



DONNER CROSSINGS



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Preserving Railroad History along the Donner Pass

Snowbound on the Donner Route!! January 1890

This view of Blue Canyon shows a relatively mild winter scene along the Donner Route. For many years snowsheds covered the tracks for much of the distance from Blue Canyon to Truckee. This issue of Donner Crossings highlights an especially harsh winter, 1889-90, when several passenger trains were snowbound for over a week near Blue Canyon and an all-out battle took place to get the tracks open. *Photo from the Ken Yeo Collection*





From the Editor:

Much has been written about the City of San Francisco passenger train that was snowbound for three days near Donner Summit in 1952. The story was even more newsworthy because of the close proximity of the stranded train to U.S. Hwy 40 (now I-80) that was also snowed in and impassible.

There were other severe winters in the history of the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific along the Donner Pass Route. The winter of 1889-1890 was especially troublesome for railroad operations.

I was aware of the storms of 1889-90 from coverage in John Signor's book, "Donner Pass, SP's Sierra Crossing," and Gerald Best's book "Snowplow – Clearing Mountain Rails." While researching newspapers for the book on Towle Brothers, I learned from a news article that during the 1890 storms Allen Towle supplied provisions to a passenger train that was snowbound between Towle and Blue Canyon (see the January 24 entry in the account on the following pages). I made a mental note to come back to it someday, and that brings me to this issue of Donner Crossings.

Recent research has again proved that old newspapers can be an excellent source of interesting stories about

operations along the transcontinental route. I found myself knee deep in another story begging to be told, but how to best tell it? After reading a series of newspaper accounts of the storms of January 1890 and of several trains stranded for nearly two weeks on Donner, I decided the best way to report this epic battle was through the eyes and printed words of the newspaper reporters as events were happening on "the hill".

I have chosen to string together newspaper accounts taken from one source, the Sacramento Daily Record-Union, through the month of January 1890. Verbatim quotes from several of those issues have been selected to tell the story as it evolved, and as the reporters and railroad officials on the ground saw it day by day.

In order to gain full appreciation for what it was like for railroad workers and train passengers that January, I encourage you to read the account from start to finish. Feel the optimism, disappointments, and dogged determination to get the line open and keep it open.

Roger Staab, editor

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You are invited to submit feature articles and/or photos for future issues of Donner Crossings. Please contact Roger Staab, email roger.staab@psrhs.org, or by mail at PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713. Assistance is available to format your information or photos into final form for publication.

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Snowbound on the Donner Route!! January 1890

In 1952, Southern Pacific Railroad's premier passenger train, the City of San Francisco, became snowbound on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Attempts to free the train from the mountain's icy grip were met with numerous frustrations. Finally after three days the passengers were able to walk to the recently cleared nearby highway where a fleet of automobiles waited to transport them to a waiting train and passage to Sacramento. It took railroad crews several more days to free the snowbound locomotive, railcars and stranded snow-fighting equipment and open the line to through traffic once again.

The Donner Pass route was famous for heavy snowfall from the earliest days of its construction. That realization led to the addition of snowsheds along much of the route to reduce the impact of winter's fury. Still there were years when major storms made it very difficult to keep the line open, but crews stepped up to the challenge and most of the time railroad operations continued with only minimal delays.

Snowsheds and bucker plows were the primarily tools then used by the railroad to help combat the effects of winter snowstorms. That and the tedious work of hand crews wielding shovels.

During the summer of 1889 a mile and a half of snowsheds near Cascade was destroyed by fire. A year earlier SP had purchased its first Leslie rotary snowplow for the Donner route, and management decided to not replace the burnt section of sheds, relying instead on the bucker plows and the new rotary to keep the line open. That decision would prove to have fateful consequences for the coming winter.

In the fall of 1889 snow began falling in early October, but with occasional breaks in the stormy patterns. By late December snowfall was accumulating in earnest, and as the calendar turned to 1890 trouble was already brewing on the Donner Route. We pick up the story of the storms and their impact on railroad operations by following the accounts presented in the pages of the Sacramento Daily Record-Union newspaper, beginning in early January 1890.



Friday, January 3, 1890

Heavy Deposits of Snow

—Hundreds of Shovelers Kept Busy.

The passenger depot presented an animated appearance yesterday morning. One hundred men were being engaged to go to the mountains and shovel snow, and large numbers gathered around the special train which stood on the side track, each one eager for employment. Those who had blankets of their own were generally the favored ones, and it was not long before the required hundred were obtained. They were placed in cars which were attached to the Colfax local and taken to that place. From there a special engine took them up the road as far as Blue Canyon, Alta and Emigrant Gap. This makes in all over 600 men fighting the snow, about 400 of whom are shovelers.

It commenced snowing in the mountains early yesterday morning and it was snowing as far down as Colfax. The two overland trains were late in arriving here. The delay was not caused by the snow, but by belated trains on the Union Pacific road. The Central Pacific line over the mountains was clear yesterday, but another gang of men was sent up from here last evening.

The new plow is at work steadily on the "hill," and another of the same kind is on its way here from the East. There was 14 feet of snow at the Summit yesterday, 10 feet at Cisco and

Emigrant Gap, and three feet as low down the mountain as Gold Run. From Colfax down rain was falling.

»—————«
Saturday, January 4, 1890

TRAINS DELAYED BY THE TREMENDOUS SNOW-BANKS.

The Railroad Track Frequently Blockaded,
and Old-Style Plows of Little Use

—Work of the Rotary.

The snow and wind-storms in the mountains on Thursday are reported by the railroad people to have been terrific, and as a result no through trains, freight or passenger, had arrived in this city up to last evening, since noon on Thursday. The two overland trains—one of which was due at 6:25 on Thursday evening and the other at 6 a.m. yesterday morning, had not arrived up to dark last evening in consequence of the blockade of snow.

To a Record-Union reporter Secretary Breckenfeld of Superintendent Wright's office gave a graphic description of the Storm, the operations of the force of men fighting the snow, and the snow-plows. On Thursday afternoon, with the wind blowing a hurricane and the air filled with blinding snow, one of the old model snowplows, with six large locomotives behind it, together with three carloads of shovelers, started from Alta to plow eastward and clear the track to Blue Canyon. It succeed-

ed in scattering the snow from the track up to within two miles of the latter place, where, on account of the increasing violence of the wind and falling snow, it had to give up the attempt to get to Blue Canyon. Snow had fallen over the track behind the train, and the entire outfit became blockaded. Meanwhile

THE NEW ROTARY PLOW

Was looking after the road near Cascade, where the sheds were recently broken down, and it was also headed eastward, endeavoring to keep the road clear as far as the Summit. Receiving the news that the other plow was storm-bound near Blue Canyon, and being ordered thither to help extricate it, the trainmen started for the Summit turntable, in order to head the plow westward. When some distance this side of the Summit, in a place where there were no sheds, they came upon a snow-slide for a distance of over 200 feet and to a depth of 10 feet.

THE SOLID BANK OF SNOW

Was bored into by the plow, and the track for the whole distance was cleared in grand style although windows in the cab were smashed. The plow reached the Summit late at night and resolved to wait until daybreak yesterday morning before starting back.

With the fast mail train behind them the start was made, but again eight feet of snow was found on the track in the open space which had but a short time before been cleared of the obstruction—a fissure in the bank had caused it to slide back again upon the track. Forging through this, they proceeded as far as Cisco, where the overland stopped and the passengers were accommodated in the hotel. The plow then proceeded to the assistance of the one blockaded, and was working at that place yesterday afternoon.

TRAINS DELAYED.

The overland trains which left here Thursday evening were at Colfax during Thursday night and most of yesterday, awaiting the clearing of the road. It snowed as far down as Applegate yesterday morning, and when the Colfax train came into the depot here, about 10 o'clock, the tops of the cars were covered with snow, and a huge pillow of "the beautiful" covered the pilot of the locomotive.

SIXTEEN FEET AT THE SUMMIT.

The depth of snow at the Summit yesterday was increased from fourteen to sixteen feet, and there was a proportionate increase in depth at all points above the snow belt.

THE SITUATION LAST NIGHT

At a late hour last night Assistant Division Superintendent Jones and Train Dispatcher Wilder were seen by the reporter. It was learned from them that the west bound trains were still behind the blockade, but might reach here this morning.

The rotary plow had also been stalled near Blue Canyon, snow slides having occurred in front and to the rear of it. The plow was, however, "working out its own salvation," and it was expected that it would be free before midnight. There was no snow falling last night on the eastern side of the Summit, but some on this side.

Assistant Superintendent Burkhalter was at Cisco—as far as he could go for the time being—and was directing operations in that vicinity. The company sent up some more snowshovelers last night, and now has upward of 600 men between

Emigrant Gap and Truckee, and many of them are said to be very tough customers. Mr. Wilder said that from all he had heard it must be

A GRAND SIGHT

To see the rotary plow strike a snowbank and march through it. It throws the snow on either side, as desired (which is naturally the down-hill side), and for a distance of from 100 to 150 feet. He said he wouldn't be surprised to hear of some of the little "shake" hamlets along the road being completely submerged by the snow thrown off by the plow. With the exception of where the sheds are intact the track lies between walls of snow as high as the car-tops.

»—————«
Sunday, January 5, 1890

BLOCKADE LIFTED.

A STUBBORN BATTLE IN WHICH THE RAILROAD WAS VICTORIOUS.

