Sahalie Historical Note #12: The Railroads

Since the land that the Turn Verein purchased in 1931 to build a ski lodge at Snoqualmie Pass was owned by a railroad, and later "ski trains" helped to popularize skiing at the Pass, including by early members of Commonwealth/Sahalie Ski Club, I thought I'd offer some historical context. John Lundin and I were initially stumped as to why the land at Commonwealth Creek was owned by Northern Pacific Railroad and not by Milwaukee Road, since NP's tracks didn't come over Snoqualmie Pass and Milwaukee's did. Some digging around in the fascinating, rough-and-tumble early history of the railroads in the West sheds light on the situation.

One of the early Milwaukee Road passenger trains going over Snoqualmie Pass, c. 1910. Photo from the Arthur P. Carkeek family, as printed in John and Chery Kinnick, 2007, *Images of America: Snoqualmie Pass* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing), p. 16.

At the mid 1800s, the country was made up of two settlements: the large block of Eastern states between the Atlantic Ocean and the Missouri River, and California, separated by nearly two thousand miles of wide open, thinly-populated territory. Most goods and people traveled by ship all the way around Cape Horn. President Lincoln, even while the Civil War was underway, initiated the major railway expansions that served to connect East and West and

that accelerated the great settlement of the West. (Historians say that it was a strategic move "for the preservation of the Union."[1])

The Union Pacific RR

The first transcontinental line was the **Union Pacific Railroad**, a rail line that connected St. Louis, Missouri, and Omaha, Nebraska, with San Francisco straight across the middle of the American territories.   The Act launching this effort, including substantial grants of federal lands to the railroad company in exchange for getting the line built, was signed by Lincoln in 1862. You've all seen the famous photo of the golden spike being driven to complete the line at Promontory Summit in Utah in 1869, a mere seven years later. East and West were finally connected with a fast and efficient transportation mode: a new age dawned in the West.

Eventually Union Pacific bought up other smaller branch lines to work its way up the West Coast to Seattle. It built a major passenger station in Seattle together with the Milwaukee Road: Union Station opened in 1911 and functioned as a passenger station until 1971. Union Pacific remains the largest railway network in the U.S. today, although it doesn't have a major presence in the Northwest compared to other parts of its current domain.

In 1936, W. Averell Harriman, then head of Union Pacific Railroad, developed the Sun Valley ski resort near Ketchum, Idaho, in order to promote more passenger usage of UP trains throughout the West. Sun Valley is recognized as the first destination ski resort in the U.S. – it is still far from any major urban centers, but in the mid 1930s it was way out in the middle of nowhere. The world's first chair lift was installed there at its opening in '36. For decades afterward, Sun Valley served as a primary destination resort for skiers from the Northwest, including many from Sahalie, who would travel by train to and from. Don Fraser, an early ski instructor for Commonwealth/Sahalie and a two-time Silver Skis winner, settled in Sun Valley with his Olympic medal-winning wife, Gretchen Fraser (originally from Tacoma). Biff Turner reports that his dad's initials are still carved into one of the tables in the Ram's bar at Sun Valley Inn.
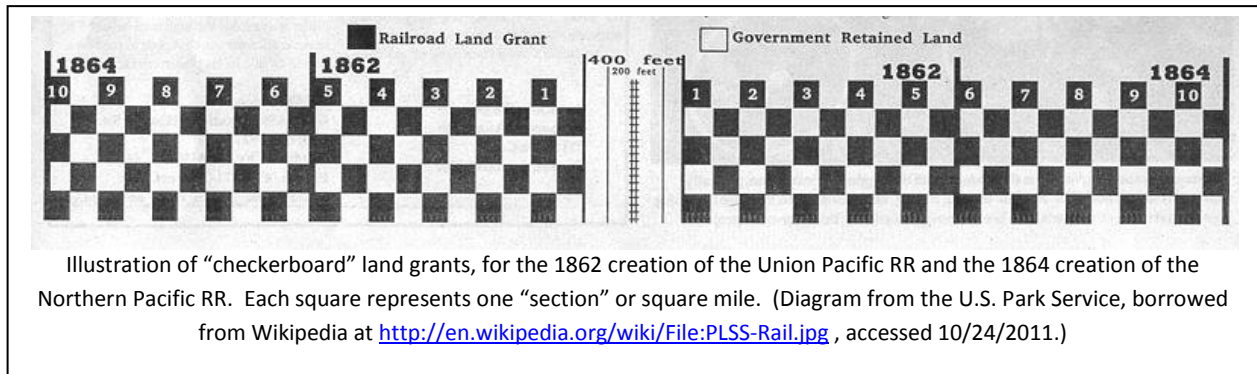
The Northern Pacific RR

