

Recreational Uses of Log Hauling Trains¹

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Abstract Logging company trains and their associated infrastructure as well as commercial trains carrying logs and forest products often served recreation-related purposes. Some of the recreation-related uses of these directly benefited users and others are indirect in nature. Some types of recreation associated with log hauling trains are only historical and no longer exist. These were mainly recreational uses by loggers and visitors to the logging areas. Other types of recreation facilities and recreation activities related to logging railroads continue today and may increase in future years. These include scenic and excursion trains, conversion of abandoned road beds and bridges to recreational trails, logging/railroad museums with logging exhibits, logging railroad model building, and recreational use of handcars and “speeders” formerly used on logging railroads.

Key Words: Recreation, Logging Railroads

Introduction

Since the beginning of the past century trains have been used by logging companies to haul their logs to the mill and/or their lumber from the mill to market via commercial railroads. These big commercial carriers could themselves sometimes be defined as log hauling trains. Commercial railroads such as the Soo Line and the Chicago & Northwestern in the lake states historically relied on the timber industry for freight revenues during the early development of their lines, but the lumber companies likewise depended on the big commercial carriers. For example, the Keith & Hiles Lumber Company of Crandon, Wisconsin bought forest land in the Crandon area in 1892 but they were unable to utilize their timber resources until 1901 when the Chicago & Northwestern built a spur into Crandon. In later years when the merchantable timber ran out railroads helped the mills continue to operate. For example, the L.N. Fisher Lumber Company of Wabeno, Wisconsin (just south of Crandon) bought timber 40 miles north of town to try to extend the time they could operate, and the Chicago & North Western was hired to haul these logs to the mill in Wabeno (Monte 2002).

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The railroads made huge differences in the logging business in the Lake States. The biggest change was probably in the infrastructure. The value added to the logs could now be closer to the logging site. Sawmills could move their operations upstream, and the mouths of rivers played a lesser part in the sawmill business. The trains could now carry lumber directly to Chicago, St. Louis and every other major city...(Monte 2002)

“One piece of infrastructure that moved into the woods with the railroads was the saloon. In the early pine-logging era, the nearest saloon would be many miles from the camps...Saloons sprung up along railroad tracks, often it was the first building built (in a new logging town). The saloon was the meeting place and served multiple functions in a new community (Monte 2002).” It also served as a recreational destination for loggers coming to town after spending a month or more in logging camp. When asked what more than a thousand loggers in the camps around Cass did for recreation when they came to town, an interpreter at Cass Scenic Railroad State Park in West Virginia responded, “fist fights, drinking, and visiting the ladies at the ‘other’ hotel on ‘Dirty Street’” (Personal Communication 2006).” More respectable recreational facilities also existed in some logging towns, such as an opera house one half block wide that was built in Crandon, Wisconsin in 1908; it burned in 1912 and was not rebuilt (Monte 2002).

Travel To and Travel Back

It has long been established that a recreational trip consists of several phases, among which are the experiences of traveling to and from the recreation destination as well as the actual on-site recreation experience (Clawson and Knetsch 1960). The logging company’s train was often the only means of transportation between the logging camps and the nearest town. In addition to providing transportation for loggers who wanted to come to town for recreation, these trains were also used to bring visitors from towns to the logging camps. One example was a train of Little River Lumber Company which logged a large part of what is now Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The company established the town of Elkmont in the mountains, with simple service facilities for their rail and timber operations. “Despite the company’s intentions, the impressive beauty of the mountains the cooler weather of higher altitude, and a remoteness from the stresses of urban life soon made Elkmont a much frequented vacation or excursion location. In 1912, a spacious hotel, the Wonderland, was constructed and land for private residences became available from property previously subdivided from tracts owned by the lumber company....Photographs in various publications show that the Little River (train) did have at least one open-air observation or excursion car...Apparently built in the company shops and painted black, this open car was used regularly on summer weekend runs and on special occasions for visitors, picnics, and excursions to Elkmont and into the woods, where it is most often seen pulled by a Shay”(Schmidt and Hooks 1994).

