



THE HIGHLINE!

WP

TAKES THE HIGH ROAD



ABOVE: On July 6, 1980, a BN-170 Highline job drums upgrade on the horseshoe curve at the west end of James Siding, 19 miles east of Oroville, Calif. RIGHT: A BN-137 glides westbound through the double bridges that are as much a trademark of Feather River Canyon as the Keddie Wye bridge. The date is Sept. 9, 1981, and a trip down the Highline has just been completed. Yesterday this train departed BN's Interbay Yard in Seattle and by the end of today the manifest will be interchanged to Santa Fe in Stockton. Both photos, Ken Rattenne

Arthur Curtis James was a smallish man, sporting a King Edward Beard and graced with a keen sense of business. A.C. James has been called the last of the great railroad financiers of the Twentieth Century, and in fact he was a man who at one time sat on the board of several significant railroad companies—simultaneously! In the bustling year of 1926, this corporate giant was a board member of, among others, Southern Pacific, Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Chicago Burlington & Quincy—and Western Pacific.

Two years previous, in 1924, James sold his El Paso & Southwestern to SP for a fortune in stocks and bonds, putting him in the enviable position of being the largest SP shareholder. In the tradition of railroad moguls past, James used his assets to purchase the World War I weary Western Pacific, a company known to many as the "Wobbly." James had big plans for his Wobbly—in addition to administering a face lift to the physical plant James wanted to add more revenue-producing miles to the system map. While WP had purchased several California short lines between 1916 and 1922, the most ambitious undertaking to date would be the building of a northern extension to connect the railroad with James' Great Northern in Oregon. This would turn the company into a north-south bridge route and give SP a run for its money. James even envisioned a San Francisco section of the *Empire Builder*!

Called the Northern California Extension, or NCE, Western Pacific and Great Northern had quite a fight on their hands winning permission from the ICC to build their line. It was finally obtained on June 30, 1930. Western Pacific built north from Keddie for 112 miles through very rugged terrain, while in Oregon, Great Northern built south from Klamath Falls, laying 88 miles of right-of-way. The two railroads met in a mosquito infested spot in California called Bieber (Bee-ber), a

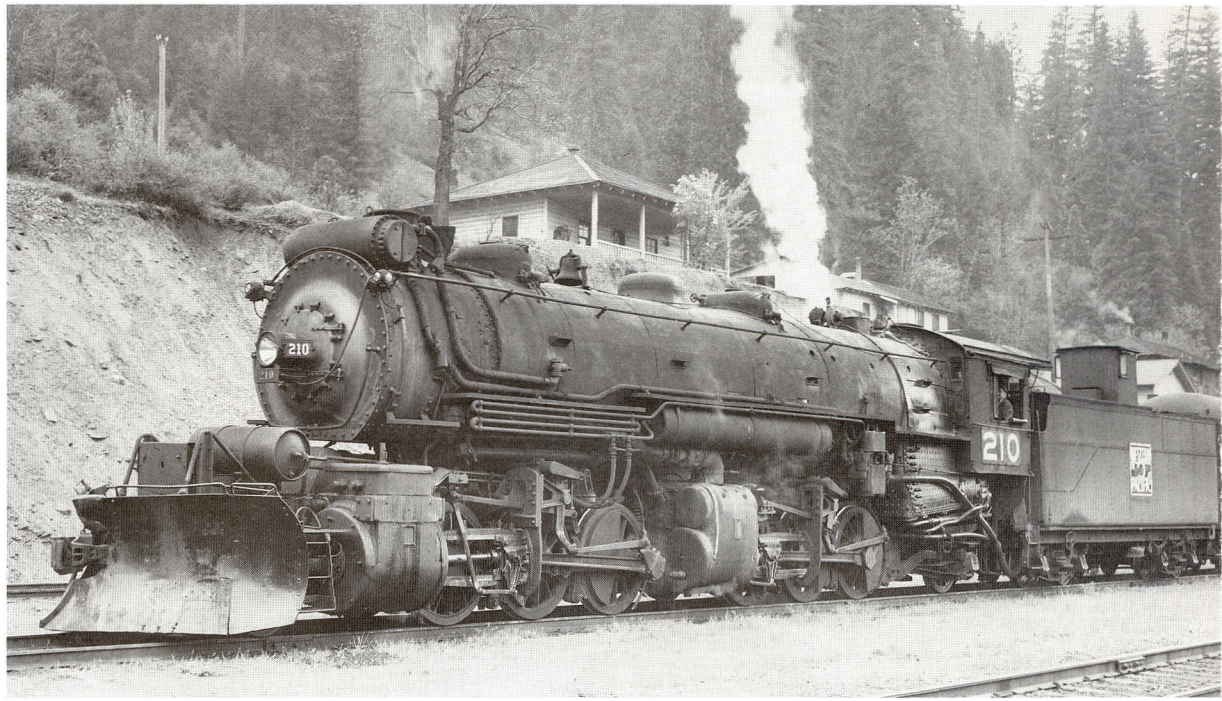
place that was relatively quiet before the coming of James' rails. While construction along the steep rock walls of the Sierra and the volcanic plateaus of Northern California was as difficult as anything the Feather River Canyon offered, construction methods had greatly improved over those used when the transcontinental route was built in the early part of the century. With the aid of modern equipment, nine tunnels were holed on the route, all completed within one year and by the same crew!

