

Reporter Describes Ride on Doomed Rogue River Train, Portland to Ashland

'Old Stop and Start' Crawls Distance in 13 Hours During Night

(Editor's note: On July 6, the Southern Pacific Railroad announced that it would abandon its last two passenger trains between Portland and Ashland—the northbound and southbound "Rogue River." In anticipation of the end of the service, the Oregon Statesman at Salem assigned Reporter and Columnist Conrad Prange to ride the train and write of his experiences, and the Mail Tribune cooperated in the assignment. Since the accompanying story was written, Public Utilities Commissioner Charles Helzel has announced he is ordering the end of service be delayed pending a public hearing.)

By CONRAD PRANGE
Staff Writer, The Statesman

A 75-year-old bit of Oregon railroad history will come to an end next week when the Southern Pacific's passenger-mail-express train, the "Rogue River," makes its final run.

Listed on the timetable as the "Rogue River," but labeled by trainowners and its infrequent passengers as "Old Stop and Start," the night train has been running through the Willamette valley on its Portland-Ashland run as a holdover from Oregon's earliest railroading days.

Slow and pokey, the Rogue is being sidetracked into the discard because passenger totals have dropped down to an average of only about five a day and because it is no longer needed, the SP says.

Last Service Left

It is the last remaining passenger service train operating south from Eugene on the old original Siskiyou mountains route—one of the most scenic in the West.

Along the 340 mile route from Portland to Ashland, the timetable lists more than 50 stops for mail, baggage, express and a number of other reasons—and on a clear night the Rogue hits just about everyone.

After passenger train service south of Eugene ends for towns such as Roseburg, Grants Pass, Medford and Ashland, mail and express will go by truck. Freight will continue to use the line however serving the rich timber and produce areas of southern Oregon.

Although the Rogue schedule stops at Ashland the railroad south from there to Dunsmuir is maintained and is used by freights. It is always available as a substitute passenger route if the Cascade line is ever blocked. SP officials said, and has not infrequently been used for this purpose.

13-Hour Trip

The trip from Portland to Ashland requires about 13 hours. And because much of it is at night you have plenty of time to catch up on the colorful history of the railroad over which you are traveling.

The Rogue is practically the last remaining carryover from the crowded passenger train era of many years ago when Oregon was first connected with California on a coast railroad.

The first tracks were laid from Portland to Salem in time for the State Fair September, 1870. The line was pushed to Eugene a year later. From there stage coaches took over and it was a five-day trip from Eugene to Redding.

By the end of 1872 the railroad reached Roseburg and the end of the financial rope for Roaring Ben Holladay, a former stage coach tycoon, who had turned to railroading.

To Ashland in 1894
Under Henry Villard the rails were laid from Roseburg to Ashland in 1894. Three years later the road was connected with one built north from California, and the original Siskiyou line of the Shasta route was officially opened.

For many years the Siskiyou route through the heart of Western Oregon was the SP's only main line through the state. Then in 1927 a new line, which veered east from Eugene, climbed the top of the Cascade plateau and ran down through Klamath Falls to rejoin the Siskiyou route near Dunsmuir, Calif., was constructed.

This new route, called the Cascade, was smoother, faster and soon became the favorite.

Service Shrivels

And passenger service on the old Siskiyou line has shriveled and, some say, neglected to the point where as you travel it now through southern Oregon you are lucky to have more than six or seven companions.

If you're making the trip you swing aboard at Portland in 7:30 twilight. If there are a dozen passengers aboard, it's about average. On a recent night there were 12 Pullman fares and 21 coach passengers (all out of Portland), which was the biggest load the train had carried for a long time.

There were 12 crew members aboard. And all of them, from Conductor A. E. Frack and Brakeman D. D. Cole on down,

personified the "friendly" in the Southern Pacific's firm friendly service slogan. The passenger equipment is not new, but crews agree it's adequate for the run.

Of the Pullman fares (\$20 one way) eight were going to Medford, three to Grants Pass and one to Myrtle Creek. These included a retired Iowa druggist and his wife who deliberately chose the Siskiyou route to view the Western Oregon they had been hearing about in the East.

All Along Line
The 21 coach passengers were destined for towns all along the line. Seven adults and two sleepy children were destined for Eugene. A woman and two small daughters were to detrain at Oakland (Oregon) and two women and a man were headed for Roseburg.

