



Short Circuit Bulletin



Issued December 1965 by the

TEXAS DIVISION

ELECTRIC RAILROADERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

206 MILAM BUILDING

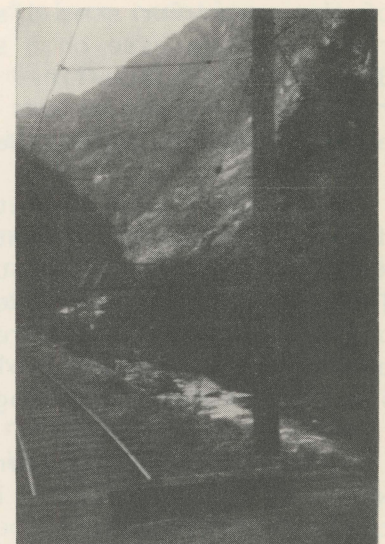
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78205



3. The train crosses Skagit River to find a better foothold.



1. The author, ready for duty in daily summer service on Branford Electric Railway.



2. Skagit Gorge, from perch on flatcar pushed by electric locomotive.

BEST TROLLEY RIDE BY A DAMSITE

By E. J. Quinby (Former Interurban Motorman)

Yes Sir! \$75,000,000 went into building the fantastic Skagit Project, and James Delmage Ross accomplished the task without costing the taxpayers one penny. The spectacular Interurban-style electric railway that he constructed to haul in materials to build and maintain three giant hydro-electric plants was part of the deal. The railway attracted me to the scene and I applied for passes from the City of Seattle to ride the line and visit the city property. My wife and I set out aboard the Sternwheel Steamer SKAGIT BELLE, for Rockport on the Skagit River. When the Dispatcher of this single-track electric line

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4. After leaving Rockport broader reaches of river narrow into Skagit Gorge.

Originally issued by the Texas Division of ERA, this feature with photos added is here presented.

The author is well known as Founder and Honorary President of both ERA & BERA, -an ardent Trolley and Steamboat Fan.



5. Engineer's view of Skagit Gorge from cab of electric locomotive.

A 75 MILLION DOLLAR TROLLEY RIDE

learned of my desire to ride on the front of the steeple-cab electric locomotive to take pictures, he said, "We'll do better than that for you -- we'll couple a flat car on ahead of the engine and you can sit on a wooden crate out there." That suited me fine. I felt like Daniel Webster on the first trip over the Erie Railroad. However, friend wife elected to share the comfort of electric heat in the locomotive cab with the Engineer. When he saw me with my coat collar turned up and my hat jammed down over my ears in the attempt to ward off the bitter chill of the wind that swept down between the snow-covered cliffs of the Skagit Gorge, he turned to Margaret and asked, "What's the matter with that guy out there -- is he a little crazy?"

"Of course he's crazy," she replied. "I've known that for years." Nevertheless I stuck it out, and got some wonderful color slides en route. The line clung to a narrow shelf that had been chiseled out of the stark vertical walls of rock along the left side of the gorge for some distance, then when an impasse was reached, it leaped over the narrow, deep crevasse on a steel truss bridge to gain a better foothold on the opposite side. Beneath us the ice-lined stream whipped itself into white froth as it dashed over jagged rocks. Our train orders gave us clearance from Rockport to the model 'company town' established at New Halem, Headquarters of the project.

Margaret soon regretted her choice of the locomotive cab, for in addition to the other dead-head passengers that included wives and children of employees, and a few sacks of U.S. Mail, there was a cargo of provisions in there and one of these items was a live young pig. This creature not only kept up an incessant squealing, but he contrived to make the atmosphere very fragrant on repeated occasions. Accordingly, several windows were slid open, admitting the same icy blasts that made my fingers numb and slowed up the shutter mechanism of my camera. The Engineer lit a rancid pipe.

