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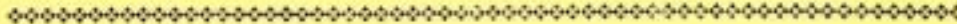
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NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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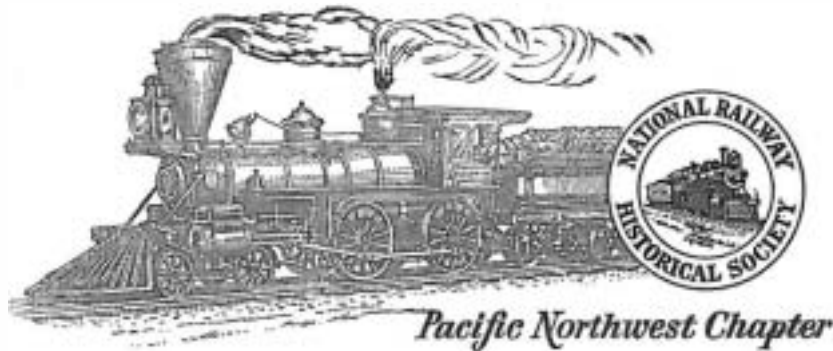
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All exchange news letters should be sent to the Chapter's business address:

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THE TRAINMASTER

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ISLAND IN THE SNOWBOUND WILDERNESS

by
Bill Keil

Three days in the workaday world can slide past as fast as a jet whistling overhead, with as much recall. Three days literally locked onto an island of warmth and civilization in the snowbound wilderness lasts much longer - in apparent time - and longer yet in memory.

I was visiting Canada doing some articles on ski resorts when the Canadian airline controllers' strike hit, grounding all flights. Intentionally, I had booked passage on the Canadian National Railroad from Vancouver to Jasper to do a story on train travel, somewhat of a passing thing. The story turned out to be a superficial nothing.

Then the strike forced the return to Vancouver by train. This was a bit of nostalgia I relished when I found the trip was necessary. I had last traveled the Canadian Pacific route in 1939.

The Montreal-Vancouver express was seven hours late leaving the picture-book town of Banff. It had already been delayed by storms in the prairies. In a fitful sleep, I realized we were creeping through a blizzard and that we had stopped several hours before dawn.

At breakfast, I asked the dining car steward where we were. I couldn't quite read the sign on the tiny station. "Golden" he said. Golden is just a 90-mile trip over the mountains from Banff. Why are we stopped for so long? "Avalanches, ahead at Rogers Pass" Why don't we go back? "Avalanches, behind us on Kicking Horse Pass."

In the dining car I met a traveling businessman from Portland. The highway, too, was closed and he had abandoned his rental car in Golden, boarding the train at 5:30am. And he was still here. Outside the steamed windows, the snow was piled up eight feet in one of the heaviest falls in years. Crews were digging out the tracks by hand and digging out the locomotives, buried to the windows by the big track mounted snowplows.

Sensing it would be a long seige with no reading material (this was to have been an overnight trip), I asked the conductor if there was time to find a bookstore. "Better hurry. Listen for the train whistle." I jumped off and hurried through the deep snow, pushing through to my waist before reaching the main street where plows were just starting to work. The bookstore must have been a good quarter-mile away and I just reached the door - when the train whistle blew.

Running all the way back, I jumped on the train just as it moved a few feet to take on water. It would be 24 hours before we left Golden.

About that time, the notebook entries started:

The first of the semi-crises started with the sickness of an 18-month-old son of a Canadian Pacific railway policeman, traveling on holiday. The conductor found a doctor in Golden who prescribed a drug to lower the boy's fever. Not too serious. I found out later that the Portlander gave his bed-room to the couple with the sick child. He spent the night sitting up in the frosted-over dome car.

A few hours later, I made another try for the bookstore, bought a paperback, and tried to phone home with news of the delay. The telephone lines were out, as were a good share of the lines in Western Canada that week. Not much of the book was read in the next couple of days. There was just too much going on.

One youth was due for his own wedding in Vancouver on Saturday. When communications were finally restored, he called his bride to let her know his wedding day would be spent on the train. He was a welcome guest at any one of the impromptu parties which organized themselves on the train.

The prospective bridegroom was anaesthetized to his fate, rather soon. Probably three-fourths of the 250 passengers would not have been on the train were it not for the strike which stopped Canada's air travel. But they soon learned the ropes of rail travel.

One lean, jolly man in his 40s went "ashore" in Golden and returned with a harmonica to accompany one of the spontaneous songfests, steering the selections away from some of the more bawdy songs. Afterwards, when someone offered him a drink, he declined, politely. When pressed, he said "Awhile back, I made a serious commitment to God and I decided that I really didn't need drinking." And he swung into a lively polka on the harmonica.

