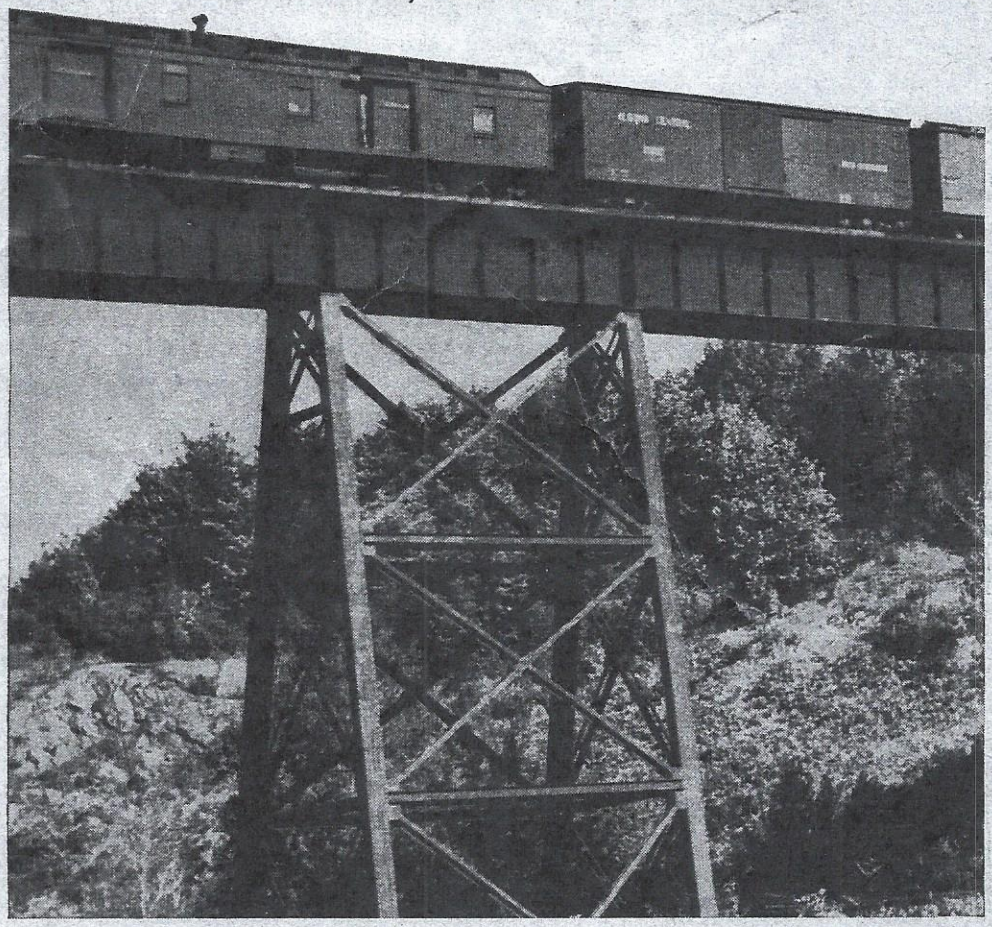
NORTH FROM THE SOO

DUE NORTH for more than three hundred miles beyond Sault Ste. Marie runs the Algoma Central & Hudson Bay Railway. Its lonely single track through the great heart of Ontario's silent wilderness is the only access to the vast forests and remote settlements of this little-known region, where moose and bear roam the timber and streams are alive with scrappy fish. Most railroads seem to make a point of not running to at least one of the places which grace their corporate titles, and the Algoma Central is no exception. For all its romantic undertones, the "Hudson Bay" of its impressive name means little, only that the line heads in the general direction of this storied body of water.

The rails end at Hearst, Ontario, a lumber town some three hundred barren

By MIKE RUNEY



Heavy-Duty Highway

Right here in America we have the world's greatest system of heavy-duty highways—*steel* highways that don't cost the taxpayer a dime.

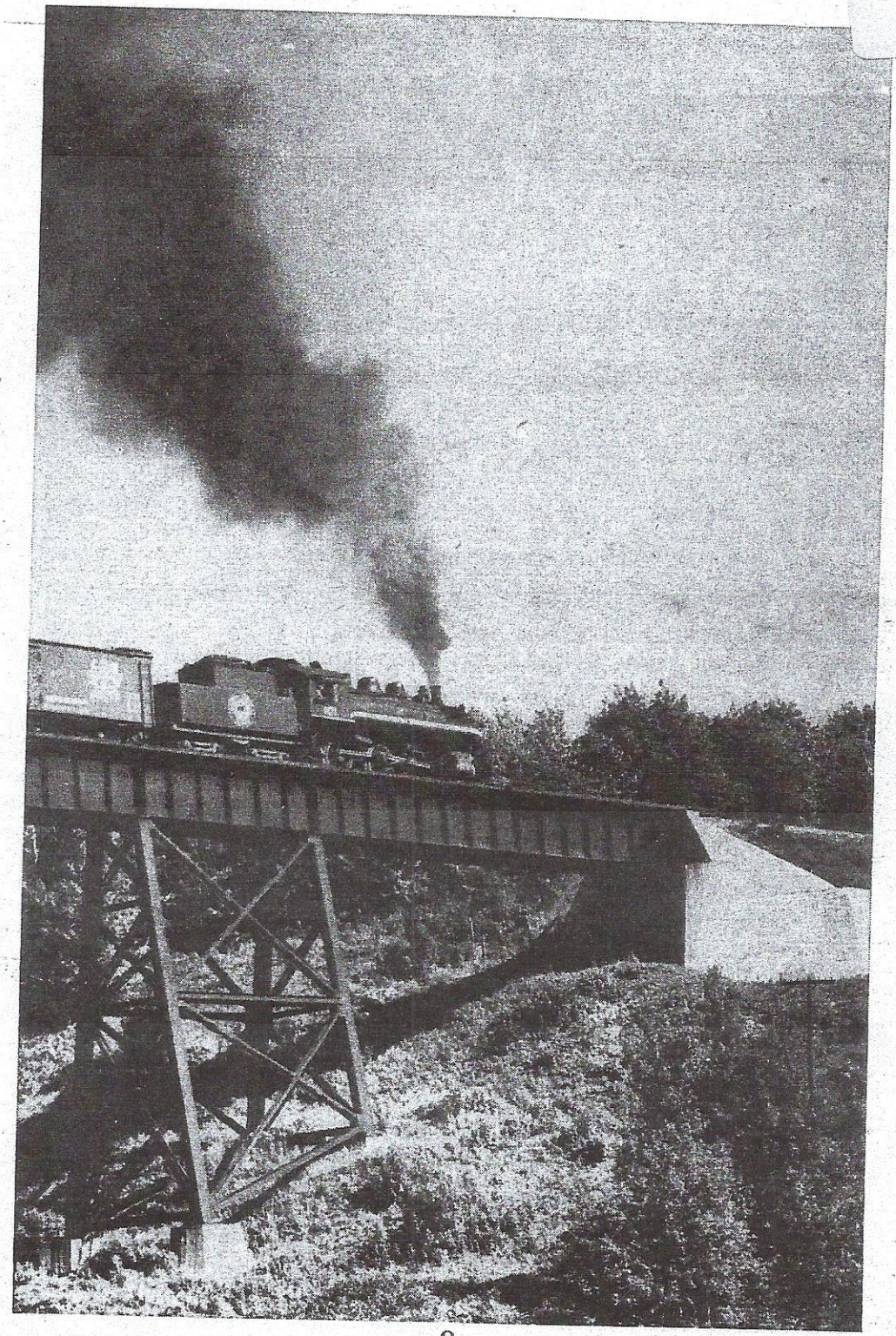
These highways—the 383,000 miles of railroad track in the United States—are always at your service, in any season of the year, to carry you or your freight to any part of the continent.

