

THE FORESTER EXTENSION OF THE ARKANSAS WESTERN

James R. Fair, Jr.

One of the last railroad construction projects in Arkansas produced a 23.2-mile stretch of mountain trackage that today has been well erased from the Ouachita landscape. This was a most interesting line that had 2.5% grades, 10 degree curves, deep cuts in rock and a monstrous wooden trestle. It rose and fell in Scott County, near the Oklahoma line, between the years 1928 and 1955. Herein is its story.

This line was planned in 1928 as an eastward extension of the Arkansas Western, and resulted from the need of the Caddo River Lumber Co. to ship finished lumber from a proposed new mill. The mill would be located near the southeastern corner of Scott County, on Cedar Creek and adjacent to the thousands of acres of virgin shortleaf pine owned or controlled by the company. To induce the Arkansas Western to invest in the construction of the 23 mile extension, Caddo agreed to ship at least 30 million board feet of lumber each year for a period of 15 years (some 15 to 20 years of cutting was available at this rate). This amounted to upwards of 1500 cars per year for the Arkansas Western, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Kansas City Southern.

At the time, the lumber company was operating a hardwood mill at Mauldin, near Mount Ida in Montgomery County, and softwood (mostly pine) mills at Glenwood and Rosboro. The latter communities were in the northeastern corner of Pike County and a few miles apart on the Norman branch of the Missouri Pacific. The company's Caddo and Choctaw Railroad had formerly operated common carrier service west out of Rosboro, but by 1929 had cut back to serving the three existing mills by trackage rights over the Missouri Pacific (Rosboro-Norman) and over a lumber company line from Norman to Mauldin.

Construction of the extension was estimated to cost \$425,000, financed by the issuance of first mortgage bonds that were purchased by the Kansas City Southern. The eastern terminus (and mill town) was given the name Forester, after an Arkansas Western director and prominent citizen, C. E. Forrester (but with the spelling changed). At Forester the lumber company developed plans for a large town complete with electricity, hotel, company stores, and some 500 houses. Investment by the company would be over \$700,000.

Railroad construction commenced June 26, 1929, after receiving approval from the Interstate Commerce Commission on April 23, 1929. Grading was handled under contract with the firm of Williamson and Williams of Batesville, Arkansas. Bridge and trackwork was handled by KCS forces. The line was well built with 85-pound relay rail, white oak ties, and tie plates on curves of 7 degrees and over. Dirt ballast was considered sufficient. There were 24 bridges, all rated Cooper E-29 or higher. One steel span was included, a 250-foot through truss affair over Fourche La Fave river at mile 49.4.

From Waldron (mile 31.8) the line swung through a gap and then began a steady 2.5% climb up the side of Ross Mountain, increasing elevation from 665 ft. at Waldron to 1,020 ft. at the summit (mile 37.8). Then there was a series of ascents/descents to the summit of Dutch Creek Mountain at 1,105 ft. and mile 41.1. From this point the line descended to the Fourche La Fave valley on a steady 2% grade, crossing Hazel Creek at mile 44.4 on a spectacular trestle 686 ft. long and 58 ft. high. From Parks (mile 45.8) the line followed the river valley to

Cedar Creek and then up that creek to Forester at mile 55.9 and elevation 655 ft. The approach to Forester was up a 1.25% grade with a final short stretch of 3.0%.

Service began with the completion of construction on September 1, 1930. For a number of months the service was quite irregular, since the mill and town at Forester were still under construction and the work force had to be recruited. Timber cutting began in the summer of 1931, and mill operations in the fall of that year. As part of Caddo River's operations, a network of standard gauge railroads was constructed out of Forester, and the mileage of these lines ultimately reached about 70, and six steam locomotives were maintained at Forester by the company. Some of the locomotives and logging cars were moved from Mauldin over temporary trackage connecting with the Forester lines