None listed themselves as steady patrons of the Rogue river. Mrs. James Morris of Oakland felt her two girls would "ride easier" on the train than on the bus.

Bill and Martin Roberts were vacationing tourists on their way to San Francisco. They were on this train because of its scenic possibilities. They had cameras.

The 10-car train (six express cars, railway post office car, club and coach cars and Pullman) started its stopping routine almost as soon as it left Salem. A passenger got off at Turner. The Rogue pulled onto a siding at Marion and waited for the northbound Shasta to sweep by in a streak of light.

Stops for Freight

Underway once more and at Halsey, Engineer C. A. Bridenstine, a 42-year rail veteran, leaned from his speeding diesel cab and plucked a message off the signal post. It told him to pull over and give way to a northbound freight—an extra. Altogether that night the Rogue gave way to three freights.

"We can make up this lost time," said Bridenstine, as the 90-car freight roared by. "But a few minutes means a lot to that freight."

At Harrisburg (11:10 p.m.) Brakeman Cole helped load aboard the express and baggage car 30 ten-gallon cans of ice cream mix from the Harrisburg Creamery. It was destined for stops down the line.

Among the pile of express taken aboard that night at various points were included a consignment of baby chicks from Albany to Roseburg and a shipment of parakeets from Roseburg to California.

Cars Dropped at Eugene
At Eugene (11:45 p.m.) three baggage cars and several passengers were dropped. Only passenger to come aboard was a railroad fireman going to Roseburg.

Passengers tried to catnap in the darkened car as the long list of stops, mostly for mail and some express, began south of Eugene. Longest gap listed between stops is Grants Pass to Rogue River (nine miles) and the shortest, Myrtle Creek to Weaver, (1.1 miles).

During the run some 1,800 bags of mail were handled by the postal crews aboard.

Contributing to the number of stops and slow-downs was the "ice patrol." The Rogue picks up ice, 50-pound blocks of it in bur-lap bags, at main points and then delivers it to the many track-side shanties of section hands and other railroad employees up and down the line.

This stop-and-start nightmare needed one passenger, a section hand going to work down the line, into remarking pointedly that one railroad he knows of gives away free apple juice to ease passengers' boredom.

Genial Conductor Frack of Portland, who was having a busy night, paused to recall almost wistfully the soft touch he had when he was a brakeman on trains which carried President Truman and Candidate Dwight Eisenhower through Oregon several years ago.

Sought-After Man
Frack, who is president of the new railroad employees credit union and secretary-treasurer of the Brotherhood Local, was a much sought-after man by crews along the line.

South from Eugene the road-bed was rougher and you were lucky if your drink of water didn't splash down your shirt front.

