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THE TRAINMASTER

PORTLAND, OREGON

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page 1

"THE EMPEROR OF THE NORTH POLE" FILMED IN OREGON

by Edward M Berntsen

Of significant interest to Oregon rail historians this past summer was the filming by 20th Century Fox of the \$3.5 million feature motion picture "The Emperor of the North Pole" on the OP&E and BN's Vernonia branch.

"Emperor" is a railroad action saga set in Oregon during the Depression in the summer of 1933. Lee Marvin stars as "A-Number 1", King of the Hoboes, whose young sidekick (Keith Caradine) thinks the King has been everywhere and done



On July 11, 20th Century Fox crews began filming "The Emperor of the North Pole" on BN's Buxton trestle west of Portland with OP&E's 2-8-2 #19 and freight cars restored to 1933 vintage. (Bob Ellis photo, courtesy of THE OREGONIAN)

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

everything, hence the film's title. Ernest Borgnine is tough freight conductor "Shack" who hates hoboes and will kill to keep them off his train. Charles Tyner, Malcom Atterbury, and Henry Caesar portray train crew members.

"A-Number 1" has never met a train he couldn't ride, and the plot involves his efforts to ride Borgnine's train with the punk kid getting in the way. Chase sequences on top of moving boxcars, coaches, and in a burning stockcar end in a finish fight between Shack, A-Number 1, and the kid on a swaying flat car. Only one survives and he knows that all three played for keeps.

Convinced in January of this year by Governor Tom McCall's special film committee that Oregon had everything they needed, 20th Century Fox executives last spring sent Unit Production Manager Saul Wertzel and Art Director Jack Martin Smith to scout locations, find suitable rail equipment, and negotiate operating contracts with Burlington Northern and the Oregon, Pacific, and Eastern Railway.

Wertzel, Smith, and Governor McCall's special representative Warren Merrill contacted Ed Berntsen and Jack Holst of the Pacific Northwest Chapter, N R H S early in March for assistance in locating three boxcars, two stockcars, a refrigerator car, and other equipment appropriate for the era.

Equipment inspection trips were made in Washington to Vancouver, Stevenson, Wishram, South Tacoma, and Chehalis to determine which of the many older wooden NP, GN, and SP&S freight cars in work service might be suitable and available for purchase.

In May a reefer was purchased from Western Fruit Express Company at Spokane and three ex-NP boxcars were bought from BN at Vancouver. The four cars were moved to Cottage Grove where arrangements had been made with the OP&E for extensive use of the line's facilities. Three stockcars were purchased from the Milwaukee Road at Chicago and moved to Cottage Grove.

Jack Smith's experienced painters and carpenters set up shop at the OP&E and went to work in mid-May repainting the freight cars to NP red, WFE yellow, and DRGW black (for the Milwaukee stockcars), and relettering them with numbers and heralds correct for the period.

Butterfly firebox doors for engine 19 were borrowed from Cliffhanger Shay 112 and the large oil tank was replaced by a smaller tank to allow room for script-required coal in the regular tender. Sticklers for accurate detail, Smith and Wertzel consulted frequently with PNW Chapter, NRHS to present as correct a picture as possible of Oregon railroading during the period.

The movie name selected for the railroad was Oregon, Pacific & Eastern. Jack Smith designed a special OP&E herald for the film, abandoning the flying goose design currently used. Smith's herald is a solid white outline map of Oregon, with stylized blue waves at the Pacific Coast and a fir tree placed just east of center on the map, providing the "and Eastern".

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

Movie co-stars Lee Marvin (left) and Ernest Borgnine (right) with Warren Merrill, special projects manager for Gov. McCall who has promoted movie making in Oregon during the past four years. (Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)



BN RS-11 #4181 leads movie train through Beaverton July 24 on return trip to Cottage Grove. (photo by Ed Berntsen)

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

Set construction and equipment modification occupied most of May and June, including building many dummy caboose and coach roofs, engine cab mockups, and breakaway stockcar sidewalls. During filming, some of these sets weren't used because Borgnine and Marvin preferred to do their own stuntwork on the actual moving rail equipment.