One businessman, grounded by the airlines, took the train from Vancouver to Edmonton to attend an hour's meeting there. With the delay, that trip took a week - for the hour's meeting.

At least one other couple was headed for a wedding in Vancouver. They were bringing the wedding cake; and another was going to a wedding anniversary there. They both missed their parties. Rumors slipping up and down the train took one back to World War II troop train days. The crew could not be faulted for its lack of communications with the passengers on that score. The lines of communication were all but destroyed by the avalanches which thundered down in Western Canada that week.

It was that lack of concrete information that foddered the rumor factory. One story of a new 1,500 ft long 20 foot deep slide (it was true) had escalated to a 2,000 foot, 500 foot deep slide by the time it traveled from one end of the train to the other.

At first, the few passengers with transistor radios were a source of information from the "outside", but the radios just wouldn't work in the roughest of the country. We heard one static-crackled mention of our plight and that of a Canadian National train trapped in the Fraser Canyon, along with a number of motorists. At one point, one of the CP Rail people said ours was the only train moving in Western Canada, a dubious distinction. We were moving at 10 miles per hour at the time.

Four or five feet of heavy snow fell in two days. The worst conditions since 1947, the crew told us. This near-record snowfall, coupled with some of North America's steepest slopes, and rising temperatures, set the snow crashing down - carrying

across the railroad tracks and the Trans-Canada highway, twisting the communications lines into a tangled mess and even striking some of the telegraph poles to the ground.

Wire communications are the nerves of the railroad. The wires are necessary to carry train orders and to control and detect the actions of the switches which safely shunt one train aside while the other comes through on the mainline. The wires even detect the fall of the avalanches.

Ordinarily staid businessmen helped exhausted young mothers by babysitting their children while the mothers took an occasional break. Stewards carried trays back to the families to spare the mothers the ordeal of the dining car with their restless children.

Huge nine-foot high V-blade snowplows, mounted on 3,500 hp diesel locomotives set out from both sides of Rogers Pass to clear the way, aided by bulldozers, hauled to the trouble spots. They forced their way through 30-foot deep slides, hundreds of feet long. Crews laid temporary wires over the snow for communications and switch control. A complete repair job probably won't be finished until spring.

Late that afternoon, the conductor came back from the little station, orders to move in his hand - countermanded just a few minutes later when the army decided more snow must come down. They lobbed artillery shells high up on the mountain faces, releasing the thousands of tons of destructive energy, poised above the tracks, bringing the snow thundering down to the flats.

Finally, the tracks clear again the next morning, we crept out of Golden, behind one of the giant plows for safety, and ground our way up the pass. We stopped at every section point, where the switches had to be dug out and freed by hand, only to be buried again as the train passed, snow flying in both directions, to be dug out by the next train crew. The heavy snow was piled four feet deep on the narrow telegraph arms, making a gnome-like appendage on top of every pole. The crossarms, normally 20 feet off the ground, were in reach of a man's hand, had a man been able to stand on top of the soft surface.

The train crew ran out of ice, in the midst of a wilderness of ice and snow. One merrymaker, during a brief stop for switchclearing opened a between-cars platform, jumped off to get some snow for his drinks, and was buried hip deep. He would have had a rough time getting back on the train in a hurry, if it had started. I gave him a hand up to get back on the platform and he dropped his bucket of snow, just as the train started.

Warm drinks for him.

Dozens of steep gulleys along the way showed the jumbled snowblocks and slide paths with which the track crews had to contend. Broken trees, snapped by the mighty force of the slides, were snarled among the telegraph wires.

It was invigorating to be on the move again, standing at the open window in the vestibule with the snow, thrown up by the wheels, blowing in one's face. Finally, on through the five-mile Connaught tunnel which protects the tracks from the worst slide-paths, and onto the snowbound Glacier station - snow up over the roof- and on down the canyon with the narrow path cut through the slides as deep as the cars are high. And on down to the comparative safety of the narrow valley at Revelstoke where the worst is over.

There were no real hardships on the train. The weather had moderated to just barely

below freezing so the few short heating system failures did not cool the cars to any great extent. The long periods of waiting did provide a lighting problem. The electrical system of each car is independent, powered by generators only when the wheels turn. A few hours on the batteries, and the lights grow dimmer and dimmer until the train rolls again.