The idea behind the NCE was to promote competition with the Southern Pacific and offer shippers an alternative transportation solution. Eventually teaming up with the Santa Fe, Great Northern and Western Pacific initiated a run-through agreement referred to by marketing types as the "Inside Gateway." Traffic was expedited between the triumvirate by Santa Fe from its Southern California connections and handed over to WP at Stockton, where it was rushed north to the Great Northern, then later successor Burlington Northern for Pacific Northwest destinations. WP was the critical middle link—a bridge line in the strictest sense.

The fascinating aspect of modern Highline operations was the parade of pool power running down from the BN at Klamath Falls. Locomotive pooling originally started in 1953 with an arrangement between GN and WP allowing WP power to run through from Bieber to Klamath Falls starting on May 31 of that year; in August 1956 the agreement extended to Bend, Ore. The newly merged Burlington Northern was only in existence 11 months when a run-through agreement was initiated on March 20, 1971, with WP units running as far north as Seattle and BN units as far south as Stockton and the Bay Area. On Nov. 20, 1982, as a result of their displeasure with the impending merger of Western Pacific and Union Pacific, BN terminated all locomotive pooling with WP.

KEN RATTENNE

In its heyday Keddie had a station, roundhouse, turntable and service facilities. WP employed 2-6-6-2 and 2-8-8-2 articulated giants for use in the Feather River Canyon and Highline, and Keddie was their port of call. On Aug. 17, 1945, engine No. 210 awaits a clear block for another run up the Highline. The plow mounted on the pilot was always a dead giveaway that these maulers worked in snow country. The arrival of the diesel made an impact not just on steam powered locomotives but also on the work force needed to service them: In 1947, Keddie's roundhouse work force stood at 38—by 1953 it had dropped to four. Guy Dunscomb, Ken Rattenne collection



KEDDIE

Until 1974, Highline train crews changed at Keddie before continuing either north or south on the railroad (engine crews changed until 1978). For as long as Western Pacific existed, the tiny town of Keddie was synonymous with WP and the Feather River Canyon. Before dieselization, Western Pacific's crossing of the Sierra Nevada was like the old good news, bad news joke: the good news was the ruling grade of 1 percent, or under, and the light snowfall; the bad news was the winter rock slides and washouts which often kept crews from reaching the end of their runs before going dead on the law.

Three decades of emerging railroad technology poised Keddie for more change. With high-hood GP20 2007 on the other end, four Burlington Northern Alco Century units hustle towards the Highline's Tunnel 1, a short bore linking the two tracks crossing Spanish Creek Trestle to form the famous Keddie Wye. Wearing the colors of predecessor Spokane Portland & Seattle, the four visitors will team up with the 2007 to shoulder tonnage along 111.8 miles of tortuous railroad to keep their connection with the BN at Bieber, and continuing the age-old competition between the "Wobbly" and business rival Southern Pacific. Tom Mougovan, Ken Rattenne collection





