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The McCloud River Railroads

Jeff Moore

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The McCloud River country, south and east of towering Mt. Shasta, was one of the premier potential logging territories of California in the late 19th century. A number of small operators were already in the area, though limited by inadequate transportation, when the McCloud River Lumber Company was incorporated in 1896. The following year, the McCloud River Railroad Company was begun by the same owners. From its inception,into the 1950s, the McCloud lumber mill was busy, and contributed steady traffic to the railroad. But as the available timber harvest declined, the lumber company and its railroad were sold to United States Plywood in 1963. The remnants of log movement by rail were terminated, and both timber harvest and railroad operations altered. In 1967, U.S. Plywood merged with Champion Paper, and a few years later the merged entity became Champion International. Leasing company Itel purchased a number of shortline railroads in the late 1970s, including the McCloud River Railroad. Some of those lines primarily served as lessors of Incentive Per Diem or IPD box cars (as did the McCloud), but the large, well-equipped railroad shop at McCloud was an additional attraction for the leasing company. The boom in IPD boxcar leasing was lucrative for a time, but virtually collapsed by 1981. At around the same period, the timber industry all but departed from the McCloud River country, removing the primary freight traffic from the railroad. In 1992, Itel sold the railroad to the Forbis family. They incorporated a new company, the McCloud Railway Company, to conduct operations, and continued through 2008, including the popular Shasta Sunset Dinner Train. But by 2009 traffic had all but vanished, and most of the railroad was scrapped. Included here are more than 385 photographs, many in color and published for the first time, and 41 maps and drawings. Maps were drawn by John R. Signor. Size 8.5 x 11, 385 photos; 41 maps & drawings

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