Because of the deep interest in what will happen to the railroad tracks Weyerhaeuser Company is not planning to use again in the near future, whether it will continue to be a railroad for excursions or the rails removed and it become a trail for hiking, we thought this would be a good time to review the history of the line. This was researched and written by Devere Helfrich.

"The Oregon, California and Eastern Railroad (O.C. & E., also sometimes known as the Strahorn Railroad), has been perhaps the largest single factor in developing the timber and agricultural industries in the Sprague River Valley. The railroad itself owes its immediate beginning to the initiative of Robert E. Strahorn, who arrived in Klamath Falls Saturday, November 20, 1915, to meet with railroad interested citizens of the Klamath Country.

Prior to that time, railroading in the Klamath Country can be traced back to 1855 when the Pacific Railroad survey party under Williamson and Abbott made the first preliminary scouting trip, from south to north, along the eastern base of the Cascade Mountains through Oregon and extreme Northern California.

Railroad surveys, projections on paper, and proposed construction became the subject uppermost in everyone's minds, especially wildcat promoters, in the early 1860's and continued for many years. Completion of the first transcontinental railroad with its final joining of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific systems on the deserts of Northern Utah on May 10, 1869 fanned the flames of imagination anew.
Later, with the completion of the California and Oregon Railroad, with the Golden Spike ceremony at Ashland on December 17, 1877 everyone wanted to build a railroad and get some sort of land grant whereby to receive thousands of acres of free land.

As early as July 2, 1864 Congress had granted the State of Oregon certain lands "to aid in the construction of a Military Road from Eugene City to the eastern boundary of said state." This road followed up Sprague River from a point six or eight miles west of the present town of Sprague River, to a point some four or five miles east of Bly.

Next, on March 3, 1869 Congress extended the time for completion of this road with the added provision for selection of suitable lands for "** depot grounds, water tanks, switches, warehouses or turnouts for a railroad, should one be constructed over said route."

Then, on January 12, 1870 the Governor of Oregon certified the Oregon Central Military Road had been completed. Accordingly on April 21, 1871 the United States Government deeded thousands of acres of open land (every odd section for three miles on either side of the road) to the Oregon Central Military Wagon Road Company for a road that had not been and never was completed. Only built (and that very poorly) to the summit of the Cascade Mountains, with a few wagon tracks, made by others, to the eastern border of the state, it was considered "completed". Thus it will be seen that nearly one half the land in the Bly area came from these odd section O.C.M. lands, clearing up the point that many old time ranches do not show on Government homestead records.

On July 2, 1874, a railroad, the Corvallis and Eastern, was formed with the intention of building across Oregon from Yaquina Bay on the Pacific Ocean, through the central part of the state to Ontario, on the Snake River, there connecting with a railroad still in the planning stage, that would later cross Southern Idaho and follow down the Columbia River. After years of failure and frustrations, this road was actually completed from the ocean to as far as 57 miles east of Albany, Oregon. Some construction was done east of the Cascades along what is now the North Santiam Highway. Originally, a branch line was envisioned, to run south
from some point near present Burns, to Winnemucca, Nevada, on the Central Pacific Railroad. By 1893-94 this road was bankrupt.

Thereafter for many years, Southeastern Oregon remained untouched, and still is, from any attempt to actually construct railroads across it. However, numerous surveys and paper projections criss-crossed it from time to time. Actually numerous branch lines have approached its borders but none succeeded in following out their original plans to connect with some other railroad across the state.

To the north in 1899, the Columbia Southern branched from the Oregon, Washington Railway & Navigation line down the Columbia River to arrive at Shaniko on May 13, 1900. Its preliminary surveys reached Prineville and its officials hopefully predicted it might be extended. This line was replaced in 1911, when the combined Hill and Harriman lines built up the Deschutes River Canyon to reach Bend for a Golden Spike Celebration on October 5th of that year.

As late as 1904, there was still talk of which railroad, the Corvallis & Eastern, or the Columbia Southern would first reach Central Oregon. Neither did.

