



## **Tourists in Wonderland: Early Railroad Tourism in the Pacific Northwest**

Columbia Magazine, Winter 1993-94: Vol. 7, No. 4

**By Carlos A. Schwantes**

It is hardly coincidental that the massive and much-documented railroad promotional campaigns conducted during the 1880s and again during the first two decades of the 20th century were each accompanied by unprecedented waves of new settlers in the Pacific Northwest. "Ask any settler in some part of the West why he immigrated," observed the well-known journalist Ray Stannard Baker in 1908, "and he will invariably point you back to the beguiling road, a pamphlet, a fevered folder, an enthusiastic agent."

Over the years hundreds of different railroad brochures promoted settlement and economic development of the far Northwest, but most of the early ones only occasionally mentioned tourism. One prominent publicist for the Union Pacific in the 1870s and 1880s was Robert Strahorn, who had a passion for collecting accurate facts and figures, and for reprinting human interest stories in his pamphlets. It was almost as an afterthought that he promoted tourism. In various editions of *To the Rockies and Beyond*, published between 1878 and 1881, Strahorn became one of the first persons to call tourist attention to Shoshone Falls, Payette Lake, the mineral waters of Soda Springs and other natural wonders of southern Idaho, which was an area long regarded only as an unattractive desert. Railroad tourism, like development activity in general, meant transforming landscapes widely considered unappealing into veritable wonderlands.

As Strahorn understood well, few if any areas of the United States were blessed with more spectacular scenery or greater variety of outdoor activities than the Pacific Northwest, but the region did not become a tourist mecca until northern transcontinental railroads made the trip easy. It was only after completion of two such lines in 1883 and 1884 that regional boosters found it practicable to lure tourists along with home seekers and investors. Even so, after through-passenger trains reached Portland on a daily basis from St. Paul in 1883, most tourists from the East still preferred to go to California and Colorado because of the extra time and money required to travel to the far Northwest. Nonetheless, as early as 1886 the Union Pacific Railway issued a booklet called *Inter-Mountain Resorts*, which called attention to Salt Lake City, Ogden Hot Springs, Yellowstone National Park and three southern Idaho destinations: Soda Springs, Shoshone Falls and Guyer Hot Springs. These places offered tourists a chance to ponder curiosities of nature and society (whether Mormons or Indians) or the opportunity to improve physical and mental health. Curiosity and health concerns were two of the driving forces behind western tourism in the late 19th century .

Hot springs were by far the most ubiquitous of early western tourist attractions. Health considerations figured prominently in advertisements for the Pacific Northwest's many hot springs, which remained popular with tourists from the 1880s through the 1920s. When Oregon Short Line tracks reached the Wood River Valley in the early 1880s, Hailey Hot Springs became Idaho's first real summer resort. Guyer Hot Springs, two miles by stage from nearby Ketchum, had waters that were "good for all nervous complaints,

rheumatism, skin and blood affectations. This place is much resorted to by tourists and invalids. It is a beautiful, quiet mountain retreat."

The Union Pacific also promoted Bingham Springs and Hot Lake in eastern Oregon until the popularity of hot springs waned after World War I. Of Hot Lake one promoter claimed, "The water is delightful to taste, having something of the exhilarating effect of champagne. It has cured innumerable invalids, who had tried in vain all the noted resorts of this country and of Europe."

Certainly not all geothermal attractions were located along the Union Pacific line. There were Green River Hot Springs on the Northern Pacific line east of Tacoma and, in Montana, more than 21 hot springs, including White Sulphur Springs, that "Eldorado of Ease and Elegance, where Cool Breezes Kiss Away the Burning Rays of the Summer Sun, and a Panacea for Human Ills Gushes Forth from Mother Earth." White Sulphur Springs promised guests a variety of rustic pleasures including dancing, fishing and ball playing, but transcontinental railroads continued to ignore the resort because of its remote location. Although in 1910 the White Sulphur Springs & Yellowstone Park Railway built railroads 23 miles south to meet the Milwaukee Road at Ringling, crowds of tourists from outside Montana still failed to materialize.

