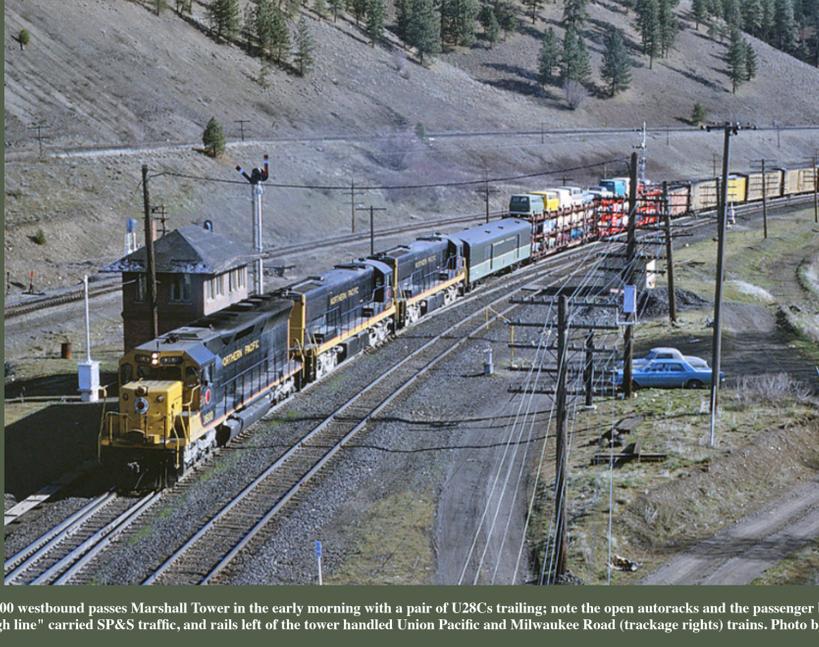


Washington Hot Spot: Scribner to Ft. Wright



Class unit NP 3600 westbound passes Marshall Tower in the early morning with a pair of U28Cs trailing; note the open autoracks and the passenger baggage car in the consist. The "high line" carried SP&S traffic, and rails left of the tower handled Union Pacific and Milwaukee Road (trackage rights) trains. Photo by Doug Wingfield.

Eastern Washington has historically offered the visiting railfan plenty to photograph: Great scenery, rolling hills, forests, rivers, tall bridges, plenty of trains, and even a tunnel or two for good measure. The center for a lot of the action, during the 1950s, 60 & 70s, took place at Scribner in Marshall Canyon (10 miles east of downtown Spokane). At one time, there were as many as seven pairs of tracks that occupied the canyon. The rail lines extended east from Scribner to Fort Wright (a western Spokane suburb) and provided lots of vantage points in between for good photography.

Frequent traffic in this scenic nine-mile area made it uniquely different when contrasted to other popular Pacific Northwest locations. Railroad diversity clearly drew fans from places near and far. Locomotive power primarily bore the flags and colors of four, (and occasionally five) different class one carriers: Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Spokane Portland & Seattle, and the Union Pacific. The Great Northern ran west from Spokane to Fort Wright then turned North towards Wenatchee. Milwaukee Road, which had trackage rights over the UPRR, treated the line as a branch and used it in-frequently, and then mostly at night. Generally speaking, the area also stood early witness to railroading's shift away from a reliance on four-axle freight power to locomotives with six traction motors.

For the varnish fan, there were six regularly scheduled passenger trains that served the area, including a rare mixed train that traversed the corridor's rolling grades and photogenic curves on a daily basis. Motive power for many passenger trains were matched sets of EMD F-units. And let's not forget that Alco fans were routinely treated to FA cab units and Century freight motors.

Occasionally viewed as a helper district, extra power could be stationed at West Scribner to assist westbound trains climb out of the canyon.

So please join us as we look back at Marshall Canyon in the waning years of first-generation locomotives and the arrival of second-generation diesel power.

New: 1 March 2019

Photo Exhibits



Spokane Portland & Seattle Alco FA1s # 862 and 864 pause at Marshall before continuing west with the Lind (WA) Turn on 13 April 1968. The two cab units were originally Great Northern #440A & 442A. Conveyed to BN at merger time, they were renumbered BN 4112 and 4116 respectively. Four years later, BN 4116 would be on the point of the last FA-powered freight in the U.S. (Doug Wingfield photo on 13 April 1968)



Highball Scribner. A pair of Spokane Portland & Seattle C424s, with #313 in the lead, has a clear signal and order board to proceed east to Spokane, with afternoon freight from Pasco. This is railroading the way it was intended with the engineman and station operator acknowledging each other. (Doug Wingfield photo on 13 April 1968)



The tower operator gives a wave to the crew of EMD-built FP7 #6507, as Northern Pacific's eastbound Mainstreeter glides through Marshall on 27 July 1968. Check-out the train order hoops and the train order signal a clear indication that railroad's of the period were sometimes slow to adopt new technologies. (Doug Wingfield photo)



Three Northern Pacific SD45's, with #3604 in the lead, are on former SP&S rails at Scribner, WA shortly after the March 1970 Burlington Northern merger. Before too long, these second-generation units will donn BN's cascade green and black attire, and #3604 will become #6404. (Doug Wingfield photo on 28 March 1970)



For several months after the merger of Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Spokane Portland & Seattle and Chicago Burlington & Quincy, there were many examples of mixed running and colorful motive power consists. Witness this morning meet at Scribner on the former SP&S between an eastbound freight with ex-GN U25B #2520 on the point and a westbound manifest with ex-NP SD45 #3604 in charge. (Doug Wingfield photo on 28 March 1970)