A beautiful "Salem" station was built at one side of the OP&E Cottage Grove yards to serve as the other end of the line from "Cottage Grove". The new station has removable waiting room walls to allow camera shots inside the working telegraph office. Hand-painted "NRA" posters were placed on a shed near the station.

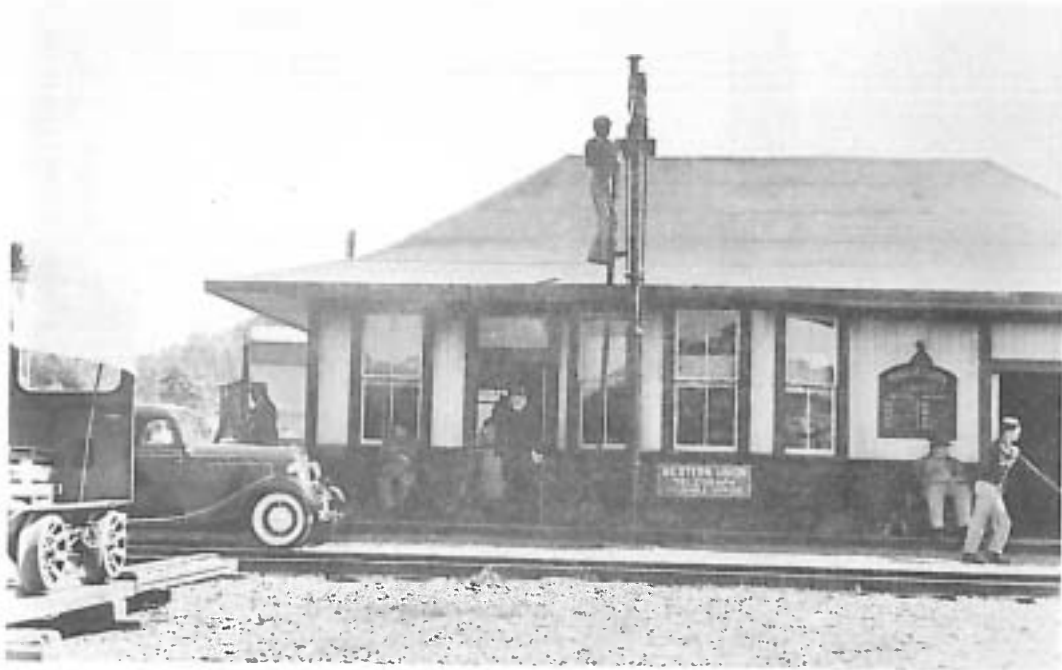
The OP&E's 18-mile line and yards offered every scene required by Christopher Knopf's script except one - a high wooden trestle. For that, 20th Century Fox moved the entire movie freight train from Cottage Grove on July 6 to begin the summer's filming with trestle shots on BN's former SP&S Banks-Vernonia branch.

A special BN train with GP-9 #1775 on the point towed the following equipment to Manning from the Southern Pacific interchange at Eugene:

BN 600722	idler flat (which was also used to move people and cameras onto the trestle)
OP&E 19	2-8-2 steam locomotive and tender, ex-YW 19
SCCX 1254	tank car used as auxiliary water supply
OP&E 302	flat with dummy load of pipe, former OP&E log flat
NP 9620	boxcar, ex-BN 962096, ex-NP
NP 9501	boxcar, ex-BN 950131, ex-NP
NP 9090	boxcar, ex-BN 962092, ex NP
WFEX 73256	reefer
DRGW 39031	stockcar, ex-MILW 105031
OP&E 3	caboose, painted orange and weathered for movie

When it was fired up Friday afternoon, July 7 at Manning for the Monday run to Bridge U-34-4, the Buxton trestle (also known to many local railfans as the "Mendenhall Creek" trestle), #19 returned live steam operation to the little-used branch. This line had last seen steam in October of 1969 when the Vernonia, South Park, and Sunset Steam Railroad's 2-6-2 #105 made its final run after six summers of Banks to Vernonia weekend excursion operation.