Health concerns also figured prominently in Western Resorts for Health and Pleasure Reached via the Union Pacific Railway, a booklet first issued in 1888. It emphasized that the "entire Rocky Mountain region is a sanitarium. It has the sun, the mountain breeze, the crisp, mild air, which combine to invigorate and heal." Simply contemplating the region's gorgeous scenery could have therapeutic benefits, especially for overstressed city dwellers, and to that end the Oregon Railroad & Navigation Company issued a brochure series in the early 20th century called Restful Recreation Resorts.

A Union Pacific brochure issued in 1889, called Western Resorts for Health and Pleasure, featured Cape Horn on the Columbia, the Idnaha Hotel of Soda Springs, Idaho, and Garfield Beach, Salt Lake City, Utah. It emphasized that "along the River Rhine or the Rhone or the Hudson there is nothing that will compare with the stately palisades of the Columbia, with their cool recesses, kept sunless by the over-hanging rocks, and watered by the melting snows of their own summits."

The arid Snake River Plain of southern Idaho had little of the visual appeal of the Columbia Gorge, but it too evolved into a tourist destination in the late 19th century, with the most notable attraction being Shoshone Falls. The site suffered from the handicap of isolation, but promoters used the anti-urban prejudice then common in America to transform its remoteness into an asset. "Shoshone differs from every other waterfall in this or the old country. It is its lonely grandeur that impresses one so deeply; all of the other historic places have the adjuncts of civilization, and one is almost overshadowed by a city while in their presence."

The Northern Pacific responded to Union Pacific tourist promotions with a booklet called North Pacific Coast Resorts, which included attractions as far inland as the lakes of northern Idaho. One of the earliest such facilities was Highland House, situated on Lake Pend Oreille next to Northern Pacific tracks. It was designed to accommodate tourists who wanted to take a break from long-distance train travel. Another area popular with tourists was the Washington coast north of the Columbia River. A steamboat ran from Portland to Ilwaco three times a week beginning in 1887. South of the river and down the Oregon coast was Seaside, so named by Ben Holladay who built a resort hotel there in 1872 and called it Seaside House.

In addition to being identified with good health and the beauty of nature, the Pacific Northwest emerged as a "sportsman's paradise," affording tourists unusually good opportunities for hunting and fishing. "Days and weeks are passed in fishing, boating, loafing, drinking in new life and strength and hope and ambition in every breath." In the late 1870s hunting and trapping for sport first attracted widespread attention on the western slope of Washington's Cascade Range. This gave "exciting and profitable employment to quite a

number of persons, some of them old trappers from the Rocky Mountains and various other trapping grounds of the country, tough, rugged, often morose men, hardened by exposure." As the number of city dwellers in the region grew, hunting and fishing increased in popularity, probably because the out-of-doors remained so accessible to residents of budding metropolitan centers like Portland and Seattle. Beginning in the 1880s wealthy tourists might even hire a private car built expressly for hunting and fishing parties. The Northern Pacific furnished such cars complete with cook and porter, parking them on sidings along its right-of-way for up to six weeks.

The national parks of the Pacific Northwest became favorite tourist destinations after transcontinental railroads realized their potential for generating passenger revenue. The Northern Pacific was fortunate in that the nation's first national park, Yellowstone (established in 1872), could easily be reached by stage from its main line at Livingston, Montana. A 54-mile branch line from Livingston finally reached Gardiner on the park's northern boundary in 1903. From there it was only five miles by stage to Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel.