Also from the west, but farther south came what started out as the Oregon Midland Railroad, but ended up as the Klamath Lake Railroad. As constructed, it branched from the Southern Pacific Railroad at Thrall, California and by means of switchbacks reached Paokega, in extreme southwestern Klamath County on May 1, 1903. Its avowed destination had been Klamath Falls but it was partially abandoned by 1911.

The Klamath Lake Railroad owned its demise to a new railroad that came from further south, at Weed, California, where the Southern Pacific commenced building a line that reached Klamath Falls on May 20, 1909 and Chiloquin and Kirk in 1911.

Also from the south, but further east came the Nevada, California & Oregon Railroad starting at Reno, December 22, 1880, which floundered around for years with many changes in route and destination, finally reaching Lakeview as a narrow gauge line on January 10, 1912.

From the east, up the Malheur River, came yet another branch
line. This time, Harriman's Oregon Short Line Railroad which began in Ontario and reached Vale in 1906, but was yet seven months short of reaching Crane, near Burns in Harney County.

One other line, a proposed one, remains to be mentioned. It was to connect the Rogue River Valley with the Klamath Country, with a possible extension to intercept the Central Pacific at some vague point on the Humboldt River in Nevada. Commenced in the Rogue River Valley, the preliminary survey was made in 1869 by Jesse Applegate and apparently brought to a standstill by Captain Jack when it reached the California line south of present Malin, Oregon.

Thus it will be seen; that by the time Robert E. Strahorn arrived on the scene, undeveloped Southeastern Oregon was reached but not entered by four railroads.

1. The combined Oregon Trunk and the lines of James J. Hill and E.H. Harriman respectively, ended at Bend.
2. The Malheur branch of the Oregon Short Line, still short of its destination Crane, Oregon.
3. The Nevada, California & Oregon ended at Lakeview.
4. The Southern Pacific's Weed-Klamath Falls line ended at Kirk.

Prior to arriving at Klamath Falls, Strahorn and other interested railroad personages had just completed a junket which visited the dead-ends of the above mentioned railroads in the order given above.

Before proceeding with the history of the Oregon, California & Eastern Railroad, it may be well to understand to a small degree the background of Strahorn, the man who was to promote the proposed new connecting railroad to an uncertain joining with one or more of the other dead-ends.

Strahorn was born in Center County, Pennsylvannia, May 15, 1852, thus making him 63 years of age when he first arrived at Klamath Falls. He had moved to Illinois at the age of four and took up the printer's trade at 13. He followed journalism for eleven years.

Then during 1875-76 he served under General Cook in the Sioux War, and was commended for gallantry by the Secretary of War. He
later wrote several books on Colorado, Utah, Montana, Oregon and Washington. After a short time spent in railroad construction and operations, he entered the advertising and publicity department of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1878. While thus employed he made his first visit to Spokane, Washington, scouting the situation for Eastern railroad capitalists. Shortly thereafter he went to Boston in 1890 where he seemed to have remained some seven or eight years, engaged in the bond business. It was during this period that he became one of the original promoters of the Granby mine in British Columbia.

Strahorn returned to Spokane in 1898 where he entered the business of establishing electric lighting and power plants, constructing plants at Centralia, Washington; Wallace, Idaho; Sumpter, Oregon; and North Yakima, Washington. He held a large interest in the Bellingham, Kenewick and Pasco light and power plants as well as the irrigation plant at Pasco. He is further credited with founding the cities of Hales, Shoshone, Payette, Caldwell and Mountain Home, Idaho; and Ontario, Oregon.

He became quite active in 1905 in promoting railroad building projects. About 1909 he formed the North Coast Railway Company to build an independent line from Spokane to Walla Walla to eventually be extended through Yakima Valley to Seattle and Portland, which was later taken over by Harriman. Usually his promotions were sold to larger companies for a satisfactory profit.

To close out Strahorn's later career, it seems he was married twice, his first wife passing away in 1925. He was again married by October 7, 1927 at the age of 85 to Ruby Garland in San Francisco. He and his wife settled there, where she passed away in 1936. Strahorn died March 30, 1944 at the age of 92 years.

