

History: Taking a ride on the Lake Valley Railroad

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A look backward at earlier days in Lake Valley, an easy hour's ramble through the pine trees, picking wild strawberries in a forest-surrounded meadow, a valuable find for the Museum, and a picnic was enjoyed by more than 30 Society members and guests on Sunday, July 27th, when Tom Armstrong led the group on a tour over the roadbed site of one of the spurs of the old logging railroad operated in to the Meyers area until 1897-98.



Although another railroad operated about 1875-85 from Camp Richardson to Meyers for logging purposes, the tour involved the Lake Valley Railroad which extended from Bijou. About 1885, George Washington Chubbuck, who was operating Sierra House under a lease from Mr. Siebeck, built a tramway operation in Bijou involving wooden rails with flat cars pulled by oxen. The wooden rails wore out so fast they were soon replaced by 35 lb. steel rails, three foot gauge. Chubbuck had a locomotive of sorts but it was heavy and bulky to operate. His oxen method of moving the timber he was cutting under a subcontract to the Bliss interest in Glenbrook was too expensive. When he went bankrupt in 1886, the Bliss company took over the railroad and, as the area was logged out, extended the rail further south and west, possibly as far as present day Christmas Valley.

The locomotive Santa Cruz was brought from Glenbrook on a barge for use; when it broke down, as often happened, others were brought from Glenbrook for temporary service, including Engine No. 2, the Glenbrook, now on the grounds of the State

Museum in Carson City.

The logs were loaded on flat cars and taken to the 1800 foot Bijou pier to be rafted or barged across to Glenbrook, worked through the mill there, then taken to Spooner Summit by railroad, sent down the flume to the Carson Valley to be taken on to Virginia City. If San Francisco is the city built by Virginia City, then San Francisco owes it all to Lake Tahoe from where the timbers came that hold up the town of the Comstock.

When the heyday of Virginia City was imminent, Duane Bliss felt the time had come to connect Lake Tahoe with the outside world. He took the rail and used it to build the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company, operating between Tahoe City and Truckee until the Southern Pacific bought it from the Bliss family in 1925 and converted the track to standard gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches. Rail service there lasted until World War II.

Mr. Armstrong, who at the age of two accompanied his father when he was conducting historical tours for the Pontiac, Michigan Recreation Department, carried on the family heritage well as he led the group over the route which is amazingly visible after more than 75 years since the rails were taken up. Located was the very apparent site of a trestle over the creek with a log protruding from the bank which was no doubt a part of the trestle. A rock outcropping showed evidence of the drill holes for placing the powder to blast away the rock to build the roadbed. One portion of the creekbank was stacked with rocks to make a higher embankment to support the road. After crossing the creek and proceeding some little way across a meadow, the group spied wild strawberries and stopped for a short recess. Continuing on, a site was located where the logs were dragged parallel to the tracks for loading on the flat cars. A considerable amount of bark still is lying on the ground at this location.

At the end of the spur track was quite likely the site of a small settlement. It would not have been unusual for a few cabins to have been set up so the loggers would not have to go back into "town". Each time the track was extended further, they would take all the boards and put up some more cabins. At this particular location, about 100 feet to the west, evidence of such a cabin had been located.

The main group commenced their return to the starting point of the tour. Others led by Ed Laine and Tom Armstrong looked further around at the area at the end of the spur and made a valuable find for the Museum in the remains of a railroad tie from the trackbed. While the major portion of the tie had long since disintegrated, there was sufficient remaining to readily identify it because of the spike holes at each end is reasonable approximation to the 3 foot gauge.

The group then had lunch in the shade of the trees along the creek the Norman Celio, Vera Broder Silberstein and Elsa Barber Strait sharing memories of their childhood in this particular area.