The Northern Pacific could not keep so lucrative a source of passenger traffic to itself. In the early 20th century the bitter rivalry between railroad barons Edward H. Harriman and James J. Hill resulted in Harriman's Union Pacific extending a branch line from St. Anthony, Idaho, to Yellowstone, Montana, the western portal to the national park, in an effort to divert passenger traffic from the Hill-allied railroad to the north. Before that branch opened to tourist traffic in 1908 the Union Pacific had joined with the Chicago and North Western in 1903 to conduct escorted tours through the Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain parks. So successful was this joint venture that the two railroads added winter tours to California. The Union Pacific considered building a grand hotel in Yellowstone Park but dropped the idea in the early 1920s when statistics showed that by then nearly two-thirds of all visitors arrived by private automobile.

Beginning in the 1880s the Northern Pacific issued an annual Wonderland booklet to promote Yellowstone and other scenic wonders along its right-of-way. Of the national park Olin Wheeler in Wonderland '97 asked,

Why is it that those who can, do not use this vast, inspiring domain as a piece of recreation! In all the large cities of the land, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis, etc. , there are men and women of wealth and leisure who are sated with the monotonous hum-drum of the sea shore, of fashionable watering places and resorts. Here is a region, new, far away from artificiality, where one can drink in inspiration of life from the very clouds themselves.

After Union Pacific trains reached the western gateway to Yellowstone Park, the railroad's Oregon Short Line subsidiary responded to the Wonderland booklets with its own series, beginning with Where Gush the Geysers. Where the Northern Pacific used the term Wonderland, the Oregon Short Line countered with Geyserland, and the Milwaukee Road used Pictureland, although it appropriated the older term for the title of its 1920s travel brochure, Pacific Northwest: The Wonderland.

While the Northern Pacific and Union Pacific became synonymous with Yellowstone National Park, Southern Pacific advertisements sought to promote Crater Lake National Park as a tourist destination. The Southern Pacific started conducting tours from its tracks at Medford to Crater Lake after the park was created in 1902. Beginning in 1906 the Tacoma Eastern Railroad promoted Mount Rainier National Park, and that relationship continued after the Milwaukee Road acquired the short line. During the summers in the mid 1920s the Milwaukee Road operated the National Park Limited between Seattle, Tacoma and Ashford. The train, featuring coaches, parlor cars and a café-observation car, required three hours and fifteen minutes to complete a one-way trip.

In much the same way, the Great Northern Railway became synonymous with Glacier National Park. James J. Hill's favorite form of outdoor recreation was fishing on the St. John River in New Brunswick, where Wall Street financiers often joined him for a combination of business and pleasure. His second son, Louis W. Hill, preferred to look west to the northern Rocky Mountains. What his father had regarded only as an obstacle for Great Northern trains to surmount, he now saw an opportunity for a magnificent new national park.

The elevation of 35-year-old, Yale-educated Louis to the Great Northern presidency in 1907 had an unmistakable effect on the railroad. Unlike his father, the younger Hill was far more interested in advertising than in day-to-day railroad operations. Some called him a public relations genius.

Louis Hill was among the leaders of a campaign that culminated in 1910 when President William Howard Taft signed legislation creating Glacier National Park. The Great Northern executive saw the preserve as America's answer to the Swiss Alps and his company's counterpart to the Northern Pacific's popular Yellowstone National Park. When the railroad created the Glacier Park Hotel Company in 1914 to operate Glacier National Park Lodge (a large hotel that opened the previous year) and other of the park's tourist facilities, Louis Hill became its president. The Great Northern spent almost a third of a million dollars that same year to promote the park.

Hill retained well-known artists like John Fery to capture the grandeur of Glacier National Park and the West. Their illustrations appeared on everything from Great Northern playing cards to wall calendars. It was in this spirit that the railroad's famous Rocky Mountain goat symbol first appeared on freight cars in the early 1920s as a way to advertise Glacier National Park across the nation.

Hill was not interested in Glacier National Park simply for its revenue-generating possibilities. He was a romantic who genuinely loved the Rocky Mountain West. Sometimes he would remain in Glacier National Park for six or seven weeks at a time. He once suggested in all seriousness that the United States Post Office replace the faces of obscure dead Americans on its stamps with pictures of the country's famous scenic attractions. Hill wanted school children of the United States to learn the history of the new Northwest, especially the Rocky Mountain country, not just that of Europe and the East Coast.