When Strahorn, "the man that changed Spokane from a village to a city," first arrived in Klamath Falls a mass meeting was held and there he presented his 400 mile "Strahorn System."

He announced that he wished to build railroads, in other words, connect the dead-ends by building a line from Klamath Falls to Silver Lake, and from there connecting links to Bend, Lakeview and Burns, the latter slightly north of the first projected route through the Harney Valley. During August, 1916 and the following
months, Strahorn approached the Mayor and City Council of Klamath Falls, and other prominent men of the area, with his plan for the Strahorn System." In the meantime, he had decided to expand his "System" to include branch lines to Merrill, Bonanza and Bly.

However, before arriving in Klamath Falls, Strahorn, to expedite his plans, had incorporated the Surprise Valley Railroad Company on October 28, 1915 as a part of his master plan. Originally the route extended from Flanigan, Nevada, on the Westwood Branch of the Southern Pacific, to Cedarville, (located in Surprise Valley in Modoc County), but by supplementary articles of incorporation filed almost a year later (October 26, 1916), the route was extended northwesterly to Lakeview, Oregon.

It may be of interest to know that by this time the railroad following up the Malheur River reached Crane on July 11, 1916, thus completing the last dead-end in the planned "Strahorn System."

Returning to the Surprise Valley Railroad, considerable right of way was acquired, and in August, 1916 the newspapers reported that J.E. Sexton of the Eureka and Palisades would undertake the job of building the line. The projected route extended southward from Lakeview, parallel and east of the Nevada, California and Oregon to Willow Ranch, then up Willow Creek and through the Warner Mountains at Fandango Pass by means of a 4820 foot tunnel at 5364 feet elevation, almost 800 feet under the summit. It would then go down a 2.2% grade to Surprise Valley, through Cedarville, west of the lakes, and entering Nevada near the Modoc-Lassen county line. It would continue through Duck Lake Valley, over the second summit and down into Buffalo Meadows with a 2.35% grade. After skirting the west side of the Smoke Creek Desert, it would go over Sand Pass, cross the Western Pacific near Astor and join the Southern Pacific near Flanigan. Distance over the projected route would be 154 miles. After acquiring a substantial portion of the right of way, the project lay idle for a number of years and was finally abandoned in 1927. Strahorn hoped to connect with the Great Northern or Union Pacific near Bend, and the Nevada, California and Oregon at Lakeview. With his base at Klamath Falls on the Southern Pacific, he hoped to interest one or
more of the four large companies in purchasing his "Strahorn System."

Strahorn's proposed railroad would reach Olene in three months, Dairy in six, and Sprague River in twelve. All that was necessary was for the communities affected to hand him terminal sites and rights of way "on a platter", and raise a reasonable bonus - in case of Klamath Falls, $300,000. He was confident that enough capital would come in as soon as we were on a through line that we would not miss that trifling sum. Klamath Falls rose to the challenge, voted bonds for the required bonus and took subscriptions for terminal sites, etc. Captain J.W. Siemens started the subscription list with $5,000 and others gave generously, according to their ability. A "one thousand club" was organized among the women, seeking to enlist a thousand women who would pledge to give a certain amount regularly each month for five months. Charles W. Eberlein of the Enterprise Land and Investment Company, who acted as trustee of the railroad terminal fund, was the largest single contributor, giving a mile and a half of right of way 100 feet wide, 3,000 feet for freight yards, and all the terminal lands necessary except the site for the passenger terminal, which the Business Mens' Association and others were buying. In 1912 Mr. Eberlein had interviewed James J. Hill at St. Paul in an effort to interest him in extending his lines to the city and at that time had offered to him these lands east of the city. Hill having declined for the time, Mr. Eberlein had kept the lands intact, hoping for an acceptance of his offer, but now, feeling that Strahorn's project offered the best chance of connecting with the Hill lines, turned his property over to him.

The first preliminary surveys seem to have been run as early as January, 1916. Included in these was a line which exited from the main Klamath Valley, up the west side of Link River.