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

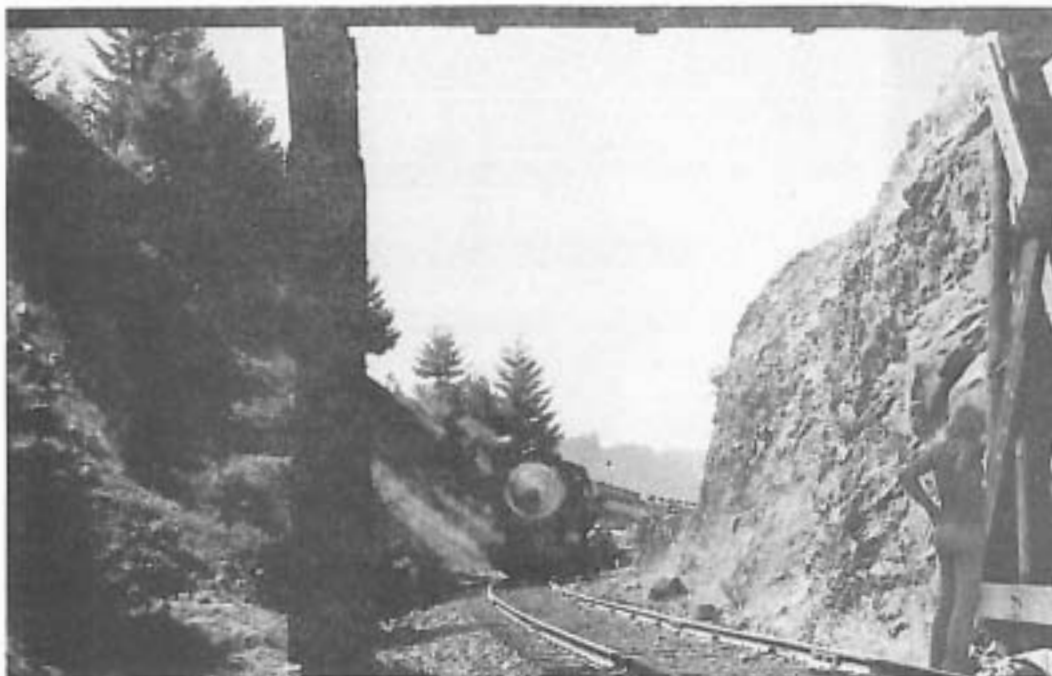


"Salem", a station location important in the movie script, was constructed in the OP&E yard at Cottage Grove. Removable walls permitted shooting inside the working telegraph office.

(Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)



The "Salem" station included a detailed interior with period artifacts. Richard Eymann was one of the local celebrities with small roles. (Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)

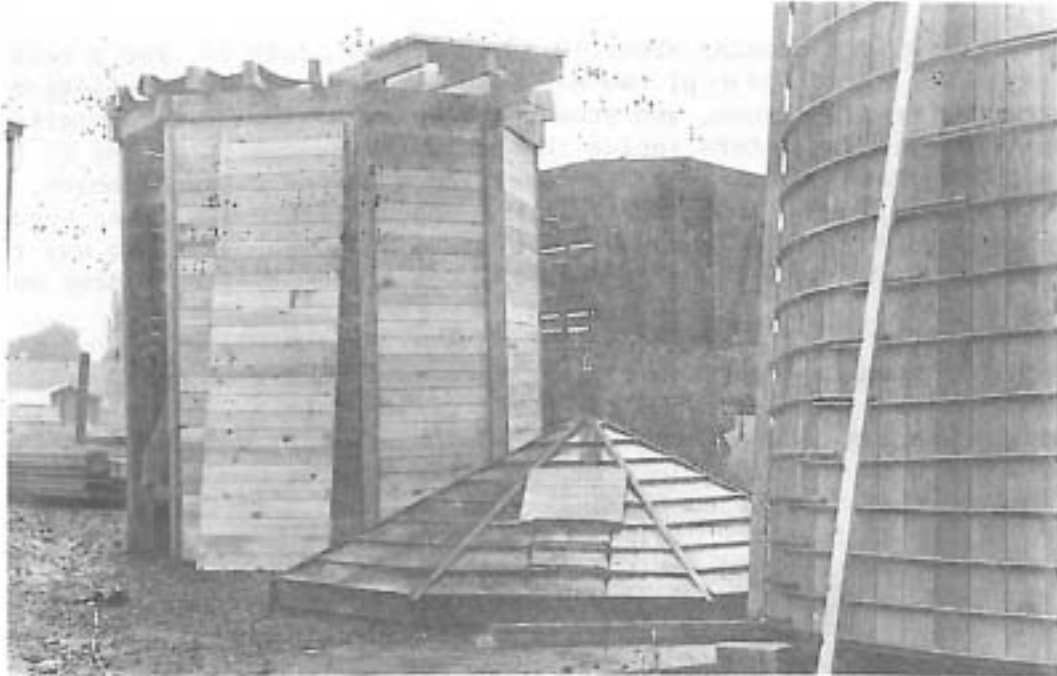
"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

