

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

November 2023 Newsletter

In this issue:

NOVEMBER MEETING PROGRAM. Page 2

Potluck Dinner Canceled. Page 2

Observation Platform at American. Pages 2 & 5

Passing Scene. Page 3

From the Archives. Page 4



Southern Pacific's observation platform that was opened in 1916 at American is featured in this month's newsletter. See page 2, 4 and 5. PSRHS collection

Scheduled Events & Notices



Nov 17-19 Northern Nevada Model RR Layout Tour

Contact Jim Petro at jpetro328@gmail.com for more information

Nov 28 PSRHS Monthly Meeting 7PM – Program – Video of Early Amtrak run over Snowy Donner on Christmas Eve and Day 1971 – See page 2

NOTE: This will be a regular program meeting – not a potluck dinner

No Meeting in December

Jan 23 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM

Your annual PSRHS membership helps fund purchase of historic photos, publication of railroad history documents, field trips, and other historic preservation activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route



Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

November 2023 Newsletter

PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING NOVEMBER 28, 7PM

November Program: Ride the rails on an early Amtrak train from Sacramento to Reno and return on snowy Christmas Eve and Day 1971. Railroad photographer Bob Morris braved the elements to film the trip from the vestibule between cars as Amtrak negotiated a rotary-cleared path barely wide enough for the mix of passenger cars. Join us for this snowy rail journey as we prepare for the coming winter weather.

Our meetings are open to all who are interested. See our web site for updates on future meeting topics and directions to the meeting location.

October Program Recap: Two vintage movies were shown of Hal Wilmunder's narrow gauge railroad ventures from the 1960's, the **Antelope & Western** and the **Camino Cable and Northern**. We were treated with commentary by Hal's son Les and grandson Casey who added background information on Hal's ventures and answered questions from attendees.

Tim O'Brien then showed photos and video clips of Antelope & Western's locomotive #1 that is still operating and has been a featured performer at the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad museum.

POTLUCK DINNER CANCELED

Our regular November meeting night comes after Thanksgiving this year. A poll of the board and some club members revealed mixed interest in having a potluck dinner meeting this November, so the decision was made to make November's meeting a regular program meeting, not a potluck dinner.

In keeping with the holiday spirit, though, PSRHS will provide holiday dessert snacks for November attendees.

The board will revisit the idea of a potluck dinner meeting next year.

OBSERVATION PLATFORM AT AMERICAN

The following article about Southern Pacific's newly created observation platform at American near Blue Canyon appeared in the Nov. 1, 1916 issue of the SP Bulletin. It was obviously written by an SP public affairs person. Note the flowery language describing the view and SP's desire to share it with their passengers. Also note the mention of the ferry ride from Benicia to Port Costa, and other sites of interest along the route

The text continues on page 5, and includes a photo from the article showing the view from the platform. More information and another photo of the view and platform can be found on page 4

Observation Platform at Mountain Top Gives Wonderful View of American River Canyon

The Southern Pacific Company has constructed an observation platform at American, which is at the top of one of the American River ridges, and has arranged to stop trains passing over the Sierras in daytime, five minutes at this point. The object is to give passengers the full benefit of a truly magnificent view of the American River canyon.

For miles the Southern Pacific's Ogden Route traverses the ridges above the river, sometimes at the very brink of the chasm, and everywhere affording vistas of magnificent sweep across a hundred miles of mountains, range above range reaching off into the distance. The climax comes at American where of a sudden the train passes out upon a rocky ledge and the traveler looks down two thousand feet into the canyon. Famous mountain views there are in every land, and some of the finest within the boundaries of our own country, but few to equal the glimpse into this tremendous gulf. Into the abyss the rugged mountain sides slope downward at precipitous angles sinking in almost sheer

Continued on page 5





Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

November 2023 Newsletter

Passing Scene - Pullman Car "Suits Me" in Colfax

On October 5, 2023, two private varnish railcars were spotted in Colfax on westbound Amtrak. Last month's newsletter featured the car labeled Central Pacific Promontory Point. This month's newsletter features the companion car from October 5, the Pullman-built "Suits Me". Both cars are owned by Zephyr Rail Services.

