

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

October 2025 Newsletter

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Where, when & why was an SP Narrow Gauge locomotive in Colfax? See page 4 for details. *Ken Yeo Collection.*

Scheduled Events & Notices



- Oct 23** Memorial Service for PSRHS member “Cape Horn Ed” Wuelfing, 11:30am, St Teresa’s Church in Auburn, with reception following
- Oct 28** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program - Chuck Spinks & Jim Wood - Britain’s Railway 200 Celebration & England’s Stockton & Darlington Rwy
- Nov 8-9** International Railfair Model Railroad Show at Cal Expo; internationalrailfair.com
- Nov 25** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program to be announced

Annual membership renewals pay for publishing railroad history documents, purchasing and posting historic photos, arranging field trips, & other historic preservation activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



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PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

OCTOBER 28, 7PM

AUBURN VETERANS MEMORIAL HALL

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

October Program: Railway 200 Celebration in Britain. Chuck Spinks and Jim Wood will present an overview of the 200th anniversary celebration of the first public railway in Britain...the Stockton and Darlington Railway in Northeast England.

Chuck will discuss the importance of the event and its implications to the railway development in Britain. Jim will share his photos of a visit to the railway museum in Darlington where much of the early railway development happened.

“CAPE HORN ED” WUELFING

We received word that long-time PSRHS member Ed Wuefing recently passed away. When PSRHS members were pursuing fund raising to complete the renovation of the Colfax passenger depot, “Cape Horn Ed” stepped up, not only securing donation of period tile for the depot bathrooms, but arranging for tile-setter trainees to do the installation. Ed’s son notified us that services for his dad will be Oct. 23, 11:30am at St. Teresa’s Church in Auburn. A reception will follow.

ROUGH DAY AT COLFAX CROSSING

Colfax experienced a rough day on Thursday, Oct. 9, with trains blocking the Grass Valley St crossing in town on several occasions. The day started with a UP train blocking the crossing for an unknown length of time during the morning school "rush hour". Numerous autos were stuck at the crossing thinking the train would get going any minute. It finally cleared the crossing shortly after 9 - I've been told it backed up. At any rate by noontime when I visited the museum in the depot there was an eastbound UP freight waiting on

Track 2 west of the depot, remaining there for the rest of the day. Amtrak #6 was delayed and word was it could be delayed by several hours. It finally showed up in Colfax about an hour late on Track 1. Waiting passengers were told the train would be held at Colfax for an unknown length of time due to a derailment somewhere between Colfax and Truckee (posts the next day said the derailment was at Gold Run). Amtrak gave passengers the opportunity to get off the train and get food in Colfax, then backed up to clear the crossing after a lengthy delay for motorists. There was confusion in that some people had been told Amtrak would bring buses to Colfax to pick up those who didn't want to wait for #6 to resume its eastbound run but others were told there wouldn't be buses.

Around 2:30 Amtrak gave 4 loud toots to bring its passengers back. They then pulled up to the crossing, apparently to load passengers on the Main Street side of the train, then pulled slightly forward but continued to block the crossing. It sat there for some time before finally moving eastbound just enough to clear the crossing. It then sat there all afternoon and into the evening.

Around 6pm #6 backed up to the crossing again. Radio traffic indicated they were offloading passengers who wanted to get on Amtrak buses instead of waiting longer in Colfax. There was a lot of confusion on the radio traffic as crew members tried to determine who wanted to get off and who was staying on board. The crossing was blocked for well over the normal 15 minute limit. At one point the crew was given an emergency override that apparently authorized them to block the crossing longer than 15 minutes due to the offloading taking place. Finally #6 backed up to clear the crossing and sat on #1 track beside the eastbound UP freight that was still sitting on Track 2. An interesting side note is that one of the Amtrak buses was apparently caught in the extensive traffic backup due to the Grass Valley Street crossing being blocked. After the crossing reopened I observed an Amtrak bus turning onto RR Ave toward the depot bus stop.