At noon yesterday word was received at the depot that the blockade on the Central Pacific line at Blue Canyon, caused by the breaking down of one of the old-style "bucker" snow-plows, was about removed. After the shovelers had cleared the track for the injured plow, the latter was taken away and sidetracked. The rotary plow then resumed its good work, and made rapid progress through the mountainous banks of snow. It soon had the track clear in the vicinity of Blue Canyon, and then proceeded to make its way toward Colfax, in order to release the four east-bound trains which were tied up at that point. This work was necessarily slow, owing to the enormous banks which drifted upon the track, but by 5:30 o'clock last evening the road was clear, and the east-bound trains were given the signal to proceed on their journeys.

From Colfax the rotary returned to Emigrant Gap, and plunged into the banks which surrounded the two west-bound trains at that place. The track to the rear of the trains was first cleared, after which the trains were backed on to a side track. Then the plow passed them and took up its position at the head of the two trains. In this manner the westward trip was made, slowly, of course, but surely, and they arrived in this city early this morning.

The rotary left the incoming trains after they reached clear ground and returning went from Emigrant Gap to Cascade, and cleared the way from the Summit to that point for another west-bound overland which could not get further than the Summit. At last accounts good progress was being made, and the railroad officials were confident that this train would arrive here to-day.

At midnight dispatches were received at the depot stating that the road was clear both east and west, and trains were moving unimpeded in both directions. One hundred extra snowshovelers were sent up to the scene of the storm last night from this city, which makes nearly seven hundred in all who have been employed by the company to battle with the snow. Their duties are to keep the track clear after having once been made so by the plow, and also to take precautions against slides.

It required the services of two hundred shovelers to release the damaged "bucker" at Blue Canyon, working constantly in

two shifts of one hundred men each. Four hundred shovelers are now at work between Colfax and Emigrant Gap, and nearly three hundred more between the latter point and the Summit. The rest are scattered about at various points vigilantly watching for slides and other breaks. Snow was still falling last night, but not heavily.

All of the railroad officials are loud in their praise of the great work which was accomplished by the rotary plow. Some say that the blockade could not have been lifted in a fortnight without its assistance.

"The old bucker plow will have ended its career of usefulness with the close of this winter," said train-dispatcher Jones last night. "The trouble this winter was that there was such a demand for rotaries in the East that we could only get one of them. Next winter, however, we will be fixed, and a blockade will then be something unheard of. No attention will be paid to them. These new plows can whisk the snow off a track faster than it can fall."

[For the next several days there was a brief respite from the stormy weather, but that would soon change. – ed.]



A bucker plow at Cisco. (Ken Yeo Collection) These were pushed through drifted snow by several locomotives, as shown in the lower photo taken at Blue Canyon in 1890. Derailments were a frequent problem. (Lower photo from Best – Snowplow)



Wednesday, January 15, 1890

Nevada City, January 14th.— The mail that should have arrived Sunday was brought in this afternoon by a sleigh from the blockaded narrow gauge train, which has been two days coming from Colfax, twenty-two miles, and is not expected to arrive until late to-morrow. All available men were sent from here today to assist in removing the snow and ice from the track.

Thursday, January 16, 1890

RAGING ELEMENTS.

The Snow King Again Waging War Against the Railroads.

The fresh outbreak of the storm has brought trouble to the railroads again. Late Tuesday night the west-bound freight train, loaded largely with live stock, was derailed in the snow sheds near Emigrant Gap, and the result was a cave of the sheds for some distance, and a serious wreck. Several head of stock were killed, and the fact that the sheds were weighted down with hundreds of tons of snow when they fell did not serve to help matters. A crew was promptly dispatched to the scene, and after working all night the road was finally cleared and the train sent on its way yesterday. It was not long after this, though, that the second-class westbound overland train passed through Truckee. It had proceeded about five miles westward when it was caught in a heavy snowslide. The engine got through all right but the slide caught nearly all of the cars and nearly buried them. One hundred and fifty shovelers were sent from Truckee immediately to dig the snow from under the wheels and clear the track. This was accomplished after six hours' hard work. The delayed train reached this city at about 2 o'clock this morning. It was due at 6:25 p. m.

[Note: Similar problems were being encountered in the mountains north of Redding on the California and Oregon line. Mention of that route is included in the articles that follow for completeness. – ed.]

The storm is still raging on the Shasta route and the Oregon Express, due here this morning, will not arrive here until tonight. All outgoing freight trains were tied up last night and will not be sent out until a through passage is insured. Owing to the fact that many of the wires were down last night, information regarding the trains was very meager.

Friday, January 17, 1890

BATTLING WITH SNOW. SOME DETENTIONS, BUT ALL TRAINS TO MOVE TO-DAY,

Eight Hundred Men Shoveling Snow-
Two New Giant Snow-Plows on the Way Out.

"This is the worst season we've ever experienced in railroad-ing," remarked Division Superintendent Wright, of the railroad company, to a Record-Union reporter last night. "There goes a gang of 130 men whom we are sending out tonight to help those now on the Shasta Division in keeping the Oregon road open. It has been snowing up in the mountains there for the past

two days, and there have been delays to the trains, but we'll have them all running again to-morrow.

There is lots of work being done on the Central Pacific road up about Blue Canyon, where we have some 500 men shoveling snow. The trouble is that in both directions it keeps storming so that the men cannot do as much as they otherwise could. The snow keeps falling, and the wind blowing so hard that the snow drifts readily. There is an immense depth of it up on the mountain, and the old snow is frozen hard, while the last couple of feet fall is kept shifting over it by the high wind."

Pursuing his inquiries the reporter learned that on "the hill" the situation is very perplexing, but in nowise serious. Two miles west of Blue Canyon one of the old snow-plows got hemmed in yesterday morning. Two hundred shovelers were sent up there, and by hard work all day yesterday they nearly got the road clear to Blue Canyon, and were expected to reach that point before this morning. Two of the locomotives handling the plow became derailed, and there was considerable delay in getting them back on the track, as the wrecking apparatus could not reach them.

If the storm had only ceased in its fury for a few hours yesterday that stretch of road would have been cleared before night. There was no trouble being experienced at any other point on that division, and the rotary plow will be sent down this morning from Cascade to assist, if necessary, in clearing the track.

The two east-bound passenger trains that left this city on Wednesday night were still at Cedar [*Shady*] Run, this side of Blue canyon, and, as they have to follow the plow, they cannot move until the latter gets through this morning. The west-bound overland train, due here at 6 o'clock yesterday morning, is at Emigrant Gap, and the one due at 6:25 p. m. yesterday is still at Truckee, but both are expected through some time to-day. The passengers are all comfortable, and experience no more serious inconvenience than such as is caused by their temporary detention.



Central Pacific's new Leslie rotary poses at Cascade in 1888. The rotary would prove invaluable in clearing the blockaded tracks in the storms of 1889-90. More rotaries would soon be added to the roster on the Donner route. (PSRHS Collection)

MORE PLOWS COMING.

Superintendent Wright states that the company has two more of the latest improved snow-plows now on the way, and when they come there will be no further detention, and little work for snow-shovelers. One of them was at Cheyenne yesterday, and will be on "the hill" early next week and ready for business. The other left New York yesterday. These plows are said to be even better than the rotary now doing such splendid work about the summit. [*This likely refers to Cyclone rotaries, which the railroad was purchasing for trial – ed.*]

Late last night the snow was falling and a high wind blowing, both on the Sierra Nevada and along the Oregon line, in the Shasta mountains.

«—————»
Saturday, January 18, 1890

THE STORM KING.

HE STILL HOLDS THE FIELD AGAINST ALL COMERS.

Terrible Snowstorms in the Sierra Nevada
and Shasta Mountains— Snow-Plows Shut In.

And still the storms on the Sierra Nevada and along the Oregon road in the Shasta Mountains continue. The snow has fallen steadily since our last report, and it has not been found possible to move the blockaded trains, notwithstanding additional forces of shovelers are daily sent to the front. The railroad company has now close upon a thousand men employed along the mountain divisions of the Central Pacific and California and Oregon roads, battling with the snowdrifts and endeavoring to keep the roads open for traffic.

The storm has been the worst ever encountered by the company, and to overcome its effects seems to be almost beyond human power. Still, the officials of the road have fought, and are still fighting, the Storm King at every point, and they declare that they will yet conquer, if human energy and the best appliances of modern times can accomplish that result.

Yesterday one of the old-styled snowplows started to clear the road from the summit to Truckee, but soon got into a bank of snow and stuck there. The rotary was sent down from the Summit in the meantime, to release the plow that was fast in the snow near Blue Canyon. It was expected that the latter would be got out before dark.

THE SITUATION LAST NIGHT

A Record-Union reporter called at the railroad office last night and learned that all the trains on the hill were in the same positions as announced yesterday. "If the storm would only let up for a few hours", said Train Dispatcher Jones, "we could clear the road and get a train or two through, but as fast as we throw the snow off the wind drives more of it back again, and the result is most exasperating.

All Eastern trains which left here Wednesday are not yet as far as Blue Canyon. The foremost is about two miles this side of Blue Canyon, with one of the bucker plows ahead of it. This evening the plow was working hard to clear the road through to the station, and had about accomplished the task when a huge snow-drift slid down upon the six engines and plow and literally buried the whole concern. The other East-bound trains are at Colfax. The West-bound trains are at Emigrant Gap, Truckee and Reno awaiting the clearing of the track.

