

'She'll be comin' 'roun' the corner'

By Tom Franks

Where is Hinkle? Ask more than a few people and you will find vague directions to this massive freight car classification yard which, aside from highways, is the main transportation link between Heppner and the outside world.

Hinkle, for those who don't know, is located south of Hermiston and north of Interstate I-80 and is currently undergoing an \$18 million expansion program scheduled for completion in January, 1978.

Traffic over the 82-mile Union Pacific run from Hinkle to Heppner is generally confined to a Monday through Saturday operation with the Saturday run depending on operations at the Kinzua Corp. mill in Heppner. Kinzua, with its lumber products, is by far the major customer on the branch line, followed by Morrow County Grain Growers of Lexington with shipments of grain and receipts of farm equipment.

Those who don't know the whereabouts of Hinkle can be forgiven. The yard was opened in 1951, a scant 26 years ago. With current developments underway, the yard has taken on more of the flavor of a terminal—with a control tower and a rather massive "hotel" where train crews lodge overnight.

One of the daily movements from Hinkle is the Hinkle Lumber Train (sometimes three-a-day), which goes direct to the UP's big North Platte Yard in Nebraska with various forest product cars collected from Oregon and Washington

shippers.

Compared to a metropolitan airport, the Hinkle Yard and the branch to Heppner give a first impression of being seldom used. But Hinkle, with all its tracks, control tower and other facilities, brings to mind some military installations where the level of business activity belies what the eyes can take in.

Behind the new 38-track yard is a capacity for 1,187 cars on 32 classification tracks. There are also four receiving tracks and seven departure tracks. Planned grading is designed to double this new capacity in the future.

Two digital computer systems to control switching and to automate clerical functions will be installed. Each computer will have a backup system.

Already in existence is one of the most extensive private communications systems in America for the direct routing of information on customer shipments.

For the crews that feed Morrow County business into the yard, both Heppner and Hinkle are homes away from home during the week. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, Hinkle is the home base, with departure scheduled for 7 a.m. Heppner is generally an overnight stop for crew members on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, depending on the lumber mill schedule.

—Making the run—

On something less than a busy day, the trip from Hinkle to Heppner will take about four hours, as was the case during our Friday trip a few weeks ago.

There are two legs in the journey. The first is 37 miles along the Columbia River, past the Castle turnoff, the new Pacific Gas and Electric power plant spur, and Boardman. At the Heppner turnoff, a number of cars were added to the train before entering the "closed" track which would take us south to Cecil, Ione, Lexington and Heppner.

Moving to the Heppner Junction, the "staff" is delivered to the train engineer. This small metal bar stamped with the word "Heppner" is kept in a locked box near the switching point. Without the "staff" in possession, no train can enter the Heppner Branch. The system serves as a key to the Heppner line which opens the track to only one train at a time.

Our journey to Heppner started from Hinkle shortly after 8 a.m. Boarding the caboose with Union Pacific Trainmaster G.R. Marshall, Hinkle, and Conductor Earl N. Martinson, The Dalles, we viewed agricultural developments along the first 37-mile leg of our journey.

Prior to leaving Hinkle, we were able to check out the 6900 diesel which holds the distinction of being the world's most powerful diesel—generating 6,600 horsepower. UP has built 50 of the units since 1969.

Marshall spoke of the possibility of developing a double main line from Hinkle to Boardman during the next few years. Our train pulled off the main line near Boardman to allow one of the "crack" high speed specials to pass in its rapid journey from Portland to points east of the Continental Divide.

After entering the Heppner Branch, our train, with engineer Red Slatt of Portland, maintained an even 50-miles-per-hour. Marshall clocked the speed and at the Junction we moved up to the hog for the 45-mile leg of our journey.

During this time, we had a chance to watch and talk with other members of the crew, including brakeman Ron H. Pfannes, Hermiston, and head brakeman Less A. Workinger. Among Workinger's other jobs was the delivery of a daily paper to a section crew on the line.

