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## Ten Mile Branch

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### Map of the Towns

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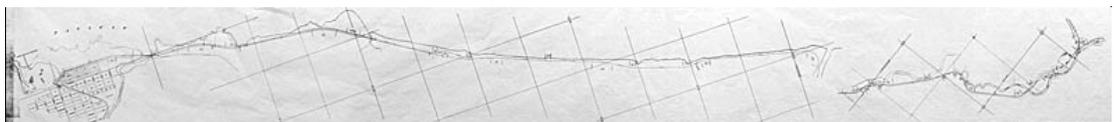
### Sitemap

The Union Lumber Company's Ten Mile Branch ran from the Mill site in Fort Bragg north along the coast over five trestles till it came to Ten Mile River. The Pudding Creek Trestle is the only one of the five that remains. At Ten Mile River the railroad made a huge sweeping turn to follow the river eastwards inland. Ultimately the railroad served **42 logging camps** and reached the east side of the last hills bordering Route 101 near Laytonville ([see map](#)).

The surveyors maps that show the precise location of the original right of way location are as rare as hen's teeth. For most logging outfits the plans were for short stretches from the existing logging camp to the location of the next. It is VERY rare for logging railroads for there to still exist the original plan for a stretch of ten miles. So what you see below – a photo of the original surveyors map of the Ten Mile Branch is close to unique. The original, when handed to us, was 3 feet by 26 feet. Our webmaster Roger Thornburn stiched together 17 photos to make a single 36,233x3,838 pixel (140 Megapixel) photo, which enables you to zoom in on any part at very high resolution.

Points to look at on the plan:

- The size of Fort Bragg (small).
- The the location of the original Depot, and absence of the wye.
- The existence and size of the pier which, at the time the Ten Mile branch was built was the means by which all the product was shipped prior to the rails going "over the hill" to Willits.
- The location of the five trestles.
- At the extreme right the location of Camp 1.



This is a complete photo of the original Ten Mile Branch survey map. [CLICK TO SEE DETAILS](#)

*The following edited two-part article appeared in The Fort Bragg Real Estate newspaper in June and July 1998. It was authored by club member Tony Phillips' neighbor, Gene Lewis.*

The historic trestle over **Pudding Creek** is a landmark familiar to Fort Bragg residents and visitors. Why was this trestle built so close to the ocean? People who have been in Fort Bragg before 1983 certainly remember trucks carrying "off-highway" loads of huge logs across the trestle and those who were here before 1949 may remember the days of the Ten Mile Railroad which carried timber and work crews to and from the Ten Mile River timberlands and the Union Lumber Company mill in Fort Bragg.

Between 1916 and 1949, the Ten Mile Railroad was a working logging line carrying few passengers except for woods workers and their families who lived in the camps along the Ten Mile River. After the change to truck hauling in 1949, Union Lumber and successors Boise-Cascade and Georgia-Pacific used the railroad route as a logging road until 1983 when winter storms damaged the oceanfront portion of the road. The old railroad bed east of the Ten Mile Bridge is still used by Georgia-Pacific [and its current owners] as a logging road.

The oceanfront portion of the Ten Mile Railroad route is now a dedicated hiking and equestrian trail from Pudding Creek to Ten Mile. The author, Gene worked for the Chicago and North Western Railway as a civil engineer for over thirty years and now lives north of Fort Bragg with a view of the dunes and the beach where the [Ten Mile Branch] trains used to pass.

What a tourist attraction [Fort Bragg] would have today if the railroad line from Fort Bragg to the site of old Camp One were still in service! The eight mile trip along the edge of the Pacific Ocean would be a world-class attraction. Imagine giving



passengers a whiff of salt-laden air as they savored the views of a vast dune land, glints of sunlight off the ocean, quick scenes of pocket beaches and flowering headlands, and the sweep of the Ten Mile River estuary.



The second Ten Mile River Bridge being used as a grandstand for the swim meet that used to be held there annually. Legend has it one male participant used to swim in the nude so that he could go faster!!!!!!

Alas, the railroad was discontinued June 17, 1949 and replaced by a private high speed trucking road, which in turn was abandoned in 1983. The road is now owned by the people of California through the State Parks system, and plans are proceeding to establish a recreational trail along the former railroad line from Fort Bragg to the Ten Mile River.

A railroad along the coast was first proposed in 1885 as part of the incorporation of the Fort Bragg Railroad. Its history is tied up with the adventures of Charles Russell "C.R." Johnson and the Union Lumber Company.

Mr. Johnson was the main reason Fort Bragg exists today. As a young man, he came to California from Michigan, where his father operated a sawmill at Saugatuck on the west shore of Lake Michigan and, later, at St. Ignace on the Straits of Mackinac. C.R. visited this area in 1873 when he was sent west for his health. Although he returned to Michigan, he came back to California in 1881 when Fort Bragg was still a deserted scrub-land. He met Calvin Stewart and James Hunter in Mendocino, and bought into the Stewart-Hunter lumber operation at their Kibesillah mill. Kibesillah was a hardy little lumber town about five miles north of Ten Mile River.