Congress and President Lincoln also launched a northern transcontinental line to connect the Great Lakes with Puget Sound. Lincoln signed this Act in 1864 creating the **Northern Pacific**

Railroad with what turned out to be the largest land grant ("public give-away," in some people's vernacular) in U.S. history.[2]

These land grants were issued in order to give the railroad the right-of-way for the tracks, but in addition the railroad was given every other square mile of land adjacent to the tracks in a swath 40 miles wide in the states and 80 miles wide in the territories, plus "in lieu" lands even beyond this swath to compensate for inholdings or mining claims. This created the infamous "checkerboard" pattern of land ownership in many parts of the West, with the railroads owning every other square mile (an official "section" in the township-and-range mapping used by the U.S., known as the Public Land Survey System). Of course the

Illustration of "checkerboard" land grants, for the 1862 creation of the Union Pacific RR and the 1864 creation of the Northern Pacific RR. Each square represents one "section" or square mile. (Diagram from the U.S. Park Service, borrowed from Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PLSS-Rail.jpg , accessed 10/24/2011.)

native Indians who were there first didn't have any say in this matter, and suddenly new "owners" took over the land right out from under them. The idea behind this massive give-away was both to encourage the railroads to invest in creating the transcontinental infrastructure, and also to anticipate increased value that would come from proximity to the rail lines which would translate to the remaining federal lands of the checkerboard, which in turn could benefit homesteaders and others.

Remnants of the checker-board ownership remain today, with the timber and now real-estate descendent of Northern Pacific, Plum Creek[3], managing land across the Cascades and still clear-cutting straight-edged blocks of land visible from I-90 and especially notable when seen from the air.

Northern Pacific Railroad first connected to Puget Sound via the Columbia River and Portland, then up through Chehalis to Tacoma and Seattle. Due to many financial meltdowns and shenanigans, this line authorized in 1864 didn't reach its intended destination until 1883, and

even then not by an ideal route. In 1888 NP completed a tunnel across the Cascades under Stampede Pass, just ten miles as the crow flies south of Snoqualmie Pass, connecting Seattle to Chicago in a straighter, shorter approach. (The head engineer, Virgil Bogue, selected the route in 1883. Brian: any relation?) On the west side of the tunnel the NP rail line ran down the Green River valley to Auburn, then split to Tacoma to the west and Seattle to the north. Northern Pacific built a major passenger station in Seattle in combination with the Great Northern Railroad: known as King Street Station, it opened in 1908 and remains as the only passenger rail station in use in Seattle today (newly renovated).

Union Station (used by Union Pacific and Milwaukee RRs) and King Street Station (used by Northern Pacific and Great Northern RRs) in Seattle. Postcard c. 1920s, origin unknown.

The NP company settlement at the eastern end of the Stampede Tunnel was called Martin. In 1928, the Mountaineers built a ski hut there, called Meany Lodge, which was primarily accessed for many decades via the NP train. Members of Commonwealth/Sahalie Ski Club were known to catch the train to Martin, as noted in a couple newspaper articles in 1934.[4][5] Washington Alpine Club also used some side-lined railcars at Martin as a base around that time. In response to competition from Milwaukee Road (see below), Northern Pacific launched a small ski area at Martin in 1938 called the Martin Ski Bowl. After World War II, it was sold to the University of Washington's student association and was known as "the Husky Chalet," but operations there ended in the mid 1950s. Today, the Mountaineers' Meany Lodge is the only remnant of the Martin days – it is one of the longest continually-operating ski lodges in the country. The NP tracks, now operated by BNSF, are still used extensively for freight to and from the busy ports of Seattle and Tacoma; there is talk about enlarging the Stampede Tunnel to accommodate double-stacked intermodal shipping containers.