One benefit of the enforced stay is free board and room. The crews turned out excellent meals under the less-than-ideal conditions, sort of scrounging off the country - buying groceries along the way. At breakfast one morning, with the batteries exhausted, the cook had no lights. And with no exhaust blowers, the air was steamy. The crew too, was exhausted after four days on the road from Montreal with as many hours sleep during that time. A waiter exchanged harsh words with the cook. A passenger, sensing the situation (the last thing we wanted at this point was an unhappy cook), led the passengers in singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow." This drowned out the argument and brought a steamy, if somewhat weak, smile from the cook.

That crisis was over.

A man in his early 20s came around the train selling chances on a pool guessing when the train would finally arrive in Vancouver. Looking on the dark side of things, his chart extended entirely through the following week. We never saw him again. We like to think he made the payoff to the winner.

One passenger read Arthur Hailey's "Airport". Hailey should research and write a book on trains. Or at least someone should.

One of our quick acquaintances was a Canadian who manufactures soft-lens contact lenses. He showed his samples of the unusual material new to the industry. Another, an armored car manager, told of his armored cars stuck in the Fraser Canyon.

(Note - as this is written, the strains of Auld Lang Syne are coming down the aisle, in an authentic Scotch brogue, from where several Scots are leading a farewell party for some of the travelers. They hope this will be the last night on the train. I would like to go down there as they swing into Sir Harry Lauder's "Roaming in the Gloamin;" but I am sitting here writing these notes. One of the penances of making your living is that often you must be an observer, rather than a doer.)

The enforced togetherness formed rapid friendships. Everyone on the train was a member of the closed society. The first "foreigners" arrived during a brief stop at Kamloops. They were definitely outsiders. There were polite hellos and smiles, but hardly the camaraderie of "us" that existed among the passengers and crew.

The next morning the porter woke us in Vancouver. We were welcome to breakfast in the diner.

Would I take the trip again? Of course. Where else can one take a three-day enforced vacation with nothing to do, and with the firm knowledge that nothing can be done about it?

And a look at human nature, with its guard down, isn't so bad after all.

LANDSCAPING WITH RAILROAD CARS:

What may be a new technique in the art of landscaping, the city of Bend's Parks and Recreation Department has covered up the remains of an old building by bringing in three railroad passenger cars.

The project started when Clarence Bells, park commission chairman and PNW Chapter member, was looking up the hill from a new waterfront park in Bend and thinking what to do to cover up the scarred site of the former Oregon Trail Furniture Company. Along with Vince Genna of the parks department, he came up with the idea to bring in some old railroad cars, maybe an engine and a caboose, and sit them on the siding behind the old furniture store.

A letter to the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern produced results; a coach from the UP and two baggage cars from BN. The two baggage cars started out life as Pullman sleeping cars but were converted into baggage and railway post office in 1948 by the SP&S Railway. The RPO car is complete with sorting bins and all the slots and counters. Some Bend post office employees who used to work on mail cars are interested in restoring the car to operating condition. The remainder of the space will be used as a museum dedicated to railroading from Central Oregon.

The baggage car will be used as a crafts center. The coach will have a few seats removed and will be used for movies, slide shows and meetings. The cars will be heated with a small gas-fired boiler that has been donated and will be hooked up this summer by the Central Oregon Plumber's Apprentice Group who will volunteer its services.

There is enough room on the 400 feet of donated track that more equipment could be moved in. How about an SP&S FA unit or one of the Oregon Trunk Mixed combines?

A NEW TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD:

The Mexican government announced plans to construct a highspeed railroad through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec which would carry containers thus avoiding the trip through the Panama Canal. Container traffic from the US and Canadian coasts would be unloaded at Coatzacoalcos onto highspeed container flats and hauled to the Pacific port of Salina Cruz in four hours. This would save three days over using the Panama Canal.

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is only 170 miles wide and was considered as a site for a inter-oceanic canal before the Panama route was chosen. Both Coatzacoalcos and Salina Cruz are deep sea ports capable of handling large freighters but both would be expanded under the plan. A single-track rail line exists at present between the ports but it will be streamlined and made into a double-track facility.

