

Yakima Valley Trolleys Newsletter

2017

The Year in Review

To say that the year 2017 was an eventful one for Yakima's trolleys would be something of an understatement! Rock slides, brush fires, discovery of an old waiting station, and the repatriation of an original Yakima streetcar are just a few of the many adventures had by the Yakima Valley Trolleys in 2017.

Rock slides in the winter of 2016 closed the Selah line throughout the 2016 trolley operating season. Differing opinions on how to clear up the rocks stalled the actual work until April of 2017. Finally City crews from the Water Department brought a small track hoe up to the gap, and trolley volunteers brought the A-6 truck. The track hoe picked up the rocks and loaded them onto the A-6 truck bed which took them to a spot where they could be safely dumped off.



Rock slide prevents trolley from going all the way to Selah. It turned out that there were four more rock slides covering the track in Selah Gap.

It turned out that the huge pile that was first noted in 2016 was only one of five rock slides blocking the track. Once the first pile was removed, the others were discovered and removed. There were two places where the track had been broken from the slides.

Ed Neel, Ken Johnsen and Jerry Boeckholder from the Toppenish RR museum rode the A-6 truck in hyrail mode into the gap and made the repairs.



City crews from the Water Department helped us clear the rock slides off the track in Selah Gap using a small track hoe.

Another obstacle to Selah operation was renewed building construction at Davis High School along 6th Avenue. The new contractor there was helpful, though, and worked with Ed Neel, Bob Desgrosellier and Ken Johnsen to make sure the trolley tracks were always open during weekends, and also on weekdays if given notice. However, the overhead wire that had been newly installed the previous season had to be removed once again in order to allow giant cranes to move into the building site.

The City of Yakima hired a new City Manager, Cliff Moore, and in May he was treated to a tour of the museum and given a ride in one of the trolleys by Ken Johnsen, Ed Neel, Bob Desgrosellier and Joe Mann. Cliff showed a lively interest in the trolleys and so we taught him how to operate one!



City Manager Cliff Moore gives the trolleys Thumbs Up!



New City Manager Cliff Moore learns how to operate a Yakima Trolley.

The state historical grant that the City had received two years ago was renewed so that we could continue work that had been started. Bob Desgrosellier manages the grant for the City. Among other things, it paid for replacement of a number of failing poles along 6th Avenue. Some new signage for the museum will also be paid for by the grant.



New poles along 6th Avenue were paid for by a state historical grant.

Most of the former YVT employees and managers have all passed on. Because he was younger, former YVT lineman Dick Noyes is fortunately still with us, and paid a visit to Yakima in June. Ed Neel and Ken Johnsen gave him a tour and discussed ideas about re-installing overhead wire on the 6th Avenue line. Dick began serving as YVT lineman under Bob Jones in about 1975 and worked right up to the end of YVT freight operations in 1985.



Ed Neel visits with Dick Noyes, former YVT lineman in June.

The Washington State Department of Transportation began enforcing new laws regarding railroad crossing signs, and notified us that some of our signs were not in line with the new rules. Specific instructions were given for size of the cross bucks, reflective background, and a blue information sign that tells where to call if there is an emergency on the track. Under Bob Desgrosellier's direction, the City sign shop fabricated the new signs and Ed Neel helped install them so that we are now 100% in compliance with the new laws.

In June, two very nice gentlemen from Australia visited the YVT and chartered every piece of YVT rolling stock that could operate. This included the #1976 Oporto car, the Master Unit #21, steeplecab #298, and Line Car A. Besides the charter fees, the two Ward brothers (Andrew and John) made a very generous donation to the trolleys and the total came to nearly \$2,000. It is not unusual for people from other parts of the world to journey to Yakima to see the YVT.

The passage of time brings about transitions and two long time Yakima motormen retired from motoring in 2017. Paul Edmondson had been a motorman since the 1990s and Larry Perrigo had motored since the late 1970s. Also, early motorman Jack Wimer passed away. Jack is remembered as the YVT motorman whose picture appeared in National Geographic in an article about the Yakima Valley. Two newer members joined the ranks of YVT motormen in 2017: Stewart Wadsworth and Russ Wentworth.



Andrew and John Ward came from Australia to visit the YVT.



Early day trolley motorman Jack Wimer (left) passed away this year. Jack will be remembered for his picture in National Geographic's magazine highlighting the Yakima Valley.

Motorcycle buff Russ Wentworth joined the trolleys in 2017 and became a motorman. Russ has a lot of mechanical knowledge and has helped Ed Neel with repairs to the trolleys.