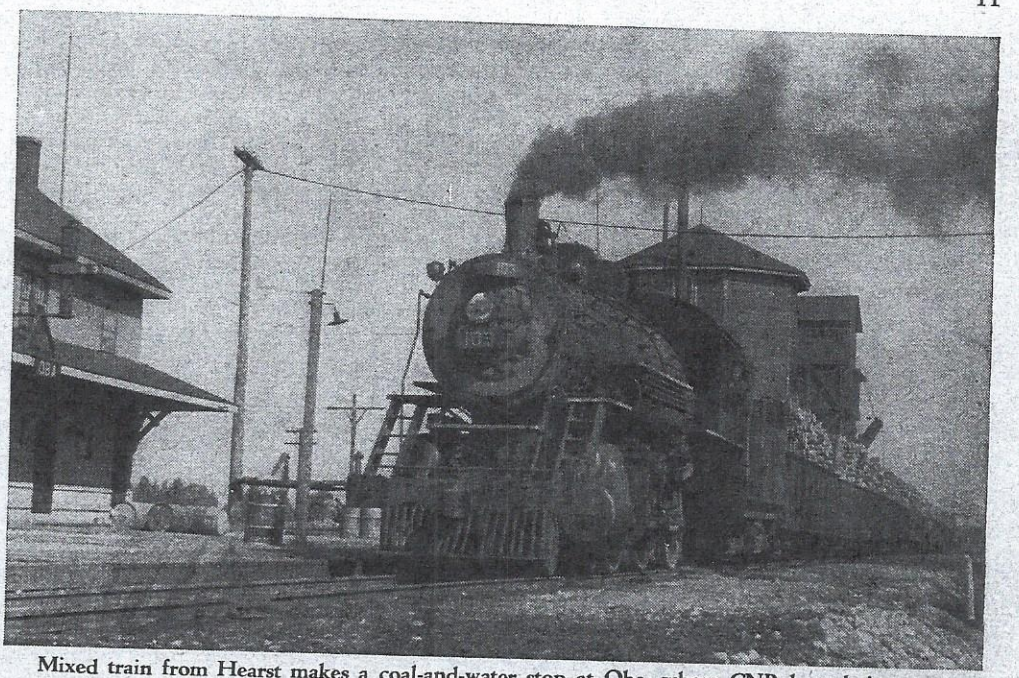
To improve these highways — and to add new and better cars and locomotives to serve you still better — the railroads have spent, since the close of the war, more than 3½ billion dollars.

And the more the ample capacity of these special steel highways is used to carry the commerce of the nation, the less the wear and damage on the public highways, the lower the cost of their repair and rebuilding—and the greater the safety and convenience with which you and your car can use them.

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS
WASHINGTON 6, D. C.

Listen to THE RAILROAD HOUR
Every Monday evening on NBC.





Mixed train from Hearst makes a coal-and-water stop at Oba, where CNR branch intersects the Algoma Central. Note carloads of pulpwood hauled by No. 103; this is tall timber country

across from the station, leaving a six o'clock call. Just before we fell asleep, a throaty, faroff whistle came drifting in from the south; it was nice to know there was an Algoma Central train somewhere in the deep woods. A lonesome sound, it was a fitting reward for having traveled the weary miles just to see this backwoods railroad that had so completely captured our imaginations.

In the morning we arrived at the station early enough to put away a big breakfast, for we'd been warned that our train would carry no diner. Familiar with the vagaries of mixed trains, we also knew that it was anybody's guess when we'd get to Hawk Junction and our next meal. The timetable called for five hours and fifteen minutes to cover the 131 miles, but we were assured by others who'd made the trip that the mixed train displayed a flagrant disregard for anything resembling a schedule. The Algoma uses the CNR passenger station at Hearst. We were surprised to find it overflowing with people, nearly all of whom were taking the southbound mixed train.

Considering the improbable and desolate destinations listed in the timetable, it had seemed reasonable to suppose that we'd be about the only passengers. We hadn't taken into account the fact that for all its remoteness the region supports many lumber camps and—along the CNR at least—scattered farming communities. This populace, small though it is, must do its traveling by train, so there is a good deal of local passenger traffic between Hearst and the lumber camps deep in the roadless woods. This business, in addition to whatever through traffic from Sault Ste. Marie may be carried, keeps the AC's mixed train comfortably filled.

The ticket agent was politely inquisitive when I asked for two round trips to Hawk Junction, wondering perhaps why anyone in his right mind would expose himself voluntarily to 260 miles of backwoods railroading. Since our sanity concerning railroad travel had been questioned many times previously, we didn't offer any detailed explanation. We had no time if we wanted to do so. Our train was backing into the station.

It was an amazing consist of sixteen gondolas bulging with pulpwood, trailed

by two grimy wooden coaches of dubious vintage. The engine was spic and span; a high-boilered, very capable-looking *ten-wheeler* with driving rods and running boards trimmed in white. On her tank was boldly emblazoned the Algoma Central's glamorous herald of a striding bear, encircled with the road's name in brilliant gold leaf. Our engineer was Larry Watson, and we talked with him while he carefully peered at every moving part of his engine, poking expertly at her entrails with a long-nosed oil can. Fireman Evans leaned out of the cab window and pointed happily to the safety valve as it sighed quietly against a full head of steam.

We only had a few moments to talk with the engine crew: it was almost 7:45 and time to pull out. Even though our train was eight-ninths pulpwood and but one-ninth passenger, it was apparent that the crew considered it a full-fledged varnish haul; it would leave on the advertised, whatever delays might beset it further along the line. Conductor C. E. Dent and Brakeman McCarthy were standing by the steps of the last coach, glancing at their watches and helping late arrivals up the steps. Right on the dot came the "All-Aboard," as magnetic and stirring as anything heard on the high iron.

We scrambled aboard, the train crew helping with the cameras, and luckily found one empty seat remaining in the crowded car. As we settled contentedly into the green and springless plush—a part of local trains everywhere—the engine whistled off. The exhaust coughed gently a few times, roared angrily as the drivers slipped for an instant, then settled down to a measured puffing. This latter was definite assurance that we were on our way.

