

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



www.psrhs.org

November 2020 Newsletter

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This image of a freight eastbound from Applegate was captured from the new web cam that has been installed by PSRHS members. See the update and photos on pages 2 and 3.

Scheduled Events & Notices



No Meeting in November due to Covid-19 restrictions

Happy Holidays!! The next newsletter will be in January.

As we approach the end of this trying year, we encourage you to renew your membership in PSRHS for 2021. As soon as conditions permit, we plan to be back in full operations with monthly presentations on historic or contemporary operations along the Donner Route, field trips to regional sites, continuation of monthly newsletter articles and historic photos, plus expanded resources on our web site. Once our new web cam is fully operational more web cams are planned so viewers can track rail operations over the route. Thanks for your past and continued support of PSRHS and regional railroad history.



MONTHLY MEETING

There will be NO PSRHS Monthly Meeting in November. Our meetings will not resume until restrictions due to Coronavirus precautions have been lifted. Watch the monthly newsletter for updated status of future meetings.

PSRHS LIVE WEB CAM

Our new web cam went LIVE this week, thanks in large part to the persistence of members Brendan Compton, Peter Hills, Jim Wood and Paul Greenfield.

Captured images can be found on page 3. Visit our web site www.psrhs.org for the link to the web cam live feed.

CPRR/SP TEA TRAINS

Your editor grew up in NW Montana, Great Northern Railway country. I was aware that the Great Northern and other railroads pushed toward the Pacific Northwest in part to gain a share of the lucrative Oriental trade in silks and tea. In fact, Great Northern ran priority silk trains that competed with shipping via sea from the Orient to the US East Coast and European markets.

It should be no surprise then that in completing the nation's first transcontinental railroad Central Pacific and Union Pacific recognized this significant business opportunity. PSRHS member Paul Helman recently provided a newspaper article on a snowshed fire near Donner Summit reportedly caused by the locomotive of a Central Pacific "tea train" (see Accidents and Other Incidents, page 4). That started an email discussion of what a tea train was, prompting me to remember the Great Northern silk trains and dig further.

My search led to the on-line Central Pacific forum (<http://discussion.cprh.net/2005/05/silk-trade-trains.html>), and further details on railroads and the silk trade. In that forum historian Kyle Wyatt provided the

following comments on Central Pacific and Southern Pacific interest in the silk and tea market:

"A significant part of the "business plan" for the original Transcontinental Railroad (Central and Union Pacific) was "land bridge" traffic between the Orient and Europe. But the Suez Canal opened in September 1869 and nearly all of the expected European traffic went that way. Except high-value, time-sensitive items such as tea and (raw) silk.

This high value, high speed traffic was a regular feature on the transcontinental route for years. Southern Pacific built special "tea and silk cars" in 1904, one of which is preserved by the California State Railroad Museum.

As other, more northern transcontinental routes were completed, they picked up part of this trade. Northern Pacific, Canadian Pacific, Great Northern and others. Such trains were still a feature through the 1920s. I'm not sure just when the last silk train (or for that matter tea train) ran, but I suspect the introduction of nylon (and other oil and synthetic based cloths) had a lot to do with it, as did air shipments of goods.

Interesting now that through containerization the Oriental-European land bridge traffic has become a major business, although the high-speed tea and silk traffic are now long gone (at least gone from the rails)."

In a later post, Kyle added:

"On the Central Pacific, we know they (*silk and tea trains*) were run fast. I think they exceeded passenger train speeds - at least in part because they didn't need to stop at stations (except for water and fuel, engine and crew changes). Their passage was frequently noted in local papers, so they clearly were something special. "

Kyle K. Wyatt

For those who have read this far, you have a hint to help answer a question posed later in this newsletter.





Passing Scene – New Web Cam Goes Live

The two upper images are views from the camera that has been installed along Track 2 between the old East Applegate station and Tunnel 28. The camera provides excellent live views and sounds of normally uphill (eastbound) train movements leaving Applegate. Getting the camera images onto the web live proved to be a challenge when dealing with a rural internet provider. After numerous equipment replacements and fine tuning of the internet protocols the web cam went live this week with video and sound.

The link to the web cam is posted on our home page www.psrhs.org

Photos captured from the live video.