OP&E "27" enters cut along Dorena Lake just prior to filming of Lee Marvin's jump from "flume" trestle in foreground to top of "Limited's" coaches. (Photo courtesy COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)



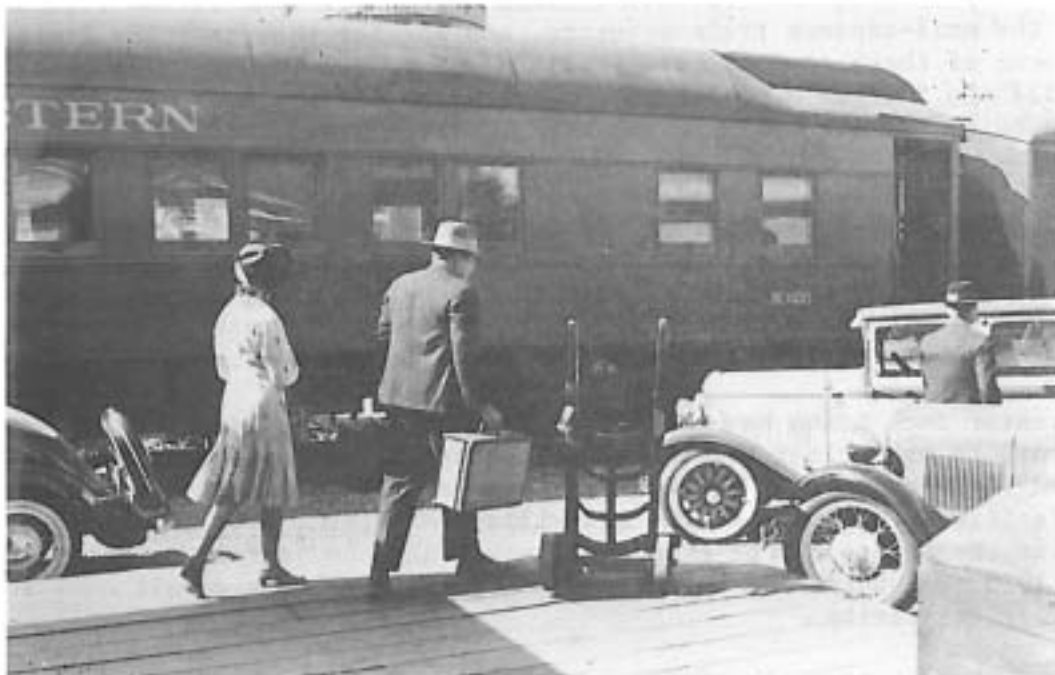
Mikes . . . camera . . . action! Filming on location along the OP&E tracks was warm in August, whether in the sun or in the limited shade of 2-8-0 #5's boiler.

(Photo courtesy COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

Looking like a giant model railroad structure kit, parts of a wooden water tower prop were built in the OP&E yard in June before actual filming of "Emperor" got under way.

(Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)



1930-era railroad cars, autos, clothing, et cetera are combined for a 40-year journey back in time on the movie set

(Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

The movie train left Manning about 10 AM on Monday, July 10, for a test run over the trestle and inspection of the equipment by director Robert Aldrich, executive producer Kenneth Hyman, and producer Stanley Hough. Camera platforms had been built by Fox carpenters inside the curve at the center of the 60 foot high trestle. One platform was at track level and a second one underneath, 10 feet below track level. The lower platform was used to catch the chase sequence along a temporary walkway through the bents. The upper platform was removed after the first day's filming on July 11 when train-level sequences were completed.

Shooting at Buxton was expected to last five days, but went very well and was completed Thursday evening, July 13, ahead of schedule. The equipment, which returned to Manning each night after the day's filming, was returned by BN special freight to Eugene on July 14, with PNW Chapter member, BN engineer Jim Abney pulling the throttle on BN RS-11 4181. SP ran a special closely connecting from Eugene to rush the equipment back to Cottage Grove in time for Engine #19 to operate that weekend for the annual Bohemia Days celebration.

Filming of "Emperor" continued at Cottage Grove and on the OP&E line through the summer with the movie freight, express, and passenger trains interspersed with OP&E's daily excursion and freight trains. This made for a very busy 18-mile shortline railroad (as Manager Mel Gowing's 16-hour days will attest).

OP&E's recently-purchased Magma Arizona 2-8-0 #5 arrived in late July from Arizona and was used frequently, both for the weekend excursion trains when #19 was busy filming and for second-train sequences. The #5 was renumbered #4 for the mail-express train sequence, and #27 for the passenger limited. (With some of these road numbers still in place, Mel Gowing calls this engine the "4527".) Builder's plates were missing, so local plates were made and applied to #5 for the movie which read "Cottage Grove Welding Works".

Several OP&E ex-Milwaukee Road heavyweight baggage cars and the PNW Chapter's ex-SP&S dormitory-baggage car 76 (renumbered 47 for the movie) were painted in "OP&E" colors of yellow with bright blue letterboard. Three ex-SP commute coaches were pulled out of OP & E excursion service, had all open windows replaced and painted in Pullman green. These cars along with an open-platform heavyweight observation car made up the "Prairie Limited".

Art Director Jack Smith had mentioned that he needed a bright color for the mail train to make clear to the audience that it was different from the "Limited". He chose the yellow-blue scheme after seeing those colors on Union Pacific's Columbine in the Kratville book Steam, Steel, & Limiteds. Smith was careful to paint even small air brake and journal repacking dates in the 1928 to 1933 period on the underbody and air tanks on all cars to maintain authenticity.

Many other interesting structures and modifications on the OP&E were made for the movie. A switchman's tower was built behind the shop at the yard throat. A wooden water tower was constructed and used in different scenes with three



"Before" - A search for 1930-period wooden freight cars turned up such equipment as this ex-Northern Pacific boxcar stenciled for BN.
(Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)



"After" - Undoing the Burlington Northern merger, a painter reletters this boxcar for Northern Pacific before painting out the BN markings.
(Photo courtesy of the COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL)



National Recovery Administration and circus posters add Depression-era authenticity to the film.
(Photo by Ed Berntsen)



Cottage Grove Welding Works fabricated a new builders plate "#9876543" for ex-Magma Arizona 2-8-0 #5, renumbered both OP&E #4 and #27 for the movie.
(Photo by Ed Berntsen)

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

"Emperor of the North Pole", cont'd

different base frames. Along Dorena Lake, a "flume" over the track allowed Lee Marvin to jump onto coach tops as the Limited passed by. A 1933 calendar and other carefully placed "random junk" in the OP&E engine house backgrounded a shop scene.

Cottage Grove's grass airfield sported an exquisitely detailed "hobo jungle" along the Row River with driftwood fishing docks, stockcar-body and driftwood huts, marvelous debris of all sorts, and a sign on the "restaurant" cook-shack advertising "We Never Close".

Filming concluded on October 7. Watch for release of "The Emperor of the North Pole" about April of 1973

Acknowledgements: We sincerely thank the Cottage Grove Sentinel and Bob Ellis of the Portland Oregonian for providing photos used in this article, and appreciate Willamette Pacific Chapter President Gil Hulin's efforts in forwarding the Sentinel photos to us.

