

## Seattle and Return by Baggage Car

Unfinished Notes by  
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In the spring of my junior year at Berkeley<sup>1</sup> a bunch of the crew managers, assisted by a few oarsmen, loaded the coaching launch and four shells from the boat house on the bank of the Estuary into an extra long baggage/mail railroad car for the bi-annual race with the University of Washington.

They were being sent north on the Southern Pacific Portland Ltd. for further transfer by Northern Pacific to Seattle. The shells, over 60 feet long, were laid and strapped onto special wooden frames temporarily installed for the purpose. The launch cockpit looked like a first rate place in which to spread a couple of sleeping bags and, carrying out a traditional custom, two of my friends and I decided to ride the rails surreptitiously up to Washington's famous crew sheds. It turned out to be a mixed disaster.

In this type of adventure there were certain simple unspoken rules to be followed. They were: no walking around or talking while the train was not under way. In addition, no using the urinal, a simple ten-inch hole in the floor of the car near the central door, while in switching yards. No loud noises or lights that would attract the notice of train brakemen or railroad detectives. The latter were fearsomely known to indulge in beating up tramps, hobos, and any other loiterers that attempted a freight or baggage car hitch.

My two friends and I were somewhat astonished when, as we applied the car seals to the locked doors, to find ourselves in a rather large group of hangers-on – freshmen and sophomore oarsmen failing to make the cut for the trip, a couple of sophomore managers, and friends of friends and fraternity bothers who simply decided to attach themselves for the duration of the escapade. There must have been at least twenty that climbed through the clam shell door at the end of the car.

We settled in for the ride, each finding a place for their bed roll and food. Late in the afternoon we coupled up with a yard engine and were shunted back and forth over the Oakland city switches to the S.P. yard where the afternoon train was being made up. These moves were accompanied by a great clanking of couplers, sudden jerks, and shouts and whistles outside the car.

Finally we were underway, but almost immediately we stopped at the Oakland 16<sup>th</sup> St. Station to take aboard the passengers that crossed by ferry from San Francisco. Then began the comforting rumble and click of wheels over straight track with the occasional roar of hitting the points on a series of switches. Finally we arrived a Martinez where the ten car train broke up to fit the car ferry to Benicia. The Carquinez Straits were rough and windy and gave our car a gentle swaying motion enhanced by the six where truck springs. Across and ashore we again were made up as a train and started up the valley. By evening time we were in Sacramento and after a ten minute stop were again rolling north.

Night wore on. Comic books and dime novels were broken out and being read by flashlight; a crap game and penny-ante poker game were set up in the middle section of the car. We were well north of Mt. Shasta and things were going very well when a young non-rowing aesthete whose family must have obviously never permitted him to ride other than first class or Pullman, reached up to a wire running the length of the car a foot or so below the roof.

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<sup>1</sup> 1930

This kid says "What is this thing for?" "The emergency cord – don't touch it!" a chorus in reply. But like a new puppy exploring a strange toy, he put up his hand and gave it a short pull. Consternation in our group! We could imagine an irritated engine cab crew, having to lose momentum on the climb over the Trinity mountains. At the next passing track we switched off the main line and stopped. Since our car was directly in back of the steam engine we could hear the train conductor and engineer discussing the situation.

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Dad's manuscript ends at this dramatic point. From the title, we know he got to Seattle and safely back again, but we'll never know if the student who pulled the emergency cord did, too. The following year Dad was the manager of the Berkeley varsity crew and traveled to the 1931 Poughkeepsie Regatta – in the baggage car again, guarding the shells - to compete against the nation's top teams. (See Dad's photo and that of the crew on page 20 of the [Regatta Program](#). The year after that, the Cal crew went to the Olympics again, but by then Dad had graduated and joined the Navy.

Chris