The buckler plow which started on Thursday to clear the track at Tunnel No. 13, between the Summit and Truckee, and which got corraled in the snow, is still there. Another plow from the Wadsworth Division started to help extricate the blocked snow-thrower yesterday, but had not got more than a few yards out of Truckee when it, too, foundered in the snow and was unable to proceed.

Conductors report that the passengers in the imprisoned trains are comfortable; and, beyond the inconvenience of delay, do not complain. The railroad company has established a provision car at Shady Run, and passengers in trains which cannot reach any station are supplied therefrom.

Last night one hundred and fifty additional men, equipped with shovels, were sent to the hill from this city. A carload of provisions was also dispatched. The rotary plow, which has worked during the whole winter with such good effect, has encountered one unexpected difficulty. In certain places where dry snow would fall and afterwards wet, slushy snow slide on top of it, the plow could not remove it clean enough from the rail, and the result is the engines working the plow are constantly being derailed. This defect is also more noticeable on the other plows.

Last night's East-bound overland trains which arrived here from San Francisco were held here until this morning, when the two trains will be united and sent up the hill.

No trains have arrived here from Oregon since the 15th inst. Those headed in this direction are detained at Ashland, and those that have been sent up from this city are at Redding. Just before midnight last night trucks were being loaded with vegetables, groceries and stoves at down-town houses, which articles were to be sent out on a train then being prepared to go to the relief of the hungry snow-shovelers.

»—————«
Sunday, January 19, 1890

ON THE HILL.

Trains are Still Blockaded,
but Will be Released Soon.

The situation on "the hill," as regards the progress of trains, is the same as it was three days ago. There has been no move at all on the part of the trains, and in all probability they will continue to remain at a standstill until some time this afternoon. The west-bound trains are still at Truckee, and those east-bound at Colfax, with the exception of the one which is in the snow near Blue Canyon. The plow which was blockaded ahead of this train has at last fought her way into Blue Canyon, but still the train behind it is blocked so that it cannot pass. Last evening the rotary plow was scattering the snow between Emigrant Gap and Blue Canyon, and as soon as it possibly can, will work down to where the blocked train is and release it. The plow was expected momentarily to reach Blue Canyon last night, and it is thought that before long the snow-bound passengers will reach the station.

The old plow, which was blockaded at Tunnel 13, has managed to get out and is in the sheds, sheltered. Last night 100 men from San Francisco and from 250 to 300 from the south were sent up on the overland to battle with the snow.

That part of the road between Colfax and Dutch Flat was reported cleared last night.

It was reported that the train which was blockaded at Sims, on the Oregon road, would be gotten out by this morning.

»—————«
Monday, January 20, 1890

SNOW, RAIN AND SLEET.

Truckee, January 19th.—Very little progress has been made in the past twenty four hours towards the removal of the blockade. Ten locomotives and a plow started out early this morning and have encountered drift after drift. Snow shovelers accompanied the train, who were kept busy shoveling them out. During twelve hours they have only been able to run three miles.

At Prosser Creek, four miles east of Truckee, huge snow-slides have been piled on the track to immense depths. The prospects are not very encouraging for a removal of the blockade for some days. It has again commenced snowing.

Cisco, January 19th.—It is snowing harder than ever, and there are no signs of a clear up. The trains are still blockaded.

»—————«
Tuesday, January 21, 1890

In the Sierras.

Truckee, January 20th.—The blockade is nearing an end and railroad officials are confident that they will have the road open by tomorrow night. Eleven engines today pushed the plow and they were enabled, with a very little trouble, to reach the five dead engines and plow. They then returned to Truckee with the engines, and to-morrow will try and reach the Summit, which they expect to do without meeting any large drifts. From Blue Canyon they have cleared the track to Cascade, at which point the rotary is again doing noble work plowing towards the Summit. East of Truckee they will put on all the power they can spare to open the road to Reno.

The Cyclone, a rotary that they have been expecting, is reported to be on the Salt Like Division plowing its way to Truckee.

Condition at Cisco.

Cisco, January 20th.—It cleared off for a few hours today, but to-night it is snowing again. There was fourteen feet four inches on a level here this morning. All trains are still blockaded,

»—————«
Wednesday, January 22, 1890

"JUST A LITTLE SUNSHINE"

AND THE BLOCKADE WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST.

If No More Snow Falls the Delayed Trains Will Arrive This Afternoon.

Has the snow king called off his forces for good, or is this only a temporary lull, preparatory to another disastrous onslaught? This was the all-important question among the railroad people yesterday and last night. The cessation of hostilities on the part of the elements in the Sierra Nevadas dates from Monday morning, and up to a late hour last night all was still quiet. The railroad people have seized the opportunity with a vengeance and never, since the storm became troublesome, have they worked harder to clear the track than they have

in the past two days and nights. Should no more snow fall within the next twenty-four hours the track will be as "clean as a whistle."

The track from Colfax to Alta remains clear, having been polished off Monday by a host of shovelers. Trains may now pass between these points, but very slowly, owing to the large quantity of ice which forms on the rails. Shovelers are now working eastward from Alta toward Blue Canyon, to meet the rotary plow, which is coming west. The track on the other side is clear from Blue Canyon to Truckee, except where the sheds are down. Thus it will be seen that all that is now necessary is a little time for the two forces of shovelers and plows to meet, and the blockaded trains may move.

The track is clear also from Emigrant Gap to Blue Canyon. The battle was waged against the snow-banks all day yesterday in the vicinity of Prospect Cut, several miles west of Blue Canyon. The shovelers worked like Trojans, and the task, though seemingly almost impossible, owing to the colossal mountains of snow, was finally accomplished. Thence the shovelers directed their efforts upon the mile and a half strip of track which was left bare by the burning of snow sheds last summer. This is near Cascade, twenty miles east of Blue Canyon. The cleaning of this strip of track means the raising of the blockade.

From information received at the depot last night it is calculated that unless another downfall of snow is precipitated, this last strip of track would be clean by morning and the imprisoned trains released. This will bring the first of the west bound trains in this city some time this afternoon.

CONDITION OF THE PASSENGERS.

The passengers in the two trains imprisoned at Blue Canyon are well provided for, having been supplied with plenty of provisions and fuel, and altogether very comfortable, thanks to the heroic exertions of the railroad people. Much of the provisions had to be packed many miles by snow-shoers. Plenty of fresh meat arrives daily, as well as other provisions of the best quality. The train which left this city yesterday for Colfax was literally loaded down with provisions of every variety for the imprisoned passengers and the army of shovelers, and the same spectacle was to be seen every day almost since the blockade began.

PREPARING TO MOVE.

A late dispatch from Emigrant Gap last night stated that the blockade was nearly raised. The rotary plow started west from Blue Canyon at 9 p. m., and, it was stated, would likely make Alta by 12 o'clock. Train No. 4 would then start west. A few drifts in the snow-sheds and the opening at Cascade still remained to be cleared, which would take several hours. The road was then open from the Summit east.

Another dispatch from Towles, which is only a mile east of Alta, announced that the road was open west from that place. East of there about six miles to Shady Run remained blocked. The rotary plow was momentarily expected through that place. Trains Nos 1 and 3 were then preparing to move east after their six days' rest in the snow near Shady Run. The weather at that time was reported fair.

WHAT THE RAILROAD CONTENDED WITH.

The Record Union's special correspondent wired the following from the scene of the blockade last night: "None but the snow-shovelers, imprisoned passengers and those who have visited the scene will ever know how hard the Southern Pacific Company has worked on the Sierra Nevadas to release the imprisoned trains and open the road. The snow is all over the mountains, even as far down as Newcastle, and at Colfax it is nearly five feet deep alongside of the track. The rails are cleared, however, and tonight the road is open as far as Towles, a station about a mile above Alta. "The tops of houses in Colfax are covered with snow to a depth of two feet and more, and the narrow gauge road to Grass Valley and Nevada City has not been in operation for several days. Mail is brought to and from those places every few days by a man with a light sleigh. He takes the roads down in the canyons where the snow is shallow.

"All Eastern destined mails have been taken from the blockaded trains and sent back and around by the Southern route. The passengers in the east-bound overland which has been lying at Colfax for the past four or five days are all comfortable, and the food, which is furnished them at the railroad company's expense, is all of first class variety.

"I'll tell you what,' said Constable Dyer of Colfax, 'the railroad folks have been treating their men and passengers royally all through this storm. Tons and tons of provisions have been shipped, and any of them that may be kicking about their condition (and I don't believe any are) are of the class who are extremely hard to please."

"The supply train which went to Alta from Colfax this morning taking men and provisions went back this evening."



Thursday, January 23, 1890

Battling With the Snow Storm King.
Gallant Fight of the Railroad Company
ANOTHER TERRIBLE STORM,
But the Sturdy Workers Are Gradually Gaining.
THE IMPRISONED PASSENGERS.
Splendid Achievements of the California
Railroad Men Under Adverse Conditions.

Snowing again!

The words flashed over the telegraph wires yesterday morning from the scene of the great snow-blockade in the Sierra Nevada, and carried dismay into the camp of the tired and worn railroad officials. Yes, the snow king had sounded another charge, just as the army of snow-fighters were about to raise a mighty shout of triumph. Had this renewal of hostilities been delayed but a few hours, the disastrous blockade would have been broken, and the delayed trains would ere this have been bounding along on their journey.

But like a cat with a mouse, the snow king only desisted long enough to fill his prisoners with hope of escape, and then pounced upon them again with all the fury of a fiend.

