
RYAN REED/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

Stokane

NION PACIFIC'S Hinkle, Ore., to Spokane, Wash., main line (also known as the "Washy") runs through some of eastern Washington's most desolate and rugged country. The line is tunneled, bridged, cut through seemingly endless basalt, hung on the side of vertical cliffs, and, for much of the way, follows the eastern shoreline of the mighty Snake River. Spectacular in all its ways, the Washy was ruled by Electro-Motive's best and most reliable locomotive for nearly 25 years.





PRECEEDING PAGES: South of Park, Wash., along the Palouse River on August 8, 1995, Union Pacific SD40-2 3711 leads Train HKCP-08 into the lonesome and astonishing Palouse River Canyon.

ABOVE: At 5:00PM sharp, Union Pacific's E9 A-B-A set eases a southbound 12-car inspection special across Joso Viaduct on October 13, 1993. Directly below the engines is the Camas Prairie line to Lewiston, Idaho.

RIGHT: Passing hundreds of bees in the wildflowers, UP SD40-2s pull SKHK-13 into Ash on July 13, 1995.

The SD40-2s first appeared on the Washy in 1972, slowly but steadily displacing most of the 10 SDP35s previously assigned to work the line. The new power saw few railfans though. Across the river, Burlington Northern's former Spokane, Portland & Seattle Highline was home to a rainbow of premerger-painted motive power. Solid consists of F-units routinely hauled Trains 174 and 175 between Pasco and Spokane. General Electric U-boats and EMD F45s, along with a few rogue Alcos assigned to western Washington lines, could be easily chased on parallel roads.

At Marengo, where the Washy met and interchanged traffic with The Milwaukee Road, equally new orange and black SD40-2s rocked and rolled over bad track, capturing



the hearts and minds of regional railfans. They and pulled back to the Midwest for good. could not get enough of the famed Pacific Coast Extension, and for good reason.

trains in April 1988. The tracks themselves All the while, UP's SD40-2s worked the were gone soon after. By the early 1990s, the Washy, getting older, season by season. Without easy highway access to the line and effec- Washy, with its now-venerable SD40-2s runtively no parallel roads to speak of beyond the ning out their last miles, called a siren song southernmost Hinkle to Wallula stretch, these to eastern Washington railfans. Suddenly, it SD40-2s were largely overlooked by those became a priority. Make no mistake, railfanning the Washy documenting the region's railroad action. In March 1980, The Milwaukee Road finally was no easy task — a harsh truth that remains had enough of transcontinental railroading to this day. It was an arduous, love-hate affair.

Burlington Northern's Highline, every bit as remarkable as the Washy, saw its last through





LEFT: The southernmost tunnel on the Washy, Tunnel 7 north of Ash, is also one of the most remote. SD40-2 3304 runs to daylight on July 17, 1995.

BELOW LEFT: Stopped short of Walker, HKCP-05 has derailed its few last cars just past Page on July 14, 1995. For the time being, the northbound train is going nowhere.

During hot summer months, the blistering eastern Washington sun was unrelenting and determined to make an unprepared photographer suffer for his foolishness — especially when three miles away from his car without water.

Winter months fared no better. Twisting gravel farm roads covered with compacted snow and ice were treacherous and sometimes impassable without a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Frigid air blowing along the Snake River made a joke of the toughest cold-weather gear. Worse yet, jagged basalt rock hidden under a layer of snow could twist or break an ankle or leg of even the most cautious railfan.

The dangers of visiting the Washy were not always limited to harsh summer or winter months, however. During a perfect April day in 1996, I lost my footing on the high ridge above Page and took a Hollywood-worthy fall down the embankment, losing my unlatched camera bag in the process. The image of my beloved Canon A-1 with an MA motor drive, along with numerous Canon lenses, boxes of Kodachrome, and a radio scanner all falling, tumbling, and spinning more than a hundred feet down to the tracks will forever be etched in my memory for all the wrong reasons.

Yet, those Electro-Motive SD40-2s with their 645 prime movers echoing, then booming, off desolate canyon walls deep in the channeled scablands, were spectacular and

train by 10 minutes and waited three hours to come to terms with your misfortune.

Operations in the 1990s

During the 1990s, Union Pacific operated four regularly scheduled through-trains on the Washy — the Hinkle-Spokane HKSK and its southbound counterpart SKHK and the Hinkle-Eastport, Wash., HKCP (for interchange with the Canadian Pacific at Eastport on the former Spokane International Railroad), along with its southbound counterpart CPHK.

Beginning in August 1978, a splash of red paint came to the Washy when Canadian Pacific run-through SD40-2s operated regularly on the HKCP/CPHK. Many trains to and from Eastport could actually be seen with pure CP consists. The practice, however, ended abruptly in 1986, and throughout the 1990s, CP power on the Washy was as rare as a snowflake in August. In 1999, a new deal with Canadian Pacific brought back a seemingly permanent run-through agreement.