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Passing Scene - BNSF Double-Stacks on Donner

As a condition for approving the merger of UP and SP in 1996, Burlington-Northern/Santa Fe (BNSF) obtained trackage rights on UP's Donner Route and Feather River Canyon. It has been common to see the occasional BNSF train traversing Donner, but recent sightings of BNSF double-stacks are something new, as seen in this excellent photo captured by Mike Haire near Cisco. A July 2025 agreement between UP and BNSF is apparently responsible for the appearance of BNSF container shipments on the local route. Find more details on BNSF trackage rights and the recent agreement in the article on page 5.

Mike Haire Photo



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Membership Information

Individual Members = \$25.00/yr
Family Membership = \$30.00/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 Narrow Gauge in Colfax

This circa 1946 view of the back side of the Colfax engine house showcases a one-of-a-kind feature, a Southern Pacific narrow gauge locomotive in Colfax. Built by Baldwin in 1886, this locomotive served as South Pacific Coast #18 until being transferred to Nevada in 1905. It received a new boiler in 1915, extending its longevity. After being removed from active service in 1945, it was brought by truck to Colfax where it found new life as a stationary boiler for the Colfax engine house from 1945-1951. It was scrapped in 1951 when the engine house was torn down. It featured a very early narrow gauge whaleback tender and looked ready to roll in this photo from the Ken Yeo collection. *Engine details from Diebert & Strapac, Southern Pacific Company Steam Locomotive Compendium, p. 291.*



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Press-Tribune, Mar. 10, 1948.* **“ROUNDHOUSE WILL CLOSE AT COLFAX** – The Southern Pacific company roundhouse at Colfax will be closed and abandoned at 4 o’clock next Monday afternoon, according to official notice received last Friday by Harry Gould, depot agent in that city.

Closing of the roundhouse will cut the Colfax railroad payroll by 25 employees who will have to move elsewhere. The jobs affected are three foremen, three machinists, three engine watchmen, three helpers, three callers and ten crew men. It may be possible, however, according to Gould, that the engine watchman may continue on the job.

Closing of the Colfax roundhouse has been anticipated for some time, railroaders in Roseville say. The move, according to company officials, is to cut the operating expenses in maintaining the Colfax house and speed up the operating of trains between Roseville and Sparks.

The Colfax roundhouse was closed fifteen or more years ago for a period of eight or ten years. It reopened shortly before World War II.”





Rough Day at Colfax Crossing (cont'd from page 2)

#6 was held west of the Colfax depot into the night until orders were received to proceed eastbound and depart Colfax running 6 hours late according to the Amtrak alert notice but I'd say more like 8-10 hours late based on scheduled and actual Colfax departure.

But wait -- there's more. Around 10pm after Amtrak had departed, the UP freight that had been waiting all day began rolling eastbound from Colfax. Since it was dark I couldn't see details but noticed a while later that the crossing lights at Grass Valley Street were still flashing and upon looking closer, sure enough the eastbound UP freight was stopped, still blocking the crossing. Radio traffic indicated a problem with something dragging on one of the cars that forced a stop until it could be rectified. Finally at perhaps 11pm or later the train was on its way and the Grass Valley Street crossing was open once more.

As I looked out my window the next morning I saw automobiles crossing the tracks at Grass Valley Street on a quiet (so far) Friday morning. rs

MORE BNSF TRAFFIC ON DONNER??

Since Union Pacific (UP) absorbed Southern Pacific (SP) in 1996, it has been common to see a daily BNSF train traversing the Donner Route. As a condition of the UP/SP merger, BNSF was granted trackage rights on UP's Donner Pass and Feather River Canyon routes to better serve its Northern California and inland customers. BNSF has been running single trains per day over the Donner route to protect its trackage rights, so the occasional sighting of a BNSF train on Donner tracks has been fairly common.

But recently there have been increased sightings of BNSF trains on Donner, including double-stacks (see Mike Haire's August photo on page 3). So what's going on with the increased BNSF presence on Donner?