Commencement of construction was delayed until Strahorn had the money "in hand". Then on May 3, 1917 the first ground was broken when Mrs. George McDonald of Langell Valley turned the first shovel-full of dirt near Third Street and Klamath Avenue. Actual construction began three days later, and on May 12th, the contract between the city and Strahorn was signed.
The Klamath Falls Municipal Railroad's (as it was sometimes called) first locomotive arrived August 18th, and helped in laying the track toward Olene that fall. The first trip in a railway coach was made November 6th. It was not until the following year on July 3rd, 1918 that the first freight was shipped from Olene on the new line.

By August 22nd, a side track was completed at Olene and it was reported that lumber was piled high on all available space, awaiting shipment to various markets, some 530 wagon-loads of lumber having been unloaded there. With the first intimation that a railroad would soon tap the area, there was a rush of sawmill building in the Swan Lake, Pine Flats and Hildebrand areas. These mills started production before the arrival of the railroad, so to market their products, manufacturers commenced hauling their lumber by horse and wagon.

Construction work was slowed by legal entanglements, time extensions, which Strahorn always presented to the City Council in due form, and which were always granted, and the failure at times to secure the needed supplies and equipment to keep moving. Sometimes work stopped completely when the general nationwide slump threatened to side-track the project in its wave of wartime (World War 1) commercial and industrial failures. However, Strahorn always managed to get the project moving again.

By April 20, 1921 the railbed was finished nine miles north of Dairy and some seven and one half miles short of Sprague River. The ties and part of the steel was at Dairy. At about the same time the first load of logs was shipped in for the Shaw-Bertram Lumber Company.

On August 25, 1922 the O.C.& E. reached Hildebrand and it was reported service from that point would begin September 5th. In the meantime construction had been held up for months by railroad strikes on the main lines, which also had its effect on O.C.& E.

With the strikes settled, four miles of track beyond Hildebrand were soon added. A contract was let on November 21st for the final twelve miles over Bly Mountain and down to Sprague River.

On January 23, 1923 a 60 day extension was asked for and received by Strahorn, it being necessary to follow a new route to
the Saddle Mountain Sawmill, then under construction some four miles west of the original railroad survey.

The contractors on the section leading over the summit were Burce and Nettleton, who were then constructing two switch-backs, one on either side of the summit, which would temporarily replace the 1300 foot tunnel originally planned through Bly Mountain. Strahorn said the switch-backs would be replaced by the tunnel later. At the time there were two railroad construction camps in action, one at Squaw Flat and one on the north side where 65 men were employed, with 50 more coming. Back at the end of track, 60 lb. rail was being laid.

City officials visited the construction sites on May 11th at which time there were four camps in operation: 1-seven miles north of Hildebrand; 2- Squaw Flat, which was reached by rails on July 1st, and freight delivered there by August 2nd; 3- The Summit; and 4- Headwaters of Cherry Creek.

The Evening Herald announced on June 26, 1923 that the O.C.& E. trains to the fairgrounds on July 2, 3 and 4, during the Fourth of July celebration, would leave Second Street and Klamath Avenue every fifteen minutes between 11:30 and 1:30. Round trip 25¢.

The new town of Sprague River was established August 21, when Frank Hatto and B.E. Wolford of Yainax Agency moved their store to the new location, where they had purchased 300 acres of land and laid out a townsit called Sprague River.

On September 16, 1923 the O.C.& E., Klamath Municipal Railroad, or Strahorn Line, whichever, was finished into the new town of Sprague River and a Klamath Falls delegation was taken there by railway coach, and accepted the railroad as satisfactory the following day, September 17th. The Golden Spike ceremony, however, did not take place until Friday, October 12th, at Sprague River.

