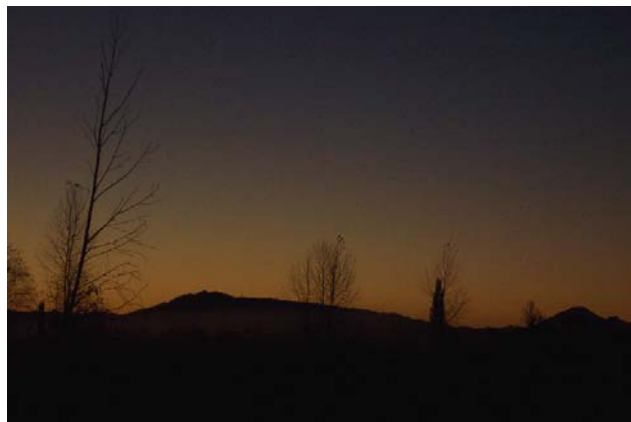


## *Thompson Railfanning*



*October 2005*

It's a typical drizzly early October West Coast morning as we pull out of the driveway in the darkness at Maple Ridge, B.C. This, however, is far from a normal Saturday. We are abandoning the usual weekend routine of soccer and domestic chores as we steal away under the secrecy of the pre-dawn sky, towards a rendezvous with an old friend we have never met and an adventure that awaits us, somewhere beyond the mountains.



*Dawn*

I soon settle down to the familiar routine of driving, and an hour and a half later we reach the Haig Junction and Highway 1. I press down on the throttle as we ascend the first long hill, and now we are in the Fraser Canyon. Traffic is light, and the miles fall away quickly. The sun is up by the time we have passed Lytton and traded the murky Fraser River for the jade-green Thompson, as the moist fir and cedar forests of the lower Fraser Canyon have given way to Ponderosa pine and bunchgrass.



*Highway 1, near Skihist*

By ten o' clock we have arrived at Spences Bridge, where we will be spending the night. Our cabin at Acacia Grove RV Park overlooks both the CN and CP railways, and we have barely completed checking in when the sound of an approaching freight sends us scrambling for the camera.



*The view from Acacia Grove RV Park*

A few moments later, Wilco arrives. We waste little time at the cabin, for there are far more important things to do...it is time to explore the Thompson Sub. We head north out of town towards Ashcroft, and we make two stops to photograph an eastbound potash train, first at Nicola River and then again a few miles to the north.



*The Thompson sub at Nicola River*





*A few minutes north, looking from Highway 1*

We continue north towards Ashcroft. We are now entering the true Thompson pocket desert, and the landscape resembles Nevada or Arizona as we roll through the arid country. The smell of sage gives a delightful tang to the late morning air.



*On the chase: Highway 1, heading north to Ashcroft*

We descend the sagebrush and cactus clad hills into the historic town of Ashcroft, and the growling in our stomachs reminds us that it's getting close to lunchtime. Of course, we will not be wasting productive train chasing time sitting in a restaurant; a five-minute stop for takeout sandwiches will do and we are again on our way. Wilco has been monitoring the scanner, and there is an eastbound freight approaching the town.



*CP 9708 entering Ashcroft, B.C.*

At the other end of town, we encounter the stopped CP9585, and its crew informs us that there are nine freights in the queue coming from North Bend. We quickly develop a plan of action that will have us follow the 9585 south to Lytton, while opportunistically photographing northbound freights along the way.

