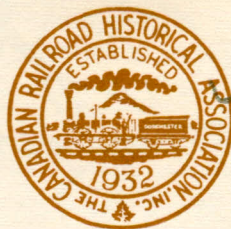


Canadian Rail



Number 158 / September 1964



GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP of railways in Canada occurs at all levels, and not the least interesting is the Pacific Great Eastern, which is owned by the Province of British Columbia. For many years, the PGE began and ended nowhere, but in 1952 and 1956, the completion of extensions linked the "nowhere" carrier with the rest of the Canadian rail network. Here, in the latter year, the inaugural train is shown arriving from North Vancouver at Squamish, the erstwhile southern terminus of the line. (See "The PGE Is A 'Different' Railway" in this issue).

Photograph by PETER COX.



THE **PGE** IS A "DIFFERENT" RAILWAY

Text and Photos by PETER COX



See this month's cartoon, Back Cover

FOR YEARS AND YEARS, the Pacific Great Eastern actually ran from "nowhere to nowhere". Its southern terminus was Squamish, B.C., from which rails stretched northward to Quesnel in the Cariboo country. Construction materials and general supplies went North, forest and mining products came down. While not having any physical connection with other railways, PGE traffic was transferred by car barges and passenger vessels at Squamish to and from such points as Vancouver, Seattle and Bellingham, Wash.

Going back farther, the history of the PGE has quite a story to tell, considering a portion of the line uses the same route as a portage railway put down in 1861 between Anderson and Seton Lakes. However, 1907 was the actual beginning, being the year in which the Howe Sound, Pemberton Valley and Northern started constructing trackage North from Squamish. By 1918, British backing caused a change of name to Pacific Great Eastern, due to the fact that the Great Eastern Railway of England financed PGE's promoters. The charter provided for the construction of a railway North to Fort George (now Prince George), to connect with the Grand Trunk Pacific, and also eastward to meet the railways at Vancouver. Neither destination was reached for many years. Trackage was

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTIONS

LEFT (Top): In steam days, Canadian Locomotive-built 2-8-2 No. 160 wheeled tonnage into Squamish.

LEFT (Bottom): Modern contrast: the "Cariboo Dayliner" on a day when it consisted of five RDC units.

CENTER SPREAD (overleaf)

LEFT (Top): The platform of "Northern Summit" often finds Premier Bennett, who is also President of PGE, greeting his supporters.

LEFT (Bottom): The typical station at Quesnel, for many years the northern terminal of the line, 347 miles from Squamish.

RIGHT (Top): Two small General Electric units crossing the Fraser River at Lillooet.

RIGHT (Bottom): The first train "eventually" arrived at Prince George on October 31st, 1952.





THE PGE IS A "DIFFERENT" RAILWAY (concluded)

laid westward from North Vancouver in 1913 and allowed interurban service to prevail using Hall Scott motor cars over the thirteen-mile line. Meanwhile, 176 miles of railway had been built North from Squamish. The First World War intervened, halting tracklaying, and leaving the PGE with two sections of line, "from nowhere to nowhere". In 1918, the provincial government of British Columbia took over the venture and by 1921 had pushed north to Quesnel. Although progressing rapidly, the PGE never failed to lose money and being a government enterprise, it suffered from political pressure and ridicule. As the years passed, producing only inactivity and indebtedness, the road's initials spelled out other meanings: Province's Greatest Expense, Past God's Endurance, Prince George Eventually. Certainly it was neither Pacific, Great nor Eastern. In 1928, the North Vancouver line was abandoned.

Despite the ridicule, PGE did get to Prince George in 1952. And in 1956 it reached North Vancouver (again). This segment used the original roadbed through West and North Vancouver, even though expensive residences had been built on property extending to its very edges. Bridges and trestlework remindful of those on the CPR's abandoned routes through Rogers Pass once again carried trains after 28 years of dormancy.

At the northern end, a dream was coming into reality: rails reached 222 miles farther North to the Peace River country at Dawson Creek and Fort St. John and a connection with Northern Alberta Railways.