At Roseburg (4 a.m.) the train

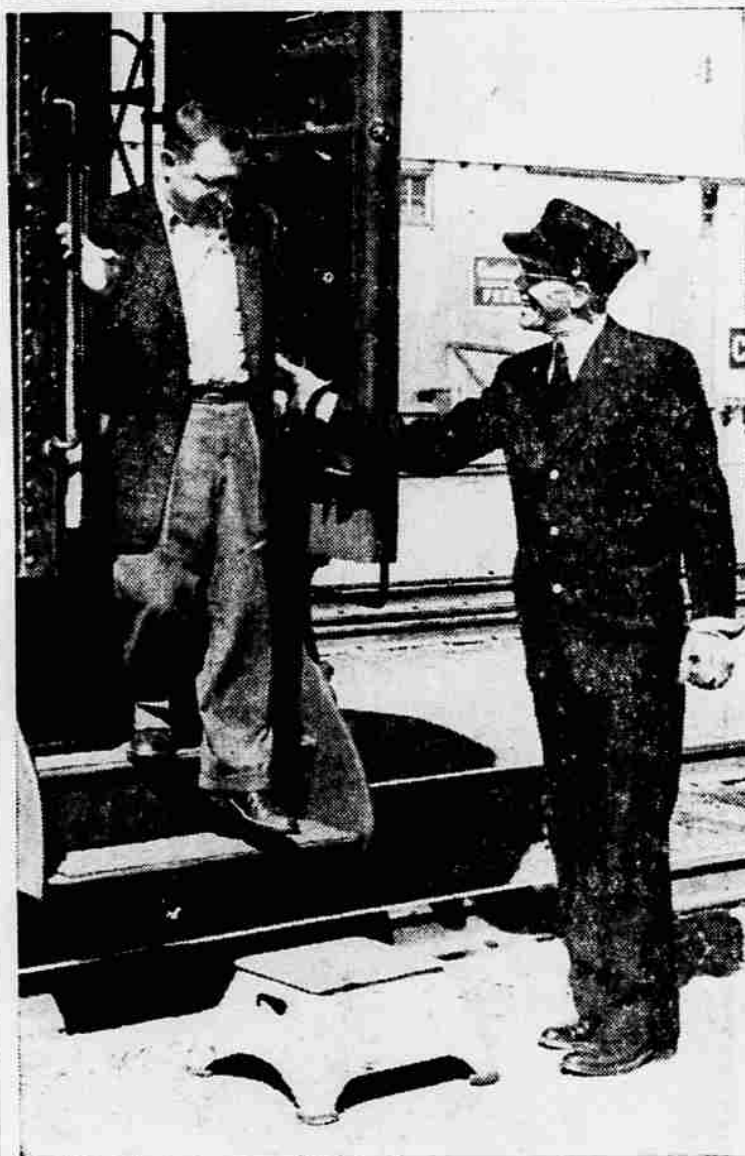


TRAIN PULLS IN—The "Rogue River," the nightly passenger train from Portland to Ashland, as it pulled into the Medford depot (50 minutes late) one day last week. The train started out as a fairly long train, but by the time it arrived here it was down to three head-end cars for baggage, mail and

express, and three passenger cars, a Pullman, chaircar and lounge. A passenger the morning this photograph was taken was Reporter Conrad Prange of the Oregon Statesman, Salem, who describes the ride in the accompanying article.—(Brainerd photo.)



MAIL UNLOADED—Conductor Wallace Cameron, Ashland, checks his watch as mail and express is unloaded from the morning train from Portland, soon to vanish if the Southern Pacific's plans are carried through. On the truck is Don Wendt, Jacksonville, a railway clerk, and barely visible inside the car is Leonard Schoessler, Portland, postal transportation clerk.—(Brainerd photo.)



AFTER 12 HOURS—Statesman Reporter Conrad Prange dismounts from the Rogue River with the help of Brakeman Al Fisher, Eugene. Prange made the trip to describe it in the accompanying articles, which also appears in the Statesman. He found the trip, slow, bumpy and start-and-stop, but said the crew lived up to the "friendly" in the SP's slogan, "The Friendly Southern Pacific."—(Brainerd photo.)

picked up a new crew plus two passengers, youths going to Dilard, 10 miles south. They paid the new conductor, Wallace Cameron of Ashland, 30 cents each for their fares.

The passenger load had dwindled to a handful. As dawn broke just out of Roseburg, the train began to parallel the misty Umpqua river and from here on the view and scenery are well worth the slow and jerky ride through the beautiful Umpqua River valley.

Along about Riddle (4:30 a.m.) Conductor Cameron stretches his long legs on a seat (it's an informal train) and tells you about the old prospector who works a claim hereabouts and regularly flags down the train near

'Pony Express' Set To Point Out Slow Time of SP Train

Roseburg — (U.P.) — A "Pony Express" race to point out the need for more adequate train service for southwestern Oregon will leave the starting line at the south city limits of Eugene next Saturday.

The race will cover the 75 miles to the north city limits of Roseburg with from 75 to 100 riders and horses in the relay.

Allen Knudtson, chairman of the race committee, said the present Southern Pacific Passenger train takes 3½ hours to cover the 75 miles. Knudtson believes the horses and riders can equal or better that time.

Poses to Help

The Douglas County Mounted Sheriff's Posse will participate in the race and Knudtson will enlist the support of other posses in Lane, Josephine and Jackson counties.

Southern Pacific recently announced plans to abandon passenger train service in southwestern Oregon and Knudtson said subject of the Pony Express race was not to preserve the present service but to promote new and faster service between Dunsmuir and Portland on daylight schedules.

Medford Attorney is RR Lions Club Speaker

Rogue River — Attorney Robert Dames of Medford Lions club spoke on legal aspects of escrows and sales contracts at a meeting of the Rogue River Lions club last week. Dames is zone chairman of the Lions club.