Burlington Northern operated Train FBN-706, also known as the "BN Lowline," from Pasco to Riparia, Wash., running on UP trackage rights from Attalia (immediately railroad-west

ABOVE RIGHT: Morning fog at Wallula shrouds the westbound Richland Turn at 9:00AM on a chilly November 5, 1994.

RIGHT: With a mostly nighttime journey down the Washy almost done, a rare rainbow consist leads Train CPHK-04 into Hinkle on December 4, 1994.

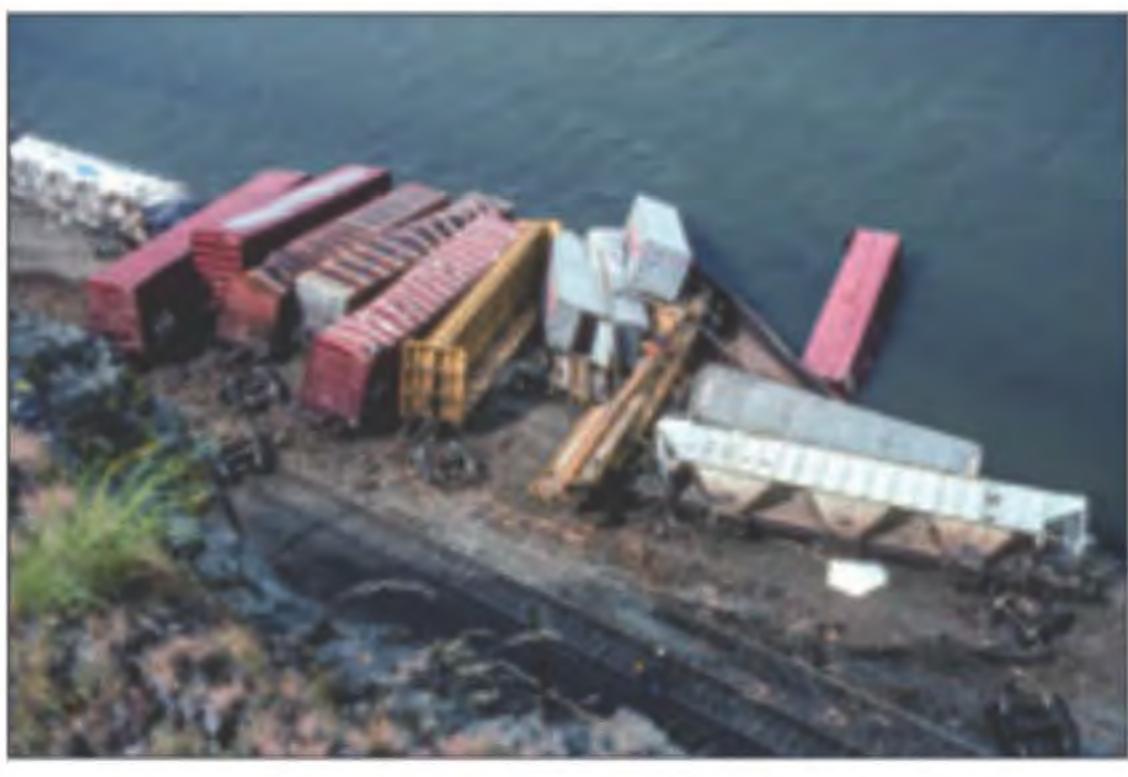
made it worth the effort. Indeed, a two-hour of Wallula) to Ayer Junction where Camas Prai- GP39-2 along with a rebuilt GP35M or GP40M, drive to Palouse Falls State Park was followed rie Railroad connected with UP. The BN Low- followed by a BN wide-vision caboose on the by an hour-long hike into the Palouse River line then traveled on the water-level line to rear, which was something rare by that time. Canyon, capped with a two-hour wait to pho- Riparia where it met up with the Camas Prairie tograph a single daytime train — if you were "Downriver Local" to interchange cars. Com- known then, operated on a totally different lucky. If you were not lucky, you missed the mon power on the BN Lowline was generally a route to reach Riparia. From Pasco, the local





Prior to 1965, the "NP Lowline," as it was





TOP: UP 9053, a brutish ex-Missouri Pacific C36-7 and looking a bit conspicuous on the Washy, leads Train HKCP-25 past ancient ruins at Croskey on July 25, 1995.

ABOVE: May 2, 1995, was a bad day on the Washy. Train HKSK-02 has stacked up 21 cars along the Snake River at Walker; the line is effectively plugged.

traveled on the SP&S Highline route to Snake senger special. Oddly enough, it was a pas-River Junction (via trackage rights on SP&S) senger special that originally brought me to where Northern Pacific's own Snake River the Washy. On April 28, 1993, Union Pacific branch split off and dropped in elevation operated a seven-car Operation Lifesaver to the Snake River's western shoreline. The special to Spokane pulled by a somewhat branch line continued on to Riparia. Backwa- new SD60M. After a three-hour wait at ters from the new Lower Monumental Dam the 240-foot-high by 3,920-foot-long Joso

flooded the Snake River branch and forced the NP Lowline onto the Washy.

