

## Final stop on Heppner Willow Creek run marks end of era for railroad train



On train l-r: Lloyd Leathers, operation manager, Charles Clayton, conductor and Gary Conley, engineer are greeted on their last trip to Heppner by a handful of people including John Edmundson (holding flag) and Mayor Bob Jepsen.



Bill Briles and Lloyd Leathers fixing the hitch to connect the last ever railroad car to leave Heppner.

Photos by Joyce Hughes  
Last stop, forever.

One hundred and six years of railroading rolled to a stop when a Union Pacific Railroad train made a final run on the Heppner branch line Thursday, June 30. Lloyd Leathers, operation manager for this branch line during the past 41 years, accompanied engineer Gary Conley and conductor Charles Clayton.

There were no brass bands to greet engine number 2045 that for the last time pulled two cars and a caboose up the Willow Creek track. Only a few local residents and railroad fans from Walla Walla were on hand when this train stopped at Kinzua Resources Mill to pick up an empty flat car that once carried lumber from the mill to market.

Brakeman Bill Briles said that it was inevitable that U.P. abandon this branch line due to the steady decline of rail shipments from the area. However when the Oregon Rail and Navigation Company built this line in 1888 it became one lifeline for marketing the area's agricultural products. Conley said he was board a steam engine that was used to pick up livestock that were loaded in cattle cars from the Heppner stockyards, then located at the west edge of town.

Before that time, ranchers drove cattle and sheep to the stockyards at Arlington, where they could be taken to the

Willamette Valley by boat. Thousands of pounds of wool and grain once had to be hauled out of this inland area by team and wagon. That same kind of horsepower was used to build the Willow Creek railroad when pioneers like Betty Carlson's great-grandfather Joseph Eskelson, helped to build this line.

In November 1888, when that iron horse, that became known as Sagebrush Annie, chugged its way up grade along Willow Creek, residents flocked to Heppner to celebrate the city's designation as a railhead. This newly incorporated county seat began to prosper as a shipping center for wool and wheat.

Henry Heppner, for whom the town was named, and Jackson Morrow, the county's namesake, drove the last spike at the end of the Heppner line. "Long may she roll and prosper," said Heppner Mayor Henry Blackman in a speech before about 1,000 people who had gathered for the occasion, according to the records.

Due in large part to the accessibility offered by the railroad, Heppner's population swelled from 675 in 1890 to 1,146 in 1900. Early day train travel, however, lacked posh accommodations such as dining cars. Passengers brought their own food and dressed in warm clothing to supplement the small coal stoves in passenger cars.

The Heppner branch line, which became part of the Union Pacific Railroad system, served the country well throughout the century. It linked south Morrow County with the Columbia River rail lines, connecting above Arlington. Supplies no longer had to be brought to Heppner by wagons. In the days when large bands of sheep were taken to Montana for summer pasture, they could be transported by rail. When cattle became more prevalent, grass-fat steers were shipped by rail to the Portland stockyards, opening up markets for area ranchers.

That early day coal-fired steam engine, belching clouds of black smoke, caused farm animals to take flight. The shrill toot of its whistle, no doubt caused stampedes. However 1885 legislation that permitted the legal use of barbed wire fencing in the west allowed railroads to fence



Gary Conley and brakeman Bill Briles getting ready to roll.

off their corridors. This lessened the number of incidents when the engine's "cow catcher" connected with wanton animals.

However, this mode of transportation coped with other hazards. The 1903 flood destroyed the rail line in several places below Heppner. The lines were soon rebuilt. However the Heppner station agent, J.M. Kernans and his wife, were among the flood's fatalities. They became alarmed when flood swept debris battered the railroad station. They died while attempting to reach higher ground. Had they remained at the depot, which remained intact, they would have survived.

This rail line built with teams of horses and slip scrapers, crossed Willow Creek in several places to avoid major bluffs and obstacles. Wooden bridges were prone to flood damage. At Morgan, below Lone, a bridge collapsed in May 1917, which killed engineer Sam Hanson and section forman Frank Habelt in the wreck.

A worn track was blamed for the derailment of six railroad cars, 10 miles south of Lone in October

1918. This time there were no casualties, but damage to train cars was estimated at \$6,000. Also there was an estimated loss of \$5,000 in wood chips loaded in cars.

Over the years improved highways and large trucks have taken business away from the railroad. Semi-trucks now carry large loads of wheat to elevators near the Port of Morrow, where grain is shipped by barge. In recent years, large trucks also carry finished lumber and logs to distant markets.

Willow Creek valley residents will no longer be alerted by a train's whistle at crossings. Rails and ties will be removed by a contractor, Leathers said. However older residents will remember that it was the railroads who helped in the settlement of the West and contributed to the

development of south Morrow County--an era that is now history.

### BMCC GED center closed for summer

The GED testing center at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton will be closed for one month beginning July 13. The regular Wednesday/Friday

testing schedule will resume Wednesday, Aug. 10, at 1 p.m. For more information contact the BMCC admissions and advising office, 503 276-1260.

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According to a recent review of two publications in the journal *American Pharmacy*, the most common side effects of prescription medicines purchased in 1992 in the United States included skin rash, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, headache, and stomach pain or cramps. Studies have shown that side effects occur most frequently with pain relievers, antacids, arthritis medicines, antibiotics, blood thinners, and blood pressure medicines. The companies that distribute medicines are required to list side effects in the literature they enclose with their medicines.

In addition to this information, pharmacists have access to reference books and computerized information systems that keep them up-to-date about side effects. Some computer systems allow the pharmacist to print information that is written for the patient or consumer. One of the most important ways to prevent side effects is to read this and other material. This helps one anticipate the possibility of a reaction.

It is important to know what to do in case a reaction does occur while you are taking a medicine. For example, you should know whether or not to discontinue the medicine. Relieving side effects may involve stopping the medicine or taking a different medicine. After reading about side effects, discuss them with your pharmacist and your physician.

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