No streaks of rust for the AC&HB, 100-pound polished steel. Work train in long siding near Tatnall houses crews busily engaged in renewing the shortline's worn rails and ties

FOR ABOUT ten miles out of Hearst a rut-torn road follows the track, crossing it a couple of times and then coming to a forlorn end in the middle of the woods. Our engine's whistle drifted back from way up ahead, blowing for the insignificant dirt road crossings. It was the last we'd be hearing of the familiar two

Girl out-strides grizzly, stepping over Algoma Central iron at Franz in approved railroader style. Mike took this photo from the rear platform of No. 3, which had pulled into connecting track to CPR, clearing the main for southbound freight

longs and two shorts for the rest of the trip. Ahead of us was a right-of-way virgin of roads and grade crossings, where the trains whistle only for far-apart order boards and desolate way stations.

From the very start of the journey, it was apparent that travel on the Algoma Central, for its regular patrons, was a highly sociable and festive affair. Everyone seemed to know everyone else, or at the very least had mutual friends to discuss. At each station stop windows were raised at every seat while passengers hailed friends and relatives who had come down to find out who was on the train. There was a marked international atmosphere prevailing on our lowly little [illegible]ersation was carried on in a variety of tongues. Finnish, Swedish, and French passengers chattered happily together and shared lunchboxes as the train rolled along its carefully ballasted single track through the hinterland.

About an hour's running out of Hearst, we ground to a noisy stop at the Hansen Lumber Camp. This is the biggest lumber operation on the line, and 500 men are employed there getting out pulpwood. An immense mountain of it was piled up near the track, and a dozen Algoma Central gondolas were being loaded on several sidings. A woodsman who had just boarded the train told us that there were more than 50,000 cords of wood in the huge pile; a nice chunk of tonnage for any railroad!

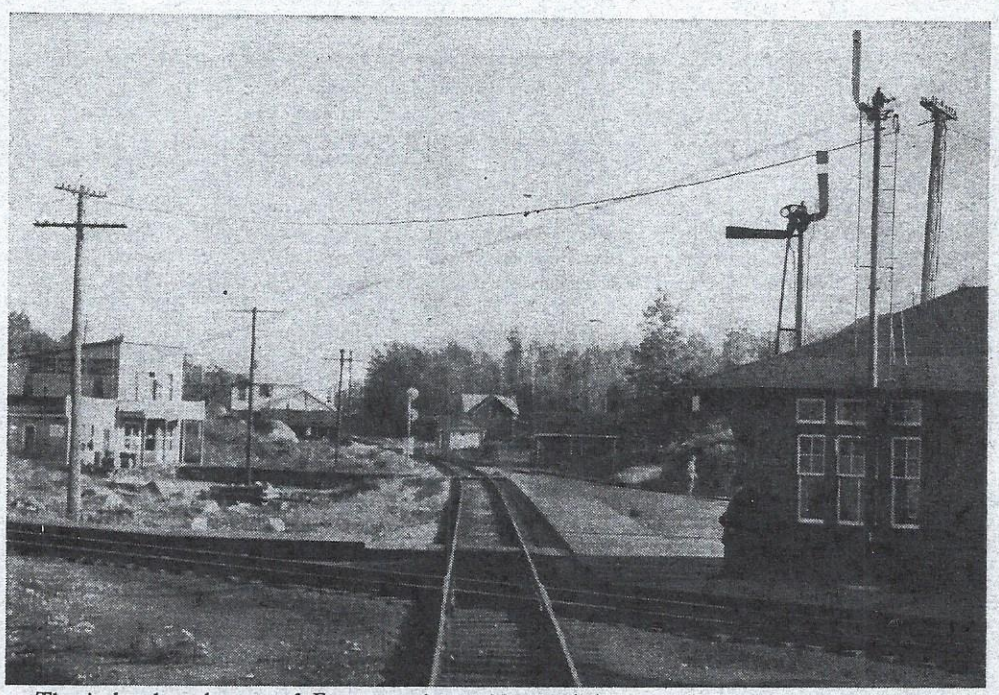
The arrival of No. 4 was obviously regarded as the outstanding social event of an otherwise drab day. It seemed as though everyone in Hansen who wasn't working at the moment had come down to greet the train. The tiny platform was thronged with men, women and children. The train crew, with an efficiency born of long experience, worked up and down the aisle arousing a few sleeping lumberjacks who had been over-zealously spending the weekend at Hearst. Aroused to semi-consciousness, they were carefully deposited on the platform, to be hilariously pummelled and welcomed back by their waiting pals. At length the engine whistled impatiently, and amid a bedlam of last-minute goodbyes and admonitions in various languages, the train puffed slowly away from Hansen.

During our wait, No. 4 had been augmented by a couple of additional pulpwood cars and some new faces among the passengers. Back at the station, clusters of people yelled and waved frantically until our train puffed around a long curve and out of sight. Although the Hansen operations are the largest along the AC&HB, a similar scene was reenacted at every stop; the region around Hearst is dotted with lumber camps, and the Algoma Central provides their only link to the outside.

The comings and goings of the Algoma Central—especially the mixed train—are a welcome diversion in the lonesome existence of those who live within miles of its right-of-way. They are, of course, wholly dependent upon it for nearly everything. The food, supplies and the eagerly awaited packages from the mail-order houses; the letters postmarked in faroff places; the welcome friends that come visiting—all come and go on the railroad. Priests and doctors ride the trains to and from the lonely camps and hamlets, and the bounty of the forests rolls to the outside world in long trains of pulpwood and lumber. The longer we rode the train, the more evident became the vital role that this shortline plays in the exploitation and opening up of its wilderness empire.

There is no alternative route in this desolate region, no highway or waterway to fall back upon for transportation. There's only the Algoma Central with its unpretentious but faithful trains. A glance at any map showing the country north of Sault Ste. Marie will explain why the AC&HB is in fact the life line of this otherwise abandoned territory. For 195 miles north of the Soo (Sault Ste. Marie), the right-of-way is near neither road nor railroad, until at Franz it intersects the single track of the CPR's transcontinental line from Toronto. Fifty barren miles farther north, the CNR mainline is crossed at Oba. Another fifty miles

of empty woods lie between this crossing and Hearst, end of steel where the Algoma Central connects with the northern transcontinental route of the CNR. At Hearst also is the miserable auto road that someday will be made part of the badly needed Trans-Canada Highway. This rutted road is the first one of any consequence encountered by the AC&HB on its 296-mile run from Sault Ste. Marie. Central crews are always on the watch for signs of danger. All trains carry "telephone sticks" to enable men to cut in on the dispatcher's wire in case of emergency. Sometimes the crews are able to warn the ranger stations when a blaze is spotted from the engine or caboose cupola. Conductor Dent saw to it that the "No Smoking" rule was rigidly obeyed by passengers riding the rear vestibule. One could