Explosive signals placed on the track slowed our progress to 20 miles-per-hour as we passed the work site of the section crew.

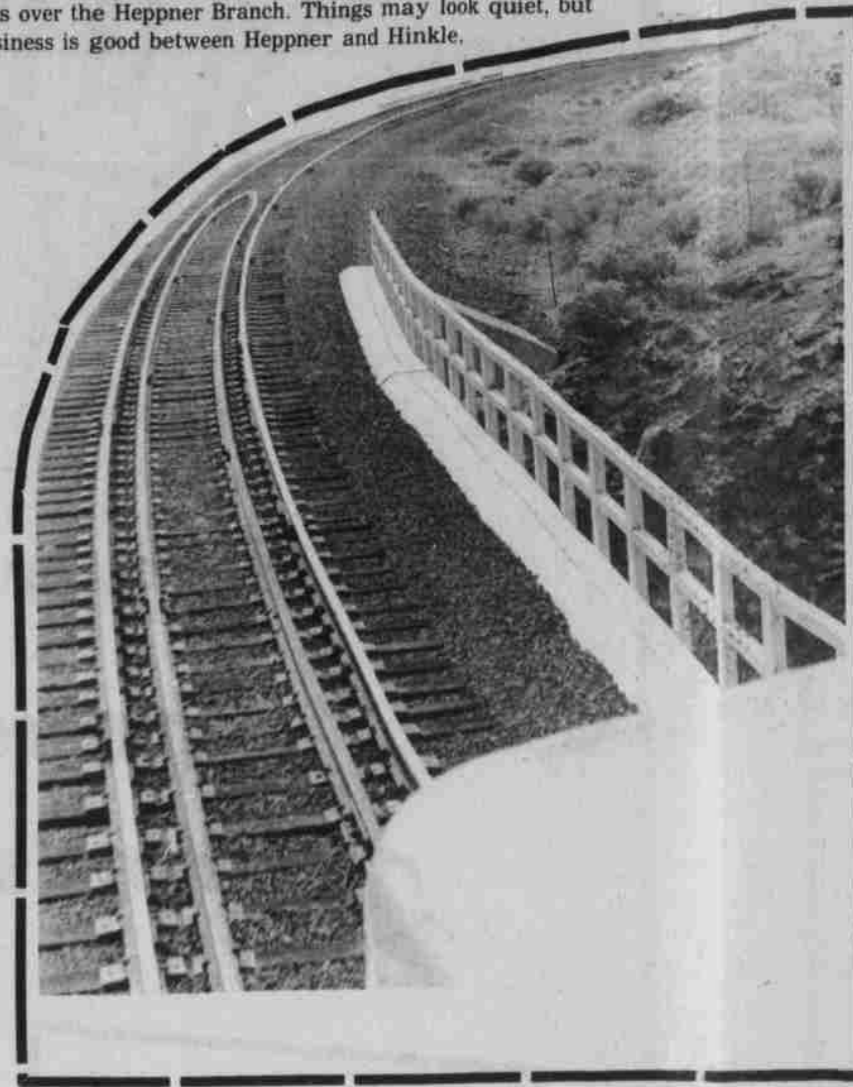
Among the more pleasant parts of the daily journey are the chances to wave at occupants of nearby farm homes, catch an occasional view of deer and obtain a different outlook on the countryside visible from the track.

During the trip, one car was dropped off at the elevator in Ione and three were delivered in Lexington. Conversation shifted as we passed the Mary Lindsay home in Ione. The cab driver killed near Pendleton was the son of a UP engineer.

We arrived at Kinzua in time for lunch, but the work for the crew had just begun. Their task was to put together an outbound shipment of lumber and return to Hinkle.

The crew will change from time to time, but the schedule

and the work remain the same and is expected to increase in coming years. Last year the UP did approximately \$3 million plus over the Heppner Branch. Things may look quiet, but business is good between Heppner and Hinkle.



Story & Photos by Tom Franks



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