As reported in a special railroad edition of the Klamath Evening Herald of October 11th, there were 16 loading stations along the new railroad: Altamont, Merrill Road (Hager), 5 miles; Pine Grove 7; Olene 10; Swan Lake Junction 14; Swan Lake on the branch line 16; Pine Flat 17; Dairy 20; Bonanza, on the Bonanza branch 27; Hildebrand 24; Horton 28; Egberts 30; Squaw Valley 32; Cherry Creek 37 and Sprague River 40.
Log or lumber shippers were: Ewauna Box, Big Lakes, Ackley, Wheeler-Olmstead, Lakeside Lumber & Box (Klamath Falls), W.H. Kitts (Bonanza), Nine, Meadow Lake, White Pine Lumber Company, Swan Lake, Langell Valley Lumber Company (Bonanza), and Southern Oregon Lumber Company.

Two short branch lines were built, one from Swan Lake Junction to Swan Lake, a distance of 1.84 miles. It was abandoned September 22, 1929. The other branch planned but only partially built was to reach Bonanza, 6.7 miles southeast of a point approximately one mile northeast of Dairy. Only 1.57 miles of track were ever completed, long since reduced to .54 but still in existence, leading to a potato cellar.

1923 was indeed a red letter year in railroading for the Klamath country. It witnessed the arrival of the O.C.&E. at Sprague River and the renewal of Southern Pacific construction toward Portland via the Natron Cut-off.

Even as early as February 21, 1924 it was reported that some of the O.C.&E. rolling stock was worn out. Their No.1 engine, a wood burner, was being scrapped, which left them with only one other, an oil burner.

Later in 1924 Shaw-Bertram Lumber Company secured timber at Squaw Flats and commenced a logging road into it from the south switch-back on Bly Mountain. By September 10th, from 60 to 75 car loads of logs per day were being shipped to Klamath Falls from the Shaw-Bertram camp, Big Lakes at Horton and Wheeler-Olmstead near Sprague River.

Between the date that the O.C.&E. reached Sprague River, September 16, 1923 and June 3, 1927 when they began extension of rails toward Bly, and even for a few more years, many events transpired concerning railroads in the Klamath and nearby country which are given briefly below:

1. The Southern Pacific commenced extension of its Natron Cut-off on May 23, 1923 when contracts for construction were let. The line was completed August 7, 1927.

2. The Oregon Short Line which had reached Crane July 11, 1916 was extended into Burns on May 1, 1924. It may be interesting to know this line was ordered to be extended to Crescent
Lake on the Natron Cutoff as late as December 14, 1929 by the Interstate Commerce Commission. Nothing developed from this order.

3. The Nevada, California & Oregon was bought by the Southern Pacific on October 19, 1926 and work commenced at Wendel, near Honey Lake, on July 16, 1927, changing from narrow gauge to standard.

4. The Great Northern remained at Bend until May 20, 1927 when they began extending southward, reaching Klamath Falls on May 11, 1928. Later, on August 23, 1930 they began to extend farther southward to join up with the Western Pacific at Bieber on September 10-12, 1931, thus paving the way into the San Francisco Bay region.

5. The Southern Pacific began its Modoc Northern extension from Klamath Falls on October 14, 1928 when the first contract was let and connected to the line extending from Alturas on the N.C.& O. at Hackamore on July 13, 1929.

In the meantime the O.C.& E. found itself in the middle of the struggle between two giants of railroading, the Southern Pacific and Great Northern. The latter wished to tap the Klamath Country on their way into the San Francisco Bay area, while the former tried to keep them out, not wanting to share the rich returns with others.

At one time the Great Northern sought entrance into the Klamath Country from Bend, via the Silver Lake and O.C.& E. lines known as the "D" route as compared to that which they eventually followed.

At another time, in 1925, Strahorn applied for the exclusive right to cross Sixth Street in Klamath Falls and when it became known that he was expecting money from the Southern Pacific to finance his further extensions, public confidence was shaken in him locally. "Many has espoused his cause in the hope that he would "break the monopoly" of that railroad company, and now he was apparently acting as its tool to keep out the Northern lines, which were beginning to evince an interest in Klamath County. Had "Uncle Bob" sold us out?" asked the History of Klamath County 1941.