In addition to the use of timber company trains for recreational transportation, commercial railroads linked logging towns to cities at some distance from the logging regions. Both residents of the logging towns and residents of the big cities would ride the

commercial trains to and from the logging communities on recreational trips. The logging town of Padus, Wisconsin, located 90 miles northwest by train from the city of Green Bay via the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, connected Padus residents to their extended families and cultural pursuits in Green Bay. “The railroad... also connected people from the outside to Padus and the northern deer herd. With a hotel to stay in, (hunting) the northern woods became less of an ordeal...(Monte 2002). During the early days of this railroad only one train a day came through this town, arriving in late afternoon, and consisting of one coach for passengers along with a number of freight cars. However, it was not long before a morning passenger train was added which ran on Wednesdays and Fridays (LaRock et al. 1997).

Passenger traffic increased steadily after 1909 on the Chicago & North Western between Green Bay and Chicago, approximately 200 miles to the south. (In “1909 the railroad announced it was going to double track the main line from Fond du Lac (mid-way from Chicago) to Green Bay and that the (wooden) bridges in Neenah and Menasha (40 miles from Green Bay) would have to be rebuilt using steel and concrete(Fritze Park 2006).” The major wooden railroad bridge there was originally built to divert the Chicago and Northwestern route across Little Lake Butte Des Morts and through Neenah and Menasha, where nine paper mills were built. “Over the years stream lined passenger trains (en route to Green Bay and points north) with names like...*The North Woods Fisherman* crossed the Little Lake Butte des Morts bridge.” The Chicago and North Western discontinued its passenger trains around 1960 and its freight trains stopped running by the 1980’s (Fritze Park 2006). After that, local activism, initiated by Town of Menasha Park Board Shirley Neumann, resulting in sufficient funds being raised to convert and integrate the Little Lake Butte des Morts bridge and a part of the former railroad roadbed into a bicycling and hiking trail (Personal Communication 2006).

Scenic and Excursion Trains

There are currently over 100 scenic railroads operating in the United States and equivalent number of such railroads in Canada. (http://www.railsusa.com/links/Tourist_Railroads/; http://www.railscanada.com/links/Tourist_Railroads/). Many of these operate on former logging railroad tracks, and some share rail line tracks with current log hauling trains.

One typical western example of a scenic railroad is Mt. Ranier Scenic Railroad, running regular tourist trains between Elbe and Mineral, Washington, on a one and one half hour 14 mile trip. Their trains are pulled by vintage Shay, Heisler, and Climax steam locomotives. In addition to the regularly scheduled scenic train rides, several special excursion trains are also run each year. Their trains have a variety of coaches for passengers which include an open car, open window coaches, heated coaches, and an observation coach called a “clopen” car. The normal fee for an adult ride on one of their scenic trains is \$15, and a ride in the cab of the steam engine is also available for \$50 (<http://www.mrsr.com/excursion.html>).

The Roaring Camp and Big Trees Railroad is an example of a western scenic railroad that is somewhat unique because it runs on narrow gauge tracks. “It is a small logging railroad which still uses Shays and Heislars on their excursions...(It) is a narrow gauge tourist railroad in California that starts from the Roaring Camp depot in Felton and runs up steep

grades to the top of nearby bear mountain, a distance of about 2.5 miles. The travel is through second growth redwood forest.” (<http://www.trainweb.org/jlsrr/pictures/full-scale/roaring-camp/roaring%20camp.htm>)

Two examples of western logging railroads which run excursion trains today are noteworthy because of their active preservation of logging history. First is the McLeod River Railroad, located at the base of Mt. Shasta in Northern California, which came into existence on January 21, 1897 and is unique because it is still a commercial log hauling railroad, after over 100 years in existence. “The McCloud River Lumber Company was brought into existence about the same time. The lumber company eventually came to control the railroad company, and for many of the early years the same officers served both lumber and railroad companies.”

