track. I waved to the crew and the engineer got out of the cab so I hollered down to him, "would you guys like a cold drink?" I went back to my car and promptly threw two "Cokes" down to them. I then grabbed my camera and climbed down to join them. I told them I would like to take pictures. The engineer said "WAIT! I'll put out the white flags and get my camera too!" (This was my first meeting with engineer BOB LARSON) He was at the controls of new GP-40 dash 2's No. 3547 and 3548 with U-23B No. 2262 sandwiched in between. We took our pictures of his train and exchanged personal information (Another example of Willing People.)

When BN138 rolled by on the main, one GE U-Boat in the middle was smoking badly and Bob remarked: "If she's not smoking that means she's out of oil". I ask if I could have a ride around the "Loop" and he said Okay let's go. When he got "the Green" we took off and I told him I wanted to get off at the end of the loop. He told me he had to maintain his speed of 25 mph – could I get off Okay? I got off running and somehow managed to stay on my feet and hurried back to my car. I believe I set a new speed record in the canyon because I arrived at Keddie just in time to catch the 138 on the Wye.

After exploring everything at Keddie I spent the night at the campgrounds maintained at the Quincy Fairgrounds. I rolled out early the next morning and after a short stack and coffee at the local cafe was prepared to run up and down the canyon all day but ended at Portola without any photos that day and decided to stay at the campground across the river that night.

The next morning I was awakened by the Steel whistling in the yard at 6:20. I jumped up out of a sound sleep, threw everything into my car and made a mad dash out to town. I stepped on the gas and drove down to the Little Bear crossing and was waiting for him when he came charging through there at the advertised and made me welcome with a long blast with his Nathan M-5 after the normal signal. I recognized the engineer. It was Bill Reed, a friend I met several times before. THAT was a great photo! I then drove down to the loop and got him again.

I liked hanging out at the Loop because I could get several photos of a train in both the upper and lower levels as it traversed the loop. Thereafter, every day was like playing a game of "Catch me if you can" On "Are we having fun yet?"

I would leave Portola early and drive down to Williams Loop and wait there for a train coming up the canyon and take photos at the upper and lower levels, then high-tail it up to Keddie and from there to the Little Bear crossing and finally on its arrival at Portola..

It was great to catch the GGM like that and after



Jack Palmer sits outside the Gift Shop at the WPRM in 2012.

leaving Keddie to get photos of it on the Clio Trestle rather than on its arrival at Portola. It was not possible to catch it at both. (The service road going out to the Clio Trestle was rather long, twisty and rough, and then the time it took to get my pictures and get to Portola it would be long gone)

This became my daily routine except one afternoon after chasing a train up to Portola I meandered over to the yard and noticed a Box Car and Caboose that were extensively damaged and I thought would make an interesting picture. At the moment the Trainmaster emerged from his office and requested that I not take the photos because they were part of an on-going investigation. He immediately recalled we had met several years ago when I visited him at his office in San Francisco. (This was Mr. Mel Graham, now Trainmaster.) I assured him that all my pictures were for my own personal use and was then allowed to take the photos. (Willing People again) I must add that wherever speaking with any WP employee who knew him held him in very high regards.

After lunch, I spent a couple of afternoons out east of town at Rocky Point sitting on a large rock waiting for a train coming from either direction.

This was a good location too, because it offered a different perspective of the taking photos of trains slowly leaving Portola, as well as those on the curve approaching Rocky Point from the east.

I resumed chasing trains the next morning until the day I had to go home. On that morning I spotted the Steel at Keddie and decided to catch it at Rock Creek on the trestle.

When I arrived at Rock Creek I promptly prepared for the Steel to come into view and was suddenly surprised to have Ted Benson join me for the same shot. After that I made a quick visit at Oroville for any last photos and continued on my way home.

I couldn't help thinking about some of the favorite locations and photos I had taken and anxious to see the results after this adventure. I also marveled at "the devil made me do it" attitude when speeding 80 mph up and down the canyon all week without being stopped once.

Train "Nuts" do a lot of crazy things to get pictures of trains and I am no exception. It all depends on what you are willing to do that THAT PICTURE. I do GO FOR IT!



Creative Kernels was set up supplying candied pop corn on 2 December, 2017 on the West End of the Diesel Shop.

—Greg Elems Photo.