C.R. saw that the lumber had only one way to go to market — by sea. Newport, the poor excuse for a "port" they used, was on an open stretch of rocky coast with little protection from rough weather for the small coastal steamers. But there was a decent harbor to the south, on the abandoned army post at Fort Bragg. C.R. bought out Stewart and Hunter and formed the Fort Bragg Lumber Company. He also acquired the timber holdings of McPherson and Weatherby on Pudding Creek and the Noyo. In addition to those holdings, the deal included the old fort site as well as their "railroad" which may have been run by ox power.

C.R. moved the Kibesillah mill to Fort Bragg and set up a new band saw. But getting logs to the mill was a prime necessity, and C.R. incorporated the Fort Bragg Railroad on April 30, 1885. The line was pushed up Pudding Creek in time for the first steam locomotive's arrival by ship in 1886. (To put this into perspective, Fort Bragg did not become a city until 1889, and did not have a newspaper until May 26, 1889 when the Advocate commenced publication.)

C.R. knew that one day he was going to need to transport logs from the Ten Mile River drainage to his mill. The river was not suited for flushing cut logs to the sea in the same manner that Big River and other coastal streams allowed — dams and weirs were expensive and chancy things. He needed a steady supply of logs for the Fort Bragg mill. Therefore, the incorporation of the Fort Bragg Railroad provided for construction of a branch line railroad to the Ten Mile River.

The Fort Bragg Lumber Company became Union Lumber Company in 1891 and the old Fort Bragg Railroad was changed to the California Western Railroad and Navigation Company in 1905. (The "Navigation" bit was dropped January 1, 1948.) Union Lumber Company punched the railroad eastward into the hills, around the curves, and through two tunnels until, at last, Fort Bragg was linked with the rest of America's railroads in 1911. (The North West Pacific had established in Willits in 1902.)

By 1915, it was obvious that more redwood logs were needed by the mill. Completing right-of-way acquisition, Union Lumber Company began construction of the Ten Mile Railroad in 1916 with the building of the trestles at Pudding Creek, Virgin Creek and Laguna Creek. Laying the rail line was easy work on the open headlands, so all was ready for the first train of logs from Ten Mile on January 3, 1917. The new branch line started near the present California Western depot in Fort Bragg. After a sharp right-hand curve to the north, it ran one mile on the headlands to Pudding Creek where it crossed on the line's highest trestle. At 527 feet in length and 45 feet high, the trestle is one of Fort Bragg's most visible and scenic relics of the former railroad.

The railroad then ran north, crossing Virgin Creek on a 367 foot trestle (now gone) to Laguna Creek at MacKerricher State Park. (Actually, it should be spelled MacKericher, but one of the daughters thought it was "tonier" to have an extra "r" in their name.) Laguna Creek was once a freshwater inlet that was periodically flushed by ocean surges. With the coming of the railroad, the line's longest trestle (815 feet) was built across the creek and the dumping of fill material created Lake Cleone. Today, the ocean has nearly reclaimed the former inlet by gradually washing away the berm.



A picture(left) taken after construction of the MacKerricher trestle not too long after it was built in front of Cleone Lake, as it was then called. After construction of the trestle the entrance to the sea began to silt up because of sand being deposited by the wind just as at Pudding Creek. The gaunt remains of the trestle (see right) can be seen today as iron

posts sticking out of the sand.

[There were two more trestles before the railroad reached Ten Mile River: one was at Sandhills Lake – 165 feet long with 11 Bents and the last at Inglenook Creek – 463 feet long with 30 Bents.]



From the perspective of seeing what used to be El Nino was a great help. It exposed the Sandhills trestle just to the north of Ward Avenue - the road on the north side of MacKerricher Park - see picture left.



North of the access to [MacKerricher State Park] at Ward Avenue, the route of the Ten Mile Railroad entered the ocean side edge of the Ten Mile sand dunes. The transition point, where the bluffs end and the dunes begin, was the site of a major El Nino washout in February 1998 when the remains of an old railroad trestle could be seen after the pavement toppled to the beach. Subsequent storms washed away most of this trestle. From the early 1970s until the road was washed out in 1983, hundreds of residents and visitors drove out on the former Ten Mile Railroad route on weekends — thanks to an agreement between State Parks and Georgia-Pacific. Those who drove through the dunes in all seasons experienced the high winds and surf which shaped this portion of the coast. In the spring of each year, sand had to be removed from the railroad tracks before the railroad was replaced by the truck road.