Rounding a sharp curve about the face of the rocky cliff, we came upon a Flagman, who waved us down. "Rock slide ahead," he warned us. "You people will have to walk over to the work train waiting beyond." This sounded easier than it turned out to be. Dismounting via the front of the flat, we started to scramble up and over the wild assortment of jagged, broken rocks that blocked the train's path. Getting Margaret over this rugged terrain was almost as difficult as getting the squirming, kicking pig across, both of whom voiced their fright and objections. The mail, some movie films and the groceries also had to be portaged over this obstruction. The men helped the women and children, whom they linked together like Alpine mountain-climbers, because of the hazard of sliding over the edge on the loose rubble. Finally we all made it to the safety of a big Box Freight Motor, in which we resumed our trip to New Halem.

There the Superintendent awaited us, and took us to ~~our~~ overnight quarters in one of the big electrically-heated bunkhouses. Before dinner, he showed us through the magnificent 75,000 hp Gorge Hydro-Electric Plant at the bottom of the 400 ft. tall dam. Margaret didn't like the deafening roar of the big water-turbines and generators, and couldn't get out of the place fast enough. Having worked up such a keen appetite in that bracing atmosphere, we found dinner a most satisfying affair. In the bachelor employees' mess house, we sat at a huge long table that literally groaned beneath great bowls and platters of home-cooked victuals. Everybody helped himself from these offerings, to the extent of his capacity. The menu included venison and trout, corn on the cob, and home-made apple pie.

After dinner, we joined the rest in the Great Hall that served for church services, community meetings, dances and other entertainment. This was movie night. The films we had brought up the line with us were screened, including Western Horse Opera and an old Charlie Chaplin comedy. As each reel was finished, a slide was projected requesting "One minute please while we change the film." During these delays someone batted out tunes on a venerable upright piano, and the audience sang. It all recalled the days when the pioneer gold miners penetrated the gorge. Slumber beneath thick woolen Hudson Bay blankets came easily after the show.

In the morning, we switched on the ample supply of electric heat as we dressed. Breakfast was cooking, and we could smell the tantalizing perfume of broiling bacon and brewing coffee. Flapjacks with real maple syrup augmented the scrambled eggs.

The train for Ruby Dam awaited us. It was a big old wooden Interurban car from the Oregon Electric Railway. Ross - bless him - had rescued all sorts of rolling stock from various Pacific Northwest lines as, one by one, they folded up. Here they were being beautifully maintained, gaily painted in canary yellow.

Through more spectacular, hair-raising miles we eased around sharp turns where the line clung precariously to the steep walls of the gorge on a right-of-way barely wide enough for the car. One dared not stick his head out of a window on the inside of the line for fear of getting his brains dashed out against the rocky "close clearance", and a glance out through the windows of the outside was enough to make Margaret change her seat to a safer location -- across the aisle! That sheer drop into the narrow canyon below her had her completely intimidated. I could read the unspoken question in her eyes: "What in Heaven's name are we doing up here in this terrible wilderness?" The year was 1950, but except for the trolley line, that country looked the same as it had since creation.

At Diablo, the local Superintendent took me through the mammoth 178,000 hp power plant at the foot of the 400-ft.-high dam. Margaret preferred to remain seated in the big trolley to escape the overpowering bedlam of water-turbines and generators that was music to my ears.

Presently we resumed the trip, and the big Oregon Electric combine was eased over the breath-taking line through the gorge up to the base of the cable incline. Here the veteran trolley car was rolled onto the deck of a huge flat car that straddled the three parallel standard gage tracks of a steep funicular with 68% grade. Now our big Interurban began gliding sideways up the mountain until a level spot was reached, over 300 feet above the Diablo Canyon. A bird's-eye view of the whole establishment below spread out before us. Now our trolley rolled out onto the upper level of this fantastic railroad, and proceeded to the landing beyond the top of Diablo Dam, where the line's rolling stock could be ferried to the Ross Dam section of the line.

