

Deseret News

AGING TRESTLE VANISHING FROM VIEW

By Lynn Arave, Staff Writer

Wednesday, December 8, 1993

Utah's second most famous piece of railroad history - the 90-year-old Lucin Cutoff trestle - is slowly disappearing and is expected to vanish completely within four years.

Today, the 12-mile wooden span across the Great Salt Lake is about one-fourth gone, victim of a new earth-fill causeway that opened in 1959, of the rising waters of the Great Salt Lake and of a 1990s salvage effort to recover its more than 38,000 wooden pilings and other wooden pieces. Ironically, this wooden trestle had itself replaced a portion of Utah's and the nation's most famous railroad landmark - the Golden Spike line. When it opened in 1903, the Lucin Cutoff shaved 43.77 miles off the trip between Ogden and Lucin and allowed passengers to "go to sea by rail."

It also meant the most prominent section of America's first transcontinental rail line was abandoned. Later, during World War II, metal drives took away all the historic rails leading to Promontory Summit and the site of the "wedding of rails" May 10, 1869. (Earlier this year, a tourist railroad line between Ogden and the Golden Spike National Monument was proposed for the future.)

The trestle was considered to be the longest, straightest, most level stretch of track ever built. It was so level that even the curvature of the Earth could be observed along it. It was also the longest rail span across water in its day. The cutoff was named after the town of Lucin, 57 miles west of Lakeside, through which the railroad traveled.

A parallel, landfill railroad causeway replaced the trestle in 1959. The wooden Lucin trestle was then used an average of once a week by trains in the 1960s and early 1970s to keep the rust off the rails and its signal system working. The last train probably rolled across it in 1975.

The original wooden trestle suffered extensive damage in the mid-1980s from rising lake water, and some of its redwood decking was also torn off during storms.

The trestle was added to the National Historic Register in 1972, but that didn't stop it from being removed. In 1988, the trestle had been properly documented and photographed, so the Utah State Historical Society had to give approval for its removal.

Trestle removal started about 18 months ago. Today, all the tracks are gone and about three miles worth of wood have been taken out by Cannon Structures, under contract by the T.C. Taylor Co. of Aurora, Ill., which secured the salvage rights from Southern Pacific Railroad.

R.L. Burton of Pleasant View, retired Southern Pacific road-master who had charge of the Lucin Cutoff, has been hired by T.C. Taylor as a special consultant for the trestle's removal.

Burton said by the 1970s, the trestle needed drastic repairs.

"They either had to spend a lot of money or do away with it," said Burton, who worked for Southern Pacific for 40 years.

The Taylor company hopes the sale of the wood will offset the removal costs. A new Utah Company, **Trestlewood**, in Provo, also hopes to market some of the historic wood.

Much of the wood is being taken to a mill on Promontory Point and then shipped to Blackfoot, Idaho, Cannon's other office, for storage. The wood is being salvaged for decorative lumber, mining timbers and for whatever wood preserved in salt water can be used for. The wood's weathered look makes it even more valuable, and big operations like Disneyland have expressed interest in buying some of it. The salt water has made the lumber heavier and preserved it.

``It's pretty good wood. . . . The pilings are pickled," Burton said, noting their perfect preservation from being in the salt water. He said some of the wood is poor quality, however.

Because of the soft lake bed, Burton said removal hasn't been difficult. A vibrator loosens pilings, and a crane from a barge, left over from the 1950s causeway construction, pulls them up. However, Burton said the outside pilings that go into the lake bed on an angle are the most difficult to remove and some have been broken during removal. He said a different removal process for them is being evaluated.

Burton said he's not really sad to see the trestle go.

``I didn't like the trestle," Burton said, speaking from a railroad point of view. ``You were at the mercy of the elements when you were out there."

Burton also said that during high lake levels in 1986, pieces of the trestle would break off and smack the new earth-fill causeway to the north like a battering ram. He was also responsible for its upkeep and repair.

The dismantling of the cutoff, called an engineering marvel in its day, is a sad occasion for some people.

``It's historic, we hate to lose it," Arlene Fielding, a tour guide at Ogden's Union Station Museum, said.

Pat Toyn of Morgan is also saddened at the loss the trestle. He and some friends discovered it by accident during 1991 while looking for ghost towns in western Box Elder County. They found no old buildings but fell in love with the historic train line and made some videos of the trestle while it was intact.

Words: 861

Section: News

Column:

Illustration: Deseret News File Photo

Shown in 1959, the new causeway veered to the left of the wooden trestle, which was considered to be the longest, straightest, most level stretch of track ever built. The trestle is being dismantled.

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