

Along the Yaquina Northern Railroad

Trackside Series #11

By: Lloyd Palmer
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The last few articles for this series have dealt with subjects of a historical nature, covering three different logging or railroading operations. Gathering the information for that type of piece always entails a certain amount of research which means spending a fair amount of time, indoors. With summer upon us and the urge to get started on the many outdoor projects that need doing, I was tempted to put off the writing of anything until later this fall.

While the intent is to try and write something for the newsletter on a quarterly routine, I had been giving some thought to giving Conductor Tom, the editor of our newsletter, a call, and trying to beg out of an article during the summer. I had even prepared myself for the verbal tongue lashing that I would probably be receiving but was willing to take the abuse just to be outside enjoying the sunshine.

However, that all changed in an instant! It was actually a day outside in the sunshine that prompted the idea for this, the eleventh installment of the "Trackside Series". It was a day spent exploring the old grade of the Yaquina Northern Railroad to see what traces of it might still exist.

This railroad was originally constructed in 1918 by the Spruce Production Division of the U.S. Army. It extended from a connection with the Southern Pacific at Yaquina City, westward along the bay to Newport then turned northward. It continued up the coastline, passing through Agate Beach on its way to Otter Rock, where it ended on the southern slopes of Cape Foulweather. It was built to tap the stands of Sitka spruce that were needed for the construction of airplanes during World War I and the intent was to extend it all the way into the Siletz River basin where large forests of spruce timber were located.

However, the end of the war on November 11, 1918 eliminated the Army's need for the railroad and construction was halted. The partially completed railroad was put up on the auction block and sold to Multnomah Lumber & Box Co. in August 1921. They used it as a logging railroad for several years before selling it to Tom Hutchinson, the owner of Hutchinson & Co. He too used it as a logging line until finally abandoning it in 1936.

While I had a pretty good idea of where the railroad had been located I had never really explored the old grade on the ground. I knew that remains were scant, due to the expansion of Newport and Agate Beach and the construction of Highway 101, which covers much of the grade along the coastline. However, several things came together that finally prompted me to spend a day along the line, seeing what could still be found.

The first thing that happened occurred during a conversation with our chapter's illustrious president, Mr. William Bain. Bill had informed me that there's a website on the internet called The Oregon Map. Its address is www.ormap.com and contains all of the tax atlases around the state of Oregon. He showed me how to tap into this website

and we called up the maps for Newport. Low and behold, these maps still showed, in great detail, the route of the Yaquina Northern RR, all the way through Newport and as far north as Agate Beach. Later that evening at home, I revisited the site and printed copies of all the maps that included the route of the railroad.

The second thing that happened is that this past winter I had spent a fair amount of time researching the spruce operations of the Army and had uncovered quite a few new photos depicting the building of the Yaquina Northern RR. This renewed interest in the line made me want to spend some time along the route, trying to find any existing indications of the old grade.

Thirdly, Terry Gookin, a good friend of mine from Salem, had called and said we ought to get together in Newport for lunch and a day of exploration somewhere. I suggested a day along the grade of the Yaquina Northern, if the weather cooperated, and the stage was set for what turned out to be the subject of this article.

June 22nd arrived bright and sunny and I met Terry for breakfast at the Chalet Restaurant at the north end of Newport. Armed with several maps, an album of photos and film in the camera we headed for Yaquina City, having decided to work our way from the beginning point of the railroad, northward to its terminus at Otter Rock. Yaquina City was the western terminus of the Southern Pacific line and the point where the army's Yaquina Northern RR began. Today's Sawyer's Landing is located about the point where the two lines connected. Their engine barn and other locomotive facilities were located a short distance further west, at about the junction of the Yaquina Bay Road and S.E. Back Bay Drive.

From this point, we drove westward, along Yaquina Bay Road, headed for Newport. The alignment of the existing road is on top of the old railroad all the way into town. We had several photos with us that depicted the construction of this portion of the route and we got into a discussion of what those soldiers must have felt as they hacked and grubbed way towards Newport, building the railroad. Today we were covering the same distance in the comforts of our pickup (or "rig" as I usually call it) and in only a few minutes. What a change.

As we entered Newport, at the top of the hill on the road (just East of The Embarcadero), we found the first indication of the railroad grade that hasn't been covered over by a road. Just east of the junction of S.E. Vista Drive one can still see the old alignment along the north side of Yaquina Bay Road, now called S.E. Bay Blvd that we're in town. The graveled area just outside the line of utility poles is the alignment of the former railroad.

The first large trestle on the railroad was the Jessop Creek Trestle, also called the Rainbow Trestle due to its curved nature. The point where it stood can be seen by driving in on S.E. Harbor Crescent Dr. to the junction of S.E. Crescent Place. The railroad passed this spot and trestled the large canyon to the north. We compared the site with a couple of photos that we had with us, taken from about where we were standing, that showed the former wooden structure. A local homeowner that was working in his yard was curious about what we were doing and was astonished when we showed him the photos of the old trestle. He had never heard about it and thanked us for sharing our information with him.

