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'Hands up!' Train robbers aboard Mt. Hood Railroad delight rail passengers



Cowgirl Bandit looks like she's made a big haul. Mt. Hood Railroad presents a train robbery for entertainment on its Saturday excursion between Hood River and Parkdale. Terry Richard/Staff

The train robbers got away with the loot, but not a single person aboard the **Mt. Hood Railroad** seemed to mind.

These robbers were the Mt. Hood Railroad Players, a troop of actors who board the railroad's Saturday afternoon train and play guns and robbers, Ol' West style, to the delight of the train's passengers.

The guns they carry aboard the train aren't real. And neither is the money they collect during the robbery. In fact, they pass out the green stuff to begin with and don't need to worry if they get it all back.

The Mt. Hood Railroad runs sightseeing excursions between Hood River in the Columbia River Gorge and Parkdale, where a great view of the namesake mountain waits in the upper Hood River Valley.

The four-hour narrated tour is one of those classic tourism experiences in Oregon. Then the train robbers show up and make it even better.

The robbers are waiting at the Parkdale turnaround, where train passengers get off the train, maybe have a picnic, then turn their eyes to the gun fight staged on the grassy lawn.

The sheriff gets shot, but just like in the movies, his sheriff badge catches the bullet and he lives to chase the bad guys and hopefully introduce them to the limb of a tree.

As the robbery unfolds, the sheriff works the train from the front and the robbers from the rear. Playing guitar and singing songs, the sheriff must pass the bad guys (and bad gal) in the dark somewhere along the way because no final shootout occurs.



Mt. Hood Railroad train robbery

Actors stage a train robbery on the Mt. Hood Railroad and the train riders love it.

Following in their wake is Matt "The Maverick" Burton, "magician and cheat," the parson turned card sharp, who is happy to free you of your money in either role. He leaves the passengers gaping at his tricks, especially when Cheryl signs a three of hearts with a flourish, then he produces the card from a sealed envelope inside a zipped wallet he keeps

in his rear pocket. (Be sure to watch the video, you will be amazed at one of his card tricks.)

The Mt. Hood Railroad Co. was formed in 1988 as a way to entertain Hood River visitors, but also to keep the rail corridor as a viable means for transporting commerce out of the valley.

It's been full steam ahead ever since.

The tour touches on the historical highlights of the region, from local tribes' use of nearby Celilo Falls as a gathering place, to early homesteaders and moonshiners in the valley.

The fruit industry is described in detail and is just about everywhere for the eyes to see. Thousands of plastic bins are scattered among the orchards waiting to take in the harvest, which is mostly pears and apples these days but also lots of wine grapes.

Just south of Hood River, the railroad reaches a switchback, one of only five left in the United States on a standard grade rail line. The grade is so steep that the locomotive pushes the passenger cars into a siding on the switchback, then reverses thrust and pulls them the rest of the way to Parkdale.

The view along the way takes in Mount Hood, Mount Adams, old irrigation pipe along the Hood River and more farms that grow sunflowers and lavender. The layover in Parkdale features enough time in town to entice visitors to return . . . then the gun play starts.

The guns the train robbers use outside are real enough to fire blanks. Boys in the 6 to 12 age range seem to delight in falling over as though hit at the sound of a each bang. When the train whistle blows, everyone climbs aboard and the train robbery fun begins.

If you go: The Mt. Hood Railroad depot is located at 110 Mt. Hood Railroad in downtown Hood River; other train excursions feature champagne brunches, timber baron dinner trains, Elvis impersonators and, during the approach to Christmas, the extremely popular Polar Express; prices range from \$25 to \$139, depending on the ride's theme and the class of service; 800-872-4661; mthoodrr.com. Also, Hood River County Chamber of Commerce, 541-386-2000, hoodriver.org.

Link to video:

http://www.oregonlive.com/travel/index.ssf/2015/09/train_robbers_aboard_mt_hood_r.html