Andy Breeding of the Toppenish railroad museum lives north of Selah, and he notified Ken Johnsen that he had discovered on a farm near him, the original YVT Speyers Station waiting station, complete with platform! The farmer wanted to get rid of it because he was selling the property and the new buyer did not want it on the property. A work party was hastily thrown together, consisting of members of both the Toppenish group and the Yakima Valley Trolleys, and the station was extricated from the farm and towed to Andy's home. A few weeks later it was brought down to the trolley yard in Yakima where it will be restored. Master woodworker and new member John Myers offered to do the restoration.



Ed Neel, Dave Grillo, Andy Breeding, Doug Shearer, and Stewart Wadsworth all helped rescue the Speyers Station waiting station from a farm north of Selah.

Just as we were getting ready to begin restored service to Selah, their City Manager informed us that he had directed their road crew to cut off a small piece of rail from the YVT crossing at Southern Avenue, because it had gotten bent upwards, and they were afraid it would damage the tires of trucks that use that crossing. Thus another obstacle to Selah operation was presented. Careful testing showed that the trolley can actually negotiate the spot, if it moves *very* slowly. Selah did not want to tear up the street for us

to repair the rail until after the fruit rush, so when service began, operators ran the trolley over the gap extremely slowly, without incident.

Former Selah Mayor John Gawlik has been an ardent supporter of the trolleys and has asked how he could help. We had one vacant space on our board of directors, so he was invited to join, which he did. He also plans to take motorman training in the spring of 2018. John will be a great connection for the trolleys from Selah.

In preparation for Selah operation, it was deemed desirable to have a vehicle to inspect the track in the gap for new rock slides, that is easier to use than the hyrail truck A-6. Ken Johnsen purchased a Fairmont track speeder from a friend and donated it to the City of Yakima to add to the YVT collection. Russ Wentworth completely rehabilitated an old speeder trailer that was on the junk pile, and now it can be pulled by the speeder if needed.



Fairmont model M-19 track speeder was purchased by Ken Johnsen and donated to the City of Yakima for inspection trips on the YVT.

Scott Neel, helped by Ed Neel, has taken on the job of rebuilding all the in-the-street switches on our track. Scott has re-machined some parts, and fabricated others. The first one completed is on Pine Street between 2nd Avenue and 3rd Avenue where the lead from the YVT yard connects to the Pine Street line. All our switches have had deferred maintenance for so many years that this rebuilding will truly make track operations a lot easier.



Scott Neel is rebuilding the in-the-street turnouts, starting with this one on Pine Street between 3rd Avenue and 2nd Avenue. Scott has fabricated new parts for each of the seven switches.

Following removal of the rock slides in Selah, it was also discovered that the vegetation had overgrown the track during the time we were prevented from using it. Initial work with pruners and chainsaws and loppers was carried out by John Myers, Joan Walsh, Ken Johnsen and Dan Tamsky. Once the heavy stuff was cleared off, we hired a weed spraying company to go through and kill off the



remaining vegetation and spray a sterilant to keep it from coming back. We hired the same company that BNSF uses to keep their line vegetation free. They brought their hyrail mounted equipment in and professionally devegetated our line.

Once the line was clear of rocks and weeds, it was time to make some test runs to Selah. These were accomplished at the end of June, and so July 1 was chosen for the inaugural runs. On the morning of July 1 we discovered a large bend in the track at the Washington Fruit driveway. Apparently the night before, a large heavy truck of fruit boxes ran up against our east rail and bent it out of shape. We were not notified of this occurrence.



It happened that two of our riders on July 1 were track workers who had come over from the Tacoma Belt Line just to ride the Selah run. When our trolley had to stop short of the bend in the track, they offered to help us bend the rail back into alignment so that we could go to Selah. With help from Ken Johnsen and Ed Neel, these two heroes got the rail bent back and spiked into place. The work took several hours, but the final trolley run of the day was able to go to Selah! The rest of the summer, Selah was the destination of choice, and it added a considerable amount of money to our treasury.

Selah service had barely been going two weeks when a new calamity befell the Selah line. Apparently some homeless people started a fire on the island on the other side of the Yakima River from where our track follows the west cliff of Selah Gap. It was a hot dry day with a little wind. Some of the embers from the fire jumped over the Yakima

River and ignited the dry grass on the west side of the gap. The fire spread quickly and ferociously. I was motoring the trolley that day and did not realize the fire could jump the river and block our way back to Yakima.