NO DECEMBER MEETING

There will be NO DECEMBER MEETING of the Pacific Northwest Chapter NRHS, as is usual for this month. The next meeting will be at 8 PM on the third Friday, January 19, 1973, at the Burlington Northern Safety Assembly Room near the Lovejoy ramp at NW 11th & Hoyt Sts. in Portland.

WE NEED SPACE !!

Pacific Northwest Chapter is in urgent need of an accessible storage and operating location for its now-enormous collection of railroad historical material. We have seriously outgrown the space in Room 1, Union Station, and Amtrak has the depot open for only one hour after 5:30 PM each day, making evening work sessions difficult. In August we received a huge collection of SP&S mechanical records and blueprints which now fills three rooms in two members' homes. The Chapter has, over the past 15 years, developed an excellent collection of railroad historical material, including books, timetables, various files and business records, photos, magazines, and artifacts of all sorts, that urgently needs sorting, cataloging and good records management. With our material jammed in Room 1 and spread in members homes, good management is impossible. We need a location such as a two-floor old storefront building in some relatively secure location accessible to Portland, where we can set up a working library, and start sales of duplicates and reprinted items from our collection. Sales revenue could sustain most of our educational activities. All readers are urgently requested to notify Chapter officers of any possible location as soon as possible for consideration.

John D. Holloway, President

NEW YEARS WEEK-END PRIVATE RAILWAY CAR TRIP TO SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA

FRIDAY DECEMBER 29, 1972 thru JANUARY 1, 1973

Be aboard the NRHS's car MT. HOOD for the most enjoyable means of welcoming in the New Year. Treat yourself to a slightly decadent week-end of parties on this grand old car. New Years Eve will spent on the car after spending two days in San Francisco. Welcome in the New Year a bit differently.

EQUIPMENT: Lounge-sleeping car Mt. Hood is a six roomette, three double bedroom lounge sleeping car that operated for over twenty years between Portland and Spokane in Empire Builder, North Coast Limited service. This will be first private use of the car.

INCLUDED: Fares include round trip transportation and designated sleeping space between Portland and San Francisco, a buffet supper and party on the evening of departure, a Champagne party New Years Eve. Adult Refreshments are included along with two continental breakfasts. (Coach Service Portland-Eugene; Car added at Eugene)

SCHEDULE: Depart Portland Friday December 29, 1972 4:05 pm
Arrive San Francisco December 30, 1972 8:15 am

Time in San Francisco is free until departure time Sunday. Passengers may remain on car in Oakland. Feel free to bring guests to the car Saturday evening or Sunday before train time for refreshments.

Depart San Francisco December 31, 1972 8:20 pm
Arrive Portland January 1, 1973 1:05 pm

We will have a daylight crossing of the Cascades to add a last touch to this New Years week-end.

FARES: Roomette for ONE--\$175.00--simple
Roomette for TWO-- 200.00--a fine accomodation for people who like to be close.
Bedroom for one or two--\$300.00--live it up a bit and have the best.
Dormette for one--\$150.00--half bedroom for singles.
Parlor--\$115.00--accomodation for those who cannot sleep onthe train or are late in making reservations.

All fares should be paid in full by December 20. A deposit of \$35.00 holds space until December 20. Refunds after this date are on the basis of being able to resell space. If the trip does not operate for any reason complete refund will be made. Use form below to reserve space. Happy New Year.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____
ZIP _____, PHONE _____

Mail to: Private Car Trip
Room 1, Union Station
800 N. W. 6th Ave
Portland, Oregon
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Please enclose a stamped self addressed envelope to speed a reply.

Please reserve me space on the New Years trip: _____ Roomette for one.
_____ Roomette for two. _____ Bedroom. _____ Dormette. _____ Parlor.

I am enclosing a total payment of \$ _____ for my party.

I am enclosing a deposit of \$ _____ and will make final payment by December 20, 1972. Any questions call - - - 227-2806 or 282-7691.