A heavy wind sprang up shortly after midnight, and carried the surface snow about in clouds up and down the mountain sides and through canyons, depositing great banks upon the

recent-cleared tracks and undoing the work of days of the hardest of labor. As morning approached the wind subsided slightly and flakes began to fall. Soon it had developed into as hard a storm as has been seen since the trouble commenced, the snow falling all along the line from Colfax as far east as Truckee, in some places at the rate of two inches per hour. At first the army of snow fighters began to despair upon seeing the results of their days' of toil completely undone in a few hours, but, cheered on by the knowledge that upon their efforts depended the liberty of many, renewed the attack desperately. They knew that there was a possibility, in spite of the fresh outbreak, of liberating at least one of the imprisoned trains by a final mighty effort, and they went at it determinedly.

The rotary plow headed this work, and for a while good progress was made. But the fates were evidently not in sympathy with the snow fighters, and it was not long before the big plow and one of the driving engines were derailed. The rails were caked with ice, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that the engines could remain on the track, even under slow speed. Work, of course, was greatly delayed while the plow and engines were being replaced on the track.

Once in position again the great rotary resumed work, but only to get off the track again half an hour later. This was the experience nearly all day. The track was so completely ice-clad that derailments were of frequent occurrence. Still, in the face of these dismaying obstacles, the railroad's forces worked nobly.

These derailments occurred about three quarters of a mile east of Shady Run, and at last accounts this morning the plow had encountered a heavy slide, which derailed it. Three engines and 130 men, provided with all the necessary paraphernalia, were then at work replacing the plow. The casting of the tender of one of the engines was also broken by this slide, and this will cause the delay to be unusually long.

The situation at the hour of going to press this morning is this: The shovelers throughout the storm district have managed to keep the track clear, in the face of the storm, east of Blue Canyon— with the exception of the mile and a half strip at Cascade, where the sheds are down—and west of Towle's. This leaves but four miles to be cleared between these two places, besides the mile and a half strip. With fair success, the rotary and shovelers will clear up the entire road before noon to-day, and the first of the delayed Westbound trains will arrive in Sacramento tonight.



Hard Work (From Yenne - History of the SP)

FROM THE FRONT.

From the "Record-Union's" Corps of Special Correspondents.

The following dispatch was received last night from the Record-Union's special corps, who have now reached the front:

Towles, January 22d.—The storm has renewed the war again, but is meeting with stubborn resistance from the railroad's determined army. A heavy wind sprang up last night about midnight and as morning approached this developed into a gale. It played sad havoc with the work accomplished yesterday, drifting the surface snow about in great sheets, burying the tracks again, and starting innumerable slides.

Instead of being dismayed, however, the snow fighters battled even harder than before, and have thus kept the track comparatively clear west of this place. We learned today that the shovel regiment on the other side of Shady Run has been equally vigilant, so with the exception of the extra delay occasioned by the renewal of the storm, the situation is about the same as when we telegraphed last night. We, as well as the representatives of other papers, have kept close to the front since the early part of the week, and we have had all our share of the excitement and hardships of the fray. All have been afforded every possible facility by the railroad officials.

Reaching this place this morning we learned that an outfit, consisting of 130 men, supplied with extra shovels and all the provisions they could carry, were about to start on foot for Shady Run, near which place the rotary plow is located in a disabled condition. We accompanied them, the start being made early in the afternoon. Five miles intervened between Towles and Shady Run, and traveling over snow on foot is not the fastest nor the most energetic kind of travel ever invented by any means. It took us two hours and a half to reach Shady, and thence one of us struck out to find the imprisoned trains, while the other returned to this place, as there is no telegraph office at Shady Run.

AT THE TRAIN.

The "Record-Union" Man Leads in the Race.

Towles, January 22d. —The Record-Union reporter was the first newspaper man to reach the scene of the imprisoned East-bound overland above Shady Run. The trip from Alta to Towles was made on a special provision train, and from there to Shady Run, a distance of five miles, the journey was made on the trail with a blinding snow-storm prevailing all the time. Over a hundred men, some carrying provisions on their back and the others shovels, made a trail on the snow which covered the track from five to twelve feet throughout the distance.

The scene at Shady Run was an exceedingly wintry one, and to see the snowbound train was a real curiosity. Those who have not been here cannot imagine such a picture as the imprisoned overland presents, with the snow on top of the cars to a depth of several feet, icicles hanging down along the sides of the windows, and a big bank of snow piled up against the side of the train as high up as the window-sills.

Steam was up in all the engines. Some few hundred shovelers were on the ground, some working and others munching the food which they had stored in their pockets. Peering through the window your correspondent saw a crowd of passen-

gers apparently enjoying themselves immensely. Some were playing poker and some whist, while others were either eating reading or singing songs.

People who imagine that these snowbound travelers are dull and impatient ought to take a trip to the scene and view their merry countenances and witness their jollity. The Boston Howard Atheneum theatrical troupe are on board and are the life of the whole train-load. Every evening for the past week they have given entertainments in one of the cars, to the great amusement of all, and this afternoon they gave a special matinee in honor of the arrival of your correspondent.

Conroy and Fox, the celebrated Irish comedians of the troupe, together with Brunin, Shepard, Dutch Dailey, and an excellent violinist of the company, did the entertaining and kept the whole car in roars of laughter. Conroy sang a parody written lately by himself and Fox, dilating on the "Resurrection of McGinty," and the whole audience went wild. Dailey gave imitations on the concertina of the crowing of a Shady Run rooster, and also the music of the Shady Run orchestra, which is said to consist of a trombone and piccolo.

Food is plentiful and of the very best quality. Supplies are being sent up continually.

The rotary plow is in the "cut," about half a mile above Shady Run, and is off the track. It is expected down in a few hours.

Being the first visitor to the scene, your correspondent departed for Towles with a bundle of letters written by anxious passengers. It stormed all day in the vicinity of the imprisoned train. It was necessary for your correspondent to leave the train early in order to get back to the Towles telegraph office.

TIRED OFFICIALS.

They Were About to Shout Their Victory When the Battle Resumed. Division Superintendent J. B. Wright looked tired and worn last night. He has sat beside the chief telegrapher almost constantly since the blockade began, receiving reports from the front and directing the movements of the 2,000 or more men who are fighting the snow. "Ah," said he with a sigh, "I wish this was over. This is the hardest fight we have ever had."

Chief Train Dispatcher Jones has also been on duty constantly. "How exasperating this is," he remarked to a Record-Union reporter last evening. "On Tuesday night we were about to proclaim our victory, and I had actually sent out orders for the trains to get in readiness to move. The engines were fired up and the cars backed down the track a distance to shake off the snow and ice. All that remained to be cleared up was that four miles of track between Shady and Towles. This is a bad cut, but still we calculated upon being through by this morning. Then at this point the rotary meets with several accidents, work is delayed and it begins to snow again. But we do not despair—not a bit of it. The harder we get it the harder we fight back. The result is, that in the face of the severity of the storm we have kept the road open this side of Towles and east of Blue Canyon, except where the snow-sheds were burned last summer. The rotary will get through the cut to-morrow and go to Alta, where, after being turned around, she will start back to Cascade to release the trains there."

Wrecking Superintendent Phil Douglas and Locomotive Superintendent Cooley have charge of most of the work at the front, and are doing nobly. A dispatch from Alta says that both look rather "broke up," but are still at it, without thought of fatigue.

MEN AND PROVISIONS.

An Estimate of the Enormous Expense to the Railroad.

One hundred and fifty men left this city last night to join the army of shovelers at the front. They will go directly to Towles, and will be placed at work in the "cut" between that place and Shady Run. This will make over a thousand men who will be at work this morning at this, the worst part of the blockade.

Additional supplies also went up from this city yesterday and last night, to the scene of operations. In all, one hundred quarters of beef, 2,000 loaves of bread, and several tens of other provisions composed the cargo.

Over two thousand men are now at work on "the hill," and they cost the railroad company over \$5,000 per day for salaries and provisions. There are over 1,500 more shovelers employed on the Shasta Division, who entail an outlay of fully \$3,800 per day. These expenses are exclusive of the passengers who have to be fed. When the passengers are counted in the bill will easily foot up to \$10,000 per day. What the loss to business and the damage will amount to can only be conjectured.

OUT OF THE SNOW.

The Story of One of the Snow-Bound Passengers

One of the three men who left the snowbound passenger train at Emigrant Gap at 6 o'clock Monday evening, after being blockaded since early last Thursday morning, arrived in San Francisco Tuesday night. The men were the first to get out since the long blockade on the Central Pacific began, and to do it they were obliged to improvise rude snow-shoes, upon which they made much of the fourteen-mile journey to Alta, where a special engine met them and took them to Sacramento.

"We left thirty-five people at Emigrant Gap," said the informant to a reporter, "and they were all very anxious to get out. There was no suffering, however. The supplies of canned goods in the buffet cars were not exhausted when I left. The hotel near at hand also had plenty of supplies. The cars were moved back and forth at our request, so as to reach the hotel. When not opposite the hotel we were lying in the snow-sheds.

"There were three sick people on board, one of these being Dr. Foulkes, of 217 Geary street. He had been ill with fever, but was convalescing when I left, and wanted to get up, though he was still in bed. Two men in the back car were sick, too. One had a mashed hand, and the other had taken cold. Both were attended by the company's physician.

