

Parallel Tracks – Parallel Universes

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The idea for the subject of this edition of the *Trackside Series* popped into my head recently as I was driving to the airport at Lihue, on the island of Kauai, for our return flight to the mainland.

I have been visiting Kauai for about twenty years and at first I made a concerted effort to keep from getting interested in the railroad history on the island. Kauai at one time had quite an extensive system of railroads that were associated with the sugar cane plantations there. I told myself that I visited the island in order to relax, soak up as much sun as possible and spend a maximum amount of time lying on the beach counting grains of sand. Exerting as little effort as possible was my main goal during my stay on the island.

While driving around the island I would spot the occasional piece of old railroad grade or see some rails still embedded in the pavement of some local road. There were even a couple of beautiful concrete railroad bridges and wooden trestles to look at but I knew that if I let myself get interested in the railroad history the days of relaxing would become severely limited.

I was able to resist the urge for somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen years but about five years ago the urge became greater than my will power to resist it and I decided to take a few photos of some of the remaining remnants. What could it hurt? It was only a few photos. As I had feared, the days of relaxing were over!

It all began with the taking several photographs of one of the existing bridges and a few more of several segments of rail that could still be found in some of the roads. As is my habit with my documentation of abandoned railroad grades here in Oregon, I noted the photo locations on the appropriate U.S. Geological Survey 7 ½' quadrangle maps of Kauai and put the materials together in an album.

When I returned home from that trip to the island, I retrieved a book from my library that I had purchased many years earlier but had never read. It's titled "Sugar Trains, Narrow Gauge Rails of Hawaii" and was written by Jesse Conde and Gerald Best in 1973. This book is the leading authority on the railroad history of the Hawaiian Islands and covers all of the sugar cane railroads on Kauai, along with the railroad systems on the other islands.



I soon realized that if I wanted to explore the old grades and take photos of what could still be seen, I would have to first know where to look. This necessitated visiting several of the historical entities on Kauai, to look for any old maps or photos that would point me in the right direction. I became a fixture at the Kauai Historical Society where I was given access to their numerous file drawers of old maps. I also invaded the Kauai Museum where I discovered a large collection of old photos that pertain to the sugar cane industry and the railroads the companies operated. I also became aware of the Grove Farm Museum which houses the historical materials of Grove Farm, one of the

companies that had operated a railroad.

As I learned of the island's railroads I started to realize that there was quite a parallel between the railroad history of the Hawaiian Islands and the railroad history of our own Pacific Northwest. The sugar cane industry of Hawaii and the logging industry of the Oregon and Washington both played a major role in the early development of the areas in which they were located. As both industries developed and advanced they realized the need to get an ever growing amount of the raw materials to the processing mills. This resulted in the development of the sugar cane railroads in Hawaii and the logging railroads in our own state of Oregon.

It's interesting to note that the very first sugar cane railroads on Kauai were built within a few years of the first logging railroads here in Oregon. In 1881 the first rails were spiked down by the Kilauea Sugar Plantation Co. and in 1886 John C. Trullinger built one of the first, if not the first, logging railroad in Oregon when he constructed his logging line along the Walluskie River in Clatsop County. (continued on Page 3)



Here in Oregon, the sawmills were built with several needs in mind. It was desirable to build them as close as possible to the source of raw materials while still being located near enough to a transportation system that they could use to get their finished produce to market. The situation was no different on Kauai. The sugar mills were located where the raw sugar cane could be hauled to the mills for processing into refined sugar and the bagged sugar could be moved to a terminal where it could be loaded onto a ship.

As it turns out, there were ten different sugar cane railroad systems on Kauai. Beginning with the first one and working our way clockwise around the island, the Kilauea Sugar Plantation Co. was situated in the northeastern part of Kauai. Next came the Makee Sugar Co. with their mill at Kealia and the Hanamaulu Sugar Plantation Co. who built their mill in Hanamaulu. These were both along the eastern coast-line.

Located in the southeastern portion of the island was the Lihue Plantation Co. and just west of it was the Grove Farm. While Grove Farm had an extensive railroad system into its cane fields it didn't own a sugar mill of its own so all of its sugar cane was hauled to the nearby Lihue Plantation Company's mill in the town of Lihue. Further west yet, the Koloa Sugar Co. built its sugar mill in Koloa which was surrounded by the company's cane fields.

Along the south coastline, the McBryde Sugar Co. had its mill at Numilia and the Hawaiian Sugar Co. was located near Kaumakani, both of which had large plantation holdings. The last two plantations were the Waimea Sugar Mill Co. at Waimea, a fairly small operation, and the Kekaha Sugar Co. who had its mill at Kekaha. Both of these were located along the dryer west side of Kauai.

There were also two common carrier railroads on Kauai. They were owned in large part by the sugar plantations that they served. The Ahukini Terminal & Railway connected the Lihue, Hanamaulu and Makee plantations and was eventually controlled entirely by the Lihue Plantation Co. after it acquired both the Makee and Hanamaulu operations. The Kauai Railway Co. connected the Koloa, McBryde and Hawaiian companies, giving all of them access to Port Allen, one of the major shipping ports on Kauai.

All of Kauai's railroads were narrow gauge. They all used thirty inch wide tracks with the exception of the Kilauea Sugar Plantation Company's rails which were twenty-four inches apart. While a few of the logging railroads of the Oregon were narrow gauge, most of them were built to standard gauge. The most notable exception being the Sumpter Valley Railway, with all of its connected logging lines, that was three feet between the rails.

Oh, and about this parallel universe thing, the last sugar cane train was operated by the Lihue Plantation Co. in late 1959 and the Georgia Pacific Corporation shut down their logging railroad here in Lincoln County in December 1959. Weird, huh?

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