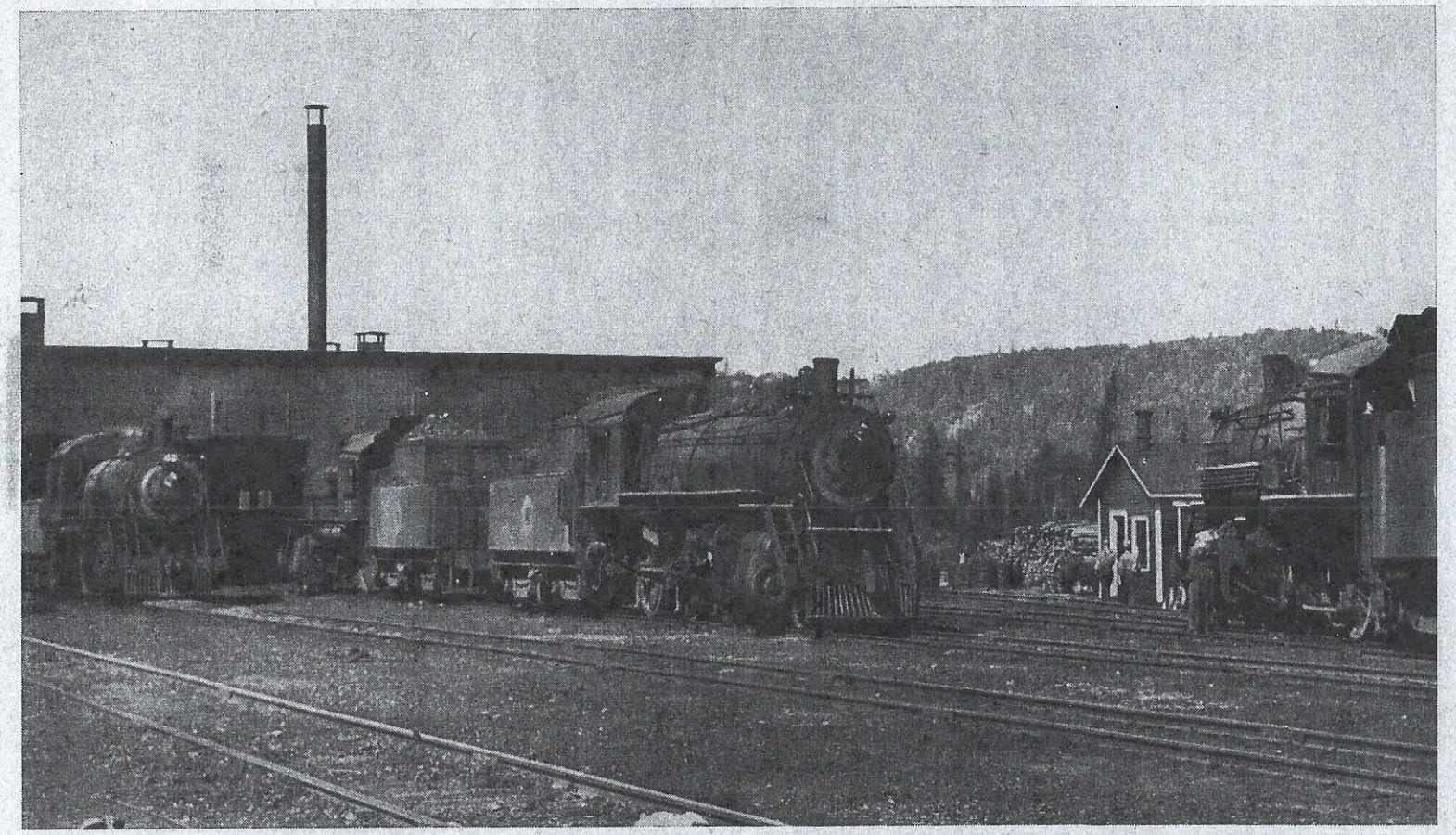
The isolated settlement of Franz recedes as No. 3 clicks over CPR's transcontinental line (diagonal foreground). Note modern color-light signals protecting the crossing

MOST of the country traversed by the northern end of the line is level and unspectacular, interesting mainly because of its rugged logging industry and the vast emptiness of the endless spruce forests. Fire is an ever-present hazard here, as it is all along the AC&HB. It was August when we made our trip, and the woods were tinder-dry; already there were several serious fires raging east of Hearst. Everyone we encountered was praying for rain and alerted for the telltale smell of wood smoke.

The threat of conflagration during prolonged dry spells is real and terrible in this densely wooded country. Algoma smoke in peace elsewhere on the train.

Stopping for coal and water, Dent came back to tell me there'd be time to get some pictures of the engine while we waited. We walked together up to the engine, but he left me there, entering the station for train orders. Oba is only a clearing in the woods where two railroads happen to cross. It has a coaling station, water tank and depot; nearby there are a couple of stores and saloons with false fronts and a few houses. Like all the stops on the AC&HB, Oba is completely dependent upon the rails for transportation to the rest of the world.

While our engine was taking water, a



Hawk Junction enginehouse, deep in the spruce woods. Algoma Central operates about 30 locomotives; ***10-wheelers, Consolidations, Mikes*** and ***Santa Fes.*** First-named are standard passenger power

long CNR freight rocketed over the crossing, its engine crew waving enthusiastically at all and sundry. It rattled away into the west, trailing a tremendous sooty fog behind it. No. 103 eventually slaked her thirst and pulled away from the water tank, easing the train a few hundred feet ahead to stop at the station platform where Conductor Dent was waiting to check his orders with the hogger. This done, we jogged back to the coach, the slack ran out noisily and we were on our way again.

The complexion of the country began to change after leaving Oba. Soon we were running through a land of spruce-lined lakes and streams. The sun-drenched evergreen forests were fragrant as our train puffed unhurriedly through them. At the marshy edge of a tiny lake we had just rumbled across stood a great bull moose, a majestic statue staring at the train. These awesome, unforgettable creatures are seen quite often by the crews from their vantage points on the engines and cabooses. Bears too are a familiar sight to Algoma Central trainmen.

The railroad used to offer a unique service to hunters and fishermen by providing camp cars and setting them off at various sidings along the line. They made an ideal camp on wheels for sportsmen wanting to take advantage of the superb hunting and fishing in this otherwise inaccessible region. The cars were regular "boarding cars" and were equipped with bunks and a cookstove. As long as they were in service, some patrons booked them year after year.

