

THE WHITE PINE ROUTE

QUARTERLY

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Inside this issue: 2: Ten Years and Counting? 4: More BENX Box Information 7: Don Somers' News and Views
3: Buying a New Diesel Circa 1950 6: Bennett Boxes in Miniature 8: August Etcetera

(Soon to be) Back In Blue BENX 182 To Get a Facelift

Editor's Note: We had hoped to report in this issue that a new coat of "Bennett Blue" paint has just been applied to our BENX 182 stage. Although the painters have not been able to start as WPQ goes to press, we expect the repaint will be old news by the time the next issue comes out. In the meantime, here is Jim West to relate some history of the Bennett Boxes and the events leading up to the preservation of BENX 182:

In the late 1950's, six miles up the WI&M tracks from the mill at Potlatch, Guy Bennett and his son, Frank, built a saw mill. Situated between Princeton and Harvard, Bennett Lumber Products Inc. (BLPI) has shipped over the WI&M for a half century. The lion's share of freight currently moved over the WI&M by the Washington & Idaho RR is wood products from BLPI.

In the early 1970's, the Bennett mills in Moscow and Troy were dismantled, and all holdings were consolidated to focus on modernizing the Princeton operation. Automated equipment was pioneered for the site, some based on highly advanced Scandinavian technology. By 1972, a brand new state-of-the-art mill rose adjacent to the older Princeton mill. It came to be recognized as one of the most advanced facilities in the area.

BLPI learned that the trunk line railroads could not provide sufficient empty cars to satisfy their shipping needs. So, along with the mill modernization, BLPI deter-



Bennett Lumber Products' All-Door boxcars have served a variety of functions through the years: in regular freight service on Burlington Northern trains (top left) and after some were sold to the Alabama Ry. (top right). During the PCC era, BENX 182 sat derelict in the weeds (center) before finding use as a rolling cover plate for the maintenance pit behind the Potlatch depot (above left). Now owned by the WI&M Ry. HPG, we hope the soon to be repainted BENX 182 will serve many more years as a rolling stage (above right—Jim West photo). T. Hillebrant Photos except as noted

mined to ship their customer's wood products utilizing their own fleet of boxcars. Forty 56' "Thrall-door" boxcars, painted and lettered for BLPI and numbered with BENX reporting marks, were ordered from the Thrall Car Manufacturing Company of Chicago Heights, Illinois. That was the first order for a fleet that would total 87 cars. With the addition of 38 BENX A-frame bulkhead flatcars, BLPI was the largest private car owner in Idaho.

Each of the Bennett blue cars were stenciled either

The non-profit WI&M Ry. History Preservation Group, Inc has been organized for railroad historians, enthusiasts, and modelers interested in gathering and sharing information on the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway, from its origins in 1905 through it's operations of today.