Maverick grain trains from Canada ran as needed down the Washy during the 1990s and could be spotted instantly with Soo Line power on the head end, strangers a long way from America's dairyland to be sure. Hardto-catch seasonal sugar beet trains operated between Attalia and Hinkle. Originating on Washington Central at Grow Siding and Bruce, Wash., the trains were ferried by BN from Connell to Attalia, where UP finally took over.

The rarest of all was a Union Pacific pas-



ABOVE: A hard-to-catch southbound grain train crosses the Palouse River and Old Washington 26 in one fell swoop on July 15, 1995.

RIGHT: On July 24, 1995, a tired-looking UP 906 leads Train SKHK-24 downgrade past Croskey and across the desolate Spokane/Lincoln county line.

Viaduct, I was rewarded with an eyeful of Armour Yellow varnish soaring high overhead. I wrote in my notes the perfect word to sum up my newly found affection for the Washy -- "Wow!"

Following the Washy

Having spent the 1980s photographing the basically paralleling Burlington Northern SP&S Highline, the Washy immediately felt like home, but not quite the house I grew up in. Good roads followed much of the SP&S Highline and one could chase a train from end-toend — not an easy task on Washy, however. In fact, railfanning the line meant learning a brand-new set of rules.

Oregon Route 207 and U.S. 730 made for



easy chasing between Hinkle and Wallula, and-go chasing as far north as Ash, next to ute; other times, I made it by a minute. Ice Harbor Dam, but from that point on, the going got tough with the nearest paralleling road well to the east of the Washy. Many a graph a northbound train along the Columbia white-knuckled dash from Washington Route River south of Wallula and drive fast to Walker,

124, down Fishook Park Road, to the curved and Thrasher's Curve near Wallula never dis- siding at Page ended in frustration as the train appointed. Paved roads were good for touch- I was trying to chase beat me there by a min-

> The best way to succeed was not to chase in the conventional sense, but rather photo-

Ayer, Joso Viaduct, or any of several locations a billion bloodthirsty Rocky Mountain wood Tunnel 13. north to Spokane where a grade crossing or ticks. overpass brought you back to the tracks. In every sense of the word, the Washy made you sparked my imagination like nothing else and scablands at its extreme — seemingly everypay to see those EMDs running out their last quickly became my favorite part of the line to thing out there wants to bite you, stick you, miles.

way in, Palouse Falls Road, got you close but



see the action. The solitude of the place, es- sting you, cut you, break you, or kill you. It is Harder still was photographing trains in the pecially at sunset, was medicine for the soul. the desert wilderness, a place too primitive for breathtaking Palouse River Canyon between More often than not, the HKCP met the south- humans to reside but beautiful all the same. Joso Viaduct and Hooper, carved deep by a bound SKHK at Marengo, so two trains could Being miles away from my car, entirely cut off fork in the catastrophic Glacial Lake Missou- be attempted in the canyon — but only once from the world, it was best to step lightly and la floods some 15,000 years ago. The nearest did I manage to see two trains in a single day. To the south of Palouse Falls Road, the still meant serious bushwhacking through Washy passes through several tunnels with bore on the Washy, meant a long hike from exposed basalt rock scabland that is home to the line clinging precariously to the side of a Ash along the Snake River. Walking through rattlesnakes, coyotes, mule deer, and about ridge. On a summer day in 1996, while waiting patches of bright yellow wildflowers occupied for an SKHK to pop out of Tunnel 13, I sudden- by hundreds of bees was only one of the obly heard a soft tat-tat-tat immediately behind stacles hindering the process of a determined me. I turned to discover a rattlesnake den with railfan obsessed with catching an SD40-2 roughly a dozen snakes twisted up in a mass leading a train through the timber-lined tunno more than three feet behind me. Needless nel. to say, I found another place to photograph

LEFT: Lit by the headlight of SD40-2 3228, signals at Wallula are drenched during an unrelenting midnight downpour on May 21, 1996.

BELOW: Train HKCP-24 grinds upgrade near Croskey, its three SD40-2s pulling hard against a 0.6 percent grade on July 24, 1995.



Rightly so, the canyon taught me one thing Despite it all, the Palouse River Canyon about railfanning in the eastern Washington avoid all the above.

Even reaching Tunnel 7, the southernmost

Adventures Along the Washy

The scabrous terrain that made photographing the Washy so difficult paid no favors to Union Pacific itself when the HKSK-02 derailed at Walker in the middle of the night on