The federal government's land grant gave the Northern Pacific Railroad ownership of 47 million (!) acres of land across the West (2 percent of the entire 48-state land area), including across the Cascades north almost to Stevens Pass and south pretty much to the Columbia River because of the company's multiple lines. This explains why it was Northern Pacific Railroad Company which owned the square mile of land from the summit of Snoqualmie Pass north into

what is now the Alpental valley, and which sold two sixteenths of this block (two 40-acre squares which were quarters of a quarter section) to the Seattle Turn Verein /Gymnastics Society in 1932.

Spectators to the Cle Elum Ski Club's early ski jumping tournaments, beginning in 1924, were able to catch the regular Northern Pacific train from Seattle, in the days before the Snoqualmie Pass road was kept open in the winters. In 1931, NP offered a "special" train to Cle Elum just for tournament spectators (see ad).[6] This special train ran for three years on the day of the event, until the last Cle Elum tournament on February 19, 1933.

The Great Northern RR

Returning back to the early days of the transcontinental railroads, two other major rail lines came into the Northwest. Tycoon James J. Hill arranged elaborate financing for the **Great Northern Railroad**, which built its line closest to the Canadian border

Seattle Daily Times, 2/9/1931, p. 11.

from Chicago/St. Paul to Puget Sound, crossing the Cascades at Stevens Pass and choosing an initial terminus at Everett. It was completed in 1893. It was the only major transcontinental company to not rely on federal land grants. The Great Northern first used eight switch-backs to get over Stevens Pass, then bore the two-mile Cascade Tunnel under Stevens Pass in 1900 with a western terminus in a small settlement called Wellington. In 1910 the worst avalanche disaster in U.S. history killed 96 people at Wellington, prompting Great Northern to build a longer tunnel to protect the line from winter snows; the almost 8-mile

long "new" Cascade Tunnel finally opened in 1929 and is still in use today. Great Northern teamed up with Northern Pacific to build the King Street Station in Seattle in 1908, and the two major railroads merged, with others, in 1970 to form Burlington Northern, now further merged into BNSF.

On February 23, 1930, Great Northern offered the first "special" or "snow" train in the area, to take spectators to the Leavenworth ski jumping championships.[7] These special spectator trains ran every year up to the war; resumed in 1955,[8] special trains ran every year thereafter until 1971, when the newly merged Burlington Northern RR offered what appears to be the last special ski train, to Leavenworth's 39th annual ski jumping tournament.[9]

The
BIG Event of the Year!
Official Pacific Northwest
SKI JUMPING
CHAMPIONSHIPS
LEAVENWORTH
Sun., Feb. 4
Get your tickets now for
Great Northern
SPECIAL TRAINS
Only $2.50 Round Trip
Leave SEATTLE 7:30 a.m.
Ar. LE'VENW'RTH 12:15 p.m.
RETURNING
Lv. LEAVENWORTH 5:00 p.m.
Arrive SEATTLE 9:40 p.m.
Diner to serve meals
Trains leave from
KING STREET STATION
Get tickets at
CITY TICKET OFFICE
4th & Union—SE. 0400
or at Station—SE. 1900

Seattle Daily Times, January 31, 1940, p. 20.

Great Northern Cancels Snow and Ski Trains

Great Northern Railway regrets to announce cancellation of two special trains this weekend.

Some of the most severe weather in Northwest history has resulted in critical shortages of equipment and train crews. As a result GN is forced to cancel a Northwest rail excursions snow train from Seattle to Cashmere on Saturday morning, February 1. Also cancelled is a special train to the National Ski Jumping Championships at Leavenworth on Sunday, February 2.

Great Northern shares the disappointment of the two host communities and of the ski and snow enthusiasts who planned to ride these special trains.