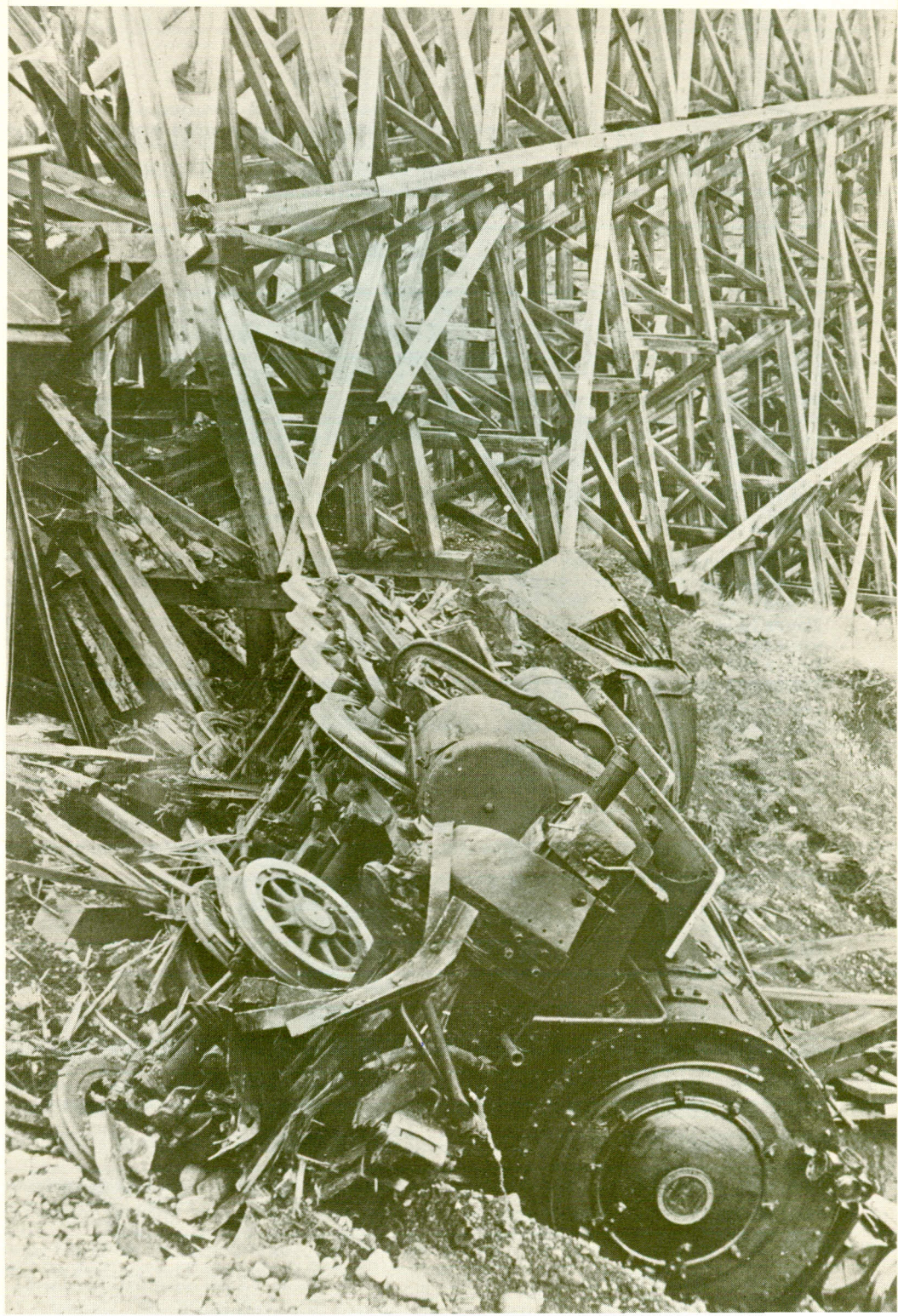
Today, the PGE is a combination of modern railroading and ancient hangers-on. Passenger service is provided by Budd RDC units but a variety of interurban and steam passenger cars still exist in the roster. Train dispatching is conveyed by radio microwave yet dynamic braking and roller bearings were "discovered" only in 1960. The North Vancouver depot is modern and attractive while up the line stations called "Water Tank" and "Number 10 Downing Street" grace the timetable and passengers can alight at their favorite fishing and hunting spots simply by arranging with the conductor. The beautiful scenery through which the road operates is constantly changing and is not accessible in many places except by railway. As may be expected, such terrain causes operating problems: it takes five units sixteen hours to haul sixty to eighty cars over each subdivision.

