

DID YOU KNOW?

Historical notes from Big Butte Historical Society
Abstracted by Charleen Brown

The Butte Falls Comprehensive Plan of 1982 states "while passenger and freight service continued for many years, the chief benefit of the railroad was the opening up of the timbered areas east of Butte Falls and the transportation of logs to the mills in Medford. The loaded flat cars were hauled up the fish hatchery hill in two sections."



Many students, this writer included, have fond memories of the Medco logging train. Every work day, the train pulled flat cars loaded with logs out of the woods and up fish hatchery hill, passing very close to the old grade school. Look closely and you can see the bell tower of the grade school visible just to the left of the smoke stack in the 1962 photo above.

The 'Fish Hatchery' grade was so steep that the train couldn't pull all the loaded cars up at one time. They had to be hauled up in two sections. This meant that the chugging train had to pass the grade school at least 4 times every afternoon. Each time it crossed the highway at Broad Street, the engineer would blow the whistle. This chugging and tooting interrupted many a lesson. Teachers must have planned study time while the train slowly made the trips back and forth past the school. Then there would be more chugging as the two sections of loaded flat cars were coupled back together. Finally, the train would be on its way to the mill in Medford and classes would resume.

It became a tradition for the 'older' boys to frequently sneak down and grease the tracks so the train would spin out on the steepest part of the long grade. We would hear the train chugging steadily up the hill and then all of a sudden it would start to make a slipping sound, 'ch, ch, ch, chug,' as the drivers hit the grease. In every class, the kids would hear this sound and know what had happened. We would duck our heads, look around at each other and snicker. Nobody ever let slip who the 'grease culprits' were, although, it was rumored that some of them might have had fathers who operated the train. Buckets of sand became standard equipment on the engine and when the sand was poured on the greasy track, the slippery problem was quickly solved.