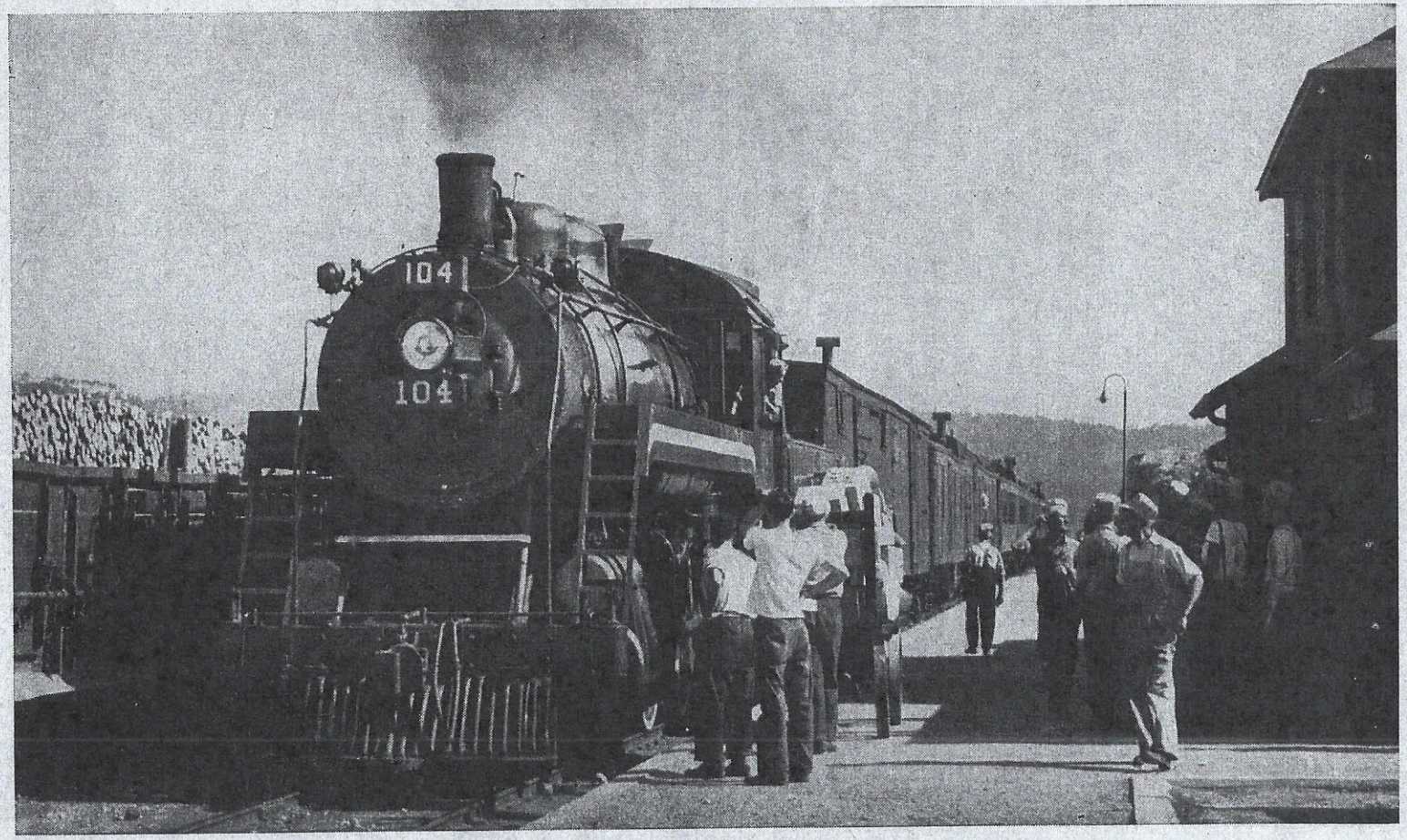
Back at Oba we had picked up a meet order with a northbound freight, so in the middle of nowhere our train suddenly ground to a halt. We held the main. After a long, restless wait, the sound of a tired exhaust heralded the approach of the tardy freight. We were already an hour late, and when the freight pulled past us, creeping through the siding, its head-end crew looked sheepish while our conductor and brakeman shouted a few well-chosen, caustic remarks concerning their slowness. The freight finally rolled past and up ahead our *ten-wheeler* whistled impatiently. In spite of our trainload of heavy gondolas, Larry Watson got us off to one of his miraculously smooth starts, which would have done credit to the hogger of a GG-1.

At Tatnall, where the lonely station overlooks a sparkling, forest-lined lake, we stopped. The road was renewing its steel with 100-pound rail, and there was a long work train in the siding. The savory perfume of roasting meat drifted appetizingly from the cook cars, mingling pleasantly with the fragrance of the woods. We remember Tatnall for several reasons, chief among which was the unscheduled loss of two of our fellow passengers.

They were Swedes, quietly drunk in celebration of their anticipated visit to Sault Ste. Marie—an excursion which had obviously been planned during their recent carousing at Hearst. For the past few miles they had shared the rear platform with us, chattering happily to each other and gesturing excitedly as the train rolled past what to them were familiar landmarks. For them, the wonders of the city's lights were understandably glamorous after dreary months of working deep in the bush. But as our train waited at Tatnall, the two city-bound adventurers made the unfortunate mistake of hailing a couple of the track gang.

Soon there was a brisk exchange of words. Both Swedes seemed to be well known, for the whole gang entered into the raucous discussion. Suddenly a stalwart individual appeared on the scene, trailed by a couple of assistants. Spotting our friends, he immediately began yelling at them in Swedish and what were apparently several other languages. His two assistants joined in, and soon the air was blue with heated epithets. It was pretty obvious that our carefree friends were being told to get off the train and back to work on the tracks, but quick!

At first they refused stoutly, laughing and gesturing to each other as the section bosses heckled them with profane persuasion. At length they began to view the situation a little more seriously, and their grins faded to mute looks of appre-



North from the Soo, Algoma Central's No. 1 arrives at Hawk Junction bristling with importance—and stovepipes. Pick up your highway map and you'll look in vain for the small communities along the AC&HB; the only way in or out is by rail

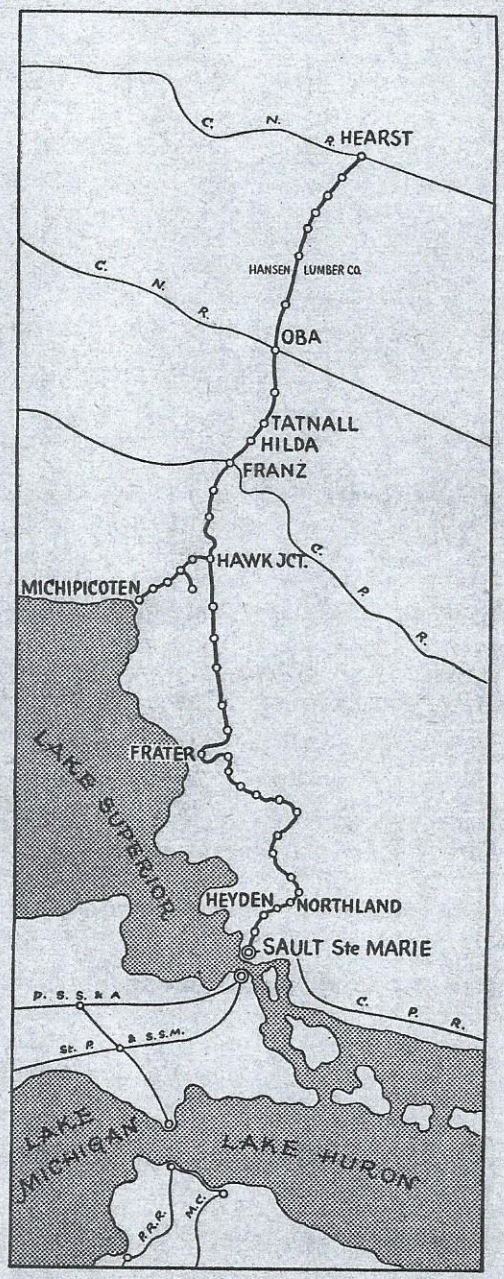
hension. Just as the wheels began to turn, what must have been an ultimatum convinced the pair that they'd be better off in the long run if they disembarked. They looked numbly at each other for a few seconds, then dashed headlong into the coach, returning on the run with their battered paper-board suitcases. In a moment they had tumbled off the rear steps onto the roadbed. The last we saw of them they were walking slowly and sadly back toward Tatnall. They disappeared out of sight around a curve as our train chuckled happily along toward Sault Ste. Marie and the bright lights of civilization.