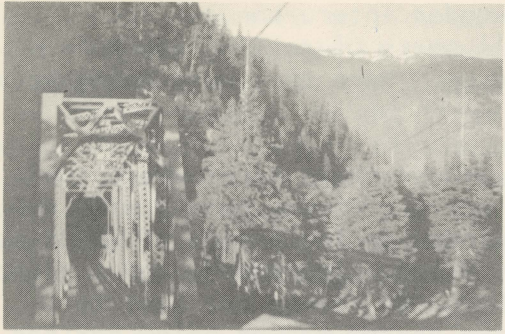
Here the Alice Ross, a little tugboat, awaited us. Her Skipper invited us aboard, and his assistant cast off the lines. As this vessel made its way north to the vast Ruby Reservoir we left behind us the last vestiges of United States civilization. Now we were heading toward Canada, as we learned from the Skipper's radio report to some unseen authority back where we had come from.

Soon we approached a narrow reach of water between the shore on our left and an island on our right. The Skipper invited our attention to some of the wild life of the area. A big mother bear was cuffing her two cubs into the water from the shore on the left. Once her offspring were struggling in the water, she jumped in, and they scrambled out onto her back as she swam out to the island. Evidently mother bears have been all through the routine of jumping in first and attempting to coax the youngsters to follow, without much success.

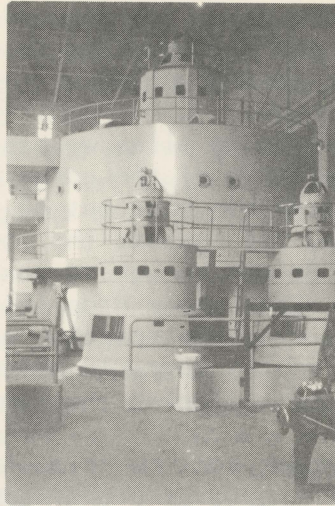
Up through the quiet, deep waters of Diablo Lake we chugged. Eventually, as we rounded a bend, the sight of towering Ross Dam burst upon us, leaving us speechless. "It backs up water clear across the Canadian border," the Skipper told us. Thus the same waters of the Skagit River are used three times over, within only 15 miles, to generate an ample supply of cheap kilowatts for the City of Seattle 100 miles away, via a quarter-million volt transmission line.

Up there in that wild country, Margaret discovered a Trappers' Trading Post which offered furs at a rare bargain. "My legs are getting so cold ... I've just GOT to have something warm to wear," she announced. So I gave her a piece of money and she came back all smiles, with a beautiful fox neckpiece. But I heard no more complaints about chilly legs.

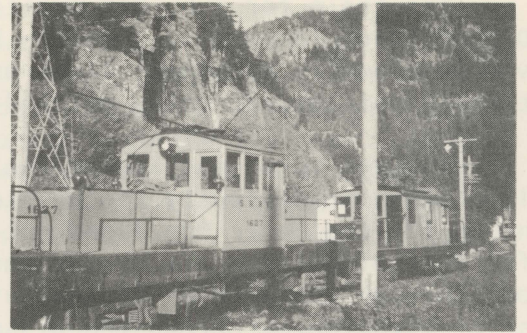
Yes, you guessed it. That magnificent single-track Skagit River R.R. has been paved over to make a single-lane highway which has to be dispatched. "J. D." would turn over in his grave if he could see what they've done to his pride and joy. But I've got the pictures to prove my story of that marvelous trolley line.



6. Via another bridge, train recrosses to shelf blasted from cliffs opposite.



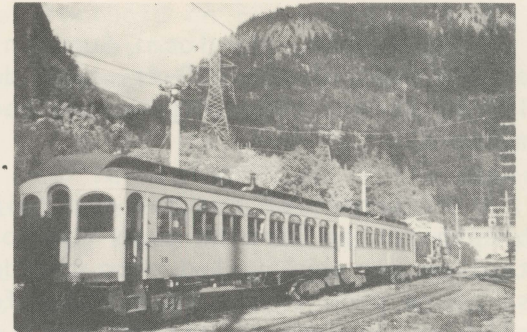
14. Mammoth Hydro-Electric Generators and Exciters roar diabolic din at Diablo plant.