GREAT NORTHERN

Seattle Daily Times, January 30, 1969

The Milwaukee Road

The last of the major transcontinental railroads in the Northwest was the **Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad**, known throughout its history as the "**Milwaukee Road**." Its expansion west to connect to Puget Sound was initiated in 1906 and completed in just three years, in 1909. It paralleled the Northern Pacific line for much of its distance, and chose Snoqualmie Pass to go over the Cascades. At first the line was constructed directly over the summit of the Pass, with a stop at the summit known as Laconia.

There was passenger service over the top of the Pass as early as June 10, 1909.[10] The first freight train to run over the Pass all the way from Chicago to Seattle was on June 25, 1909.[11] From Union Station in Seattle, trains ran south up the Duwamish valley to Tukwila, then turned east across the Black River area of Renton and along the Cedar River through Maple Valley; at Landsburg the line crossed the low point between watersheds to the edge of the Snoqualmie River valley at Rattlesnake Lake, then ran east up the South Fork Snoqualmie to the Pass.

Snow and rockslide issues caused Milwaukee Road to bore a 2.3-mile tunnel under the Pass, which opened in 1915.[12] Its western portal had a small company settlement known as Rockdale. The Mountaineers built their first lodge uphill from Rockdale in 1914[13] and accessed it primarily via the train until the lodge burned in 1944.

When the Milwaukee Road line was completed, it was the shortest of the three competitors; Chicago-to-Seattle distances were: via Milwaukee Road 2,177 miles; via Great Northern 2,245 miles; via Northern Pacific 2,320 miles. Even these relatively minor differences in distance translated into time and cost savings for the Milwaukee Road.
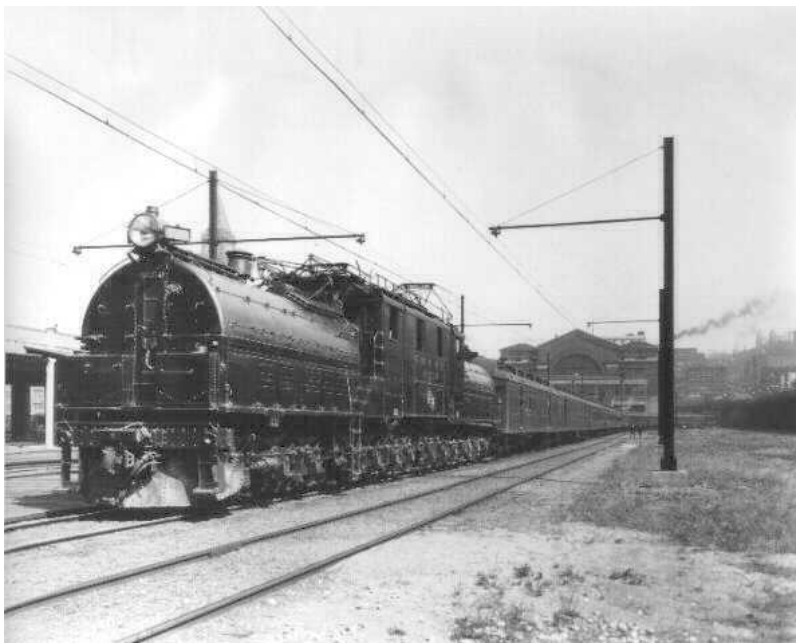
A Milwaukee Road passenger train pulled by an electric "bi-polar" engine, leaving Union Station in Seattle c. 1925. (Photo by Asahel Curtis, entitled, "Milwaukee Road Electrification: Gearless passenger locomotive with train, Seattle passenger station," borrowed from "Dave's Electric Railroads" website, http://www.davesrailpix.com/cmstp/htm/milw008a.htm , accessed 10/21/11.)