CANADA'S Forest Service maintains a post at Tatnall. We saw a couple of their bright yellow float planes pulled up near the shore, planes used mostly for fire spotting throughout the area. The fliers and their families live in trim log buildings on the lakeshore. Some of them were swimming as we clattered past and waved at the train until we were out of sight.

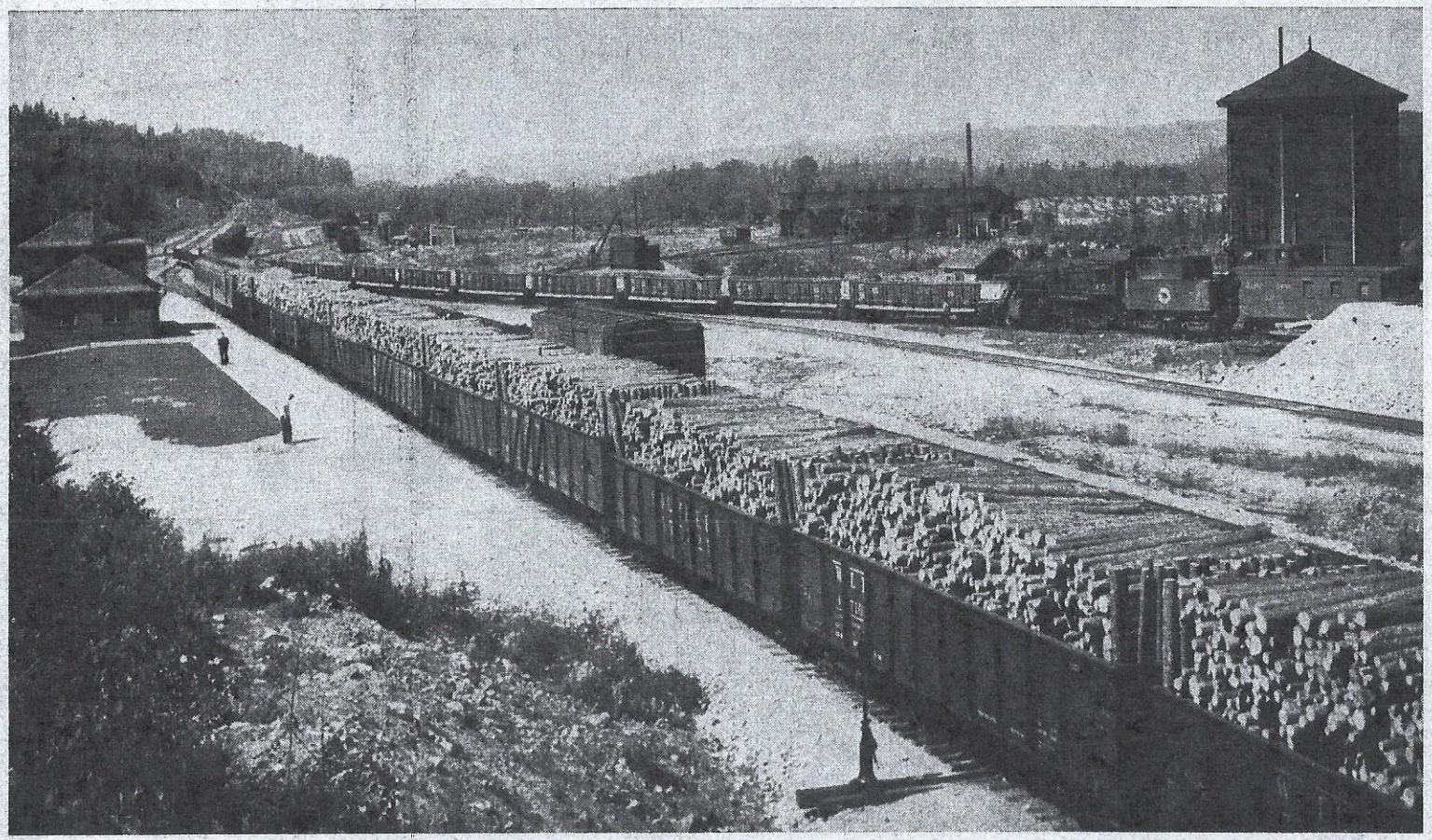
At Mile 210, near Hilda, we topped the Arctic watershed. The streams began to flow south, instead of north into Hudson Bay. An hour and a half late, we pulled into Franz. This little settlement differs from Oba principally in that here the Algoma Central crosses the Canadian Pacific instead of the Canadian National; otherwise the setup is about the same. We waited at Franz for an endless half hour, a ridiculous length of time considering the size of the place. Every once in a while our engine whistled despairingly, but nothing happened.

It became discouragingly apparent that we were going to be good and hungry long before No. 4 hauled us into Hawk Junction. We were thankful for the oversize breakfast at Hearst that morning, but the pleasant effect of it was beginning to wear off. Hawk Junction, only thirty miles away, began to take on the lustre of the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. Everyone in the car showed signs of restlessness. The few infants on board began to wail with increasing enthusiasm, and there were many muffled curses and complaints aimed at the company. Suddenly, and with no warning, we lurched ahead. Obviously the engineer was as peeved as everyone else by our long delay.

With the wheels clicking briskly south



Algoma Central dies out some 300 lonely miles short of Hudson Bay



Believe it or not, the train in the foreground is strictly varnish in the eyes of Algoma Central personnel. It's the two cars at the rear that work the transformation. Stiff grade behind them is diverging branch from Hawk Junction to Michipicoten Harbor. Rugged winters account for the completely encased water tank

again, good nature reigned in the coach once more. The babies stopped crying as a cooling breeze dispelled the stuffiness of the warm car, and the passengers forgot the blasphemous thoughts they'd been harboring against the road. The train swayed and rattled, the two coaches played crack the whip with the long string of pulpwood as we raced over what was fortunately an excellent roadbed. The passengers grinned happily at each other over this satisfying sprint of our venerable *ten-wheeler*.

However all hopes were unceremoniously dashed as the brakes took hold again, and we came to an unexplicable, screeching stop. There was no visible reason for the unwelcome delay: no order board or siding, yet there we were, and from way up ahead, the panting of the engine's air pumps was the only sound heard in the wilderness. Conductor Dent came striding purposefully down the aisle and onto the back platform. We followed, and as he lifted the platform we saw the cause of our sudden stop stumbling along the tracks a hundred yards to the rear. Soon three campers, dressed in the best sporting goods store tradition puffed and wheezed into the coach with the friendly assistance of Conductor Dent. He helped them with their duffle, then tossed the head end a highball, all with no apparent concern for the unscheduled stop.