Back on S.E. Bay Blvd, we continued on, taking the right hand turn onto S.E. Moore Dr. and drove as far as S.E. View Dr. where we turned right and immediately

drove onto Spruce Way. Yup, you guessed it, this short street is on the alignment of the former railroad grade. From here, the railroad continued northward, located about where the front door of the Elks Lodge now sits and crossed Hwy. 20 just east of the traffic light at the junction of N.E. Harney St. The grade was actually lower than the current highway as a fill was placed over the grade where Hwy. 20 heads east from the light.

At the corner of N.E. Harney and N.E. 3rd St. the railroad ran right under the canopy over the CFN gas pumps and headed into the Lincoln County Fairgrounds at about the location of the entrance gate. From this point, the railroad was located on a southeast to northwest alignment for quite a distance and has completely been obliterated by all the housing construction. We had hoped to find some angled fencing or something that would indicate the location of the old grade though this area but to no avail. Our maps showed the grade crossing N.E. 8th St at the corner of N.E. Grant St. and crossing N.E. 12th St. just east of the corner of N. E. Benton St. but nothing could be seen of the railroad grade as we first zigged then zagged our way through the neighborhood.

The maps showed the alignment of the railroad crossing N.E. Chamber Ct. just east of the cul-de-sac at the west end of the street but again no luck. Housing has destroyed any sign of the grade. However, it was at about this location that the railroad turned more northward running up the east side of the Coast Highway so we returned to Highway 101.

As we drove north, Terry navigating with maps in hand, we soon realized that we had earlier eaten breakfast sitting right on top of the old grade! That's right, it passed though the west parking lot of Fred Meyer's, then though the spot where the Chalet Restaurant now stands then continued northward under the current location of Sizzler's. Hum, should have had dinner on the grade too but didn't think of that at the time.

The second big trestle, and the largest on the line, was the Monterey Trestle, so named for the Monterey Hotel that was located on Big Creek, just west of the structure. The fill that Highway 101 crosses Big Creek on is located at the same location where the trestle formerly stood. This is the fill just north of today's Best Western Agate Beach Inn.

The grade crosses to the west side of Highway 101 at this point and continues northward on a rather serpentine route. The construction of a new development called Meritage at Little Creek has obliterated anything that might have still existed at that location. The grade then crossed Little Creek, the north end of the structure having been located about the entrance into the Little Creek Cove Condominiums.

From here, the railroad continued northward again, paralleling Highway 101 along its western shoulder. It climbed the hill towards Agate Beach, passing just east of Izzy's Pizza and through the Coast Dairy buildings. Across the street from Coast Dairy, and still on the alignment of the old grade, we noticed a sign for RR Towing. Interesting, we wondered if there's was any connection there. Driving on N.W. Gladys St. in Agate Beach, we were again right on top of the grade. At the north end of Gladys St. where it crosses N.W. 60th, the railroad continued on but that's the point where our maps ended since grade is no longer indicated on the current tax atlases.

We now had to resort to an older map that we had in the pickup, oops, I mean rig, but that had a lot less detail on it. Studying the map as we continued north on Highway 101 we determined that the grade was just west of the road but has been completely wiped out by all the housing and resort construction. Once north of all the buildings, the

route of the highway is atop the grade all the way to Otter Rock. All of the creeks were crossed with fairly large trestles where highway fills are located today. At the bridge that crosses Spencer Creek we compared photos that we had, showing the old trestle at this same location.

It was at this exact spot, the south end of the Spencer Creek trestle, that the end of rail was located. The army had completed much of the grading and built several of the trestles between here and Otter Rock but no rail was ever spiked down on that segment of the railroad. In fact, a little grade work was even completed beyond Otter Rock as the intention of the army was to loop back towards the southeast as they built beyond Otter Rock. They planned to climb the southern slopes of Cape Foulweather and cross the divide into the Siletz River drainage.

It's at this location that perhaps the most interesting indication of the old grade work still can be seen. Driving north on Highway 101, from the beginning of the passing lane at the bottom of the hill, there is a new logging road that extends eastward from the highway, just a short ways up the passing lane. The next time you're in this area, pull off the main highway and onto the gravel road. The odd looking notch in the hill just in front of you, and just to the right of the existing gate, is the alignment of the old grade. Rails were never spiked down on this segment and in fact much of the grading was never completed but this little notch was cut into the hillside in anticipation of the railroad to come. Hiking beyond this cut we saw no indication that any work had been done on either the trestle across the draw or on the adjoining hillside.

Thus we had reached the end of the line, the furthest extend to which the army had constructed the Yaquina Northern RR. The subsequent logging companies never laid rail in the area around Otter Rock and in fact may have never laid rail any further north than Spencer Creek. They logged the area east of the highway using spur lines off the mainline and even established a logging camp back in the hills but that story and their history will have to wait for another story.