Louis Hill took justifiable pride in his role in developing Glacier National Park. He was a big backer of "See America First," a campaign that sought to divert wealthy tourists from the traditional attractions of Europe to new ones in the American West. One promoter took precise aim at those affluent tourists when he entreated,

To the tourist who travels for pleasure, the slogan "See America First" applies with unusual force to the whole Rocky Mountain region, and more especially to Idaho. To the invalid seeking to restore his health, the healing properties of Idaho's hot and mineral springs offer as many inducements as the famous waters of Carlsbad or Baden, to which may be added the pure, mountain air and the scent of pine forests, things not to be found in any European watering place.

The "See America First" slogan is attributed to numerous promoters, including Louis Hill. As early as January 1906 a See America First League was founded in Salt Lake City. American railroads spent millions of dollars annually to support the "See America First" campaign. The Great Northern even added the slogan to the covers of its passenger time-tables and various tourist brochures. But nothing aided the campaign more than the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914 and the fear of transatlantic travel after a German submarine sank the Lusitania the following year.

Railroad promotion of national parks was originally aimed at wealthy Americans who had both time and money for an extended stay. The word "vacation" was not part of the vocabulary of a pioneer generation of

Pacific Northwesterners, and paid vacations for the masses were still largely unknown when the new century dawned. Most vacations were for wives and children of well-to-do businessmen. But another form of tourism, railroad excursion travel, evolved to cater to a less affluent crowd.

In lieu of vacations for both workers and business executives, brief local excursions by rail and boat became popular. One Midwestern resident remembers railroad excursions as "those crowded, grimy, exuberant, banana-smelling affairs on which one sat up nights in a day coach, or if a 'dude' took a sleeper, from Saturday 'til Monday morning and went back to work a bit seedy...." But that was not always the case, particularly as excursion travel itineraries grew longer and catered to an increasingly affluent middle class. The Oregon Railroad & Navigation Company offered personally conducted excursions from Portland to the East Coast in trains that featured free reclining seats and tourist sleepers with stoves for cooking meals. "The linen is carefully laundered and it's the best. Ladies' and gentlemen's toilet and lavatories in each car."

Nearer to home, Seattle and Tacoma residents could easily cruise Puget Sound in a commercial steamboat or cross over to the still-pristine Olympic Peninsula. Completion of the Tacoma Eastern Railroad put the meadows of Mount Rainier within easy reach of Puget Sound residents. The railroad ran passenger trains 55 miles from Tacoma to Ashford. From there a good wagon road and stage lines enabled tourists to reach Longmire Springs, a resort with two hotels and a mineral spring, at the base of Mount Rainier.

Portland residents, like those of Seattle, Tacoma and other Pacific Northwest cities, were well-situated to take advantage of outdoor recreation made easily accessible by excursion trains and boats. Close at hand were Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge; and it required only slightly more time and effort to reach the coasts of Oregon or Washington. From the railroad station at Hood River a daily stage-coach wound along the 40-mile long road to Cloud Cap Inn. The Inn was a quaint log structure built in 1889 at the base of Eliot Glacier on the north shoulder of Mount Hood between 6,500 and 7,000 feet. "Ladies intending to go on the glacier or climb the mountain should provide stout ankle boots and short woolen skirts. Tourists cannot be too strongly urged to take this trip," the Union Pacific advised in 1892.

The Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway in mid 1916 offered numerous "Sunday Picnic" fares from Portland to points along the Columbia River Gorge. Prices for a round trip ranged from \$1.25 to \$1.50. For \$39.10 the railroad offered special 125-ride tickets to points as far inland as White Salmon, Washington, the jumping-off point for alpine tours to 12,307-foot Mount Adams. One option for excursionists was to go one way by train and return on the Bailey Gatzert or Dalles City of the Dalles, Portland & Astoria Navigation Company. On the Columbia's opposite bank the Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation Company promoted "Bonneville on the Columbia River," a picnic grove that in 1911 boasted a dance pavilion, refreshment stand, children's attractions, baseball diamond, camping sites and trout fishing in the nearby Columbia River. Situated only 90 minutes east of Portland by train, it was a favorite site for group picnics.