Horace C. Henry of Seattle won the $20 Milliion contract to build the Milwaukee Road segment over Snoqualmie Pass. He went on to donate his extensive art collection to U.W. and founded the Henry Art Gallery there to house it.[14]

The eastern portal of Milwaukee Road's Snoqualmie Tunnel was at Hyak. It immediately offered easy access to the Pass, and began to be used by the growing cadre of skiers who ventured to the Pass, especially in these early days in the 1920s before the auto road was well maintained or kept open through the winter. Hyak served as a major jumping-off point for skiers for decades.

On March 1, 1931, Milwaukee Road offered its first "special" ski train to Snoqualmie Pass for a major ski jumping tournament at Seattle Ski Club's "big hill."[15] "Stages" (buses, I assume) shuttled spectators from Hyak to the pass summit, where they then had a mile walk up hill through thick forest to the Beaver Lake site.

In 1937 the Milwaukee Road decided to open a ski area at Hyak. It was first called the Snoqualmie Ski Bowl, and opened officially on January 8, 1938 to much fanfare.[16] (After WWII, the name changed to Milwaukee Ski Bowl to differentiate it from the new Snoqualmie Summit ski area.) The ski trains offered by Milwaukee Road from Union Station on weekends were an immediate success in that winter of 1938 – the railroad had to continuously increase service to accommodate the huge demand. A Friday night train was added in the second week of operations, since the railroad offered some lights at the Ski Bowl; this was touted as the first night ski train in America (see ad at end of this article). The *Seattle Daily Times* offered an eight-page section completely devoted to the Ski Bowl at its launch.[17]

JOIN IN THE
OFFICIAL OPENING

SNOQUALMIE
SKI BOWL

SATURDAY and SUNDAY
JANUARY 8th and 9th

Leaving 7:15 A. M. and 9:30 A. M.

Photos by Robert C. Schumann
Upper—Ken Syverson in action.
Right—Lodge at Snoqualmie Ski Bowl.

Visit this new
Winter Playground

An ideal playground in the heart of
the Cascades specially developed by
The Milwaukee Road . . . plenty of
exciting runs and a roomy, com-
fortable ski lodge.

Milwaukee Road Special Ski Trains
to Snoqualmie Bowl include warm,
comfortable coaches, a specially
equipped baggage car for storing
your skis, and a recreation car for
dancing.

EXPERT INSTRUCTION BY KEN SYVERSON
at moderate cost.

Leave Seattle after breakfast . . . return in time for late dinner.
You'll enjoy a carefree, exciting day in perfect surroundings . . .
your choice of numerous courses, ranging in length from 1,200 to
1,600 feet. Power Ski Lift at reasonable rates. Special arrange-
ments for parties. Write or call for additional information.

$1.70   Round Trip

from Seattle to
SNOQUALMIE SKI BOWL
On Special Ski Trains
Every Saturday and Sunday at 7:15 A. M. and 9:30 A. M.

Seattle Office:
White Bldg., Fourth Ave.
and Union St.
Phone ELliott 6800

Union Station, Fourth Ave.
and Jackson St.
R. E. Carson, Gen. Agent

CHICAGO
MILWAUKEE
ST. PAUL
AND PACIFIC

The MILWAUKEE ROAD

Seattle Daily Times, January 5, 1938, p. 23.
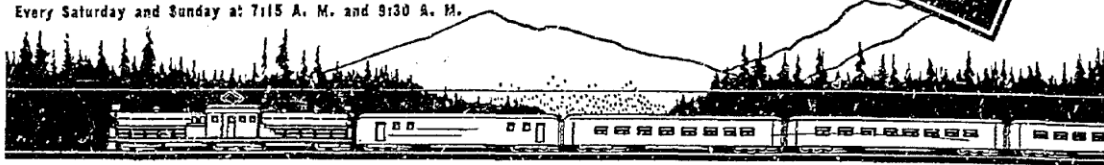
TRAINS BRING THE SKIERS TO SNOW LAND
A Milwaukee ski train—one operating in the first regularly scheduled ski train service in America—arrives at the ski bowl to be greeted by skiers who had come on an earlier train.