"Among those on board are A. G. Freeman, the fruit-packer, and Mr. Hutton and Mr. Barnum, of this city; W. A. Barclay, of Battle Mountain, and Mr. Pike, of Wadsworth. Our train consisted of two sleepers, one coach, a smoker and mail and baggage cars. It was the first of all the west-bound passenger trains that got stuck, consequently it has been in the snow longest. It met with no impediment till it arrived at the Gap. There the snow was so deep that it was impossible to proceed any further.

"It was not excessively cold. Fortunately we had plenty of coal. We grew very tired of our snowy prison and concluded we would make a herculean effort to get out. John J. Jennings, the representative of the New York World, who was one of our passengers, was as anxious as any of us, or more so. On Monday night we set out on long runner snow-shoes.

"We advanced to Blue Canyon, five miles away, where we overtook the snowplow. It had been three days getting from Emigrant Gap to that place, so deep was the snow. The mountains and gulches all about there, as at Emigrant Gap, were covered with very deep snow, and we had pretty hard work getting along. We pushed on for four miles very wearily, for our snowshoes did not work very well.

"Then we managed to pull ourselves together and get on to Towles, four miles further, and finally, after a pretty severe experience, a mile further to Alta.

"The snow all about there is very deep. It is probably ten feet on a level, and in the cuts on the track it is a great deal deeper. There was only one rotary snow-plow at work. Besides the rotary, there were several ordinary plows. There were gangs of men everywhere shoveling. I was told there were 500 men within a distance of fourteen miles. We certainly saw a great many. The men all had plenty to eat, but they did not seem to hurt themselves working.

"We passed two eastbound passenger trains on our way out. One was in the sheds this side of Prospect Gap and the other at Shady Run. One of our men went over and talked with the passengers. They said they had enough to eat, but were impatient to get out. Both trains left this city last Wednesday, one in the morning and the other in the evening, and they had been about five days there.

"There were a great many passengers aboard. We passed one train just a few moments after midnight last night and the other at 1 o'clock this morning. So deep was the snow and so hard to get over, that it took us at one time four hours to go four miles.

"The supplies which the passengers have are canned goods which they have in the buffet cars. I think the passengers will be very lucky if they get out tomorrow."



Friday, January 24, 1890

Battles With the Mountain Storms.

BLOCKADE BROKEN.

Record-Union Reporters at the Front.

Continuation of the Storm

Trains to be Moving This Morning on "The Hill."

The condition of affairs at the scene of the blockade changed but little during yesterday. The storm let up slightly in the morning, but recommenced in the afternoon, preceded by a heavy wind which caused numerous slides and drifts. Snow then fell more or less heavily all day. The army of snow-fighters made a stubborn resistance, and not only did they hold their own, but they actually continued to advance upon the great banks in the very teeth of the storm.

The same trouble continued all day as was experienced on Wednesday, viz., the constant derailing of the rotary snow-plow

and the driving engines, owing to the ice which had formed on the rails. It was no fault of the plow itself, whatever, that caused these derailments. The firmest and most "sure-footed" engines on the road experiences the very same difficulty on an ice-clad track.

Another great obstacle encountered was the fact that the banks on either side of the "cut" between Shady Run and Towles, were so high that the rotary could not throw the snow over them. The result was that much of the snow tumbled back on the track and interfered with the progress of the plow.

But, slow as the work was, the sturdy snow-fighters —of whom there were fully a thousand at work in the "cut"—gradually fought their way through.

An anxious party waited patiently for the coming of the rotary, as this meant practically the breaking of the blockade. When, about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, the unmistakable "whir" of the rotary became audible at Towles, a mighty shout went up from the people, and the scene was one of much excitement. But though the rotary could be plainly heard, she was yet a long way from the end of the "cut."

The great rotary, however, was never working better than she was right at this time. The "whir" became more and more audible. The people at Towles were all out, waiting for the first sight of the big machine. Presently a little milky stream could be seen spouting up out of the "cut" about half a mile distant. This was the signal for more enthusiasm. The stream approached nearer and nearer and the "whir" louder and louder.

Hurrah!

The great plow had burst through the last bank and was now snorting and puffing in front of Towles station. The engineers and firemen were the recipients of congratulations from the crowd. Brave fellows, they deserved it. "Well," remarked one, as he wiped the perspiration from his steaming brow, "we've punched a hole through the toughest part of the whole blockade, and it's all plain sailing now."

True it was. The "cut" between Shady Run and Towles was considered by many as absolutely impregnable —but not by the gallant railroad people, as the result shows. But still there was much work ahead

When the rotary folks breathed for a few minutes, the signal for a fresh start was sounded. The westward journey was



Path Cut by the Rotary (Jack Duncan Collection)

resumed, the idea being to dispose of the drifts and other accumulations of snow which obstructed the track between Towles and Alta. Once in the latter place, the road was clear to Blue Canyon.

The experience of the past few days, in the matter of derailments, necessitated slow speed over this stretch, but the plow stayed with the work nobly and no serious mishaps were met with.

It was now night and the snow was falling again with more or less severity. A high wind also prevailed, which threw up many annoying drifts. But the snow fighters had become well used to this, and now that the great "cut" had been penetrated, nothing could impede their progress.

At 11:20 o'clock last night the rotary whirled in all her glory into Alta—and the back of the great blockade was broken. There was another scene of wild enthusiasm at Alta, the people there cheering the sturdy snow-fighters to the echo, for their bravery and tenacity.

Immediately upon the rotary reaching Alta, orders were received to turn around and retrace the track to Blue Canyon. This was for the "polishing" process. The distance between Alta and Blue Canyon is ten miles. It consumed two hours of time to turn the rotary and the three driving engines around, besides coaling and watering. It was about 1:30 o'clock this morning when the plow started Eastward.

With a successful run back to Blue Canyon, the road up to that place will be perfectly clear. It was calculated that the rotary would reach there about daybreak this morning. As soon as she does reach there the first of the blockaded west-bound trains will move, and if nothing unforeseen happens will arrive in this city to-day shortly before noon.

The rotary will continue on Eastward ahead of the delayed East-bound train and put them through. The only serious obstacle to be encountered after leaving Blue Canyon is at Cascade, where a mile and a half of sheds are down. The snow here is about fifteen feet deep, on an average, and in some places it is lodged in narrow 'cuts,' where it is difficult to throw the snow out; but withal the railroad people do not look upon this strip with much apprehension, and are confident that it can be easily handled.

AT THE FRONT.

"Record-Union" Reporters at Blue Canyon
Hailed with Delight.

Blue Canyon, January 23d.—The ninth day of the great battle with the elements is just closing and still the great highway over the Sierra Nevada is not opened. But the untiring and almost superhuman efforts on the part of the Southern Pacific Company are fast overcoming the difficulties. It is needless to say that during all this trying and perilous time, both night and day, the mighty plows of the company and scores of engines, together with nearly 2,000 shovelers, commanded by a score of trained and thoroughly competent assistants, have battled unremittingly and continuously with the mountains of snow, which covered upwards of sixty miles of track.

The situation at this moment, as regards the clearing of the road, is favorable, and if the storm ceases for the next forty-

eight hours it is reasonable to suppose that the road will be opened to traffic.

Your special correspondents set out this morning

FOR THE SECOND TIME

on foot from Towles for Shady Run, with the view of reaching Blue Canyon if possible. Several railroad men advised us not to attempt the perilous trip for fear of being caught in the snowdrifts, which were being tossed about and reformed and madly beaten about by the high wind which was prevailing at the time.

Anticipating serious danger of this kind, before leaving Towles we secured the services of an experienced mountain telegraph operator, who, with a complete outfit of instruments, accompanied us on our dangerous tramp. Our plan was that if the worst should come, the wires might be tapped, and relief summoned.

Arriving at Shady Run, after a trip full of trials and difficulties, we were welcomed again by the merry passengers, and a few short interviews were obtained from them.

PASSENGERS INTERVIEWED.

Professor Thomas Price, the well-known assayer, appointed by the United States Government, and who is an old resident of San Francisco, was on the train on his way to attend the Convention of the United States Mint Commissioners, which convenes in Philadelphia, in February. Mr. Price was quite jovial, and said: "While our situation at present is not the most desirable, yet the railroad people have done everything within human possibility to contribute to our comfort, as far as the surrounding circumstances will permit. Most of us do not know how hard it has been for the company to get provisions here, and as long as we have plenty we have not considered the difficulties which have had to be overcome to get it here. I, for myself, know that it has had to be packed on the backs of men through fearful snowdrifts, for a distance of from four to six miles, and yet we have plenty and of the best assortment. Even turkey and chicken and canned fruits of all kinds have been supplied us."

All the passengers who were spoken to were loud in their praise of Allen Towle, the big-hearted pioneer of Towle's Station, who knows himself what it is to be snowed in. When the train was first blockaded at Shady Run and provisions were scarce, Mr. Towle, on his own account, started out ten men on snow-shoes, supplying each from his own house with twenty-five pounds of provisions for the passengers.

This act the passengers will never forget. He has also shown your correspondents every consideration, furnishing them with the best meals and sleeping accommodations, and at the same time refusing to accept any consideration for his hospitality.

THE ROTARY.

Just before your reporters had reached Shady Run the rotary plow, backed by half a dozen engines, was met standing still in an immense cut. One engine was off the track, but was quickly replaced, and rapid progress was being made toward Towle's when we left.