THIS N' THAT:

Its official; the Pacific Great Eastern is now the British Columbia Railway. The new emblem is a floral emblem, the dogwood, which is British Columbia's official flower. We will still miss the Caribou head.....British Columbia Railway also announced the construction of a new 4,500 foot tunnel in West Vancouver. The \$2.1 million dig

will start at the east end of the trestle over Nelson Creek in West Vancouver and run to a point near the ferry terminal at Horseshoe Bay. The new route will reduce track curvature and cut track mileage by approximately 1.2 miles.....OP&E to start steam operations for the season on May 13th. Daily service during the week will be diesel powered.....Northern California Railroad Club will operate 12 steam trips over the McCloud River Railroad using their engine #25. For a flyer on dates and prices write Northern California Railroad Club, PO Box 668, San Mateo, CA 94401.....Railfans in Oregon were taken to task by a rail publication for making no effort to save the depot at Linnton from destruction. Apparently none of the fans in our state knew the importance of this station until pointed out by someone from east of Mississippi. There were reports that the station was closed since it endangered the life of the agent who might bring the wooden structure down around his head if he slammed the door too hard. The business once conducted at Linnton will be handled through Wilbridge.....In what certainly must be one of the shortest off-train notices and cancellations ever seen in the West, Amtrak has decided to keep the two daily roundtrips between Portland and Seattle and the Coast Starlight to tri weekly service. Amtrak was going to increase the Seattle-Los Angeles service to daily but changed its mind when the congressmen from Oregon and Washington let their unhappiness be known at dropping the Portland-Seattle roundtrips.....Amtrak announced that new equipment would be placed on the Coast Starlight this summer. There is also to be an ad campaign to try to increase ridership on these trains.....
.....Have you seen any of the new Union Pacific commercials on TV lately? With enough exposure many of the children in the US may be singing the praises of the Union Pacific Railroad instead of the Pepsi Generation songPacific Northwest Chapter is planning to operate an excursion for the general public to Point Defiance Park in Tacoma to ride the Shay at Camp Six. Be on the lookout for the announcement in the near future.....

BUS GUIDE REVIEW:

Although practically heresy to promote a bus guide in a railfan newsletter, Russell's Official Bus Guide is nevertheless a publication that will come in handy for most railfan travelers. It cannot be denied that Amtrak's skeleton network allows far fewer route choices than in past years, and frequently a bus ride can fill in a gap between rail lines to permit wider train selection.

For example, Northwest travelers might elect Portland-Pasco, Portland-Yakima, Portland-Salt Lake City, Cheyenne-Billings, Odgen-Butte or Shelby-Calgary bus rides to complete desired circle trips involving Amtrak, D&RCW and Canadian Pacific.

And while most railfans will know their train schedules by memory before departing, there is no reason not to be equally well-versed on the available busses in advance.

The National Motor Coach Guide is published monthly by Russell's Guides, Inc., 817 S.E. Second Avenue, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406. Single copies of the 900-page volume sell for only \$2.70, and like the Official Guide of the Railways, a complete station index follows the timetable section.

Gil Hulin

A NEW BOOK:

Kalmbach Publishing Company has just released Journey to Amtrak, a hard-cover book detailing the historic last years in the life of the privately operated American passenger train and its takeover by Amtrak. The 104 page book costs \$6.50 and is available from the publisher at 1027 N. 7th St. Milwaukee, WI 53233 or hobby shops.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

- Saturday May 13 First steam excursion train for the summer of 1972 over the Oregon, Pacific and Eastern. Leaves Village Green Motel at 10:00am.
- Friday May 19 Regular monthly meeting of the Pacific Northwest Chapter, National Railway Historical Society at the Burlington Northern Safety Exams Room, 11th and NW Hoyt under the Lovejoy ramp. Meeting starts at 8:00pm and the Chapter library at Room 1, Union Station will be open at 7:00pm for members to check in and out material from the collection. The program for May will be:
- Excellent slides of mainline railroads in Western Europe and the Orient by Don Munger. Also included will be steam, passenger and traction action in these areas. This is an excellent program.
- Friday June 16 Regular June meeting of the Pacific Northwest Chapter. May be held outside at a place to be announced in the next issue of the Trainmaster.
- Saturday June 17 Local day of **mourning**: Last Rites (nuptial) for Chap.Pres.Holloway.
- June Sometime in June Amtrak will begin passenger service from Seattle to Vancouver, B.C. At this writing a tentative date of June 11th has been set but days of operation and schedule has not been confirmed.
- Friday Sept. 15 Regular September meeting of the Pacific Northwest Chapter.

NOTE: THE PNW CHAPTER DOES NOT MEET IN THE MONTHS OF JULY AND AUGUST ALTHOUGH CHAPTER ACITIVITIES MAY OCCUR IN THESE MONTHS. READERS OF THE TRAINMASTER WILL BE SENT ANY DETAILS OF ACTIVITIES.