The coming of electric streetcars and interurban railroads offered still other low-cost recreation alternatives for city residents. The Spokane & Inland Empire Railroad owned a minor league baseball team in Spokane and used its games to generate passenger business. More typical was the streetcar company that for a nickel or two would whisk a patron to a bucolic setting that featured a picnic grove, small dance pavilion, and a few amusements and concession stands. "I would want my patrons to feel that they had enjoyed a trip to the country, unmarred by familiar city sights," explained one operator.

Trolley car parks were promoted as places where Sunday schools, fraternal societies and other associations could meet together. "The real excuse for the existence of any park is that it offers opportunity for out-of-door pleasures which would otherwise be denied to the vast majority of our urban population." It did not hurt that "electric parks" and other recreation facilities boosted passenger traffic on trolley and interurban railways, particularly on weekends when rider-ship might otherwise be low.

Artificial amusement parks had to a large extent superseded picnic groves and other natural attractions by World War I. The former dated back to the Midway at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and during the following decade evolved into "electric parks" with brightly lit grounds that dazzled the eyes with incandescent lamps. Invariably, a variety of thrilling rides, among them the "Helter Skelter" and "Shoot the Chutes", provided the main lure of such parks. "Speed is almost as important a factor in amusing the million[s] as is the carnival spirit," advised one park operator. "We as a nation are always moving, we are always in a hurry, we are never without momentum."

In Portland an amusement park called the Oakes opened on a tree-covered sand spit in the Willamette River in 1907 and was soon billed as "Oregon's Coney Island." That first season open-sided trolleys carried 300,000 visitors, many of them families with small children and bulging picnic baskets.

The Seattle Electric Company owned and managed both Madrona and Leschi parks on Lake Washington. They became city property when Seattle acquired the streetcar company. Adjacent to Seattle's Madrona Park was White City Amusement Park. Luna Park featured similar recreation in West Seattle near Alki Point. It was to promote such forms of entertainment nationwide that trolley executives formed the national Amusement Park Association in 1908.

Yet another popular attraction promoted by trolley companies was the natatorium. Ostensibly these were large, elaborate indoor swimming pools, but many evolved into amusement parks. The "Nat," operated by Spokane United Railways in 1924, featured an array of standard concessions: merry-go-round, Ferris wheel, electric bumper cars, penny arcade, shooting gallery and refreshment stands.

True trolley car tourism arrived in the early part of the 20th century when electric interurban lines developed distant recreation getaways for city dwellers. When it came to developing the local tourist trade, the region's most innovative interurban company was the Spokane & Inland Empire Railroad. One of its several attractions was the dance, dining and swimming facility at Liberty Lake, nestled in the mountains about 17 miles east of Spokane. After the interurban opened a branch there in 1907, the Liberty Lake resort became so popular that the electric line built a hotel to accommodate visitors who wished to spend the night. Still farther out was Coeur d'Alene, another popular Liberty Lake cruise destination.

On the shore of Hayden Lake, just north of Coeur d'Alene, the Spokane & Inland Empire built one of the finest resort complexes in the entire Pacific Northwest. To implement its grand design for a "Green City in the Pines," the interurban's subsidiary Hayden Lake Improvement Company hired noted landscape architect J. C. Olmsted, of Brookline, Massachusetts, son of the man who designed New York's Central Park, to plan the 158-acre grounds. Its centerpiece was Bozanta Tavern, a Swiss chalet-style building designed by Spokane architect Kirtland Cutter. Bozanta Tavern featured a wide veranda overlooking the lake that "has always been noted for its big, gamy cut-throat trout and bass." The Hayden Lake resort also featured a golf course, four tennis courts, boating and bathing facilities and a mountain trail for climbers. When the original golf course was expanded from nine to eighteen holes in 1912, it became the largest course in Idaho.