Despite the warnings of many who were familiar with the rapidity with which the snow drifts between Shady Run and

Blue Canyon, your correspondents and the operator, eager that the Record-Union should again be in the lead as it was yesterday, started out east from Shady Run, at their imminent peril, leaving all other newspaper men in the rear. The Record-Union is NOW THE ONLY PAPER represented as far up as Blue Canyon, and the copies of the paper given to the passengers both at Shady Run and Blue Canyon were the first newspapers that had arrived since the blockade began, and were eagerly grasped by the imprisoned travelers. When the supply had gratuitously been distributed, frequent offers of a dollar a copy were made for the papers, while fifty cents was offered for San Francisco journals, but none could be found.

The passengers were all loud in their praise of the enterprise of the Record-Union, which had given the hungry readers the first news of the world for ten days.

AT THE RISK OF THEIR LIVES Your correspondents had proceeded but half a mile from Shady Run when they saw by a dark and angry cloud and noted by the sharp, cutting wind that the warnings given in advance were about to be realized. The snow was blown fiercely from all directions in the faces of the tramping travelers. The effect was to impede their progress, do all they could, and it almost disheartened us.

Yet, spurred on by a desire for success, but not regardless of your direction to take all proper precautions, we pushed on. In this high altitude and keen rarified atmosphere you can fancy what it was to fight the snow for nearly ten miles over the frozen and snow-laden mountain tops. Often we sank above the knees in the snow, and again would be blown from our balance into the drifts, HALF BLINDED by the whirling, blinding clouds of snow, benumbed by cold, knowing, however, that to pause for rest was to take the risk of a chill and invite death, our little group pushed resolutely forward. Though well clad and in vigorous health, we were often inclined to turn back and give up the fight. You can realize that as the miles appeared to lengthen out instead of becoming less, we came to believe that Napoleon's passage of the Alps sank into insignificance in comparison to our perilous trip and its trials.

At last we reached Blue Canyon, weary, faint and more glad to reach that haven than we ever thought we would be to see shelter ahead in this world. Our journey consumed six hours, so that we made less than a mile and a half an hour. Here we found the imprisoned west-bound overland passenger train, which arrived here yesterday from Emigrant Gap. It was found to be walled in by great banks of snow.

A work train was also on the side track, almost completely covered with snow. A large gang of men was found shoveling, but it is nothing in size in comparison with the force the railroad company has fighting the snow drifts between Towles and Shady Run, there being some 1,200 men employed on that section.

SECOND DISPATCH.

Plenty of Good Food Furnished Passengers

Blue Canyon, January 23d.—The Record-Union representatives have to-night finished a tour of the cars of the overland train snowed in here bound west, and in some cases find passengers dissatisfied because they are not, as they claim, shown enough attention by the railroad people. These com-

plaining ones are, for most part, occupants of Pullman palace cars, who are either too independent to ask for or receive attention, and who choose to pay a couple of dollars for a meal rather than take a check from the conductor of the train and have meals at the station hotel at the Southern Pacific Company's expense, or at the company's supply station.

PHASES OF HUMAN NATURE.

These people hire a boy and send him around to a few houses around the station to buy bread and other articles, paying for the former articles as high as 25 cents a loaf. At this rate one meal costs a dollar or more, and they pay their own shekels for it. But if they would simply accept checks from the conductor they could have well prepared and good meals at the hotel and not be a cent the loser.

The telegraph agent here says that he offered to supply them with all the bread they needed, besides other eatables, but these offers were declined, and they then made purchases of the bread above referred to. On the other hand, a great many other passengers have accepted tickets offered, and gone to the hotel three times a day, each time securing good meals.

To-night it is snowing here lightly. Tomorrow morning your correspondent will push on to Cisco, unless otherwise advised to-night.

IT BREAKS THE RECORD.

What Superintendent Fillmore Says of the Present Situation.

San Francisco, January 23d. —To-day is the eighth day of the snow blockade on the Central Pacific and California and Oregon roads. During this entire time no mails have been received from the East, nor have any passengers or freight over the Central Pacific got through. The east-bound traffic is not so badly interfered with, as it was sent over the Southern Pacific as soon as the blockade become serious on the regular Route.

Superintendent J. A. Fillmore, of the Southern Pacific Company, said that this is the longest and heaviest blockade in the history of the Central Pacific road, and never before was there such deep snow. The storm ceased to-day in the Sierras but the weather is cloudy and threatening. Late this afternoon Superintendent Fillmore telegraphed to the office of the California Associated Press as follows: "Indications at present are that we will have the Central line open between this and 10 o'clock this evening, and all delayed westbound trains moving. We expect to have the Shasta division on the California and Oregon road open to-morrow at noon.

"This is in anticipation that we do not have any more storms to contend with."

The blockade on the California and Oregon extends from Sims on the south to Sisson on the north, a distance of twenty-seven miles, and is entirely within this State. A snow-plow and 500 men are engaged clearing the road. A train which left here a week ago and got only as far as Sims returned to-day. The passengers numbered 115, and included Colonel Fred Crocker, of the Southern Pacific Company.

Owing to the lack of communication, provisions are getting scarce at points within the blockade. All the snow-bound passengers are being well taken care of by the railroad company and no suffering is likely to occur. The effect of the block-

ade in this city has been to interfere considerably with commercial interests, caused by the delay of mails and stocks of merchandise.

IT COMMENCES AGAIN.

Towles, January 23d --- Snow has been falling since 3 p. m.



Saturday, January 25, 1890

Rain Drives Back the Snow King, ROAD NEARLY CLEAR

Two of the Blockaded Trains Arrive Here,
PASSENGERS ARE JUBILANT
Prospect That Other Trains Will Move To-day
Cascade is Now the Only Obstacle.

As was stated in the Record-Union yesterday morning, the back of the great snow blockade on the Sierra Nevadas is practically broken. Orders were sent from this city yesterday morning to get the west-bound overland which has been delayed at Blue Canyon in readiness to start for this city as soon as the rotary plow made its reappearance on its eastward trip.

These orders had to be canceled temporarily, however, as it began to snow again heavily. The wind sprang up and soon developed into a heavy gale, which tossed the surface about in great drifts, covering the tracks again and undoing the work of days. It continued to snow all day.

It was exasperating, and toward evening the great army of snow-fighters began to despair of ever effectually conquering the belligerent snow king. The blockaded passengers, for the first time since the trouble began, looked anxious, and began to realize, that the situation was serious.

It was a supreme moment. Several of the brave shovelers threw down their—

But what was that which they now beheld? Rain!

True as they lived, it was gradually growing warmer, and rain had taken the place of the snowfall. It was only a light sprinkle at first, but presently it increased in volume, the temperature grew warmer and they were now in the midst of a drenching rain.

The effect on the snow was immediate. It began to melt right and left. Drifts on the track disappeared, little gutters appeared in the sides of the banks and embryo rivers and creeks established themselves on the roadbed and went tumbling down the grade. It was not long before the passengers could see a clear stretch of unimpeded track as far as the eye could reach. News came up from Towles, Alta and other places further down the track that rain was falling heavily there, too, washing the track clean. Orders were again received from Sacramento to get ready—and this time it was for good.

“Number 4 move west slowly to Shady Run,” came the orders by telegraph from Division Superintendent Wright, at this city, and a wild shout went up from the passengers when the engineer proceeded to obey. The train steamed down to the point mentioned unobstructed, and there further orders were received to take aboard the mail and passengers on East-bound train No. 3. which has been at Shady Run for the past week.

The transfer was made as quickly as possible, and then another dispatch came to move on westward.

The plan was to bring the delayed Eastbound passengers back to this city, change their tickets and send them East via the Southern route. Ditto the mail. Alta was reached at 9:30 p. m. without mishap, and thence to this city was all plain sailing, as it were, the track having been thoroughly cleaned by the rain.

That the great blockade is now broken is evidenced by the fact that all that now remains to be cleared up is the mile and a half strip of track at Cascade, where the snow-sheds were burned last summer. The track is perfectly clear up to Cascade, with the exception of a broken "bucker" plow which blockades the track at Emigrant Gap. The strip at Cascade will be disposed of to-day by the rotary, and by to-morrow the other east-bound train at Cisco may move, as well as the west-bound ones at Truckee and Reno.

STILL LEADING.

The "Record-Union" Corps Sends Some More Exclusive Dispatches. From the Record-Union Special Correspondents.

Cisco, January 24th—We are still in the lead, as we have been since the race for news began. Fifteen more miles of travel to-day and your correspondents are at Cisco — nearly ten miles further up "the hill" in advance of the foremost of the other newspaper reporters. Some of the latter are nearly twenty miles behind us. The RECORD-UNION men are the first to reach the blocked eastbound train at this place.

Your standard bearers started early this morning from Blue Canyon, and Emigrant Gap was reached after a five-mile walk through the snow, with a blinding snow-storm prevailing all the time, and the trail entirely obliterated in places where the snow had drifted. Immense banks of snow stood in perpendicular walls on both sides of the track, and at Blue Canyon, before our start was made, the shovelers were to be seen in tiers on the bank, throwing the snow up fully forty feet higher.

MORE PLOWING NEEDED.

The track from Blue Canyon to the Gap, with the exception of that part which is covered by tunnels and sheds, is covered over with drift from two to four feet deep, and in many places in the sheds the snow has worked its way in so as to cover the track to quite a depth.

