

A VISIT TO THE KLICKITAT LOG AND LUMBER CO AT KLICKITAT, WA ON FEB. 22, 1963
(by Walt Grande)

On Feb. 22d, Chuck Hayden, Harold Mehlig and I drove to Klickitat to ride and photograph the Klickitat Log & Lumber Co shay #7, on one of the last regularly operated steam logging railroads in the country. We left Portland on a very foggy morning about six am and drove out the freeway to Hood River where we crossed the Columbia River on the toll bridge, and then proceeded up the Washington side of the river to the west edge of Lyle, where we turned north to Klickitat.

We arrived in Klickitat a few minutes after 8 am where we immediately checked at the main office of J. Neils Lbr. Co. to secure permission to ride the locomotive and also to sign a release. They told us the train was scheduled to depart in about 45 minutes (normal departure time varies from 8 to 9 am and they arrive back about 2:30 pm). While the town of Klickitat was in the sun, a heavy blanket of fog and smoke hung in the canyon where the mill is located and where the train crew were finishing dumping the previous day's logs. Harold and Chuck were to ride the train up, while I drove and I would ride the train back and they would drive.

After a second breakfast, we got back to the mill just as the train was pulling out and Harold and Chuck had to board on the fly. I drove out the highway which parallels the railroad for several miles, stopping frequently for photographs, alternating between black and white and color slides. The weather was quite chilly with some frost on the ground in shaded spots, which made the smoke from the locomotive really stand out against the blue sky. The shay (number 7) departs head first pulling the empty log cars on the trip to the reload and most of the time the light is excellent for photography. The train starts out on a ridge above the highway, but gradually works down until it is right alongside the highway. After about three miles the railroad swings away from the highway following the Klickitat River, while the highway has to climb up on a high plateau via a steep grade. After reaching the top of the plateau, the terrain is very level and you get a beautiful view of Mt. Adams. You follow the highway to Goldendale for about two miles and turn off on the road to Glenwood. The Glenwood road proceeds north for several miles until it comes to the edge of the canyon and as you start to descend into the Klickitat River canyon the pavement ends, but the road is well gravelled and in good condition. As you descend you can look across the canyon and see the railroad tracks at the bottom of the canyon. As you near the bottom of the grade, you can see where the river and railroad make a sharp bend and you can get some distance shots if you have a telephoto lens. However, I would suggest that you drive to a public fishing park where you can drive down to the river and see the train go by on the opposite side. Ordinarily you will have plenty of time to drive to this camp, as the train stops enroute for water, but only if you haven't waiting for the train to go around the previously mentioned bend in the river. As soon as you have seen the train go by the fishing camp drive to the reload and park your car and then start walking down the tracks until you find a good spot for a picture. The train will be climbing a three per cent grade the last three miles into the reload. There is a sharp curve at the bottom of the grade which should produce very good action shots, if you can get there in time. I didn't get that far.

The train got to the reload about 11:15 am and after dropping the empties and picking up the loads was ready to go about noon. On the return trip the locomotive is travelling backwards, which gives the crew a better view of the logs on the train, as every so often they lose some logs. The train crew had heard nothing definite but they feel this may be the last year for the railroad. The company had made a survey on the cost of converting to truck operation and apparently some trees have already been marked to indicate that they must be removed for the new road. Time will tell.