The Spokane & Inland Empire was once called the most pretentious of the region's new electric interurban systems, but it did have a way of making its corporate dreams become reality. Few other interurbans in the United States developed the kind of luxury resort that the Spokane & Inland Empire built at Hayden Lake. From the time the facility opened in 1907 until the mid 1920s, Spokane & Inland Empire trams whisked excursionists from Spokane to the lakeside retreat in its elegant parlor cars in about 90 minutes. One could leave Spokane's Interurban Depot at one in the afternoon, arrive at the resort by half past two and complete the nine-hole golf course twice before dinner. An early morning train that left Hayden Lake at half past seven allowed a businessman to reach Spokane by nine o'clock and put in a full day's work. There was even a 25-ride family ticket that enabled a businessman to commute to work while still spending evenings and

weekends with his vacationing family. Some exceptionally affluent tourists came to the Bozanta Tavern in private railway cars. A number of prominent Spokane families built summer homes near the shore of Hayden Lake.

The Spokane & Inland Empire issued a variety of attractive folders to promote its tourist traffic. One such, Hayden Lake, was mailed along with fresh pine needles "to carry the balsa of the forests direct to the recipient." There was nothing cheap about the interurban company's various brochures.

We often hear criticism about the expensive literature issued, but we insist that one folder that is artistic enough to be kept and shown or mailed to others covers more ground and makes a greater impression than twenty common, ordinary leaflets which are generally glanced over and thrown away. We have never yet seen one of our folders discarded on the floor of our cars or depots.

The electric line was an enthusiastic patron of Spokane's commercial photographers, who illustrated its brochures, because "a photograph can be read and the impression gained instantly."

Unfortunately for tourism on the Spokane & Inland Empire Railroad and every other interurban railway, the brochures and advertisements that ultimately made the biggest impression on Pacific Northwest travelers during the decade after 1910 were those for new models of automobiles. Steam railroad excursions and interurban resorts both proved extremely vulnerable, after the end of World War I in 1918, to a new breed of patrons called the "tin can" tourists, cost-conscious travelers who toured the West in increasing numbers in their own automobiles. The automobile made cheap family travel possible for the masses and heralded an egalitarian era of tourism that blurred the tie between railroads and national parks and virtually erased the link between trolley companies and amusement parks.

Of the many varieties of railroad tourism advertising before 1920, one enduring legacy of that early era is the promotional literature that emphasized one common theme: the Pacific Northwest as a region richly endowed with natural attractions. Nature's prodigality as manifested in national parks like Mount Rainier, Crater Lake and Yellowstone, and in a host of lesser places like Shoshone Falls, became a defining characteristic of regional identity and remains so today. What the far Northwest lacked in prominent historical attractions, such as the many Revolutionary War and Civil War battlefields scattered throughout the East, it could more than compensate for in natural attractions.

One need only compare the number of natural parks and monuments in the Pacific Northwest devoted to natural wonders, from Oregon's new Lava Lands National Monument to Idaho's Craters of the Moon, to those devoted to history, such as Fort Vancouver and the Nez Perce National Historical Park. In the East a reverse proportion existed between the number of national parks and monuments devoted to scenic wonders and the number of historical sites. This relationship is but one illustration of how the image of the Pacific Northwest as a "natural wonderland," which was so strongly emphasized in the steam and electric railroad tourist brochures, still defines the region in its own eyes and in those of modern tourists.

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**MLA Citation:**

Schwantes, Carlos A. "Tourists in Wonderland: Early Railroad Tourism in the Pacific Northwest." *Columbia Magazine*. 7.4 (Winter 1993-1994): 22-30. Date accessed <http://columbia.washingtonhistory.org/anthology/economyofwashington/touristsInWonderland.aspx>.