As reported July 16 by Trains Magazine staff, UP and BNSF settled a dispute in July over access to BNSF's

new intermodal terminal in the Salt Lake City area, including transporting containers on UP tracks to be processed there. UP had contended that the trackage rights given to BNSF at the time of the UP/SP merger required BNSF to share the costs that UP incurred to modify the Donner Route tunnels in 2009 to accommodate double-stack trains, while BNSF contended that it didn't apply to overseas containers. An agreement was reached in July between the two railroads just prior to a meeting called by federal regulators to gather facts and render a decision. Details of the agreement were not released by either railroad, but it apparently allows BNSF trains that include overseas containers to traverse the Donner Pass and Feather River Canyon routes. The Trains article implied that BNSF would be restricted to single-height container cars, but Mike Haire's recent photos clearly show double-stack BNSF trains on Donner.

For those who follow the Donner route, the agreement likely means we will be seeing more BNSF orange to add to the steady parade of UP yellow passing by.

HOW TO ASSEMBLE A TRAIN

Colfax Railroad Days 2025 was a major success thanks in part to Union Pacific providing equipment displays this year that included UP's Western Pacific Heritage locomotive, a flanger, spreader and new fire train.

As an added bonus, our Colfax railcam on the roof of the Colfax passenger depot provided birds-eye views of UP switching and arranging its equipment on the display track, as well as returning the fire train after the event to the westbound siding in Colfax and reassembling the other equipment for the return trip to Roseville.

See page 6 for views of the arrival and placement of the UP equipment for display in images captured by Mike Haire and Roger Staab. The Colfax railcam provided the images on Pages 7 & 8 showing the fire train being returned to the Colfax westbound siding, the flanger set being turned on the wye track, and the process of assembling the remaining equipment for the return trip westbound to Roseville led by UP 572.



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UP Equipment Arrives for Colfax RR Days - 9/11/25



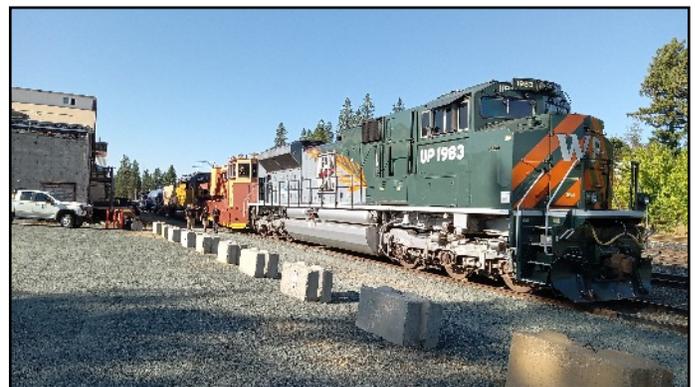
Collecting Fire Train Cars from Westbound Siding (photos this page by Mike Haire except bottom two)



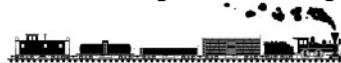
Retrieving the Spreader



Adding the Flanger Set



Adding Remaining Equipment to Fire Train to Complete the Display (photos by Roger Staab)



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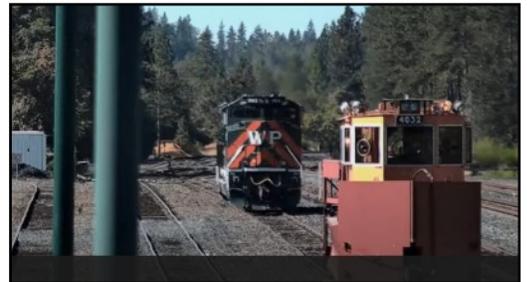


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Preparing UP Equipment To Depart Colfax After RR Days



Placing Spreader on Spur Track
(photos on pages 7 & 8 are screenshots from Colfax Webcam)



Repositioning UP 1983 For Return Trip



UP 572 & Flanger Return Fire Train to Westbound Siding, then Reverse Direction on Wye Track



Flanger Set Picks Up UP 1983 Sandwiched between UP 572 and Flanger



Continued on page 8



Preparing UP Equipment To Depart Colfax After RR Days (continued)



The Final Consist is Assembled on the Siding



The Consist Led by UP 572 Backs Through Siding Switches onto the Mainline, Ready to Depart Colfax on Track 2 for Roseville

