

# Venture into the forest

## Sip, dine, enjoy the old railroad in one scenic outing

Story and Photos by Tracy Beard



Next time you're looking for some local fun, spend your afternoon in Yacolt, Washington, located just 30 minutes east of Woodland, off Highway 503 heading east. Step back in time and travel through the lush green forest and alongside the Lewis River on a two-hour historic train ride with Chelatchie Prairie Railroad. Later, savor local libations at Moulton Falls Winery & Cider House, where you can sip on delicious wine, beer or cider.

### The Ride

Two locomotives run on the railway, an ALCO steam engine built in 1929, previously used for logging, and a diesel ALCO constructed in 1941. The train travels along a somewhat bumpy track at the whirlwind speed of 13 miles per hour. Passengers relax while taking in the views of thickly forested landscapes, open pastureland filled with sheep and the occasional llama, and panoramic stretches running alongside the Lewis River. The volunteer announcer notifies guests when approaching Moulton Falls and before entering the ominous darkness of a 330-foot tunnel through solid rock. The train meanders over trestles crossing the Lewis River and then stops at an unmarked location to reverse direction and head back toward Yacolt.

Passengers can travel in a variety of cars—one that is entirely open and features unobstructed views, another that is enclosed with cushy seats and windows, a third that is open-air with a covering to protect riders from the sun or rain and, finally, the brightly colored cabooses.

Passengers in the first three cars are free to move about during the ride and can enjoy a snack, drink or even a picnic lunch if they choose to bring one aboard.



### Chelatchie Railroad: The History

Historical notes and long-told stories record the unverified history of the Chelatchie Railroad. Its past is filled with many fluctuations in ownership, name, and use. According to these records, Vancouver businessman L.M. Hidden enjoyed a picnic at Moulton Falls with his family back in 1886. He was so impressed with the timber in the area that he convinced five of his associates to leave the Vancouver area for a month and survey a route to Yakima to build a railroad to transport the wood. After one intense month of research, they decided to fund the project.

On September 22, 1887, the Clark County register announced that Vancouver's first railroad incorporated with \$1 million in financial backing. L.M. Hidden would serve as vice president. The project began on January 31, 1888. The first locomotive arrived on December 20, 1888. The line eventually expanded to cover the distance between Vancouver and Brush Prairie, but business came to a screeching halt when the economy tanked and the company went broke. The men decided to sell the railroad on November 25, 1897, when they had no more funds for further expansion.

Ownership of the railroad changed hands many times over the years, and so did the name. After the sale in 1897 the new owners began making money by moving logs from Brush Prairie to Vancouver and soon were able to finish the line out to Yacolt. The new industry caused a boom in the small town's economy. Passenger service began from Vancouver to Yacolt, and a one-way ticket went for \$1.07.

Over the years the railroad continued to change hands and finally fell into disrepair. In 1998 a group of volunteers banded together to save the railroad. They repaired the rails, bridges and buildings along the route. Volunteers working with Clark County extended the track from Yacolt to Chelatchie, enabling the line to function as a historical railroad.



Three-quarters of the way into the ride there is a 20-minute stop at Yacolt Falls, which is the perfect place to cool off in the water or get out and stretch your legs. Chelatchie Railroad offers several unique rides throughout the year: the Old West Train Robbery, the Headless Horseman, the Winter Holiday Experience, and Winery Runs to Moulton Falls Winery & Cider House. The train ride is a fun way to get outside, get a scenic tour of the area, and savor a day with family or friends.

### The Winery

Moulton Falls Winery & Cider House opens at noon on Saturdays and Sundays, and 4 pm on Fridays. Visit the winery before or after your ride on the train, or make a trip to the area to simply enjoy sipping wine, cider or beer and listening to local music on weekend nights. Owners

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The work of freelance writer and photographer Tracy Beard has been published in many regional, national, and international magazines. Her stories focus on luxury and adventure travel, outdoor activities, spas, fine dining, and traditional and trendy libations. She attended culinary school in San Francisco, and owned a catering company, adding to her enjoyment and authoritative understanding of food. Formerly of Longview, she now lives in Vancouver, Wash.

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Joe and Susan Millea opened the winery in March 2012, and they currently produce 16 wine varietals, sourcing grapes from Red Mountain in Eastern Washington. Joe also makes 12 different ciders, and each day the winery serves four local micro-beers and four of Joe's ciders on tap.



“We want people to come out, relax and have fun,” said Joe Millea. “We are kid and dog friendly and just want to see everyone have a good time. On Friday and Saturday nights we have some of Portland’s top musicians.”

Terry Robb, voted the number five acoustic blues player in the world, and Doug Smith, Grammy-winning guitar player out of Vancouver, frequently play at the winery. Before opening the winery, Joe designed indoor theaters, so during construction of the winery he made sure that it was built with incredible acoustics. The winery is a fantastic place to listen to music any time of the year. Musicians play indoors during the winter months and outside on the lawn during more favorable weather.

Visitors to the winery can order a pizza baked in the wood-fire oven to snack

on with their beverages, or they can bring along a picnic to enjoy at one of the outdoor tables.

This year I celebrated Mother’s Day with my family in Yacolt. We shared and tasted three different flights of wine and one flight of cider while we enjoyed a light and healthy lunch before venturing out on the Chelatchie Railroad. Each wine was unique and tasty, and my son-in-law, Jeremiah, enjoyed the cider selections. We packed in cucumber sandwiches, tuna salad with pear dressing, delicious fruit skewers drizzled with chocolate, and my daughter prepared sweet and tasty strawberries filled with cheesecake. The sun was shining, and together we relished our day of sipping, dining and riding the old railroad.

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## PROVISIONS ALONG THE TRAIL

By Tracy Beard

### Pear Dressing

- 1 ripe Bartlett pear (peeled and chopped)
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 Tbl pear nectar or pear balsamic vinegar
- 1 1/2 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper

### Tuna Salad

- 1 head butter lettuce (washed and dried)
- 2 ripe Bartlett pears (cored and sliced)
- 1 avocado (diced)
- 1/4 cup hazelnuts (toasted and chopped)
- 1 4-oz can tuna (all white meat, flaked)
- 1 14-oz can cannellini beans (drained and rinsed)



Place all dressing ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Tear lettuce and place in a bowl with tuna and cannellini beans. Toss with dressing until lightly coated. You will have leftover dressing. Lay salad out on a plate or bowl and decorate with avocado, sliced pear, and toasted hazelnuts.