<http://www.trainweb.org/mccloudrails/History/History02.html>

Two different classes of railroads were built in the McCloud operations, those lines built for the benefit and exclusive use of the lumber company, and those that became part of the common-carrier McCloud River Railroad...Most of the trackage used by the McCloud companies consisted of temporary log spurs laid down by the lumber company to reach the area that was being logged at the moment, and in most cases the trackage was removed as soon as the trees were gone...Many hundreds of miles of roadbed laid out by the lumber company still exist winding through parts of Siskiyou, Shasta, and Modoc counties, but only a few dozen miles would be operated at one time. Traffic on the McCloud River Railroad could be broken down into three basic categories. The first was movement of raw logs from interchanges with the lumber company railroads to the McCloud mill; the second was movement of commercial freight between points on the railroad; the third was passenger service. Commercial freight generally meant finished lumber from the McCloud River mill (and other mills in later years) to connections with the outside world as well as whatever other traffic was offered to the railroad by members of the general public. A side note to the passenger traffic was the less-than-carload freight and express business that was generally carried in the same car as the passengers.

<http://www.trainweb.org/mccloudrails/History/History03.html>

The McCloud River Railroad has a very complex history of ownerships and development of very diverse operations over the years. In 1960 rail fans became interested in the last steam locomotive was still on the McCloud River property. “The railroad responded to this interest in 1962 by rolling the locomotive out of retirement and back into service hauling special excursions. A new era of excursions dawned on the railroad.”

<http://www.trainweb.org/mccloudrails/History/History05.html>

Each year more and more people found out about the McCloud steam program. “The railroad ran a few excursions on its own, but the majority of trips were sponsored by civic and rail fan organizations. An average year during this time period saw several trips run, including a few specials ... and at least one snow trip in winter... Two tourist operators did try their hand at regularly scheduled trips on the railroad (in 1964) using the line’s equipment...However, rising insurance and train rental costs forced the group to suspend

operations after the 1971 season...The railroad's steam program continued strong through the 1960's. By 1969 the steamer was needing some work and there was some consideration given to ending the program...the recession of the early 1970's cut into opportunities for the locomotive to operate, and trips became fewer and fewer. The last runs occurred in 1975 when the locomotive along with a crew were transported to central California to participate in the filming of the movie *Bound for Glory*."

<http://www.trainweb.org/mccloudrails/History/History06.html>

The McCloud River Railroad ran very few excursions between 1975 and the early 1980's, and most of these were for school or civic groups. There were an average of only one to three steam excursion trips per year between 1982 and 1986. "Hollywood once again called on McCloud in 1986 when it used the McCloud to film parts of the movie *Stand By Me*. The filming of the movie proved to be one of the last runs of the #25 (their steam locomotive)...as a result of a breach of contract issue."

<http://www.trainweb.org/mccloudrails/History/History07.html>

"Steam locomotive #25 was restored to service in time to run several excursions over Labor Day weekend of 1997. A second steam locomotive was added early the following year...Today's McCloud continues to handle between 1500-2000 loads of freight a year...The passenger traffic has evolved into a year-round operation. The dinner train has expanded to six cars in length and runs Saturday nights year round, with Thursday and Friday night runs added during the summer months. An excursion train runs partway between McCloud and Mt. Shasta City on the same day the dinner train runs. The railroad runs special excursions throughout the year as well, such as Memorial Day and 4th of July steam excursions. The railroad has also run special charter trips for private individuals and groups as needed."

<http://www.trainweb.org/mccloudrails/History/History08.html>

The second noteworthy example is the Alberni Pacific Railroad located outside of Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. This log hauling railroad re-creates the adventure of early logging days by providing a complete package for summer visitors and school children during the school year of the daily life associated with logging camps, the mill, and traveling to and from the port from which the forest products were shipped. It achieves this experience by offering a ride aboard a restored 1929 Baldwin ex-logging locomotive No. 7, through the Alberni Valley where the McLean Lumber Company held its timber licence, to the McLean Mill National Historic Site. The McLean Mill is Canada's only steam operated sawmill today. It is on the site of the original re-created lumber camp complete with the dwellings, store, and restored logging equipment including steam donkey, logging trucks, and lumber carriers.