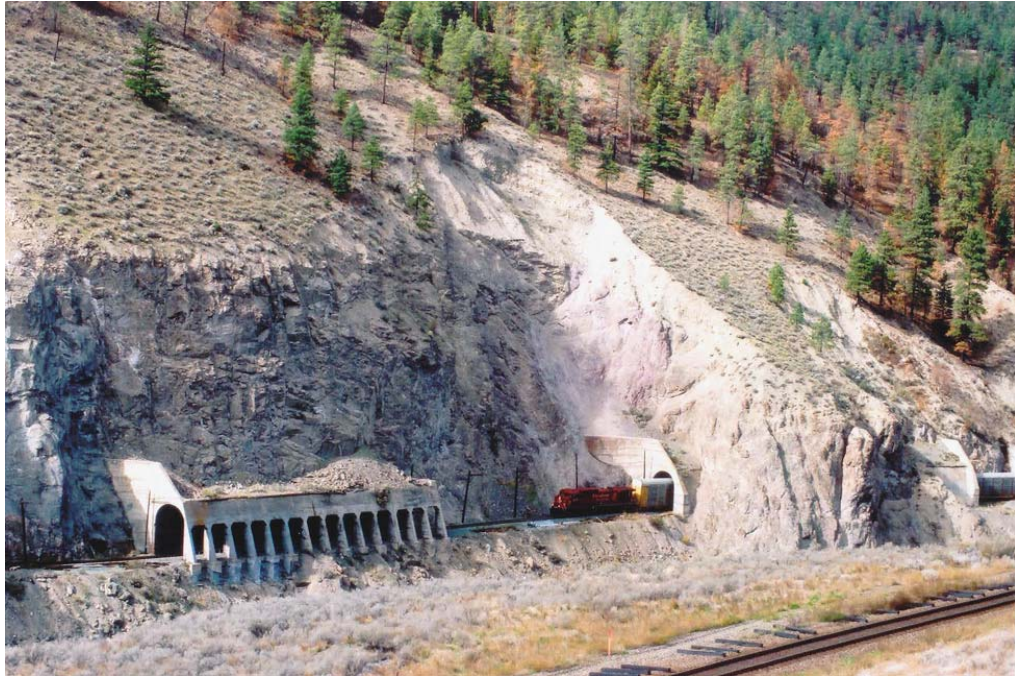




*CP 9585 with two of the chase team at Ashcroft*



*CP 9585 a few miles south of Spences Bridge...*



*...and again at Skoonka tunnels, on the CN Ashcroft sub.*

We photograph the 9585 several more times as we wind our way down the Thompson River on what has become a beautiful fall day. This is true railfanning, with plenty of scrambling over hilly terrain in order to achieve the best viewpoints. We are thankful for the fact that it is October, and that we don't have to contend with the intense summer heat that is typical to this area. Suddenly, at Skoonka, the scanner crackles to life. There is an eastbound freight approaching Drynoch, and it is very close. Wilco turns off the highway onto an access road, and the Jeep fishtails momentarily on the dirt track as we hurry towards the spot. "Kind of like the Dukes of Hazzard," he remarks with a crooked smile. As it turns out, we are no sooner set up than the CP9769 rounds the corner, and Engineer John Leeming toots the whistle in greeting as the ex-Holiday Train unit roars past us.





*CP 9769 east at Drynoch*



*Remote unit 9712 at Drynoch (9769 leading)*



We later encounter another eastbound, near Thompson. As we approach Lytton, the country is changing. The Thompson is descending into a steep canyon, and the steep mountain ranges to the west of Lytton rival the Rockies in height.



*CP 8628 east near Thompson*

We continue south on this golden autumn afternoon, filling our eyes with the changing scenery of pine forests, mountain views and dramatic river canyons. The trembling aspen in their full fall colors provide splashes of yellow and orange to the hillsides. Sunshine pours in through the windows of the Jeep as we munch away on potato chips. The detector that we can hear on the scanner tells us that it's 18 degrees. We have picked up another westbound freight, with an SD90MAC on the point. Wilco pulls into the access road for Kumsheen Rafting Tours, and we hurry along through the sage and pine towards a vantage point. Wilco, as agile as the deer that roam these mountains, has descended far below us in a matter of seconds as the westbound freight comes into view.



*CP 9104 west in the Thompson Canyon*

We decide to follow the train as far as Siska. However, we miss the access road and end up backtracking. By the time we descend off the highway down the rough track towards the Siska bridge, the train is already coming into view. “Run for your life”, says Wilco as we sprint towards the bridge.



*CP 9104 west at Siska*



It is late afternoon by the time we arrive back at Spences Bridge, with our cameras as well as our memories full of the sights and sounds of the Thompson country. However, we are not done; before heading back to the cabin we pause to have a look at a westbound coal train, stopped on the CN tracks.



*CP 9673 west on CN Ashcroft sub at Spences Bridge*



*CP 8632 races by Acacia Grove RV Park in the late afternoon*

After dinner, we head out to the campfire. Wilco has brought his video camera, and we watch footage of the CP Mountain sub with the sounds of the crackling campfire, the river, and the passing trains providing the ultimate backdrop. It has been an incredible day. We will not forget this experience or this place, and we will be certain to return, many times.



*Ross Davies*