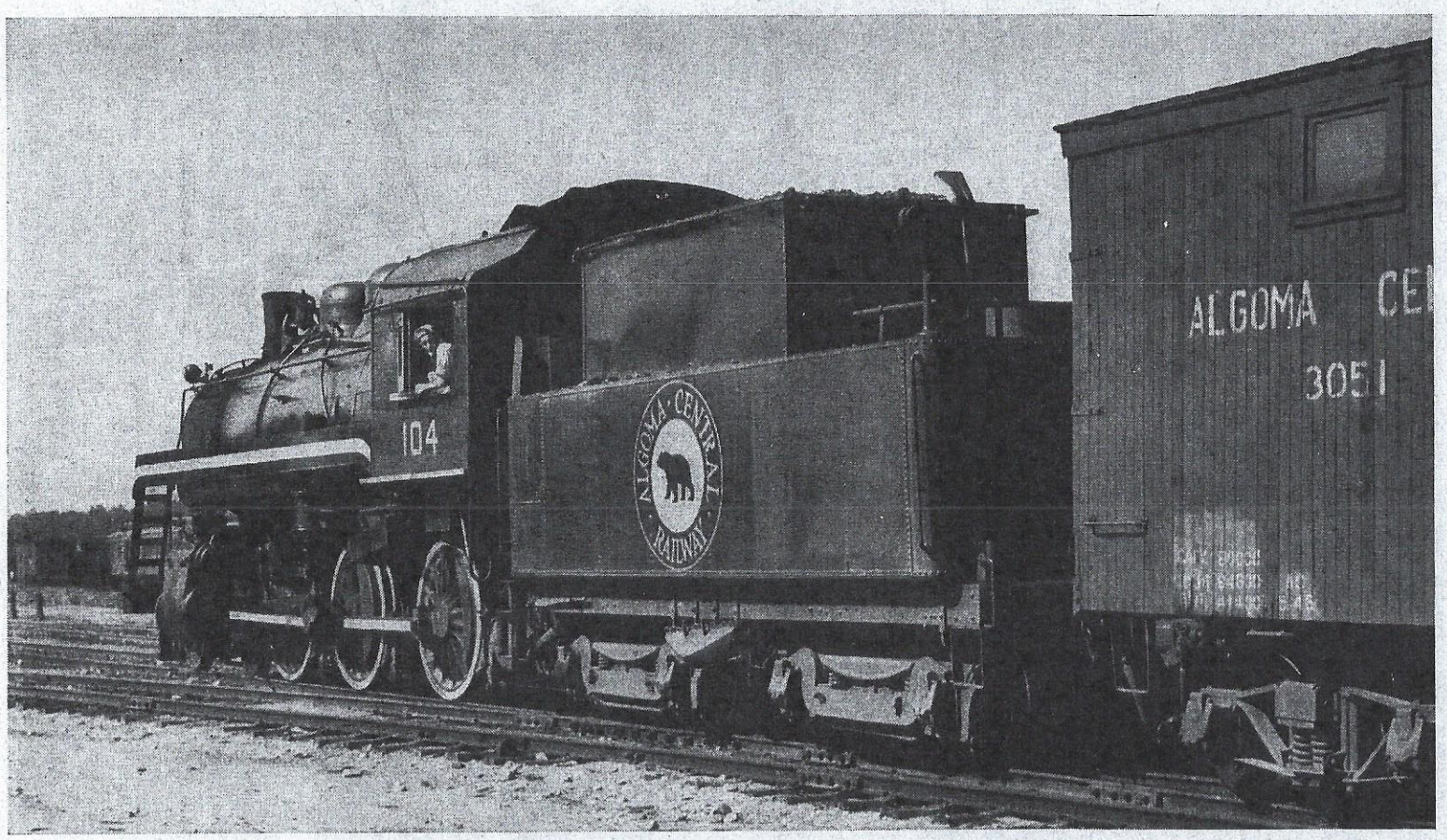
In this part of the country no one thinks twice about flagging down the Algoma Central if he wants to ride. Our new passengers had become lost, and in the process of finding themselves again had acquired sore feet. They heard the train coming along and flagged it to save themselves a long, torturous hike into Hawk Junction. The friendly Algoma Central seems to consider such unorthodox railroading as natural on a backwoods line; good naturedly, it has resigned itself to such goings-on. It was a nice touch, done as it was with no fanfare, heroics or even comments. It's certain that the three tired campers will always have a warm spot in their hearts for the considerate Algoma Central!

We were nearly two hours late pulling into Hawk Junction. All passengers and the crew made a beeline for the town's one and only eating establishment. Inside the little restaurant the situation was one of complete chaos; there were seats for only a handful of customers, and a trainload was clamoring to be fed. The proprietor and his help were game to the occasion, however. Although we'll never know quite how it was done, everyone eventually was fed. The whole world seemed much brighter as we left the restaurant with lunch under our belts, and turned our attention to Hawk Junction's modest railroad facilities.

A handful of locomotives were snoozing peacefully in and around a six-stall enginehouse built right at the edge of the woods. A grimy, busy little *Consolidation* puffed energetically back and forth through the miraculously neat yards. Finally she paused to refresh herself at the water tank and we went over to watch the process of filling the tender. The water tower at Hawk, typical of such Northland structures, was a large, multisided affair of wooden siding, complete with stove and a tall smokestack for heating it during the winter.

The chunky, low-wheeled freight engine, after filling her box tank to overflowing, clanked away with a string of ore cars. In a few minutes she reappeared and proceeded to couple onto our train, which had been standing unceremoniously on the main track ever since its arrival from Hearst, an hour ago. Noisily the *Consolidation* hauled away our pulpwood-and-passenger consist, leaving the main clear for the up-train from the Soo, due shortly.

Passenger service on the AC from Hawk Junction south to Sault Ste. Marie is somewhat sketchy, and unlike the line north the passenger trains don't run on a daily-except-Sunday basis. You can ride from the Soo to Hawk Junction on Train 1 on any Monday, Wednesday or Friday, and you can return on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday. The same service also prevails on the Michipicoten Branch.



Twenty minutes at Hawk Junction. The fireman of No. 1 waits for the highball which will start the 104 laboring up the slope toward Michipicoten Harbor, 26 miles over the branch line. Archbar trucks are not uncommon on home-road equipment

WE TOOK some pictures from atop a small hill at the south end of the yards, then walked back to Hawk Junction station. A stalwart member of the uniformed provincial police was standing on the platform, balefully eyeing the prospective passengers. In spite of his forbidding appearance, he turned out to be both friendly and helpful; the same proved true of all others we met in the whole North Country.