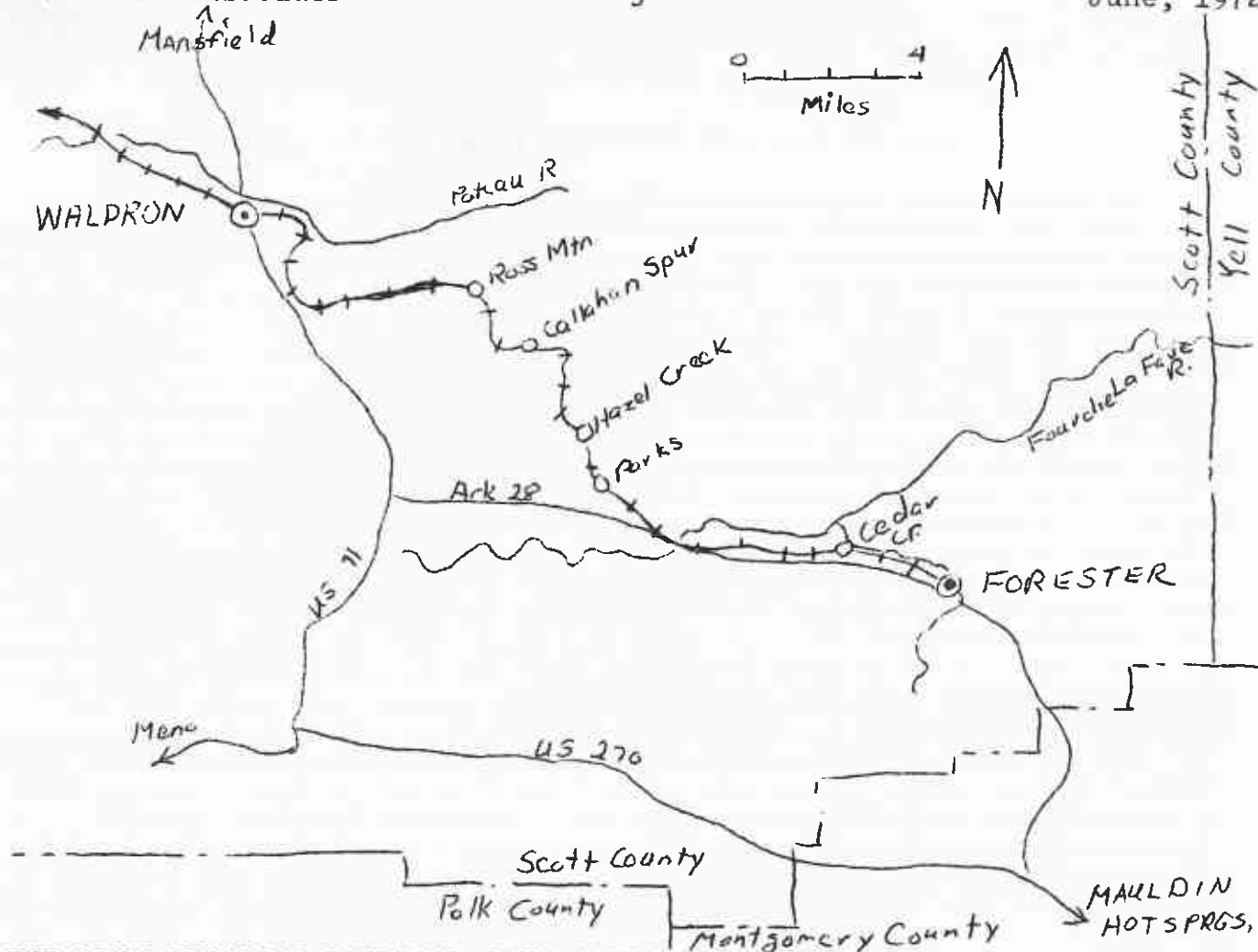
Regular schedules were posted for Forester service on November 9, 1931, and called for the thrice-weekly mixed train out of Heavener, Oklahoma, to extend its operation to Forester. The train arrived at Forester on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 12:30 p.m., and left Forester on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 8:30 a.m. Facilities at Forester included a 20 x 60 ft. frame depot (which never housed a regular agent), water tank, wye and yards which connected with Caddo River tracks. Loading platforms at the mill could accommodate 25 cars. The crew handled switching in the afternoon, and then laid over at the Forester Hotel for the night. Outbound trains were limited to 10-12 cars because of the 2% grade up Dutch Creek Mountain; on occasion it would be necessary to double the grade, setting out the cars at Callahan Spur, mile 40.8. Motive power was a light E-3 consolidation of the KCS.

The Forester mill had nominal capacity of 40 million feet/year, and after shaking the throes of the depression managed to exceed this capacity. Operations were conventional: steam-loading of logs in the woods, hauling to the mill with logging cars, transferring the logs to the mill pond, and feeding the saws. Lumber was planed and dried at the site. The train arrived three times a week, after a leisurely trip over from Waldron; in season the crew had time to stop and pick huckleberries that would later in the day be served to them by the cook at the Forester Hotel.

When the 1940 census was taken, the busy Forester outscored the sleepy county seat of Waldron in population, 1,306 to 1,298. But increased operations during the years of World War II depleted the timber reserves, and by 1950 the end of the cutting was in sight. By this time there was blacktop road (Arkansas No. 28) almost to Forester; field operations had been converted from rail to truck; and population of the town had declined to 818. Caddo River Lumber Co. had been acquired by Dierks Lumber and Coal Co. on August 23, 1948. Preparations were made to bring the business to an orderly conclusion.

The mill shut down on April 15, 1953, after having shipped only about 100 cars since the first of the year. Some shipments of logs, posts, pulpwood billets, etc., continued for the rest of the year while the mill, houses and stores of Forester were dismantled. On April 24, 1954 the Arkansas Western filed application for abandonment, noting that at the time one train per week was being continued to Forester, with essentially no business. By this time Forester was deserted.

There was no opposition to the abandonment, and on September 9, 1954, the Interstate Commerce Commission granted the petition. Shortly afterward, rails were taken up to a point just east of Waldron at mile 35.1, to serve local industry. Today one can find traces of the line along Highway 28, as well as foundations and the Chinese elm-lined streets of Forester. But the traces are few.



THE NEXT ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB MEETING IS SUNDAY, JUNE 11, at 2:00p.m. in the Model Railroad Clubroom in the basement of the Missouri Pacific Union Station in Little Rock. Our program will include some movies of the recent double header on the Reader. We will also have some film made in 1964 and 1965 of the M. C. & S. A. during its last period of steam operation. Who would have thought at the time that several of those locomotives sitting derelict at Camden would be under steam again in six years, especially in Central Arkansas.

BOXCAR BERTHA TO PREMIERE SHORTLY IN LITTLE ROCK, either June 9 or June 13, the former according to the Capitol Theatre box office, the latter according to the Arkansas Gazette. We are promoting the movie here because all of it was filmed in southwest Arkansas including the Reader. The advertising posters show No. 108 and a train being blown to pieces. Whether this actually occurs in the movie or not, we don't know, but the prairie is still intact at Reader.

THE ARKANSAS RAILROADER IS THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB, a non-profit corporation whose aim is the promotion of interest of railroads - past, present and future. Annual dues are Regular - \$5.00 (Arkansas residents) and Associate - \$3.00 (outside Arkansas), payable to C. R. Byrd, Treasurer, 12 Flintwood, Little Rock, Arkansas 72207. Contributions for the newsletter should be mailed to Jim Wakefield, Editor, 316 Auburn Drive, Little Rock, Arkansas 72205.