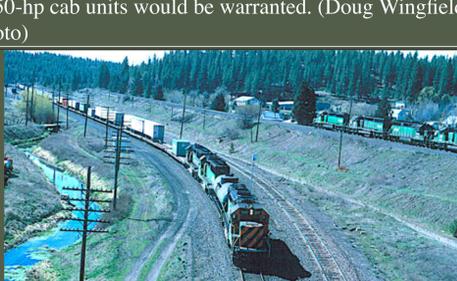
Fort Wright is where the SP&S and NP lines join the GN for a short run to downtown Spokane. The three ex-CB&Q six-axle freighters have been assigned to the northern trancon service and are headed for Portland, Oregon, which lies 340 mile southwest. The two trailing SD45s wear a BN merger color scheme, which was unveiled 18 months prior to the marriage. (Doug Wingfield photo on 28 March 1970)



A pair of Union Pacific E8As, with the #927 in the lead, takes a six-car mixed train west through Scribner on 27 July 1968. The Official Guide identified this westbound consist as No. 19 (and No. 20 eastbound). However, local fans more commonly referred to the daily (except Sunday) mixed train as "The City of Hinkle." On most days, the westbound afternoon train was appreciably longer, and two 2250-hp cab units would be warranted. (Doug Wingfield photo)



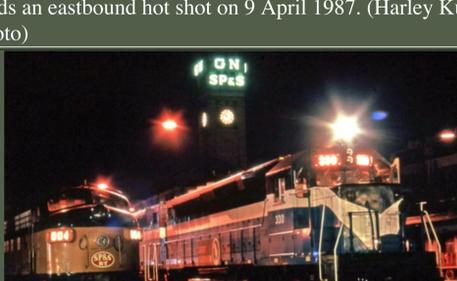
Union Pacific's mainline between Spokane and Marshall Canyon was commonly known as the "Washy", and it was home to some of the UP's Fairbanks-Morse locomotives, prior to 1970. The FMs were replaced by large numbers of four-axle EMDS, which in turn gave way to six-axle EMD power. The daily CPHK freight train, with SD40-2s on the point, begins a westward climb out of Marshall Canyon on 24 April 1987. (Harley Kuehl photo).



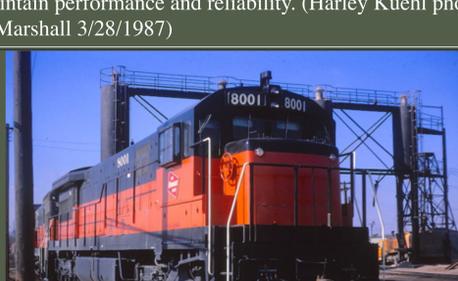
Not long after their arrival, BN ran the four-axle GP50s in service on fuel tenders to reduce the need to refuel long-distance trains; it was also a means of managing differences in state fuel charges. A tiger-striped #3119 leads an eastbound hot shot on 9 April 1987. (Harley Kuehl photo)



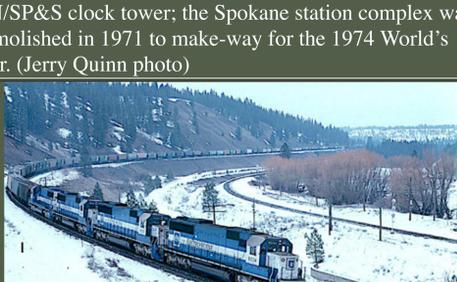
BN was displeased with the performance of EMD (GP50s) & GE (B30-7ABs) diesel purchases during the early 1980s. Consequently, the BN entered "Power by the Hour" lease programs with EMD and GE on future loco orders. The lease arrangements put the onus directly on the builders to maintain performance and reliability. (Harley Kuehl photo at Marshall 3/28/1987)



Both sections of Great Northern's westbound Empire Builder are poised to leave the station in downtown Spokane. SP&S F7A #804 will depart at 11:40 pm with train #1 to Portland, and GN SDP40 #330 will leave five minutes later with train #31 to Seattle. The only thing remaining today from the above 1968 scene is the GN/SP&S clock tower; the Spokane station complex was demolished in 1971 to make-way for the 1974 World's Fair. (Jerry Quinn photo)



The Milwaukee Road had trackage rights on UPRR between Spokane and Marengo, WA, but they were seldom employed after 1970. However, Milwaukee trains were re-routed through Spokane and Marshall Canyon when a derailment blocked the GAP (non-electrified mainline between Avery, ID and Othello, WA.) GE-built U33C #8001 waits at Spokane for an assignment. (John Stubblefield photo)



Oakway Leasing SD60s began appearing on the Burlington Northern in large numbers during the latter part of 1986. It was a unique approach which had BN purchase "power by the hour." The 100-unit lease fleet wore a version of EMD's blue and white demonstrator scheme. Four Oakways, led by #9034, roll a grain train west through Marshall on a January morning in 1987. (Harley Kuehl photo)



This trip down memory lane comes to a close with a photo of private business car Pointe Ste. Charles. Built as a 12-1 sleeper in 1928, it was converted into a CN business car in 1954. Returning to its home base in Wisconsin, the open-platform car brings up the markers on Amtrak train #28, the Portland section of the eastbound Empire Builder, which has stopped in Spokane. (Patrick Weeden photo)

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- Don Strack's Utah Rails (internet website)