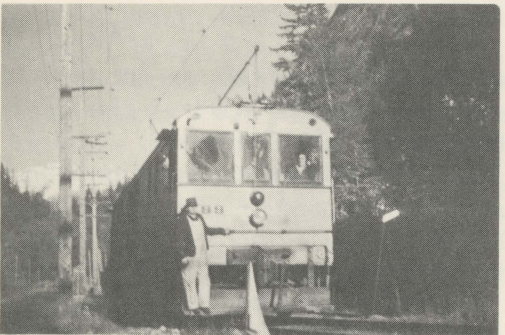
7. Approaching New Halem, locomotives 1627 & 1626 sidetracked for our train.



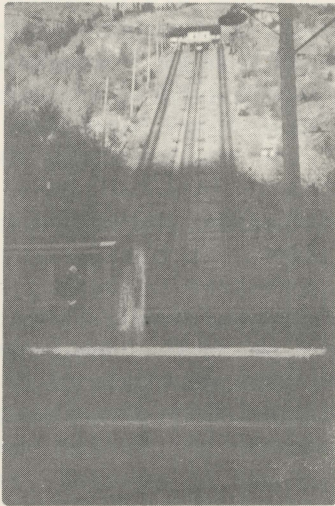
8. New Halem HQ, 89 on main, ex. Oregon Electric Interurban on siding beyond platform.



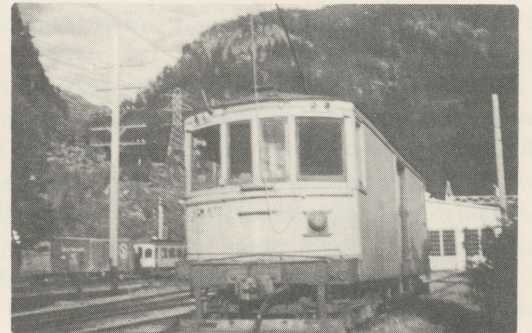
9. Safe in mountain retreat, 18, 17 from Oregon Electric, two flats, -powerhouse beyond.



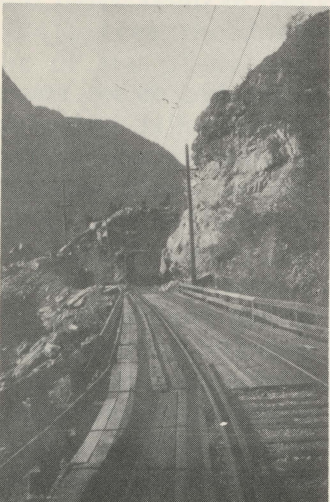
11. Crew of 89 stops for flag near Diablo under dramatic backdrop of snowcapped peaks.



12. Diablo's flatcar straddles 3-track 68% grade, hoists trolleys to the upper level of this fantastic railroad,



10. In New Halem yards, 1317 ready for trip to Diablo. (Beyond) Interurban & GN Box.

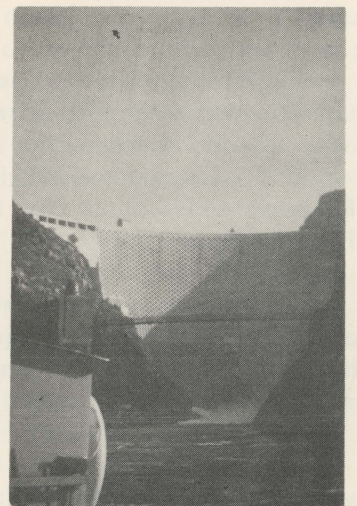


13. No. 3 on upper line leaves rock cut, via trestle to ferry dock.



15. Tug ALICE ROSS disturbs Lake Diablo's profound silence among snow-capped mountains.

Photos from author's color slide collection.



16. Ross Dam towers above high suspension bridge. Resultant Ruby Lake extends into Canada.