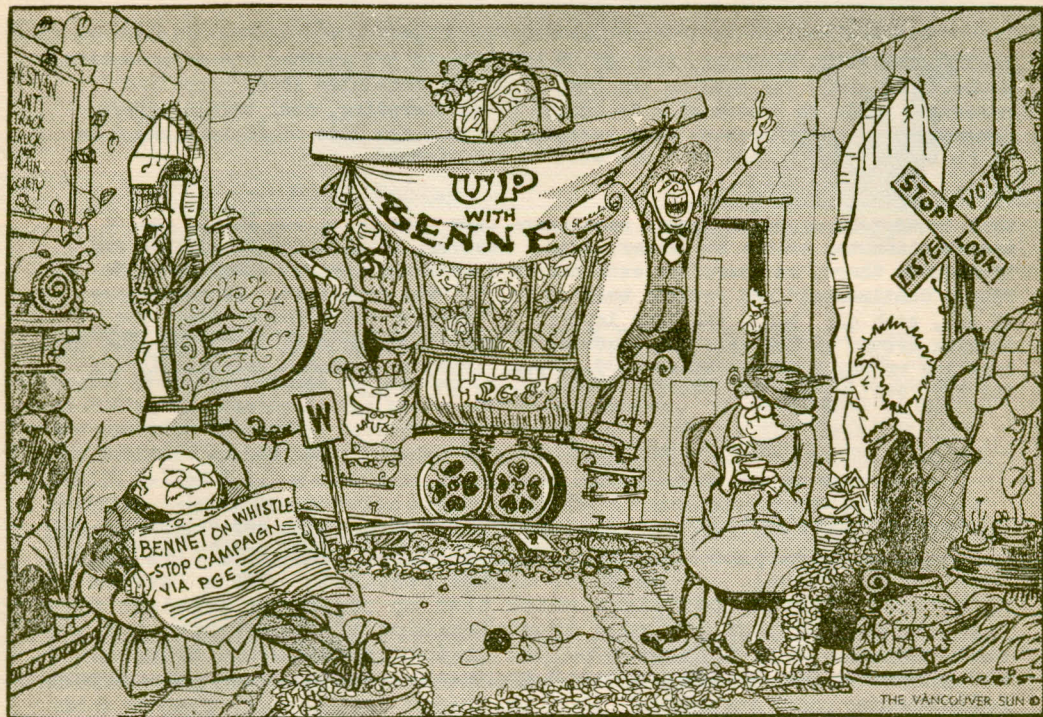
The main shops are still located at Squamish. Chop-hood diesels and older models are completely overhauled here in a modern facility. The car shop is noted as being able to reconstruct even badly wreck-damaged freight cars to their original appearance and has had plenty of practice -- also on foreign line equipment.

This railway is different. Piggyback, microwave, diesel power, Budd cars - are all here and so is the "Squamish logger", a daily train of log buggies carrying a genuine B.C. cargo: sticks so big that two or three constitute a car load.