Seattle Daily Times, January 23, 1938, p. 57

Legions of skiers came to use the Milwaukee Road trains as their primary access to skiing at the Pass. Legions were trained by Ken Syverson at the Snoqualmie Ski Bowl. High school ski clubs were formed, and special trains were set up to carry students to the Pass to learn to ski, to race, and to dance on the trip back to Seattle. Olav Ulland and other Norwegian immigrants from Seattle Ski Club (including Steve Boyle's grandfather, Cornelius "Charles" Hageman) helped to build the largest ski jump in North America at the Ski Bowl, which hosted the

Seattle Daily Times, November 12, 1941, p. 24.

Seattle Daily Times, March 9, 1949, p. 18.

U.S. Olympic jumping trials in 1947 and the U.S. championships in 1948.

After its lodge burned at the beginning of the 1949/'50 winter season, the Milwaukee Railroad decided to get out of the ski area business. Its last passenger train passed through the Snoqualmie Tunnel in 1961, and it filed for bankruptcy in 1977. The last freight train used the Snoqualmie Pass line in 1980. Subsequently, the Milwaukee Road right-of-way, including the Snoqualmie Tunnel, was acquired by the State of Washington for a trail, and is now open to foot traffic, bicycles and horses as the "John Wayne Pioneer Trail," part of Iron Horse State Park.

■ Dave Galvin

Last updated 10-26-2011

Photo by Asahel Curtis, c. 1925, entitled, "Milwaukee Road Electrification: Passenger Train showing trolley construction, Cascade Mountains, Coastal Division," borrowed from "Dave's Electric Railroads" website, http://www.davesrailpix.com/cmstp/milw.htm , accessed 10/21/2011.
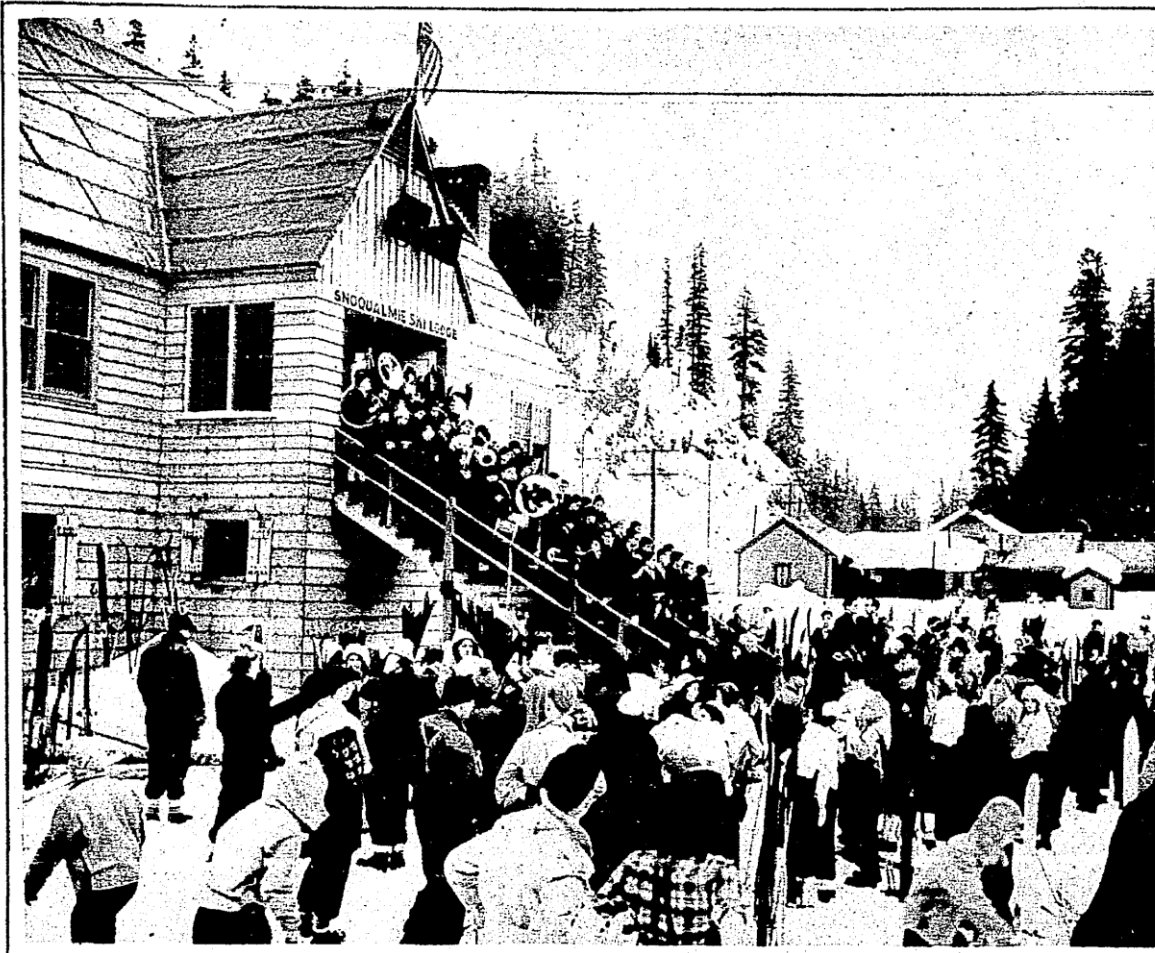
A NEW NORTHWEST WINTER PLAYGROUND IS DEDICATED TO SPORT

