

Can You BEET This?

By Vic Neves

When asked, "What is the most significant aspect of California railroading?" What peaks your interest? I can't help but say the sugar beet campaign harvest throughout California. It is a 20th Century anachronism that goes beyond pictures and words. Seeing solid train sets of wood composite gondolas vibrating down the mainline sends shivers down my spine. In the thousand upon thousand photos and unknown expeditions with these venerable beet gons, there comes a time when even a wood car will fall apart. This was the case with the USGX cars. After the end of 1993, the 40 year old rule on old friction bearing trucks would take effect. After the last 1993 harvest, Imperial Holly Sugar Corporation would idle the remaining fleet of beet gons forever.

In the early 80's, the Southern Pacific decided to either retire the fleet or offer them to the shippers Speckles Sugar Co. and Union Sugar Co. It was decided to split the 1,000 between the two sugar companies. Spreckles was assigned the reporting marks ASRX and retained the original SP numbers while Union Sugar renumbered theirs in a three digit class. Soon after Spreckles Sugar Co. decided to abandon rail operations and scrapped their fleet of sugar beet racks. Union Sugar was bought by Holly Sugar Corporation by 1990. At this time it was doubtful if Holly would continue the tradition of hauling out sugar beets by rail to the processing facilities. Corporate leaders retained the use of rail and for the time the venerable "woodies" would carry on into the nineties. In 1991, Imperial Holly Sugar Corporation bought 60 rebuilt coal hoppers with extended sides for sugar beet service. They were painted white with the Holly emblem. It was thought this was the beginning of the end; by this time there were less than 300 "woodies" left in the fleet. Any kind of a major bad order repair would retire a car. Although the folks at Betteravia did an excellent job of maintaining the cars, they were showing their age. During many a trip to Betteravia to record the various campaigns, I became acquainted with various officials within the Holly Corporation. Donating beet gons for preservation was in their best interest. As the process began with phone inquiries, changes within the company began. Jan Pond's position as Director of Distribution and Traffic was being eliminated. Randy Bauer - Agriculture Manager was being transferred. After being forwarded to officials at Colorado Springs regarding a donation, I was again told to refer to the folks at Sugar Land, Texas. At about this time, the plant at Betteravia stopped receiving loads of sugar beets. Another era in sugar beet processing had ended. Contact was made with Bill Coker, Vice President - Transportation and Traffic. It was explained that the 40 year rule of interchange cars would take effect after the first of 1994.

A letter for request of a donation of three composite sugar beet gons was sent to Bill Coker. By the first week of December, an acceptance letter was received and returned by the museum. At this time, it was agreed by the Board to accept the donation. Bill Herndon, President of the California Northern Railroad agreed to move the cars from Hamilton City to the SP interchange at Davis. While the paper work was processed, the cars were stored at the end of the Hamilton City branch. The cars were released to our ownership on December 20, 1993 with their moving from Hamilton City to Maxwell via the Corning local. On December 21, 1993, they arrived at Woodland. An arrangement had to be confirmed with the SP as to which local would best suit the interchange with the UP at Haggin yard. On December 23, 1993, the California Northern interchanged the cars with the Dixon local and set them out at Haggin. On Christmas Eve

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Blue Flag #2

Freight Car Restoration Report

By John S. Walker

It has been a couple of months now, since we've reported on the progress of the Freight Car Restoration Department. But, that does not mean that we have not been working hard this winter. Due to the winter climate at the museum, the SN 1632 caboose project has been put on hold until spring. But, before we closed up shop for the year, we succeeded in rebuilding the cupola, repainted the exterior, reattached the ladders, reinstalled the windows and had a new roof put on by a local roofing contractor in Portola.