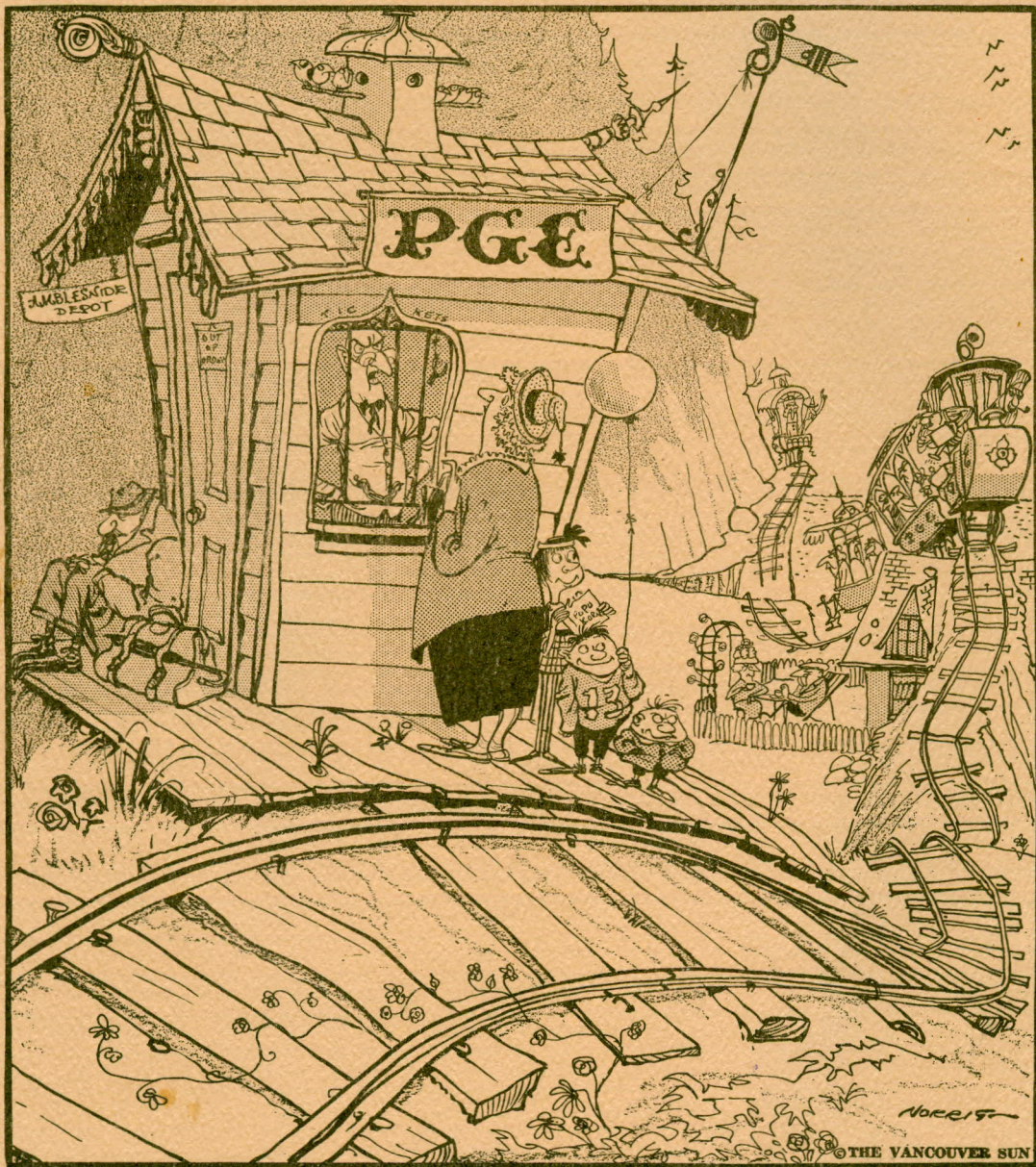


RIGHT: Railroading on the PGE has its hazardous moments: engine 54 makes her last trip.





"... We've become so used to it that we never pay any heed to it any more."



©THE VANCOUVER SUN

August 21, 1957

"... it's not 50c a ride, madam ... and it's the PGE, not the PNE."