
Wayne McKy, Hugo Railroad Man: 1951 - 1955

For many years, a railroad crew or Section Gang was assigned to a section of track to maintain it. Most of the work was done by hand with hand tools. For years they would walk from job to job and then by horse and wagon, then hand car, then speeder, etc.

High School To Railroad Man In 1951 Wayne McKy had a job waiting for him on the Southern Pacific Railroad when he graduated from high school. He had been promised a job by Ivan Bridge, Hugo Section Foreman. The Hugo section was from Leland south to Merlin.

Getting a job with the railroad right out of high school did not turn out that way. In 1951 the night 17-year old Wayne McKy graduated from high school he had to travel to Fort Lewis for two weeks of National Guard training. The Guard usually went to training locations by troop train, but the graduates followed the troop train by special chartered bus so that they could attend graduation ceremonies.

When Wayne came back to Hugo from training he was to go right to work for the railroad — he already had the job. But, guess what? The railroad had a policy that its employees had to be 18 years old. They found out that he was 17 years old and Wayne had to wait until his birthday on July 26th. On his birthday he woke up with his arm swelled-up, but he still was going to work, but his Aunt Fern looked at his arm and said, “*Your not going to work, your are going to the hospital.*” Somehow Wayne had contracted blood poisoning and ended up in the hospital for three days.

Southern Pacific Railroad

Hugo Railroad Section Gang Finally he went to work for the railroad on the Hugo Section Gang and stayed with it for five years. The normal beat of the Hugo Section Gang was from north of Tunnel No. 9 at Leland south to Merlin, Oregon. It was a real uptown 40-hour a week mostly day job, but all pick and shovel work. The Gang shoveled gravel, raised track, and replaced railroad ties. Sometimes they might have to work all night long after one of the numerous train wrecks. These wrecks would take them out of their section to places like Cow Creek Canyon. It was quite a job cleaning up the wreckage of cars down in some canyon and fixing the tracks. Sometimes they had to completely tear the old twisted tracks out and put in new ones.

As the name suggest, a "Railroad Section Gang" is a crew of men, with a foreman, that maintains a section of the railroad. In the first half of the twentieth century these "Gangs" also took care of the bridges and trestles for a certain section of the railroad. Later on, two different crews were organized to take care of this part of the railroad. A "**Bridge Gang**" maintained the bridges and trestles while the "Section Gang" took care of the rails and railroad bed. In the "Fifties", these men maintained their section of the railroad with very few mechanical tools. They used mostly hand tools and the work would have been difficult even if the weather was not considered. Add the "Hot and Dry" conditions of summer and the "Cold and Wet" conditions of winter, and this job was not for the "Faint-at-heart". It was a physically demanding job that a lot of men just could not do.

Hugo Section Gang

During WWII Southern Pacific Railroad put in a lot of untreated fir ties because they could not get the Cresote to treat them. By the early 1950s many of those tires were rotting out and many of them the “Gang” shoveled out. It was a big job to replace all those railroad ties.

Hugo B & B Gang Albert Tavis worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad for years. He was the Assistant Foreman of the Bridge and Building (B&B) Gang. Around 1952 Wayne McKy worked with Albert on the drain tunnels on the railroad tracks this side of Tunnel No. 9. Wayne was a section hand working on the railroad. When they had to clean the drains out the Hugo Section Gang had to donate one man to the Hugo B & B Gang and Wayne was the one that got donated.

Tools of Hugo Section Gang: 1950s The Southern Pacific, like every railroad, has to maintain the line 24/7 - this task falls to the Maintenance-of-Way crew also known as the "Gang", or “Section Gang”. Their main tools were track bolt wrenches, sledges, shovels, pickaxes and pry bars. All of these tools were heavy and heavy duty, and had to be stored somewhere. Since they didn't take them home, the railroads build small sheds or tool houses periodically along the railway to house these tools. Later the tool house was expanded to include a handcar or speeder storage room. Sometime it would be near the tool house.

More information Contact an officer of the *Hugo Neighborhood* on how you can become involved in your community's land use, and/or history projects.

Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society's Mission

This information brochure is one of a series of documents published by the *Hugo Neighborhood*. We are a nonprofit charitable and educational association composed of a voluntary group of citizens interested in both the land use and history of the Hugo area, which is located in Josephine County, Oregon.

Land Use & History

Its land use mission is to promote the social welfare of the citizens of the area by working to educate, preserve, protect, and enhance the livability and economic viability of its farms, forests, and rural neighbors.

Its history mission is to educate, collect, preserve, interpret, and research its local history and to encourage public interest in the history of the Hugo area.

Send us your email address if you want to know what we are doing; email does not cost us money, just time and effort.

Hugo Neighborhood

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Hugo, Oregon: 1916

(Same location as 2011 Wayne McKy picture)

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Wayne McKy: May 2011

June 1, 2011

**Hugo Neighborhood Association &
Historical Society**

HNA&HS 2011-RR31A

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