The crowd gathers in front of the new Snoqualmie Ski Lodge for the exercises formally dedicating Snoqualmie Ski Bowl near Hyak Station at the east entrance to the Milwaukee Railroad's Cascade tunnel. On the steps, the Franklin High School Band, that furnished music.

Seattle Daily Times, January 23, 1938, p. 57.

SKI TRAIN

literally • and figuratively •
we don't want you to miss it

Best's doesn't want you to miss the fun of the train itself . . . that comfortable modern magic which whisks you from green grass to the white glissades of the Ski Bowl just like that. And to be sure you don't "miss the train" about your clothes, Best's skiers made a special trip to the Bowl. That's how we're sure you should have simple, workmanlike parkas and trousers . . . but colorful peasant sweaters and accessories for lunch at the lodge; professional shoes for skiing . . . but ski-train slippers for dancing on the way home; natural wool sox and mitts that snow won't stick to . . . and all the other things that are really right.

Best's Apparel

WESTLAKE, FIFTH AND PINE

Ski instructor pants...14.95
Melton ski pants..... 5.95
Gabardine pants and
 knickers ....9.95 to 12.95
Hooded Parkas 7.95 to 12.95
Arlberg ski shoes.....15.00
White canvas gaiters... 2.50
Natural wool sox......1.50
Natural wool mitts.....1.50
Tyrolean belts..........1.95
Resthaus jackets.3.50 and up
Ski-train slippers...... 2.00

Seattle Daily Times, January 5, 1938, p. 25.

Seattle Daily Times, January 5, 1938, p. 20

ALL ABOARD FOR LEAVENWORTH MEET!
* * *   * * *   * * *   * * *   * * *   * * *
SKI TRAIN RESERVATIONS AVAILABLE
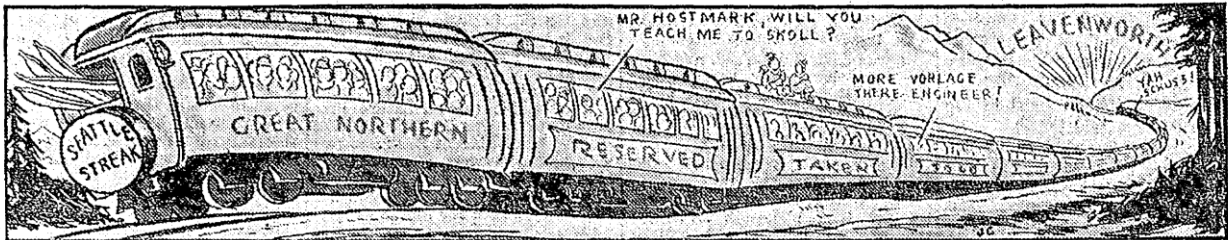
All aboard Seattle's special ski train for Leavenworth!