At the same time the Southern Pacific was seeking approval of
its contract dated February 3, 1925 to acquire all stock of the
O.C. & E. from Strahorn. I.C.C. approval was granted in May, 1926
for the O.C. & E. to build its proposed extensions, and for the
Southern Pacific to acquire its stock, subject to certain condi-
tions, the most important being that it should allow the Great
Northern to buy one half interest in the O.C. & E. The Southern
Pacific acquired full control on July 22, 1927 and the Great
Northern acquired one half interest on March 23, 1928 or even an
earlier date. The purchase price of the O.C. & E. seems to have
been $830,000.

During this same period of time, other events were also trans-
piring. "On May 22, 1925 City Attorney Carnahan asked the Inter-
state Commerce Commission to help us (the city of Klamath Falls
and others) save our $300,000 investment; on September 1, 1926
Mayor Goddard requested a receiver for the Oregon, California &
Eastern; and in June, 1928 the Southern Pacific and Northern
Pacific, having become joint owners of said Oregon, California &
Eastern, paid the city $150,000 for the bonds."

Concerning these transactions, the Evening Herald of April 30,
1929 wrote: "Electorate go to poles to decide what should be done
with the city's $300,000 worth of O.C. & E. stock. If the vote is
yes, should they accept the $150,000 offer by the Southern
Pacific? Or, the $50,000 and the 7th street property offered by
the same firm? The City Council adopted ordinance for bids by
banks. Strictly a legal procedure." The $150,000 was eventually
accepted.

During the mid-1920's when the O.C. & E. was at its peak under
Strahorn it boasted following motive power and rolling stock: Two
2-6-0 Prairie type steam locomotives, built by Baldwin in 1888,
and bought used in 1920. Three, 2-8-0 Consolidation type steam
locomotives, built by Pittsburg in 1888, bought used in 1924, one
four wheeled caboose, bought used in 1925, four 80,000 pound cap-
acity log flats, wooden underframe, eight 60,000 pound capacity
log flats. These cars were all bought used in 1924-1925. Had one
passenger coach, built by Harlan & Hollingsworth in 1883. It was
48 feet long, wood body and underframe with four wheel trucks,
bought used in 1917. The O.C. & E. also had some outfit cars and a
1911 Pierce Arrow with a limousine body, bought in 1917, and a 1920 Ford, bought in 1926. The latter two were used as inspection cars for officials.

After remaining stationery at Sprague River for approximately four years, the I.C.C. ordered the O.C.& E. to resume extension of their line by June 17th, 1928. Purchase of rights of way began at once and by June 2nd, the first ground was broken for the extension to Bly. N.H. Bogue was the chief engineer and John Morgan the contractor. A line change was probably made at this time when the old line around by the river at Sprague River (2.215 miles) was relegated to a side track, a portion later being abandoned.

Then on May 18, 1928 a new contract was given Johnson Brothers for the final 19 miles of construction to Bly, with actual work starting immediately. Grading was completed to Bly by October 24th, while the rails were yet four miles away. At last, on Monday, November 24, 1928 the railroad was finished into Bly.

During the summer of 1928 the O.C.& E. railroad was reblasted, telephone lines and fences were built. During the following winter, 1928-29, new and heavier rails were laid, and construction of stock yards at Bly finished.

On April 13, 1929 the O.C.& E. established a six day per week service to and from Bly, and on the 15th, the first shipment of logs was made from that place. By June 21st, the O.C.& E. was rebuilding their bridges between Sprague River and Bly, and constructing a $2,500 depot at Bly, to be in charge of Charles Williams.

Several large logging railroads were constructed, leading into the timber along the O.C.& E. at various locations. As stated previously, Shaw-Bertram commenced a logging road from the south switch-back on Bly Mountain as early as 1924, which by 1926 extended some six miles westward. By 1929 this line was extended another seven miles to the Ya Whee Plateau. It climbed to the top of the plateau through the aid of a switch-back. Big Lakes also had trackage leading from this spur, which they built during 1926, with a new Shay locomotive for locomotion. Their line also extended to the west. Over this line by July 14, 1929 came 25-28 carloads of logs from Squaw Valley per day.
Pelican Bay Lumber Company started construction of a logging railroad south from Bly even before the O.C.& E. reached that place. It extended southward some 12 miles to their camp at Robinson Springs and much farther on its branch lines.

