

## **THE FERROPHILIAC COLUMN** *August 1992 - A.P.*

### **CONDUCTED BY JUST A. FERRONUT**

Welcome to a ghost-written column this month, while Just A. and Art get the car pointed east for a bit of research and exploration closer to the Atlantic. First, Gord Webster has sent along a few notes further to the brief mention last month (on Page 3) of the traces of the White Pass and Yukon in Whitehorse.

In 1989, the station was open to tourists, and the offices of the Vice-Presidents of the White Pass Corp. and other WP&Y officers were also in the station. All of the track was intact, and, in fact, in May of that year a train had run all of the way from Skagway to Whitehorse to pick up some equipment. The only noticeable thing about non-operation to Whitehorse was that a slope had eroded a bit, covering a short 50-foot section of track in about one to two feet of sand, beside the AlCan highway on the outskirts of Whitehorse. Crossing protection was still in place at the highways, but most of the lenses had been broken (shot).

The only equipment in Whitehorse was WP&Y tank car No. 28, a flat car and the two-stall engine house and car shop. Some track in the "intermodal" yard had been gravelled-over and the area was used for White Pass's trucking division. There was a loop at one time where WP&Y had loaded containers onto the flat cars. And finally on the station in Whitehorse was the following, engraved on a wood plaque:

#### **THE WHITE PASS & YUKON RAILWAY**

On August 17, 1896, George Carmack and two Indian companions, Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie, discovered gold in the Klondike Valley an event which triggered the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98. It was evident from the start that the Klondike could not be serviced without a permanent transportation system. By chance, British engineer Sir Thomas Tancrede, Close Bros. representative Samuel H. Graves, and Canadian railway contractor, Michael J. Heney met at Skagway in 1898. Within hours, "Big Mike" Heney had agreed to build a railroad from Skagway to the Yukon, if Sir Thomas and Graves would provide the funds.

Construction began May 27, '98 at Skagway. By July 21, a passenger train was placed in service and it operated a distance of four miles. This was the first train to run in Alaska. By February 18, 1899, the track crossed the summit of White Pass and by July 6<sup>th</sup>, it reached Lake Bennett, BC.

Railway construction was completed July 1900, and the first through train from Skagway arrived in Whitehorse after White Pass President Samuel H. Graves drove home the "golden spike" at Carcross July 29, 1900.

A rotary plough and a couple of cabooses were stored at Lake Bennett at that time. Gord did not go there, because it was a 16-mile hike on the railway or about five miles over a very large "hill," and he was not inclined to take either route.

Pat Scrimgeour in the "Hi-Rail Honda," recently drove up part of the right-of-way of the abandoned CN Sellwood Branch (later known as the National Steel Spur and the Lowphos Spur), north of Capreol. This spur last appeared in the Great Lakes Region timetable of November 1987. The spur extended from Mile 9.1 of the Ruel Subdivision at Milnet to an open-pit iron ore mine.

The mine was a going concern at the time of one of the first employee timetables of the Canadian Northern Ontario (No. 21, dated September 18, 1910). From that timetable, Sellwood appears to have been the north end of busy traffic on the CNOR. North of Sudbury Jct., the timetable shows two "passenger or mixed" trains to Sellwood on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Train 50 left Sudbury at 7:15 a.m., and continued as Train 9 at 7:31 a.m. from Sudbury Jct., with flag stops at Garson Jct., Bertrands,

Hanmer and Nickelton Jct., arriving at Sellwood Jct. at 8:36, and at Sellwood at 8:50. Train 10-51 left Sellwood at 9:00 a.m. and arrived at Sudbury at 10:35. Then, Train 52-11 left Sudbury at 2:30 p.m. and arrived at Sellwood at 4:15. Train 12-53 left Sellwood at 5:30 p.m. and arrived at Sudbury at 7:30.

On other days of the week (Thesday, Thursday, and Sunday), Train 64-15 ran north from Sudbury to Gowganda Jct., tuming around there (was this the end of track at that time?) and returning as Train 14-65. Trains 41, 42, 43, and 44 shuttled back and forth between Sellwood and Sellwood Jct. to connect with Trains 15 and 14 on those days.

Seven years later (Canadian Northern Timetable 9, dated June 16, 1917), there were transcontinental trains on the Ruel Sub., Capreol had been established, and Sellwood Jct. was renamed as Milnet. Mixed trains 344-43 and 44-343 ran Monday Wednesday and Friday from Sudbury to Ruel and return, making the side trip to Sellwood on the northbound trip.

This diagram is a schematic of the mine tracks as they were shown in a CN car control manual dated September 1970.

Skipping ahead to 1983, the spur was out of service beyond Mile 1, and there were severe weight and speed restrictions. There was at that time still a reference reading "Engines are not permitted to operate inside the National Steel ore loading building on track FA4O." An October 1984 car control manual shows only a simple spur, with no other tracks branching off. By 1987, the timetable said that no movements were to be made on the spur and all reference was deleted in the next timetable.

All of the mine buildings and any other buildings that may have made up Sellwood appear to be gone. (There must have been something of a town where the workers lived – the post office at Sellwood opened in 1909 and closed in 1926.) A large pile of tailings remains just west of what appeared to be the railway yard.

The mine site is on property owned by Moose Mountain Lumber who maintain the last few kilometres of Regional Road 84 as their own gravel road, on which they allow public access. Part of the mine site has been used in recent years by the lumber company. The railway grade was easily driven from Milnet to the point where Road 84 crossed, and looked passable, but in a bit rougher condition, beyond there.

#### **THE FERROPHILIAC COLUMN**

Please send your thoughts, reminiscences, and historical notes to Just A. Ferronut, c/o Art Clowes, 1625 ouest, boul. de Maisonneuve, Suite 1600, MontrJal (QuJbec) H3H 2N4.