It leaves Sunday morning, February 7, from King Street Station; it will be packed to the whistle cord with folk eager to see the Pacific Coast's No. 1 ski-jumping attraction of 1937; and you may make your reservations now.

Seattle business houses, eager to assist a sport which has caught them by the heels and set them whirling, are taking reservations for the train . . . a bit of cooperation that will help ski train fans, Leavenworth, and the Great Northern Railroad, alike.

The reservation method of getting aboard the train, which last year numbered fourteen cars, and this year may total twenty, makes getting a seat a certainty.

It assures a definite starting time—both for the train and the tournament.

It gives the railroad company a definite working idea on how many people are going, and how many coaches to provide.

The round trip rate from Seattle to Leavenworth and return is $2.50. Tickets to the tournament cost 75 cents. Busses will meet the train on the Leavenworth siding, and take Seattle visitors directly to the ski jump. There is no climb. Just a walk through the gate, and right to the huge jumping hill itself.

There are two special trains booked for the Northwest championships. One will go from Everett, an hour before the 7:30 a. m. train from Seattle. It will leave an hour before the Seattle train does, from Leavenworth. The Seattle train will head home from Leavenworth at 6:30 p. m., arriving here at 11 p. m., Sunday night.

Seattle Daily Times, January 26, 1937, p. 14.

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[1] "Union Pacific Railroad," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Pacific_Railroad , accessed 10/21/11.

[2] Derrick Jensen, George Draffan and John Osborn, 1995, *Railroads and Clearcuts: Legacy of Congress's 1864 Northern Pacific Railroad Land Grant* (Sandpoint, ID: Keokee Co. Publishing).

[3] Plum Creek Timber Company is "the largest and most geographically diverse private landowner in the nation," according to its current website. It is a direct descendent of Northern Pacific Railroad Company, via Burlington Northern (created in 1970 with the merger of NP, Great Northern and other lines) and then the spin-off of its timber lands into a separate company known first as Burlington Resources.

[4] "Skiing Goes On; Paradise Folk to Hold Slalom," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 15, 1934, p. 16.

[5] "Cross-Country Skiing on Schedule; Paradise Offers Enlarged Program," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 17, 1934, p. 7.

[6] "Cle Elum Schedules Skiing Meet; Slide Reported Fast," *Seattle Sunday Times*, February 1, 1931, p. 20.

[7] "Great Tourney Is Planned for Coming Season:…Leavenworth Is Planning Sports Meet," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 11, 1930, p. 22.

[8] "Ski Roundup: Top Jumpers in Leavenworth Meet," *Seattle Sunday Times*, January 30, 1955, p. 25.

[9] "Leavenworth Ski Jump Set February 7," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 17, 1971, p. 22.

[10] "C., M. & P.S. Makes Change in Schedule," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 10, 1909, p. 15.

[11] "Coming of C., M. & P.S. Ry. Significant Event," *Seattle Daily Times*, July 11, 1909, p. 35.

[12] "New Tunnel Will Be Opened in One Week," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 17, 1915, p. 15.

[13] "Mountaineers to Dedicate Lodge: Special Train Will Carry 250 Members to Open New Building at Rockdale, Near Snoqualmie Pass," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 21, 1914, p. 8.

[14] "Horace C. Henry," Wikipedia, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Chapin_Henry, accessed 10-24-2011. Henry fought at Gettysburg before moving west to build railroads. His house on Capital Hill in Seattle was built in 1901 with a 5-car garage! His contract to construct the western-most section of the Milwaukee Road between 1906 and 1909 was for $20 Million, a lot of money in those days.

[15] "Seventy Expert Skiers To Vie In Snoqualmie Meet: Leading Stick Stars of West To Be Present," *Seattle Sunday Times*, February 22, 1931, p. 16.

[16] "Skiing Throng Tries Out New Snoqualmie Bowl Today: Special Trains Loaded for Trip to Snow Resort," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 8, 1938, p. 9.

[17] "Ski Train Section," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 5, 1938, pp. 20-27.