The new roof is a rubber based material that has a water proof membrane. The roof is easily repairable and should last for 20 years. There was some discussion about putting on a new canvas type roof similar to the original roof covering. I rejected this idea because we currently have little or no knowledge about stretching and sealing canvas and we would have to spend a great deal more preparation time and probably have to hire an outside contractor from another railroad museum to supervise the work. With eighty other freight and passenger cars to attend to, we simply can't afford to spend that much time and effort on one car. And, due to the climatic conditions at Portola-the roof probably would have to be repaired again in a few years anyway. A nice thing about the new roof is that it passes for a canvas tarpaper type roof anyway (if I hadn't told you-would you have noticed?).

The SN 1632 project has taken a lot longer than we originally hoped. The primary reason for this, is that we simply did not know how much water damage had to be repaired. This car was built in the late 1930's, and most of the construction seems pretty strange by today's standards. Repairing the car-and trying to keep it historically accurate-was no simple task. On one occasion, Clyde and I had to apply 1930's technology (i.e. a manually powered, air cooled wood planing tool) to get the right fit of an end sill against the side of the cupola.

Apparently, our SN 1632 was involved in a wreck at some time in it's career. The result being that whoever repaired the car, did not do as good a job as the guys who built it in the first place (Maybe this was due to the damage involved). Surprisingly, the centerline of the roof on the long end of the caboose is off by 1 to 2 inches where it joins the cupola!

By the time you read this, we should be installing the new roof walk, repainting the interior and finishing the exterior lettering. We still need volunteers for the interior restoration.

When completed, we would like to install full size figures and period accessories to show how the car looked in regular service. I think this would be a great interpretive learning display for our visitors and can still be used in train service on special occasions. We're still looking for photos of WP/SN/TS cabooses for display inside WP 614 when that car is finished. Please send them to the museum in care of the Car Dept.

Meanwhile, Clyde Lippincott has been busy refurbishing the interior of the volunteer shower-lounge car. A new shower, kitchen area, changing room and dining area have been constructed. I'm sure that this work will be greatly appreciated by our volunteers. This project should also be completed this spring. Again, volunteers are needed for painting and other tasks.

The WP 614 caboose project got off to a slow start (a severe case of wood caboose restoration fatigue on my part) but has been progressing over the winter when weather conditions permitted. Many hours have been spent preparing the interior for repainting, repairing dry rot problems and pre-

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Circle the Wagons

Less than 30 days remain before our giant Tenth Anniversary event. There are still a lot of details to be completed, but we are working diligently trying to remember everything. At this time we have two units coming from California State Railroad museum, F7A WP 913 and E8A SP 6051; a privately owned E3A will probably be coming from Wisconsin, and Nevada State Railroad Museum is sending their 4-4-0 steamer. We may have one or two other units, one or two dome coaches and other equipment.

The pageant is coming along with Jim Beckwourth and Arthur Keddle being represented. There will be cowboys, Indians, a hobo, one or more horse drawn wagons and others. This event will be held at 1:00 PM on Saturday and Sunday, July 2 and 3, 1994. We are still a little short on food service people, but this should be worked out OK. We will need help with parking, crowd control, food service, clean up, etc. Our sleeping space in the museum equipment (caboose, Pullmans etc.) may be tight, so if you have a camper vehicle, space in our balloon parking area will be available. All volunteer worker vehicles will be parked in this area at least for Saturday and Sunday. Please, if possible, let us know if you are coming up to help, so we can assign jobs.

Feather River Special Trains

As previously reported, the Westwood turn July 9, 1994 is sold out. However all other runs: July 1 Fremont to Portola, July 2-3 Portola to Keddle and Reno Jct., July 4, Portola to Fremont, Fremont to Oroville July 8, and Oroville to Fremont July 10, all have seats available. Probably not dome seats, but coach seats are available. We are also selling short segments such as Fremont to Sacramento or Oroville to Portola. Check with us or Pacific Limited in SLC for more information.