ROCKY ROAD

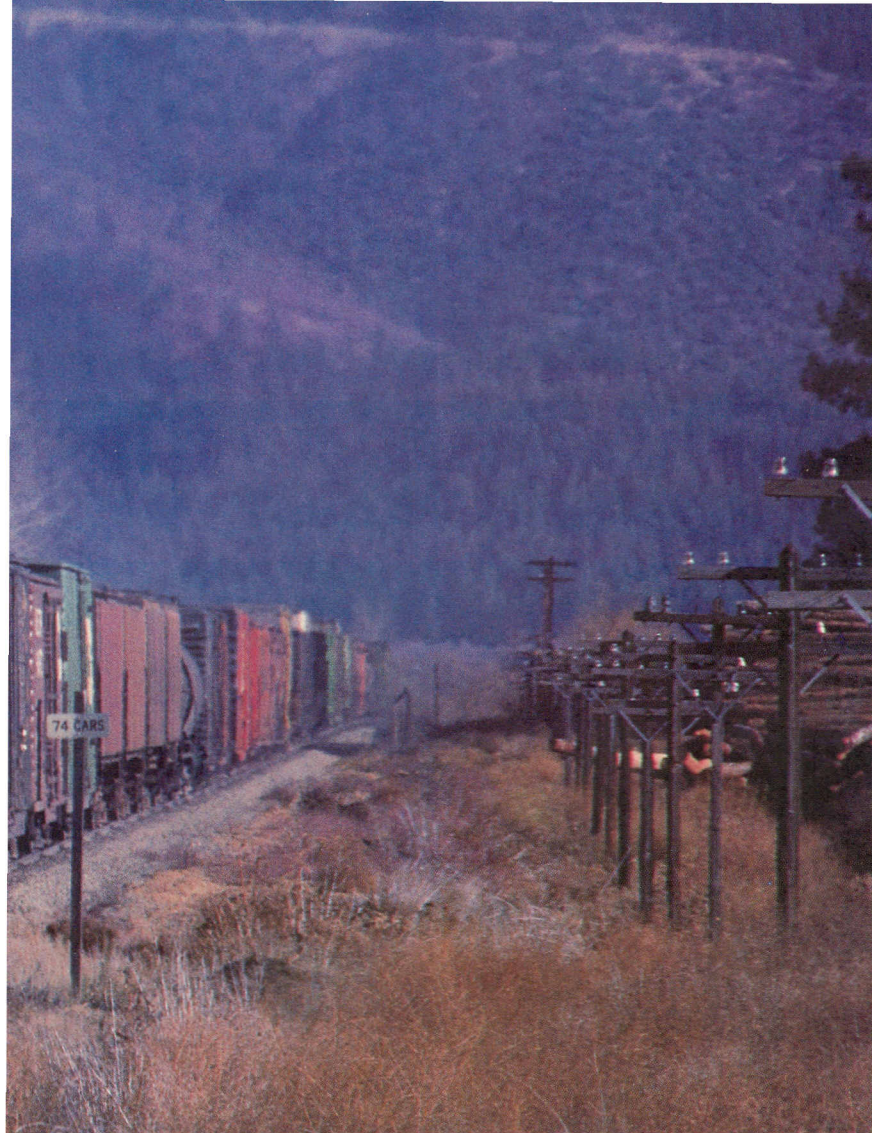
The miles between Keddie and the Highline's Indian Valley were some of the most rugged on the entire Western Pacific; the first five were literally benched into the sheer granite walls of the Spanish and Indian Creek canyons. The line was supported by several bridges and snaked through five tunnels while maintaining a steady 1.5 percent grade to climb out of the Feather River Canyon.

ABOVE: Rolling southbound at milepost 7 on November 26, 1982, WP Extra 3520 West makes its way towards Moccasin, less than a mile further down the line. This power set, made up of GP40s 3520, 3521, 3531 and 3503, ran to Bieber the previous night as a light move to pick up the BN-137 train left by the Burlington Northern. It's been six days since BN terminated its run-through agreement with WP, making power moves like last night's a common event. **Ken Rattenne** **LEFT:** When the Northern California Extension was originally built, nine tunnels were constructed on the line, but by December 1982, tunnels 7 and 8 had been bypassed and tunnel 9 daylighted. Of the remaining six, five were within the first four miles of track. Snaking its way into Tunnel 3, caboose 474 waits its turn to plunge into 621 feet of darkness in the last summer of Highline operation under WP ownership. **Ken Rattenne**



CRESCENT MILLS

Nestled on the floor of Indian Valley, Crescent Mills was once a bustling little lumber town that not only hosted the WP but between 1917 and 1937 saw the steam engines of the Indian Valley Railroad. The 21-mile IVR was a copper-hauling short line that had close ties with Western Pacific, sharing a depot with its big neighbor at the Feather River Canyon location of Paxton, and an interchange at Crescent Mills. In modern times the town was—like most lumber communities—subject to the rise and fall of that commodity's price.



