

THE WHITE PINE ROUTE

QUARTERLY

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WORKIN' ON THE RAILROAD

WORK TRAINS AND EQUIPMENT ON THE WI&M

Before there was even a railroad, there were work trains.

Simple affairs, they usually consisted of a new or leased steamer pushing a few flatcars loaded with ties, rails, and other equipment along a newly cleared and graded right-of-way. Pausing briefly for each new length of rail to be spiked in place, these humble trains brought progress and prosperity to new corners of the wilderness 39 feet at a time.

But, after the trailblazing construction trains withdrew from the completed line and regular passenger and freight service commenced, work trains still filled an essential role. Even with steel rails laid on new ties embedded in a heavy layer of ballast, the regular trains quickly wore down the rails, flexed the joints and spread the gauge. Crews of section workers, armed with spike mauls and pry bars, could handle the day-to-day wear and tear on their assigned lengths of track. Small quantities of supplies (spikes, joint bars, what have you) could easily be moved with hand cars, but when the time came for more involved repairs, out rolled the work trains.

William Deary oversaw the construction of Washington, Idaho & Montana Ry., and insisted that it be built to the same high standards as its larger



A 1994 Burlington Northern work project left a large number of tie ends and other scrap alongside the WI&M right-of-way. To clean up, BN dispatched this train of gondolas and a small crane with a claw on its arm to pick up the scrap material and place it in the gondolas. When Carl Sonner took this image, the crew had just realized that the crane would no longer rotate, and the arm would impact the rock walls if the train continued forward. Instead, they had to back the train to Princeton and repair the crane while allowing the eastbound freight train to pass.

neighbors. To ensure the WI&M remained a first class railroad, he knew that regular and frequent maintenance would be necessary. To this end, he established several maintenance sections along the line (a "section" is a segment of the railroad assigned to a single work crew). He also purchased several pieces of heavy equipment, including a steam crane, steam shovel and pile drivers, which

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.