Conclusion of Can You BEET This

By Vic Neves

the UP picked the three beet gons and brought them into South Sacramento yard where they sat until December 27, 1993. Because of a lack of paperwork, the UP returned the cars back to Haggin thinking they were destined for the SP. WRONG! After a few phone calls to Omaha, the cars again returned to South Sacramento yard on the 28th where they sat for at least 4 days. They were later picked up and arrived at Portola on January 4, 1994.

These beet cars that the museum received represent three variations of composite wood gons. The extensions were added in the sixties to increase capacity. USGX 60 is the former SP 358262 built 5/48 and has the inside plank/outside frame extension. USGX 149 is ex SP 358646 built 10/49 with the outside plank/inside frame extension. USGX 322 was the ex SP 359246 built 11/49 and has the plywood extension, the last style modification done to these cars. Other variations include different locations of the hand brake and different styles of end sills. The composite sugar beet gondolas that survived countless decades of reliable service were an anachronism in today's railroading. Their dedicated service will be missed but not forgotten. Three will be remembered at our museum and it's a sure bet that one of the trains at this year's Railfan Photographer's Day will be a sugar beet train.

Conclusion of Car Restoration Report

By John S. Walker

paring the exterior for a new Silver & Orange paint scheme.

The construction of WP 614 poses some interesting questions. We have found four different shades of green on the interior of the caboose (Was the WP a little short of paint on the day they built this car?). There are lots of 1/2 inch holes drilled into the side of the car and filled with wood plugs. These holes do not serve any apparent function! You may also note that there is no "plug" where the old boxcar door use to be on these cars (They were rebuilt from boxcars). In fact, the new exterior of the caboose is composed of single boards that stretch the entire length of the car! In addition, the interior of WP 614 reveals an imprint of what appears to have been a WP metal herald! At this point, I can only conclude that when these cabooses were constructed, the old boxcars were stripped down to the metal frame and rebuilt using some pieces of wood from the original car(s)! Do any of our members have information about how these cars were built?

The WP 614 should be painted inside and out and moved to the museum for mounting on trucks, installation of brakes and (Quick-somebody hold me back!) another new roof (after the roundup) by the time you read this in the newsletter. Hopefully we will have a silver & orange caboose to match the 2001 and 805 by Railfan's Day in September!

New in the Gift Shop

The long awaited Diesel Builders, Volume Three "Beautiful Baldwins," by John Kirkland, will soon be available through our Gift Shop. The book contains 359 rare black and white and 20 color photographs previously unpublished. 296 pages - \$59.95 Shipped postpaid (Calif. res. add \$4.35 tax).

We have on hand 5 each Overland brass WP F7A and F7B models in HO scale. This is a special purchase which we can sell for \$225 each. Shipped post paid (Calif. res. add \$16.30 tax).

Once again name badges are available. The badges are green metal with gold letters. Your name and Feather River Rail Society are on front with a pin type back. Send \$3.00 to Jack Hathaway, 1190 Williams Ave, Reno, NV 89503. Pick up at the museum or include \$1 extra for mail orders.

Winning ticket drawn on April 24, 1994

By Chris Skow

We are pleased to announce that Feather River Rail Society member Jim Atkins of Sacramento won the 6th Annual Fund Raising drive sponsored by Trains Unlimited, Tours and the Feather River Rail Society.

Jim has won a free trip on the Rocky Mountaineer Ralltours "Rocky Mountaineer" passenger train which operates between Vancouver, British Columbia and Jasper National Park and Banff in the Canadian Rockies. His tour package includes lodging, food and even roundtrip air from California on Canadian Airlines.

Jim is a signal maintainer for the Union Pacific and takes care of the Feather River Canyon up to Portola. Jim has been a Society member for many years and we congratulate him as our 6th winner in this worthy cause.

The Feather River Rail Society was able to raise close to \$2700 on our 6th Annual Fund Raising Drive for the Portola Railroad Museum. Within the next few months, Trains Unlimited, Tours and the Feather River Rail Society will announce the 7th Annual Fund Raising Drive and drawing. We thank everyone that supported this project by buying tickets.