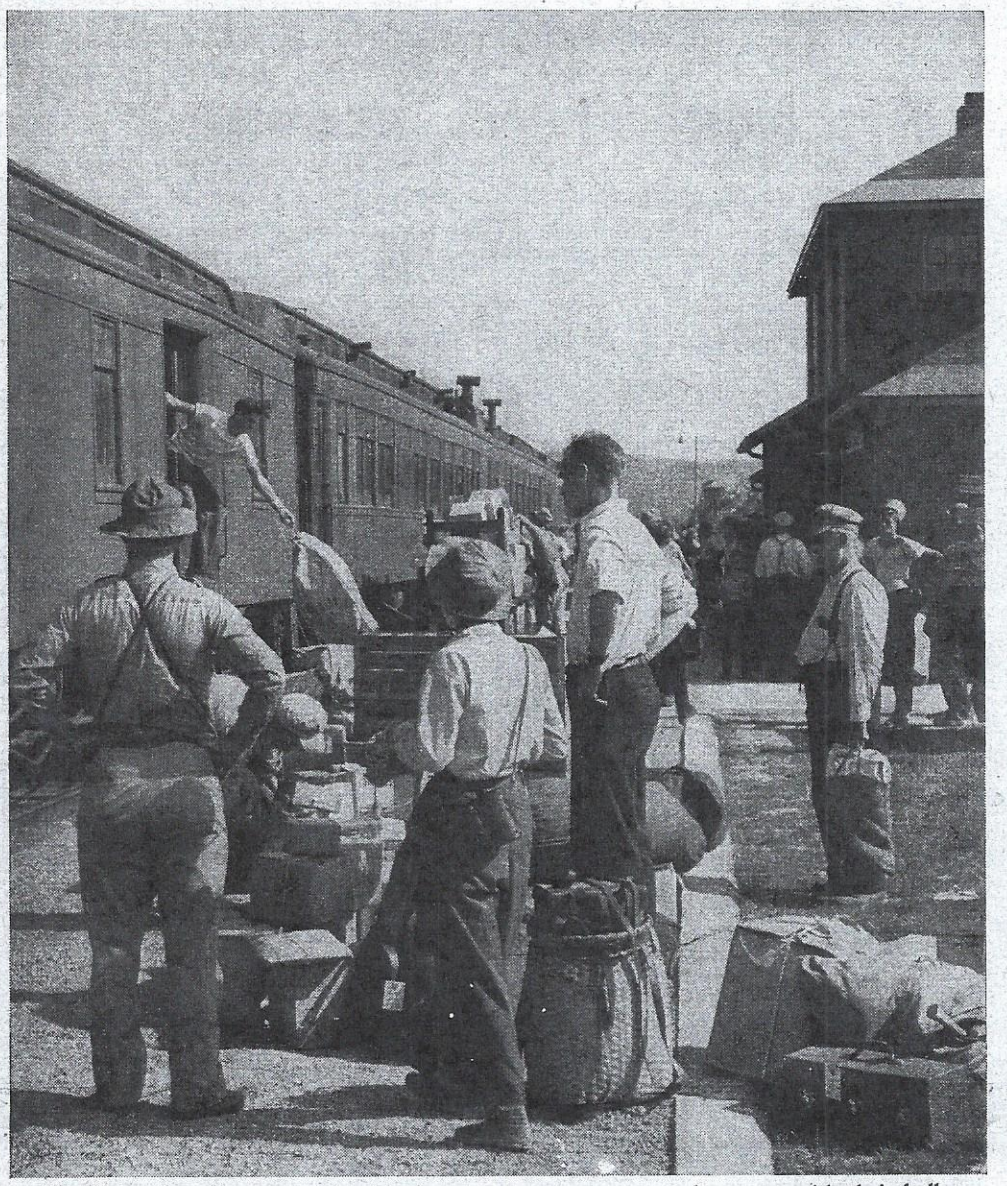
The passenger station was a good-looking, clean brick structure, its tidy waiting room filled with travelers, mostly from our train, who were going through to Michipicoten Harbor. This is a name you hear often in Algoma Central country: in many ways it's the key to the present and future development of the whole region. It is located on a 26-mile branch which leaves the mainline at Hawk Junction and has an excellent deep-water harbor on Lake Superior. The AC&HB owns and operates the extensive dock facilities which handle coal, coke, sulphur, pulpwood and iron ore in tremendous quantities. The Algoma Ore Properties Limited plans to increase its output of finished ore, or siderite, from the present tonnage of 500,000 to better than a million tons per year.

The ore comes from a rich vein known as the Helen Mine, adjacent to the original hematite deposit first mined by the Algoma Steel Corporation around 1901, about the time when construction of the Algoma Central began. The steel firm now operates the Helen Mine through their wholly-owned subsidiary, the Algoma Ore Properties, Limited. The entire mineral output of this rich holding moves to the ore docks over the AC&HB, a large-scale operation throughout. A million tons are hauled annually over the road facilities at Michipicoten, with iron ore ranking first. Coal is a close second, and pulpwood a poor third. Sulphur and coke are handled in relatively minor quantities.

Michipicoten is big business. About two-thirds of the ore moving through the port goes to U. S. steel companies, the balance being shipped to the Algoma Steel Corporation's plant at Sault Ste. Marie. The scope of AC&HB operations at Michipicoten comes as a distinct shock, when one rides through miles of wilderness that is virgin of industry save for logging camps. However, this strange railroad is even in the steamship business; it operates the oldest bulk freight steamboat line on the Great Lakes under the name of the Algoma Central & Hudson Bay Railway Steamship Lines. Michipicoten Harbor and the Algoma Central may increase in importance as the country north of the Soo continues to give up more and more of its bountiful timber and mineral wealth. There is great promise of untouched mineral deposits in the general region served by the railway. Prospects for this richly endowed district and the railroad that has so efficiently tapped it are now extremely bright.

We were still talking to the local policeman about Michipicoten Harbor when a long wail sounded down the track. It was No. 1, which arrived almost on the advertised after the long haul up from Sault Ste. Marie. Engine 104, another *ten-wheeler*, was hauling the seven-car varnish which came sliding proudly into the station, watched by a score of waiting passengers. A feeble attempt to dress up the engine with a white-striped cowling along the running boards fortunately hadn't detracted from her trim and symmetrical lines.

Immediately behind the tank was one of the Algoma's boarding cars deadheading north, followed by a boxcar doubling as a baggagecar and loaded with canoes and other camping equipment. A conventional baggage coach came next, trailed by a sway-backed postal car carrying His Majesty's mails. A string of four wooden coaches, all with stovepipes on their roofs, completed the consist of this backwoods varnish. After a fifteen to twenty-minute wait, during which mail, express and miscellaneous freight were loaded and unloaded and a carful of U. S. Boy Scouts then switched out of the train, No. 1 whistled off and tackled the branchline



His Majesty's mails arrive and, with them, summer sportsmen and campers with their bulky paraphernalia. They ride the route of the growling grizzly by the thousands each year and at every station the town turns out to appraise their choice of duffle

grade to Michipicoten Harbor. We heard it working steam on the grade long after it had disappeared, leaving a thin haze of smoke among the wooded hills to mark its going.

NUMBER THREE, our train for Hearst, was almost made up. Many passengers climbing aboard had come 165 miles on the train from the Soo and were transferring to No. 3 for Hearst and other points north. When we rolled out of the station, the coaches were well filled, a state of affairs we had now come to expect on the AC&HB.

Familiar landmarks of our morning's journey came and went as the train clattered back to Hearst, while we lazily re-