Lions club president, Harold Sander, presided at the meeting, at which James Woody and Grady West were initiated as new members by Past President Howard Miller.

Four out-of-town guests attended. They were Earl Bennett of Portland; Paul Michener and Fred Becker of Long Beach, Calif., and Emmory Kettler of Huntington Beach, Calif. Michener has a 10-year perfect attendance at the Lakewood, Calif. Lions club.

day with their camera sighted on the lush Oregon terrain.

Gold Hill and running late. The stops for mail and express continue. Medford at about 9 a.m., about 50 minutes late. Sole passengers from Medford to Ashland are the two vacationers and a woman and her three young daughters going the 12 miles to Ashland.

End of Line

The Rogue pulls into Ashland at 9:40 a.m. — only about 35 minutes late — the end of the line! The hustle at the station these days is considerably less, you think, than on that Dec. 17, 1887, when they whanged in the last spike connecting Oregon with the south.

A last word with Al Fisher of Eugene, a rear brakeman with a nostalgic sense of the historical. "This is a beautiful line," says Al, meaning the Rogue River run. "It seems a shame to abandon it."

As the Rouge Rogue moved along through wooded hills several deer were sighted along Cow Creek.

Out of Grants Pass (7:30 a.m.) the train is about 15 minutes late and now moves along the stretches of the cool-looking, broad Rogue river — a fisherman's paradise. The two California tourists are having a field



45 YEARS AGO—The picture above is of the Jacksonville baseball team of 1910, taken 45 years ago this summer. It is from the files of Ike Dunford (third from left in the team), and was sent to the Mail Tribune by M. Dale Newton, a railroad enthusiast, because of the fact that the youngster seated in front with the brimmed hat is Donald Russell, president of the Southern Pacific company, who was raised in Jacksonville. The picture was accompanied by a letter which is quoted in the accompanying article. According to Dunford, the other youngster, in the cap, is Roland Hines, who he thinks

now lives in Portland. Lined up for their pictures, left to right, to the best of Dunford's recollection, are the following: 1. unidentified; 2. Warden "Preach" Ennis, son of a Jacksonville minister, now deceased; 3. Dunford; 4. unidentified; 5. Ephraim "Curly" Wilson; 6. Charles Dunford Jr., Applegate, Ike Dunford's brother; 7. Al Duncan; 8. Billy McIntyre, recently deceased, Jacksonville; 9. unidentified; 10. "Heinie" Schmidt, Ashland, and 11. Lewis Ulrich, team manager, Medford, recently deceased.

Railroad Enthusiast Points Out Western Pacific Plan; Says 'Tsk, Tsk' to Russell

M. Dale Newton, Medford printer and model railroad enthusiast, last week sent the Mail Tribune the above picture accompanied by a letter discussing the Southern Pacific's plan to discontinue passenger service between Medford and Ashland.

His letter follows:
The following story came to me, rather deviously, from the office of the president of the Western Pacific railroad, and I thought it paralleled, in part, our situation with SP or rather, perhaps, SP's situation:

Several years ago WP asked the ICC for permission to abandon their Salt Lake to Oakland run (passenger). They were running much the same sort of equipment SP now is on the Portland run; old and dirty; impossible service; indifferent attitudes on the part of employees. The effort to discourage passenger travel was almost too apparent!

But ICC said "NO!" However something had to be done, as WP was losing \$1,200 per month on the run. So, on a last effort, they purchased 50 passenger and 72 passenger Budd diesel rail cars, new, fast and modern.

Instead of running them at night (another parallel) they made a daylight run of it. As

And him treating the Rogue Valley like a step-child; him that was born and raised here. Tsk! Tsk!

I say that if the SP can't run a railroad to the advantage of the paying customers, they should let someone take over who can!

Most emphatically,
M. Dale Newton.

Dies in Tractor Mishap

Grants Pass — (U.P.) — A 29-year-old Sunny valley logger was killed Friday when he was run over by a tractor near Macklin Gulch, 25 miles north of here.

Dead was Clarence Krewson. He was run over by a tractor operated by Kenneth Brady, who said he was driving down a steep incline when the accident happened.

Sheriff's deputies said they were unable to determine how Krewson, a choker setter, got in the way of the tractor. They were investigating the accident, which occurred at about 12:30 p.m.

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