

## GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY\*

### *Reconnaissance and Surveys, Puget Sound Extension, Spokane to Puget Sound*

In the spring of the year 1890, I was assigned to and placed in charge of explorations and surveys for the line from Spokane to Puget Sound. It had at that time been practically decided that the Wenatchee River would probably be adopted as the route west from the Columbia River, but such selection was dependent upon what data and conclusions I might develop as the result of that season's work.

To dismiss the Northern part of the State as quickly as possible—I will say that I personally examined the Columbia River—from the mouth of the Spokane River to Pasco, visiting every one of its tributaries—the San Poil, Okanogan, Methow, and went by rowboat up Chelan Lake to its head, and on over Cascade Pass, and some fifteen miles down the Skagit River. Nothing could, in my opinion, be developed in that section that would be of value. There was quite a pressure from parties interested in lands on Bellingham Bay to have a decision made in favor of the Skagit route, but I will say right here, that I was left untrammelled in my judgment—orders were to “get the best line,” regardless of interests.

I examined every creek which debouched from the Cascade Mountains eastward into Lake Chelan, but found nothing encouraging. In any case if there had been, Lake Chelan, with its extreme depth of water, two to three miles in width, with its practically vertical bluffs along the west shore, would have rendered any such route impracticable.

I went up the Entiat River and even traced an imaginary line paralleling the Northern Pacific Railway from the Columbia River to Cle Elum and thence across Snoqualmie Pass and down Cedar River.

By this time, I had become thoroughly convinced that the Wenatchee River offered the correct solution of the knotty prob-

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\* After the celebration of the opening of the Great Northern Railway's new tunnel through the Cascade Range on January 12, 1920, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce gave a memorable banquet in honor of President Ralph Budd and other officers and guests of the Great Northern. Among those guests was the venerable and famous engineer, John F. Stevens, who was quite the most attractive personality present, as claimed by President Budd. Mr. Stevens told the story of locating the original line of the Great Northern through the mountains in 1890-1891. He spoke informally, without notes or manuscript. He was promptly requested to reduce his remarks to written form and he has asked that this article be accepted. Some of those who heard him at the banquet will be disappointed at the brevity of the article, but it is a delight to preserve in print even this much.—EDITOR.

lem. I then turned my efforts towards developing the possibilities of that river.

I followed the Wenatchee from the Columbia up to and through the Tumwater Canon and on up to Lake Wenatchee. Then on up to the summits of several small valleys which debouched into the lake. None of them were satisfactory. From Indian Pass (see Rand & McNally map), I followed the crest of the Cascade Mountains clear through to Snoqualmie Pass.

In going up the Wenatchee, as above noted—I marked what was afterwards known as Nason Creek, and kept it in the back of my head. In cruising the top of the range, I noted carefully what is now known as Stevens Pass, and felt confident that it was the head of Nason Creek; if so, it would afford the shortest line from the Wenatchee waters to Puget Sound. After my return from my trip to the top of the range I sent Mr. Haskell, an engineer who had been sent to report to me, with orders to proceed up Nason Creek and develop its head, which he did successfully and quickly, thus confirming my previous idea. He went down the Skykomish until he knew that he was over the range.

As the season was rapidly advancing, and it was imperative that a decision as to the route to be adopted should be made by the following spring, I at once organized a party of engineers and put it to making a hasty preliminary from the Summit west down the Skykomish River.

It is of course well known that the escarpment of the Cascade Mountains is everywhere much more abrupt on its west than on its east side, and on the west side lay the problem in this case.

The results of the survey were disappointing to me. The foot of the maximum grade, landed way up on the North Fork of the Skykomish, involving some terrifically heavy work, and a lot of "dead" line to get back to the main valley.

By this time winter had set in, and the deep snows precluding any further surveying until the next spring, I realized that more distance must be developed in the main valley or my plans would come to naught.

After studying over the matter for some time, I went up into the mountains in mid-winter and after a couple of days and exploring several apparent possibilities, I conceived and sketched out the Martin Creek loop, as it was located and built. Early in the spring, I had the loop roughly surveyed and finding it practicable, proceeded at once with preliminaries and location from the Summit down.

During this year I also personally examined other possible routes—such as what is known locally as Icicle Creek (the real name is Nacagel) which comes into the Wenatchee at Leavenworth. Also, I went up the “Chumstick” twice, as I have always had a lingering idea that route should have been chosen, and I recalled telling Mr. Beckler so later on. You must understand that on location, my jurisdiction was confined to the Switchback, and line West of the Summit.

It can readily be understood that the year 1890 and '91 were fairly strenuous on my part, but I think that they afforded me more satisfaction in my work than any other two years of my career, with the exception of those years on the Panama Canal.

Mr. Haskell, the engineer referred to above, was in service East of the Cascades, and not with me later on when he was drowned by the swamping of a small boat while attempting to land from a steamboat on the Columbia River.

JOHN F. STEVENS