BURLINGTON NORHE N:

BN reported substantial gains in earnings for 1972's first quarter. Net revenues were up from \$239 million first quarter 1971 to \$250 million while the net income rose from \$1.7 million to over \$7 million. The settlement of the West Coast dock strike and its large increase in grain shipments accounted for part of the good showing.....BN also announced that it was entering the air forwarding business with the formation of BN Air Freight. BN Air Freight, a subsidiary of BN, has applied to the Civil Aeronautics Board for authorization to operate as a domestic and international air forwarder. Lawrence Rodberg and George Ryan were named president and executive vice president of the new company. Both were with Airborne freight which is the second largest air freight forwarder in the United States.....BN once again is hard on Western Pacific units, this time putting five of them on the ground or on their sides between Paxton and Gateway on the Oregon Trunk. No serious injuries reported in the April 25th accident.....Many of the ex-SP&S FA's will probably not outlive the summer since their number has been dropping fast. Get those pictures while they last since they are the last FA units left operating in the United States.

As we go to press, late word was received that all remaining BN FA units and Alco RS-2's will leave the Portland area for service in Illinois prior to about May 20, after which they will be traded in to EMD for GP-38 units. As of May 11, all three RS-2's, BN 4000, 4001, 4002, and the six serviceable FA-1 and FA-2 units, BN 4100, 4104, 4108, 4114, 4116, and 4120, were operating in the Portland-Pasco-Seattle-Eugene area, and BN 4118 and 4126 were stored unserviceable at Vancouver, Wash. The latter two will be towed dead to Illinois. All 11 former SP&S units, are expected to be traded in directly to EMD or to Precision Engineering at McCook or Mount Vernon, Illinois, by early June.

---Ex-SP&S Sleeper Lounge Car MOUNT HOOD, donated to PNW Chapter in January, continues in AMTRAK Empire Builder service between Seattle and Chicago pending completion of repairs to the remaining two out-of-service Great Domes at Como Shops, St. Paul. We understand the car will spend a few weeks the end of May between St. Paul/Minneapolis and Chicago on the Hiawatha while the Hi's regular lounge joins two others at St. Louis for use by DOT Secretary John Volpe. SP&S dormitory-baggage 76, also donated to PNW Chapter, remains at King Street Station Seattle pending release of the Mount Hood and appropriate donation ceremonies at Portland. TRAINMASTER readers will be advised by mail prior to the ceremony when it has been scheduled, if time permits.

---Seven ex-NP VO-1000 Baldwin switchers (BN 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 409, 412) located at Auburn, Wash., and \$60,000 worth of spare parts for these engines were offered by BN for sale closing May 15th. If we learn of their disposition, we'll let you know.

---A second group of surplus BN lightweight passenger equipment, 128 cars, is being offered by BN for sale until 10AM May 22. Cars include former OT Combines, SP&S 272 and 273, which were enjoyed by members on the OT Mixed trips 1967 through 1970. The cars are currently stored at South Tacoma. Other cars include SP&S diners 405 and 406 (Willamette and Columbia) and coaches SP&S 275, 276, 301, 303, 304, 307, 308 and sleepers 701 and 702. NP, GN, and CBQ diners, sleepers, coaches, and lounge cars are included. All cars have not been selected by Amtrak and are surplus to BN's needs, but are subject to final approval by Amtrak when sold.

---INTERMOUNTAIN CHAPTER NRHS will operate UP 4-8-4 No. 8444 on an excursion Denver to Laramie via Speer, returning via Borie, on Saturday, August 5, 1972. Trip leaves Denver Union Station 7:00 a.m., arrives Laramie 12 Noon, out at 100 p.m., returning to Denver 6:10 p.m. Consist includes baggage car, lounge, nine coaches, and Intermountain Chapter's ex-CBQ business car 96 (which may be the last run for this car.) Fares roundtrip: \$25 adult, \$20 child. One way fares half of round trip. Order tickets from Intermountain Chapter NRHS, P.O.Box 5131, Denver, Colorado 80217.

---Jim Abney reports that the B of LE newsletter, LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEER, May 5 issue, mentions Canadian National plans to remove 4-8-2 No. 6060 from display at Jasper, Alta., and refurbish the engine to excursion service on CN to replace the recently-retired Northern No. 6218. CN Mountain type No. 6015, now at the Canadian Railway Museum at Delson, Que., will replace the 6060 on display at Jasper.

---SOUTHERN STEAM will operate all Summer in the South. See Ed Berntsen for details.