On the historic site, the visitors to the camp can see a mill demonstration of a steam-driven headsaw, the original logging camp, as well as observe a local theatre troupe as they tell the stories of camp life. Moreover, the docents of the McLean Mill site have developed approved educational programs that meet the themes of the British Columbia school curriculum and these program are delivered during the school year to local K to Grade 12 school groups. One such curriculum program, entitled "McLean Mill", prepared for K to Grade 6 students, is described as follows-

Living in a Single-Industry Based Community - Explore the reality of working, living and learning as a community during the early years: where a trip to town was an adventure, and argument with the boss might mean the loss of your home, and you live next door to your teacher.

Thus, the log hauling Alberni Pacific Railroad combined with the McLean Mill National Historic Site provides an opportunity to step back in time and learn first-hand what life was like for loggers, mill workers, and their families in remote coastal lumber camps in the early 1900's.

<http://www.alberniheritage.com>

Museums, Models, and Parades

There are both logging museums and railroad museums which have exhibits of log hauling trains. The National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, Wisconsin has a Shay logging locomotive in its collection which it is now beginning to restore. It also has logging railroad books and other materials in its archives, some of which provide information relating to recreational use of logging trains.

Many of the railroad museums have model train exhibits associated with them, and there are some hobbyists who specialize in building models of logging trains. For example, one model builder from the UK states:

For nearly 20 years I have been modeling and collecting information on North American timber railroads, and for about 15 years I have been building a freelance HO-scale railroad based on the one operated by the Simpson Lumber Company of Shelton, Washington. In August, 1999 I made my second visit to the USA in 10 years, and I hoped to enhance my enthusiasm for and do further research on the Pacific Northwest, its timber industry, and its associated railroads (Sewell 2000).

The Wabeno, Wisconsin logging museum has a unique locomotive on display called the Phoenix Log Hauler. "The Phoenix was used throughout the Lake States where the terrain would permit, and was also used in places like Finland and Russia" (Monte 2002). The G.W. Jones Lumber Company used the Phoenix to pull a string of as many as 32 sleighs loaded with heavy hardwood logs. Instead of rails it required iced tracks for the runners of the sleighs to follow. The locomotive was propelled over the ground by a caterpillar-like tread on each side and was steered by runners in the front. The city of Wabeno fires up the Phoenix once a year and runs it from the logging museum down the main street in town, where it serves as the central attraction for an annual parade.

Handcars and Speeders

Handcars on logging railroads were of several different designs and were used for diverse purposes. In addition to use by rail repair crews hand cars were used for transportation by doctors visiting logging camps. “Unofficially, people used them to go hunting, fishing, or just to go to town” (Brown 1983). Cass Scenic Railroad State Park has three different types of handcars on display in their museum. They also rent a working example of one of the three to the visiting public for use on a short section of track apart from the main tracks for their logging railroad’s scenic train rides, charging \$2.50 per person for ten minutes of use (Cass Scenic Railroad State Park 2006).

When these self-propelled cars have motors they are referred to as “speeders” or “speedos.” Sewell Valley in West Virginia used one version of these motorized cars for employee transportation and also for carrying passengers and mail on occasion” (Warden 1993). Small motorized “speeders” have recently become popular for recreational use by private individuals who have acquired them. One such group of individuals calling themselves the Northwest Railcar Group published an article describing a long trip by ten speeders over Weyerhaeuser’s woods line (Cummings 1994). A quote from this article indicates that this is a very recreational activity and that some of the people participating may have had similar experiences in their youth:

It’s hard to describe how much enjoyment I got from this trip. Believe it or not, it took me back almost 50 years to our family speeder trips at Simpson’s Camp Grisdale in the Olympics. Every summer during blackberry season we would travel by speeder south from camp and then over the Wyoochee River bridge...

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