

Why I Model the Hetch Hetchy

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Dad nearly missed it. It was the summer of 1958 in the hot high Sierra. We were driving home from the Dimond O Boy Scout camp at the old Peach Growers sawmill site near Yosemite National Park. We were on the abandoned Hetch Hetchy right of way that was by then a gravel road. Dad slammed on the brakes of our '56 Chevy wagon. As I remember, Dad skidded to a stop. There it was. On the right side of the road mile marker "52 J" was nearly invisible, just a white blob nearly buried by the dirt and weeds. We kids (Alan 14, Sue 7, and me 12) remember helping Dad dig it out. 52 J:..... 52 miles to the start of the railroad at the Hetch Hetchy Junction with the Sierra Railroad.

For the next 50 years 52 J occupied THE place of honor outside the door of our childhood HO gauge Red Gulch RR. Many years later I asked my elderly father if I could have 52 J. Dad said I could have it when he "croaked", but I talked him out of it a few years later when he was only 90. It was really the only thing I wanted from my father's stuff. Now it's here on MY ON30 Hetch Hetchy Railroad. 52 J is propped up in front of a layout scene of the four of us digging it out. Dad died at 97, before he had a chance to see 52 J propped up there.

In 2016 my adult son Jess and I went to find the location of 52 J on the now paved road. It would be exactly one mile from the ruins of the Intake Station at mile 51 and on the right side of left-hand curve heading West toward home. We found a likely spot took pictures and were very happy. But....

While researching the Hetch Hetchy preparing to build my model I'd found many pictures of it and been looking for mileposts in them but I had never found one. The California State Railroad Museum Library in Sacramento had a file on the HHRR. In 2017 I went there and found number of a 3x5 inch snapshots probably taken during a Hetch Hetchy fan trip in 1947. One was unremarkable: just tracks, no annotations, no engines, no cars, no people, just trees, tracks and weeds. But *what is that tiny white blob on the right side of the right of way?* Could it be a milepost? Quickly, I got a magnifying glass. OH MY! I ALMOST FELL OUT OF MY CHAIR! IT'S MILE MARKER 52 J! OUR 52 J! I was ecstatic. But there was a HUGE problem. The terrain in the picture is NOT at all what we had found the year

before.

It took another year to get 52 J to its correct home. In 2018 my brother Alan came out from upstate NY and we went back up there. It was nearly 60 years to the day after digging out 52 J. Another hot summer day in the Sierra! We had a copy of the 52 J photo, Google maps, my *faulty* memory, cameras and, THE Mile Post 52 J. After driving slowly West toward home like our Dad had, looking for likely left-hand curves where the sign would be on the right. Rats....no such curve existed.....Alan figured out that my memory was BAD. Dad HAD missed it driving West toward home! He went right past it! He had slammed on the brakes, spun around and drove back the other way to the EAST on a left-hand curve. So we turned around, drove and looked.....We found the spot! The curve,the terrainall matched.

But where were the trees? There had been a forest fire there a few years ago and most trees were gone; but there were big stumps where trees should have been. We took pictures standing with mile marker 52 J proudly poked back into the ground. We had found it! It sure looked like the place. But it would be nice if there was some way to verify that we put the post in the EXACT SPOT... But how?

But wait; is that a bent sapling next to 52 J in the 1947 photo? Is that a full-grown tree leaning the same way in 2018? Is that tree in the EXACT SPOT next to the curve in the road? It is. 52 J was truly home.

This is why I model the HHRR.

Steve, Alan, and Sue Redeker
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