Ewauna Box Company had two railroads connecting with the O.C.& E. The first line extended over fifteen miles northwesterly from Sprague River, joining up with lines previously used to log into Chiloquin and the main Southern Pacific. A second line was built from Bly to Quartz Mountain in 1929. Eighteen miles were in operation in the fall of that year, and the grading was continuing past their camp. It was reported to be an exceptionally well built logging road.

Lorenz Lumber Company built a railroad about four or five miles long, construction on which was commenced around May or June of 1929. This line led from a point two miles east of the town of Sprague River on the O.C.& E. to and up the west watershed of Whiskey Creek. One of their camps was one half mile west of the present Sprague River-Highway 140 Junction and on the south side of the highway.

Weyerhaeuser built a line in 1940 from the O.C.& E. branching from the main line at a point now known as Sycan Siding, about three miles northeast of Beatty. At first it ended at Camp Six and later Camp Nine, some fifty miles to the northeast. Other branches extended to Camp Eleven and beyond. The Weyerhaeuser logging road is the only one that remains in use today, the others have all been abandoned and torn up.

It is claimed the O.C.& E. "has never made any money. In fact, it has lost over $3,000,000 since being acquired by the Southern Pacific and Great Northern. Its real value is as a "feeder" line, hauling mostly logs, although in the fall, potatoes, grain and livestock have been hauled in carload lots."

The operation of the O.C.& E. has for years been traded between the two parent companies, the Southern Pacific and Great Northern. Every five years the entire railroad transfers operators and equipment with the train and track crews remaining the same. Therefore, if past changes hold true, Southern Pacific took over in 1973 and is the present operator (in 1974).
Passenger train on the O.C.& E. This photo was taken at the Klamath Falls end of the line July 14, 1918. The "K.F.M. RY." painted on the tender stood for Klamath Falls Municipal Railway which was the early name of the road.

O.C.& E. Railroad engine No.1 at the terminal in Klamath Falls. Robert E. Strahorn, promoter, is the man in the straw hat and light "duster", third from left.

Photo courtesy Klamath County Museum.
In the early 1960's "two trains a day departed from Klamath Falls during the peak summer and fall season. One went to Sycan, which is the junction with the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company railroad. The other train departed later in the afternoon, and made the trip to Bly and returned to Sycan and picked up the logs which the first train cannot handle. Weyerhaeuser shipped approximately 90 cars of logs per day from its Camp 11 to Sycan, and was the largest single shipper on the O.C.& E. Train lengths were restricted because of the "Tails" on the switch-backs, which will hold only 50 cars and two diesel units. Heavy grades are also a determining factor for the length of these trains. The ruling grade from Sprague River over Bly Mountain is 2.9%.

As late as 1939 it was rumored that the tunnel through Bly Mountain would be excavated, eliminating the grade and switch-backs, but the advent of the second world war halted this operation before it had fairly begun.

Within the past year (1973), rumor further has it that Weyerhaeuser will take over ownership and operation of the entire O.C.& E. system from Southern Pacific and Great Northern. In furtherance of this plan they have rebuilt much of their Sycan Spur and have put into operation their new sawmill at Bly during late 1973."

According to an article in the Herald & News written by Carolyn S. Rarden, a member of the Klamath Scenic Railway Ass., the Right-of-Way Coalition, composed of landowners want the tracks removed and the land returned to them. The Rails to Trails group want the tracks removed and the railroad bed used as a trail for hikers and bikers. The Great Western Railroad Museum wishes to have the tracks preserved as does the Klamath Scenic Railway Ass. for use for excursion trips, demonstrations of operating logging machinery, and educational programs. Tourists would be offered a variety of scenery as the train travels through Olene and Dairy farm country and then into wooded areas of higher elevations. There many good ideas but what the outcome will be is yet to be seen.

Mae L. Smith