LEFT: Approaching Crescent Mills from the west a BN-138 lugs tonnage on Nov. 26, 1976, with GP40 3519 leading a BN GP30, U33C and SD45. With Burlington Northern's incredibly varied roster, photographers flocked to the Feather River Canyon and Highline to see consists like this. Most "WP men," both railroaders and railfans, considered WP's green-and-orange scheme an abomination and longed for the bright *Zephyr* colors of silver-and-orange. The 3519 wears the original Perlman Green paint scheme applied in the early 1970s. Units painted during 1976 would lack the tiger stripes on the nose, which were replaced by a Spartan "WP" and single safety stripe Wayne Monger **BELOW:** In July of 1982, a mixed bag of Western Pacific and Burlington Northern power leads the BN-138 just north of town along Wolf Creek in the summer of 1982 when Crescent Mills had but one mill left to show for its past glory. Ken Rattenne



GREENVILLE TO BIEBER

Six miles up the line, Greenville was another town whose livelihood depended on a healthy lumber market. Somewhat bigger than Crescent Mills, Greenville managed to hold onto its depot past WP's demise. In 1983 the structure was sold to the city for a dollar with the understanding that it be moved from UP property. It took seven years for the financially strapped town fathers to finally relocate the structure, and the depot was trucked away from its lot in August 1990.

The grade between Greenville and the siding at Almanor, some 11 miles upgrade, was a stiff 2.2 percent; in steam days this meant a helper on every northbound train out of Keddie. Once at Almanor, northbound growlers snaked through the S-curve of 7,914-foot Almanor siding and began briefly running along the sparkling waters of Lake Almanor.

A little over 35 miles north of Keddie WP connected with the tiny, 13 mile-long Almanor Railroad at Clear Creek Junction. Owned by Collins Pine Lumber Company, the Almanor rosters a single locomotive, GE 70 tonner No. 166. Today, the Almanor is the Highline's only on-line customer and is served by whatever Union Pacific freight happens to be going in the direction the Almanor's traffic is destined for.

After traveling north 76.5 miles, and only 36 miles from a hot meal and warm bed at the Bieber dormitory, northbound crews encountered the unmanned station and siding of Halls Flat. Rather descriptive of the surrounding terrain, the line offered little resistance to Bieber-bound freights with a .40 percent uphill grade until milepost 77. Hoggers then got a thrill as they drifted downhill for a mile with a gradient of 1.40 percent, after which the descending grade increased to 1.80 percent all the way through the old sidings of Jellico and Willow Springs.



Extra 920-D West passes in front of the Greenville depot in a cloud of dust on the afternoon of June 18, 1968, taking its cue from the clear order board as it rolls south for Keddie. This is the combined GWS-CAL (Great Northern-Western Pacific-Santa Fe and California) and features a common consist for the day: two F7As, two F7Bs and a GP9. The GWS originated on the Great Northern in Seattle and terminated in Stockton, where it was handed over to Santa Fe; the CAL's traffic originated at Vancouver, B.C., and offered shippers a through connection to Oakland. Tom Taylor, Ken Rattenne collection

Portions of the text in this feature were excerpted from Ken Rattenne's latest book, *FEATHER RIVER ROUTE TWO: KEDDIE TO SALT LAKE CITY*. This book, together with the first volume, *FEATHER RIVER ROUTE ONE*, provides fans of Western Pacific a very personal photographic tour of one of the West's most-beloved railroads. Both volumes are available from Interurban Press.



Back in January 1979 severe storms swept over Donner Pass and forced SP to bring out their heavy guns in the form of rotary snow plows. By the time this intense weather front drifted over the northern Sierras, the storms had blown themselves out and were quite mild. Illustrating the light snowfall the route experienced is the BN-138 of Jan. 16 of that year, drumming upgrade at Clear Creek Junction with GP40 3538 passing through snow that has drifted only lightly along the rails. Kyle Brehm

POSTSCRIPT

From Halls Flat, Bieber was only an uneventful 90 minutes away—or longer if trouble occurred. At Little Valley the north-bound grade once again forced trains to fight gravity for another seven miles until milepost 103. From there on, a crew could drift down into Big Valley, where near milepost 109 and the siding of Pit River, the line flattened out to for the last two and a half miles to Bieber. At milepost 111.8, Western Pacific's Highline ended: Upon entering the small yard at Bieber, WP trains were now on Burlington Northern property. Weary crews would climb down from their cabs and wait their 12 hours off for another run home.

Burlington Northern would forward trains 88 miles north to Klamath Falls, Ore., where they continued with another crew up the Oregon Trunk to points north. Aside from offering Californians their only chance of seeing Cascade Green machines in the Golden State, the High Line was honest competition at work. Up until the Union Pacific merger in December 1982, the original idea of the Inside Gateway was a vision made real. Once Union Pacific took over, the line would fall into disfavor and a series of events would cloud its future.



In the summer of 1982, overhead light plays havoc on the angular profiles of a team of high-horsepower EMDs lead by GP40 3510 as they lead Western Pacific's priority BN-138 train past a location that featured the railroad's last water plug as late as 1980. Ken Rattenne