

## Commentary... Working on the railroad

By Sue Stafford  
Correspondent

Earlier this month, on a tour with Steve Lent of Prineville's Bowman Museum, I took a step back in time to the development of railroads in Central Oregon.

The battle between two railroad giants, James J. Hill and Edward H. Harriman, to complete the first rail line from the Columbia River to Bend, resulted in a duplication of effort, time, and materials, with two separate rail lines, one on either side of the Deschutes River.

The tour focused mainly on the route of the Oregon Trunk Railroad in Central Oregon. We visited old remaining railroad depots in Redmond and Madras, and various points of interest along the old rail bed.

We started at the now-vacant Redmond depot located right off Highway 97 and Veterans Way. From there, the tour headed north to Prineville Junction where the Oregon Trunk and City of Prineville Railroads connected. We worked our way north to Terrebonne, Crooked River Gorge, Opal City, Culver, Metolius, Madras, Venora, Pelton, Rattlesnake Canyon, Mecca and Gateway with the last stop at Trout Creek.

Lent has an encyclopedic grasp of Central Oregon history and truly brought that history alive with his stories and anecdotes. The story of Hillman and Harriman's unbending egos that drove them to complete competing railroads seems unbelievable when viewed through

present-day lenses.

In 1909, the Harriman lines had almost a monopoly on railway transportation in Oregon. In that year, James Hill decided to extend his Northern Pacific and Great Northern lines into and south through Central Oregon. The Oregon Trunk Railroad had a charter to construct a line up the Deschutes Valley but lacked the funds to complete the project, so Hill secretly purchased the Oregon Trunk charter.

Harriman had already located a line of railway south from their line through the Columbia Gorge. The line occupied in part the lower section of the valley and conflicted in places with the Oregon Trunk line purchased by Hill. Legal battles ensued, with both lines receiving the green light.

The two railroads utilized large wooden trestles to cross canyons and gorges, as well as blasted out 11 tunnels to go through steep hillsides. Throughout the construction of both lines, the companies repeatedly sabotaged each other's efforts. Some years after both lines were completed, a joint line made up of different sections of the two competitors was established.

The race between the Oregon Trunk R.R. and Union Pacific R.R. up the Deschutes River ended at Metolius on February 15, 1911. The Oregon Trunk won. The Metolius Depot still stands, and efforts are underway to establish a museum in the depot.

On September 21, 1911, the railroad arrived in Redmond, to the depot

constructed by Hill in the same style as his depots in other Central Oregon locations – made of hewn stone quarried near the Deschutes River. A major "Railroad Day" was celebrated by 1,000 people who had gathered to greet the train. Later the same day, a similar celebration was held in Bend.

It was the immense ponderosa forests that brought the railroad to Bend. The forests in Minnesota had been logged out, so the timber companies turned their eyes to the West. Shevlin-Hixon and Brooks-Scanlon both had their roots in the East and came to Bend to start new mills. With no railroads, there was no way to get the lumber from the Central Oregon mills to far-off markets. The arrival of the rail lines in 1911 enhanced the fortunes of the timber companies.

Some of the points on the tour still have railroad tracks, a few have depots, while others have only the old sign along the tracks denoting the name of the long-ago stop.

Prineville Junction is located four miles north of Redmond. Believing Prineville would become a ghost town since the railroad bypassed the county seat, several bond issues were approved by the local citizens. In 1918 the 19-mile rail line connecting Prineville with the Oregon Trunk line began operations, carrying both passengers and freight, mainly livestock, on four trains a day. In the late 1930s, when large sawmills came to Prineville, the line prospered until many years later when the mills began to close.



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Cantilevered arch bridge over the Crooked River Gorge built in 1911.

Trucking and the automobile began to take a heavy toll on rail traffic, and the only city-owned and-operated railway in the U.S. faced hard times. The Crooked River Dinner Train operated out of Prineville Junction from 1987-2012, complete with a train robbery on board.

Hillman town site was established in 1910, as the rail lines approached the area. Originally named in honor of

Hill and Harriman, an unscrupulous developer in the area by the name of Hillman gave cause to change the name to Terrebonne (good earth) to avoid connection with the land fraud scandal.

The old depot at Terrebonne is now a restaurant, with tables and a bar made out of the wood from the old foundation of the depot. Patrons who happen to

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