Suits Me is a heavyweight Executive Car built by the Pullman Company in 1928 for Percy Todd, the president of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad as Car #100. According to the Zephyr Rail Services web site, when Mr. Todd was asked how he liked the new railcar, he said "It suits me." For the next 75 years "Suits Me" served the company president "for his exclusive use in entertaining guests, hosting business meetings and providing special travel accommodations for the privileged few." That list included Ted Williams, Boston Red Sox left-fielder who was invited to join then company president Curtis Hutchins on a fishing outing to Presque Isle Maine to celebrate Ted's "first" retirement. Ted was picked up in Boston by #100 and made the overnight trip to Maine with all his tackle. <http://zephyrrail.com/suitsmehistory.html>



Photos by Roger Staab



Membership Information

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

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

PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713
or join/renew online at <https://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:

roger.staab@psrhs.org





From the Archives - SP Trains Stop at American for the View

This image shows the view from American, located about half-way between Alta and Blue Canyon. SP established the platform at American in 1916. Trains made scheduled 5 minute stops here to allow passengers to take in the panoramic view of the American River gorge and Giant Gap. The stops were eliminated in 1918 due to the war, but were resumed from 1920 until 1933 when they were permanently eliminated during the depression. See the companion SP public relations article on pages 2 and 5 of this newsletter.

Image from SP Booklet "The Overland Trail", PSRHS Collection



Accidents/Other Incidents. *The Sacramento Bee*, Sept. 9, 1944. **"Stalled Trains Pose Problems for Businessmen of Colfax** - Traffic was resumed yesterday afternoon on the Southern Pacific main lines over the Sierra Nevada following the completion of repairs on the Cascade Bridge nine miles west of Norden, which was damaged by fire. The bridge, a steel structure 180 feet long, has a wooden deck. It was this which was burned. The principal damage was to the deck on the westbound track. While repairs were in progress crack trains of the Southern Pacific were halted in Colfax, Norden and Sparks ... The 1,000 persons turned out in Colfax when their trains were held for 10 hours ... doubled the population temporarily and gave the hamlet an unprecedented feeding – and drinking – problem. One of the two restaurants in town had been closed to enable the owner to take a short vacation. His townsman, routed from bed, took down the "closed" sign and opened for business. But in no time at all there was no milk, bread, beer, cigarets (*sic*) or carbonated beverages in all the town ..."





SP Bulletin, Nov. 1, 1916

Observation Platform at American - Text continued from page 2

descent. The Sierras rise like a wall beyond and ahead looms the dark pine-clad promontory of Giant Gap, pushing its bulky form far out into the canyon and blocking the way of the river which swirls around its base. The stream twists and turns, now showing dark and sombre (*sic*) in the shadowy woods, now shining like a stream of pure silver as it makes its way into the sunlight. Great boulders far below seem no more than stepping stones in the water, yet against these in winter and in spring when the waters are at flood the river shatters itself in white anger, receiving the tribute of a thousand turbulent torrents that cascade down from the side canyons. Always there lingers in the canyon a blue haze that gathers in the tree tops and floats like faint smoke-cloud mist against the farther ridge. Through this mountain mist the wild splendors of the

landscape are revealed with outlines softened and colors mellowed as in impressionistic painting.

The trip west from American is very attractive and teeming with other interesting features – Dutch Flat and Gold Run, famous mining towns in the days of '49; the old placer mines all through the foothills as far as Colfax; Sacramento, capital of California; the ride through the Suisun marshes; the ferry ride between Benicia and Port Costa and then along the bay to Oakland Pier and then across to San Francisco.

The building of the observation platform at American should be borne in mind by agents and other employees (*sic*) in soliciting business, for from here the traveler gets a mountain view that will never be forgotten.