While our trolley was laid over at Selah the fire grew out of control. Firefighters told us we could not run back to Yakima because fire was all over our track! We waited and waited at Selah. A very helpful female bus driver from Yakima Transit pulled up beside our stranded trolley and told us all the trolley passengers could ride free with her back to Yakima! The passengers were very



glad to be able to get back to their cars.

The same bus driver came back a while later with bottles of water for the trolley crew while we waited out the fire. I am so sorry I was not able to get this kind-hearted woman's name to properly thank her!! Finally the fire fighters told us we could try taking the trolley back if we dared. Russ Wentworth walked along in front of the trolley with a fire extinguisher while Larry Fournier carefully ran the trolley through the burning landscape. Fortunately nothing on the trolley caught fire, but approximately 100 of our ties were burned in the fire.

We applied for a grant to replace the ties, and were awarded over \$4,000 from the Cahalan Trust. Many thanks go to Scott Hay for helping us secure this money when it was much needed!

Our super helper Anne Hatch and her husband Dusty organized the second annual car show to benefit the trolleys on July 22. It was a smashing success with lots of cars in attendance. Anne very kindly donates all of the proceeds from the car show to the trolleys. We are hoping to make this car show/fund raiser a recurring annual event!

A joint meeting was held between the YVT board of directors and the William O. Douglas Trail Association board at their request to see if we could work out a way for them to get across the Naches River bridge. Numerous ideas were debated and cast out for various reasons. Finally, Ken Johnsen suggested why not carry the hikers over the bridge in the trolley. Bill Cook from the trail association liked the idea, and a dialog was begun that will most likely lead to a cooperative venture between the trail association and the trolley association to help open up the interesting areas of Selah Gap. In addition to the William O. Douglas trail, there is a historic Indian encampment at the confluence of the Yakima and Naches Rivers.

As is known, YVT possesses two of the three Brill Master Units built for the YVT in 1930. Ken Johnsen has been talking with the owner of the third Master Unit for decades about purchasing the third unit for Yakima. The owner was reluctant because he and a business partner were planning to use it on a proposed trolley railroad they were planning in the Seattle neighborhood of Ballard. The railroad never came to fruition and the gentlemen involved are getting older. So in the fall, the Master Unit's owner offered to donate it to the trolley association and we accepted. It is in pretty dire



condition and will be used mainly for parts, but its shell might become a static display somewhere in Yakima as a reminder that Yakima is Washington's trolley city.

In October, we ran our Halloween Trolley on the weekend of October 28-29. Our webmaster Gregory Johnsen purchased and donated advertising on Facebook for the event, and many people told us that is how they found us. Larry Fournier also took out newspaper ads, and the ridership and income from the Halloween trolleys far exceeded any Halloween weekend we have ever had before. Wray's Markets very kindly donated the pumpkins we gave away to kids again this year.



The scenario was repeated for our Santa Trolleys on the weekends of December 9-10 and 16-17 and once again we had record turnouts. Advertising has shown that it definitely pays for itself and brings in a lot of business. Facebook advertising is relatively cheap, but well worth it. Gregory is going to help us set up Facebook advertising for the summer runs and we expect to see an upturn in business.



Santa Clause rode the 2017 Santa Trolley.

The brake systems on both Oporto cars have been under repair by Ed Neel and Russ Wentworth. With the help of

some machining done by a local machine shop, car #1776 will soon be operable again. And Ed and Russ put in many hours in the freezing cold carbarn to make sure we had car #1976 ready for the Santa runs. That car runs and stops beautifully now. Many thanks to Ed and Russ!!!!



A lot of people helped with the event trolleys, including Larry Fournier, Cheryl Fournier, Joan Walsh, Dan Tamsky, Russ Wentworth, Ed Neel, Scott Neel, Stewart Wadsworth, Ken Johnsen, Joe Mann, Gregory Johnsen, cashier Peyton and Bob Desgrosellier. I apologize for any names I have left out.

Blast from the Past:



Jerry Henderson reads a proclamation to Bob Hively in 1989 upon the occasion of Hively's leasing to us of his two Master Unit streetcars that were originally built for YVT in 1930. Hively is seated, to Jerry's right. The fellow seated in the navy blazer, gray slacks, white shirt and red tie has gained some notoriety since this picture was taken. If you can name him, I will send you 500 extra points which have absolutely no value at all!

Many thanks to all who supported us in 2017, whether financially or through volunteering time or expertise. Your support is absolutely critical to keeping trolleys rolling on the streets of Yakima, so I hope we can continue to count on you in the year to come. We have a big year planned for 2018 and there will be ways for everyone to contribute, regardless of background or skill level.

Compiled by
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