One who is not familiar with the drifting powers of snow would wonder how in such dark and covered places in sheds it could get in, but it slides almost as freely as dry sand and any crevice or small opening will find the snow drifting and sliding



Inside the Snowsheds (Ken Yeo Collection)

through until it forms a sort of pyramid up to the opening. This pyramid keeps getting larger and larger until quite a bank is formed, in many cases covering the track.

However, the sheds between Blue Canyon and Emigrant Gap are in tolerably clear condition, and a few hours' work by the shovelers would clear away what drift there is.

But not so in the open places. The plow will again have to be brought into service to clear the road in these openings.

"BUCKER" STALLED.

On the way up to the Gap your correspondents met one of the old push-plows and six large engines stuck in the snow. They were plowing west, and had nearly reached the sheds when they were forced to come to a standstill. An immense mass of snow was piled up in front of the plow, and the two scribes had to climb up this and on to the plow in order to get by.

The orders were then for the whole outfit to get back to the Gap, but as much drift had fallen behind the engines, men had to be procured to shovel, and this work was going on when your reporters left the scene.

Emigrant Gap was reached at 10 o'clock this morning, and here your correspondents only stopped long enough to wire you of their whereabouts.

HO, FOR CISCO.

When the start was made up the hill for Cisco— nine miles distant— snow was falling heavily. Upon reaching a point about half a mile above Emigrant Gap, where the track crosses over upon the Bear River Valley side of the ridge and where the sheds are down for thirty or forty feet, the wind tore up from the valley, on the opposite side, in true hurricane style, driving the snow over the track in tons, and almost burying your correspondents.

This attempt on the part of the elements to impede progress, served to add only new energy and a desire to overcome all difficulties and reach Cisco at all hazards. After proceeding several miles an engine and work car in charge of conductor Smith and engineer Reid, were met in the sheds, and the two reporters immediately boarded the train by invitation and were taken to Cisco, arriving there about noon to-day.

Here the East-bound overland in charge of conductor M.V. Murray, of Sacramento, was met, and your correspondents had a chat with most of the passengers. This is the train which left Sacramento on the 15th inst., and was delayed above Shady Run until the 21st inst, and which reached this point on the 22d.

MERRY PASSENGERS.

The passengers were all merry with the exception of one person, and were making the best of the situation. There was plenty to eat and all were being served by the railroad company with an unstinted hand. Enough provisions are yet here to last three or four days, and if a train is not gotten out inside of this time supplies can be brought over from Truckee.

WATCHING THE SHEDS.

One of the busiest men at this place at the present time is J. A. Sinnott, foreman of the Bridge and Building Department of the Southern Pacific, who has 1,000 men here working like Trojans to keep the falling and drifting snow off the tops of the sheds, and also seeing that they are sufficiently braced.

D.R. Davis, General Pacific Coast Foreman of the Western Union Telegraph Company, is here and has thirty men in his employ, who are traveling on snowshoes along the line, carefully guarding the wires, which, by the way, are in excellent working order at present.

Up to this writing an unusually heavy snow-storm is prevailing here, and where no drifts have occurred the depth of the snow is sixteen feet. The snow is up against the houses to a depth of twenty-five feet, and every few hours it has to be shoveled away from the windows in order to let light in.

THIRTY SEVEN FEET OF SHOW.

The snowfall for the season, according to the register kept here, is thirty-seven feet. This afternoon it was drifting on the mountain sides badly, and an attempt to travel on snow-shoes would have been dangerous and impractical.

George W. Trenson, an old resident in the upper region of the Sierras, and who has been a resident here for thirty-seven years, said to your correspondent to-day: "We folks used to point to the heavy snowfall of 1852 and comment on it when questions of big snowfalls were brought into conversation, but I tell you what, the record has been knocked out, and hereafter we will have to take 1890 as the date, if we want to talk about snow-storms."

Incidental to the trip of your reporters from Blue Canyon, it might be said that at the latter place the fall of snow measures twenty feet. Nearly every house in the place is buried, as is the case, too, at Cisco. The residences . . . are so completely hidden that one would not notice them as he passed by. The snow is on a level with the roofs.

SITUATION AT TRUCKEE.

Engineer Garcia Subjected to a Practical Joke— No Accidents.

Truckee, January 24th.—This has been the most eventful blockade that the railroad company has experienced on the Sacramento and Truckee division since the road was completed. This is now nine days since Truckee has been shut out from the rest of the world, and even telegraph news has to be sent to San Francisco via Ogden, while a Record Union since January 15th would be a luxury, and quite lively bidding could be had by holding it up at auction.

In all the blockades of any importance accidents have been frequent, but as yet the present one has proved an exception. Many very narrow escapes have been met with, but they have been very lucky in only receiving scares instead of broken bones.

Tuesday morning eight engines with a plow started for Reno, and every engineer started out with a determination backed by plenty of grit to let nothing in the way of snow banks defeat their purpose. They put on all their steam at Truckee, and there was nothing before their vision but an immense cloud of flying particles of snow, as the plow cut its way along the track, and it was a desperate ride as they tore along blindly over the rails.

In the first engine the windows on the engineer's side were crushed in, and the snow, as though crazed for a chance to destroy everything in its path, poured through the broken sash.

Engineer Garcia was outflanked, and he was compelled to whistle "down brakes." It was answered by the second engine by "off brakes," and re-echoed by the other six engines, and

instead of decreasing their speed the drivers doubled their revolutions. The snow came pouring in harder than ever, and the throttle was fast disappearing from sight. The snow in front of them was now behind them, and snow all around them.

When the engineers were satisfied that Garcia understood and realized the pleasure of being engineer on the front engine they slowed up. When Garcia was found he was at his post of duty, but all that was visible was his head. He was nearly snowed under.

The rotary plow, which was expected to cut through all obstructions to an open road, met with an accident. She broke her eccentric, by which is necessitated another delay of twelve hours, as another key will have to be made.

The Cyclone plow, which is on its way from Ogden, will have to plow her way on the Salt Lake division, as the cuts made by the old plow are not wide enough to permit her to travel. She is expected in Truckee by to-night or to-morrow. Indications are for plenty more snow.

CONDITION LAST NIGHT.

Truckee, January 24th.—Late to-night the situation is not very hopeful. It is snowing hard, and the wind is drifting it at a fearful rate over the track that has been cleared. The plows are kept constantly running, and it will require very energetic work to keep the track clear to the summit.

To-night the third snowshed is beginning to show signs of weakening on account of the heavy weight of snow. The large timbers are cracking, and it is becoming very dangerous to pass through. Snow shovelers cannot be hired to undertake the job of shoveling it off.

When the Directors passed over the road last summer they recommended the removal of the snowsheds and such sheds as were destroyed by fire were not rebuilt.

At Cascade they lost about two miles of shedding that they never replaced. Had they expended a few thousand dollars in rebuilding there, no doubt they would have saved the enormous expense that has been occasioned by the blockade. At Cascade the snow is the deepest, being from 20 to 25 feet.

The Blockade Completely Broken.

Blue Canyon, January 24th.—It has been snowing and blowing all day until 3 p. m. when it turned into rain. It is now raining hard. The rotary plow left here at 2 p. m. with the delayed No. 4 following close behind. The road is now open all the way through excepting a half-hour's work by the rotary at the Cascade break in the sheds.

Ho! for Sacramento.

Towles, January 24th.—At 9 o'clock p. m. train No. 4 passed here with all the transfers and three sleepers of train No. 3, moving West.

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Sunday, January 26, 1890

SNOW AND RAIN.

The condition of affairs on "the hill," the scene of the great snow blockade presented a decidedly improved aspect last night. It ceased storming all along the line early in the evening, and at midnight information was received by the railroad officials in this city that the stars were out and the weather was

clear and cold as far east as Truckee. At the Summit the barometer was rising rapidly, and everything indicated that the great storm was over. Should this condition continue, it is only a matter of a few hours, the railroad people say, until all trains will be moving.

The road is now thoroughly clear from Sacramento to Blue Canyon, and on the other side it is clear from Reno west to Cascade. The rotary plow was engaged yesterday in clearing up some troublesome "slush" between Blue Canyon and Emigrant Gap, a distance of five miles. This portion of the track is partially covered with snow-sheds. From Emigrant Gap it is eight miles to Cisco, and this is covered throughout by sheds. It will be necessary, however, to send a "bucker" plow through these, in order to clear up the little mounds which form on the track from the fine snow which sifts through the cracks in the sheds.

The only obstacle of importance now is the mile-and-a-half strip at Cascade, where the sheds are down. This strip is really an unknown quantity, but the officials do not anticipate much trouble from it. During the last blockade the snow at Cascade was cleaned up by the rotary in twenty minutes. But at present it is deeper and has laid longer than was the case with the other blockade. At any rate, barring accidents to the plow, confidence is expressed that this will be cleared off in a couple of hours.

The rotary will in all probability reach Cascade this forenoon, and after going over the mile-and-a-half strip, the plow's work will be done—that is, if the storm does not break loose again.

As soon as Cascade is clear and everything is reported in good order—and it is expected that such report will be received this afternoon or evening—Superintendent J. B. Wright will order the delayed train now at Cisco to proceed to the Summit and thence East. The west-bound trains at Truckee and Reno will also receive orders to move.

Superintendent Wright stated last night that he felt confident that all trains would be moving by to-night.

FROM THE FRONT.

The Delayed Passengers at Cisco Still enjoying Themselves
[From the Record-Union's Special Correspondents]

Cisco, January 25th.—At this writing your correspondents are yet at this place, having deemed it imprudent to proceed to Cascade, the operator there being dead [*of pneumonia*] and no station agent has yet been sent there, consequently no dispatch or information could have reached you from that point.

