



The Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad is a historic narrow gauge railroad located near Fish Camp, California, in the western Sierra Nevada near the southern entrance to Yosemite National Park. The 4-mile long railroad follows a portion of a grade originally carved into the mountain by the Madera Sugar Pine Lumber Company in the early 1900's. The company originated in 1874, when it was organized as the California Lumber Company to log the area. The Madera Sugar Pine Lumber Company once had a large sawmill at Sugar Pine, California, just south of the current YMSPRR. The railroad had seven locomotives, over 100 log cars, and 140 miles of track in the surrounding mountains. The railroad never connected to the outside rail system; instead, the Company built a flume that stretched 54 miles from Sugar Pine to Madera, California, where the lumber could be transported on the Southern Pacific Railroad and, after 1899, on the AT&SF-controlled San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley Railroad. The flume was also used for westward (down-flow) passenger transportation from Sugar Pine to Madera.

Due to the onset of the Great Depression and a lack of trees, the logging operation closed in 1931. But the graded right-of-way through the forest remained, enabling the Stauffer family to reconstruct a portion of the line in 1961 as an excursion railroad. YMSPRR service began with the purchase of three-truck Shay locomotive No. 10 from the West Side Lumber Company of Tuolumne, California. Built in 1928, No. 10 was the largest narrow gauge Shay locomotive and one of the last ever constructed. In 1986, the YMSPRR purchased Shay No. 15, also a former West Side Lumber Company locomotive, from the West Side & Cherry Valley Railroad tourist line in Tuolumne. The two steam locomotives operate daily during the summer months, while the railroad's Model A "Jenny" railcars, capable of carrying about a dozen passengers, typically handle operations during the off-season.



No. 10 burns oil, and its tender holds 1,200 gallons of oil and 3,420 gallons of water.



I had seen many Shays on static display in many places, but I was completely unprepared for the spectacle of an operating Shay. This picture, like a static display, doesn't do it justice. First, the three pistons drive three shafts on the engine's "passenger side." The up-and-down motion of the pistons drives a horizontal shaft that rotates along the entire length of the engine and tender. This shaft has a toothed gear at each wheel of the engine and tender, which drives a similar gear on each wheel and, miraculously, the whole thing moves forward!



Shays ride asymmetrically on the track because of the side-mounted pistons.



Detail of cylinders, pistons, and the horizontal drive shaft.



More detail of cylinders, pistons, and the horizontal drive shaft.



The No. 10 lets off some steam in second growth forest, once clear cut by railroad-supported lumber operations.