Just east of the web cam location is the west portal of Tunnel 28, shown in the image at right. Compare this view with the historic photo on page 4 of the west portal under construction. *Roger Staab photo.*



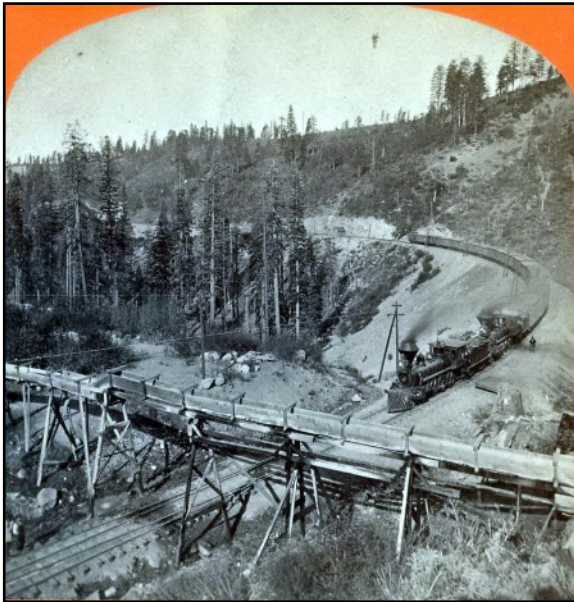
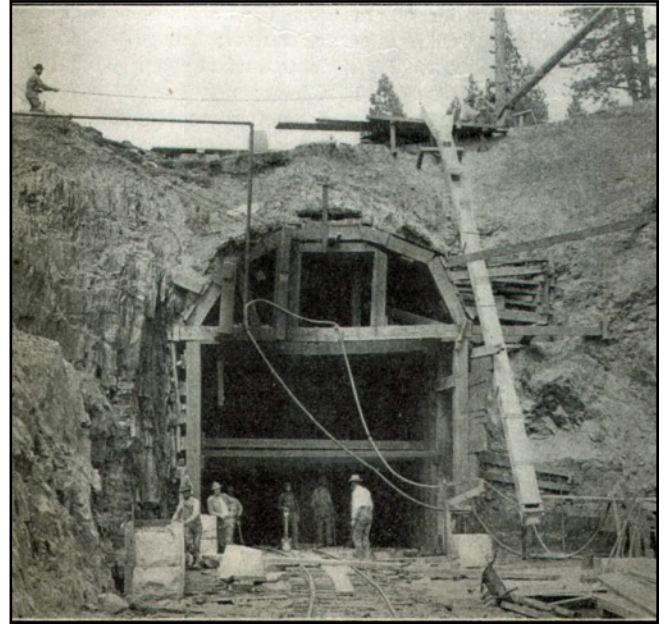
Amazon Smile Fund Raising

We are now part of the Amazon Smile fund raising campaign. We receive a donation to the society based on your purchases. Please feel free to copy and paste the link below and include it in all your emails.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0488569>

From the Archives

October Mystery Photo (right): The west portal of Tunnel 28 is under construction as part of SP's double tracking between Rocklin and Colfax circa 1910. This is now Track 2 for uphill trains, and is near the location of the new PSRHS webcam. *Railway Age Magazine, PSRHS Collection, courtesy of Peter Hills*



November Mystery Photo (left): What is the significance of the train in this photo, where was the photo taken, and who was the photographer?
PSRHS Collection

Accidents/Other Incidents. *Sacramento Daily Union, 30 Dec 1876* - "City Intelligence - Snow Shed Fire - About 6 o'clock last evening the snow and woodshed between the summit and Summit Valley were discovered to be on fire and burning furiously, three or four hundred feet being ablaze before an alarm could be given. The fire was fought at each end by the fire brigade with great energy, but before it ceased spreading, about 4,000 feet of shedding had been burned, and the heat was so intense that it was not thought that the track repairers could commence work before daylight. Division Superintendent Fillmore went up to the scene of conflagration on the Virginia City express train last evening, to oversee repairs. The return Virginia City express will not reach Sacramento until late this evening, and the Eastern express will be similarly delayed. The immigrants will probably be eighteen or twenty hours late, at least, unless they are brought on by the express train. The fire is supposed to have been caused by the locomotive of an eastbound tea train. The sheds have little if any snow about them, and being very dry burn like tinder." *Thanks to Paul Helman for providing this news item*

Membership Information

Individual Members = \$25.00/yr
Each Additional Family Member = \$5.00/yr

- Monthly Meetings (4th Thursday) and Newsletter
- Member Activities, History Pubs and Field Trips
- Display and Restoration Projects

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or join/renew online at www.psrhs.org

Reader comments, additional details, etc., are invited on any newsletter items or photos. Please forward comments, suggestions or information for inclusion in future issues of the newsletter to:

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