Between Cascade and Summit, for a stretch of nearly two miles, the snow is piled upon the track to some depth, and the rotary is expected to clear it away. After clearing this space the road will then be opened to Truckee, and trains permitted to move. Your correspondents propose to wait for the push plow and rotary due here from Emigrant Gap this evening, and proceed on them to Cascade, where the fight will be made toward Summit. The snow-storm which we made mention of in yesterday's report, continued here until 12 o'clock to-day.

At the hotel here men are engaged in shoveling the snow from the roof. The passengers here are beginning to brighten up with the prospects of clearing the road, and no doubt this

evening when the rotary gets here, if it does, a great cheer will go up as at Blue Canyon and Shady Run.

The track in sheds between here and Cascade is slightly covered with snow, and the push plow will be handy in making the way clear.

THE PASSENGERS.

Your correspondents again visited the snow-bound travelers to-day, finding them in the best of spirits. Many were engaged in playing dominoes, which were made out of bits of cardboard and marked in the regulation manner. A number of cardboard checker-boards were also in view, giving evidence that they were making the best of the situation. The lady passengers, who have been more closely confined to the cars on account of drifting snow than the gentlemen, seemed the most contented of all.

Dr. H. N. Miner of Colfax, sent by the Southern Pacific Company, arrived here at noon to-day, walking eighteen miles through the snow drifts to attend the snow-bound passengers here who are suffering with slight colds, and also to attend several snow-shovelers who are ill. The doctor made part of the trip late last night, getting to Yuba Pass a little before midnight. It is expected that he will remain until the blockade is completely raised.

Capt. W. R. Knight, one of the company's oldest conductors, also came in tired and footsore. He is sent by the railroad people to grant extension of time on all limited tickets, thus saving the passengers all annoyance as they proceed on their journey.

To-day while the snow was falling, one of your correspondents expressed a desire to get outside of the sheds on to some point where the genuine mountain blizzard could be witnessed to advantage. The station people referred him to a place called Lookout, built for observation, a short distance above the ticket office, where a fine view of the mountain tops can be had in clear weather, for miles.

LOOKING FOR A BLIZZARD.

The correspondent at once set out for the place. Upon arriving there he found that a bank of snow stood in his way, but the difficulty was soon removed, and an ascent made to the opening on top of the snowshed. Here he met with a more serious obstacle, as the opening above the shed was covered by a knoll of snow rising about ten feet higher.

Returning to the hotel he asked of Mr. Davis, of the Western Union Telegraph Company, for the loan of a pair of snowshoes. The request was kindly granted, as well as instructions how to fasten them on. The reporter had never seen a snow-shoe before, and thought that lessons in their use unnecessary.

In this connection it may be well to say for information of readers that at Cisco for many miles up and down the railroad is entirely covered with sheds, and they, at present, by many feet of snow. Inside it is very dark, and lanterns are constantly used. If you want a view of the mountains of snow you must go to Lookout or get outside of the sheds some way. On this account the snowshoes were borrowed. The reporter then went to the second-story window of the Cisco Hotel, buckled on the shoes, straightening himself up with a long Alpinestock, and

started off on his journey through and over the mountains of snow.

NOT SO EASY AS IT LOOKS.

The correspondent had not proceeded far before he got his feet tangled—or, rather, his snowshoes, which are about eight feet long—and losing his balance, fell over into the snow, and when released by Mr. Davis, who had been taking an observation from the gable window of the hotel, only the bottoms of his shoes were visible.

After being righted and given a few pointers, which were thankfully received, he again proceeded on his journey of upwards of an hour, which was without incident worthy of note, except experience gained by witnessing the storm.

THE LATEST.

Some Work for the Rotary at Cascade This Morning.

Cisco, January 25th.—11 p. m.—The snow plow passed Cisco from Emigrant Gap at 10:15 on its way to Cascade, seven miles above. At that point the blockade covers only a mile and a half. The snow is reported very deep, and no attempt will be made to raise the blockade until the arrival of the rotary, which at present writing is working between Blue Canyon and Emigrant Gap eastward.

The mightiest efforts are being put forth all along the line tonight to reach the last trenches of the storm king. It is calm here.

STILL LATER NEWS.

Cisco, January 25th.—12:30 a. m.—G. G. Myer, conductor, in charge of six engines and the "bucker" snow-plow, which ran up to Cascade, has just returned, having cleared the track to the mile-and-a-half strip. They are now awaiting orders to return to Emigrant Gap to side-track for the rotary. The conductor reports the track above is splendid condition. No news yet from the rotary at this writing.

ALL OUT OF GEAR.

What Superintendent Fillmore Says About It.

San Francisco, January 25th.—To-day added new complications to the railroad situation, caused by the continued heavy rains and warm weather, which melted the snow in the foothills, thereby causing numerous serious washouts in nearly every portion of the State.

The west-bound passenger train which left Blue Canyon yesterday, where it had been blockaded on the Central Pacific line since the 14th, and which also had on board passengers of the delayed East-bound train which was blockaded at Shady Run, was again brought to a standstill at Avon, north of Martinez, owing to heavy land slides and washouts. The passengers will be transferred by steamer to Vallejo Junction and will probably arrive here tonight.

Superintendent Fillmore, of the Southern Pacific Company, says the blockade will be raised on the Central Pacific by tomorrow evening if the storm does not increase.

The blockade on the California and Oregon will not be raised for several days, on account of the heavy landslides north of Redding and the heavy snow between Dunsmuir and Edgewood.

Railroad traffic on nearly every line leading out of this city, and in fact nearly every railroad in the central and northern portions of the State is impeded more or less by washouts, landslides or snow. The latest reports from the Sierra and Siskiyou mountains state that snow is falling as heavy as at any time during the present storm, and washouts and landslides are reported in increasing numbers from all sides.

All indications point to the situation as becoming worse in the next twenty-four hours notwithstanding the almost superhuman efforts of the railroad men to repair and prevent further damage.

WILL COME TO SACRAMENTO.

The slides at Altamont and Port Costa prevent trains from going by the regular route. The delayed train No. 4, from the Central Pacific, which was in the snow blockade in the Sierra Nevadas for the last ten days, which started for San Francisco via Martinez, had to return to Sacramento to go down via boat in the morning.

Monday, January 27, 1890

AFTER THE BATTLE.

The Rain-storms Have Cleared Up all Along the Line.

San Francisco, January 26th.—The storm came to an end last night. The snow in the mountains and the rain in other portions of the State have ceased to fall, and the weather to-day was clear and cold. All further danger from floods, washouts, landslides and snow slides are over for the present. All the

streams are reported falling. The damage occasioned by these last named casualties cannot yet be estimated, but it will be very heavy.

To-night the railroad situation is more encouraging than for the past twelve days. The road between here and Sacramento, which has been washed out near Martinez, was repaired this afternoon, and is the only outlet between this city and the East.

The snow blockade on the Central Pacific has been cleared except for a short distance between Cascade and the Summit, which is expected to be open to-night. The regular Central Pacific eastbound train left here this afternoon, carrying mail and through passengers. All the delayed westbound trains now at Truckee and Reno will be started for this city to-night, and are expected to reach this city to-morrow.

The passengers and mail which were snowbound at Blue Canyon since the 14th arrived here to-day on a steamer, to which they had been transferred at Martinez.

Nothing new has developed on the California and Oregon road, which is blockaded by snow and landslides north of Redding, and which is not expected to be open for traffic before Tuesday.

Narrow-Gauge Trains Running.

Colfax, January 26th.— Nevada county narrow-gauge trains arrived on time to-day, having resumed making regular trips between this place and Grass Valley. The weather is clear and frosty.



The change in weather finally appeared to signal an end to the stormy pattern that had haunted railroad workers for a month. After stranding several passenger trains on "the Hill" for nearly two weeks, the blockade of 1890 was nearly broken, but the Storm King was not done yet. Heavy snowdrifts still had to be cleared on over a mile of track at Cascade where the sheds had burned. The banged-up and battle-weary rotary labored for nearly two days fighting through the icy drifts, but it breathed its last gasps with still 300 feet of closed track remaining to be cleared and had to be sent to Sacramento for repairs. It was left to teams of shovelers to clear the final 300 feet by hand, and clear it they did. It began to snow again on January 29, but fortunately didn't last long. On January 30 the blockade was completely broken and eight westbound trains resumed their much-delayed run to Sacramento.

Bucker plows were soon taken out of service and replaced by the new rotaries. The much touted cyclone rotaries proved to be a dismal failure in mountain tests, and were abandoned in favor of the battle-proven Leslie rotaries.

The 1890 blockade convinced management to revise its thinking and rebuild the burned section of snowsheds at Cascade along with adding more rotaries to the arsenal of equipment ready to take on the Snow King. Improvements were made to the plows to minimize the snow and ice build-up on the tracks that contributed to derailments. Flanger cars and later spreaders would soon be added as tools available to railroad crews to help keep the tracks clear until conditions got bad enough to bring out the rotaries.

As a final footnote to our story of the 1890 storms, after a much needed break a new severe storm arrived in mid-February, dumping low snow for a week with over 4 feet on the ground at Colfax. Fortunately a second rotary was now available on the Donner Route and crews were able to keep the rail line open.



Rotary Snowplow in Action
(From *Best - Snowplow*)