Long before Highway One became the transportation route north from Fort Bragg, the Ten Mile Beach was used by hikers, equestrians and horse-drawn wagons to reach Kibesillah, Newport and [Westport](#), which were all larger than they are today. After the state purchased the dunes and the ocean-front area in the mid-1970s, trail advocates organized to request recognition of this traditional use. The Pudding Creek to Ten Mile Hiking and Equestrian Trail was dedicated on November 12, 1977. However, State Parks did not complete the purchase of the coastal portion of the route until 1995.

Beyond Laguna Creek the railroad curved gracefully through several reverse curves along the headland until a transition zone north of the present day Ward Avenue access point was reached. There the railroad descended to the beach level from the headlands and ran for three miles along the edge of the sand dunes. Constant efforts were required to keep the track clear of drifting sands. Approaching the Ten Mile River, the railroad line swung around to the southeast in a long ten degree curve and then tucked itself into the south riverbank for the rest of the trip to Camp One, located on the South Fork of the river. Construction was completed in 1916 from Fort Bragg to Camp One. The first train of logs came to town January 3, 1917.



A recent aerial photo of the ten degree curve at the mouth of the Ten Mile River



A ULC promotional photo taken at the ten degree curve at Ten Mile River of a train carrying 50 carloads of timber – a hopeful sign of better times in the depression.



The ten degree curve at the Mouth of Ten Mile River

Because it was built as a logging branch, it was not subject to regulation under the Interstate Commerce Act or by the California Public Utilities Commission. The railroad was just an extension of the lumber milling process. Crews and motive power came from California Western, but none of the cars were in interchange service and hence were pretty simple ready-made affairs.



Camp One had been established in 1914 as a base camp for the entire Ten Mile drainage. It was a complete community in itself with housing for single men, ranch houses for married families, a cookhouse, store, blacksmith shop, electric plant, machinists' shop, dance hall and theatre. There was a community bathhouse with a schedule calling for men's use on Saturday night, women's on Sunday night and the kids' on Monday. There was also a 14 hole outhouse for the single men's use; the ranch houses had their own outhouses. At Camp One the company established an office with drafting facilities to manage the logging operations. There was also a guest house.

There were many smaller camps scattered up the creeks as the

railroad was pushed further up the South, and later the North, Forks of the Ten Mile River. There were usually only one or two automobiles at the camps making going to town complicated. The railroad, however, gave people a chance to get to town, do their errands and get back in time for supper. Switch engines usually brought empty cars out to the camps in the morning, and women would often ride back to town with them, returning in the afternoon on the "big" engines (#21 or #22) which came out to take the loads into Fort Bragg. For short trips some people had "wheels," which were tricycle-like contraptions that could be pedaled on the railroad tracks. But the company discouraged their use, especially for jaunts to town.

By 1938 the camp system was pretty well over as most folks had cars by then and the road had been greatly improved. The State of California took the county road as far as [DeHaven](#) into its secondary system in 1933. But the railroad continued to bring logs to town until 1949. A last big celebration was held at Camp Two, featuring a "logger's" luncheon on June 17th of that year. One hundred people rode the excursion train out and back. The next day, the cleanup train came into town carrying bulldozers, equipment, and the remaining empty railroad cars. The Ten Mile Railroad was all over. C.R. Johnson did not live to see the demise of the railroad; he had died of pneumonia on February 1, 1940.

The lumber company announced that the rails would be pulled up in one day, but it took a bit longer than that. The target date to get the new logging road into operation was July 18th, so a lot of work was necessary in a hurry. Apparently, some railroad iron was left, because when the 10-foot-wide trucks began to run, the truck drivers reported damage to tires from protruding spikes left in the ties. Trucking continued until the 1983 washout north of Ward Avenue occurred. Restoration of this logging road was not to be. The lands had come under the jurisdiction of the State Parks, and the logs could come down Highway One on legal-sized trucks.

After the railroad was taken up in 1949 the tracks were turned into a haul road and "hot logging" using massive trucks was instituted. The trucks had 10 foot wide beds and were so heavy they were not allowed on county roads. Here is a picture of one of them (right). They could carry up to 250,000 pounds of logs at a time.

Now there is a program by the State Parks department to reestablish the former railroad line as a recreational trail, restore the trestle at Pudding Creek [n.b this has been done], and improve access to that magnificent ocean beach, and, most importantly, restore the continuity of travel that the coast dwellers have used for so many years. Today, seven of the eight miles of the Coastal Trail are available for immediate use - 4.5 miles from the north end of the Pudding Creek trestle to a point north of Ward Avenue and about 2.5 miles of existing pavement at the north end. Plans are underway to connect the two pieces by closing the one mile gap opened up by the El Nino event of 1983 with a suitable pathway. The Ten Mile Coastal Trail Foundation is working closely with State Parks to develop this facility and build an endowment to provide for its future maintenance as the ocean will certainly not go away



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