

# The Rail History



## Tracks Through Time

*The Great Shasta Rail Trail follows the route of the eastern expansion of the McCloud River Railroad, stretching across 80 miles of the natural and human history of the west. The town of McCloud, at the western end of the trail, sits on the southern flank of Mount Shasta, an isolated volcanic peak rising 14,162 feet above sea level. Along the route, there are dense stands of timber, which drew loggers and early settlers. As the logging industry drew the railway east and south, camps, villages, and towns sprang up along the route until the railroad reached the vast timber resources surrounding Burney, the southern terminus. Though the railroad is gone, the towns remain. The story of the railroad still connects these communities, and will come alive again through the Great Shasta Rail Trail.*

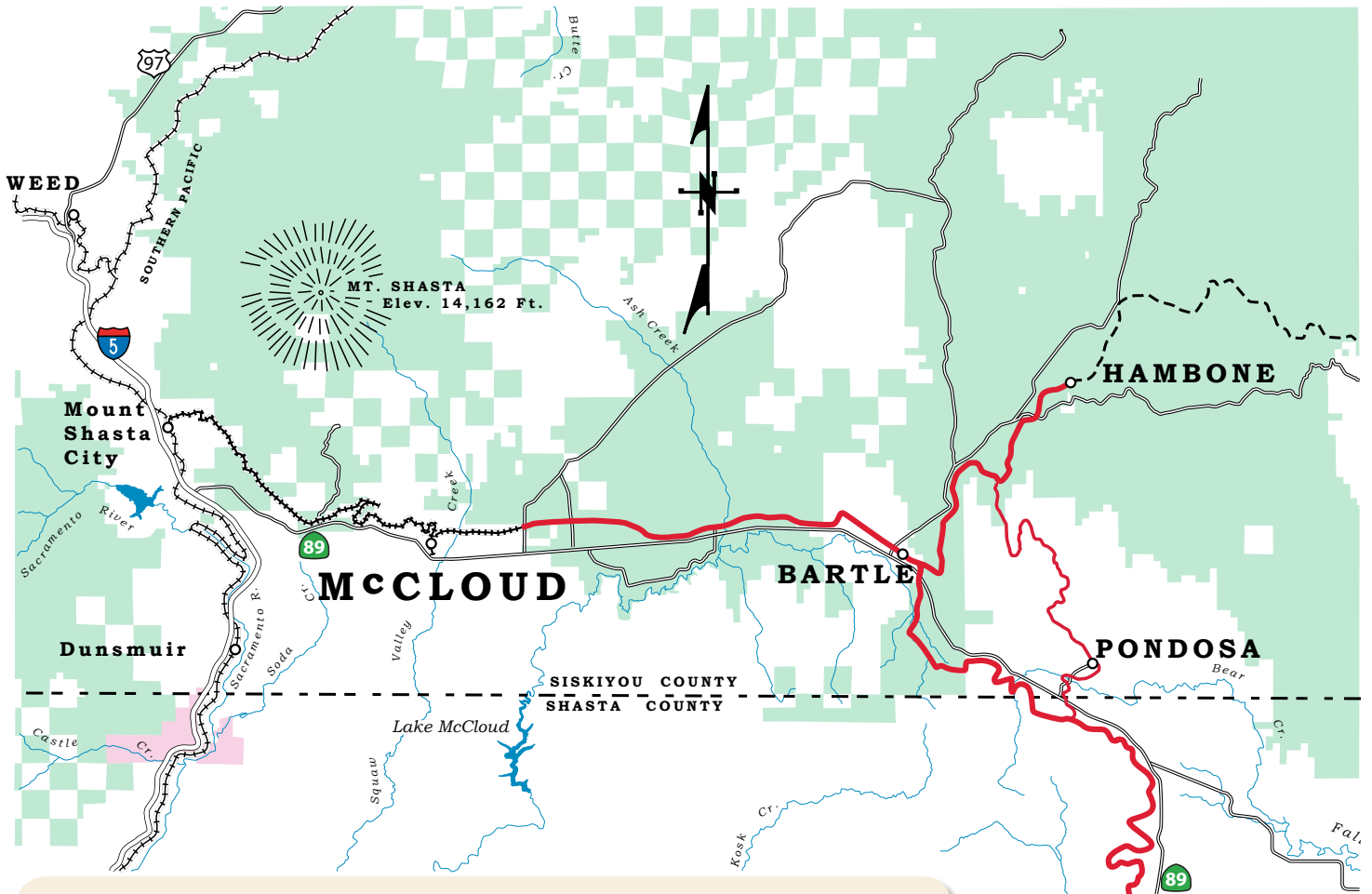
## Timber History

The McCloud River Lumber Company began construction of the rail line just north of the town of Mount Shasta (then called Sisson) around 1896 to haul harvested logs and milled lumber to and from its mills. The line, known as the McCloud Railway after its separate incorporation in 1897, extended to follow the expansion of the lumber industry until it reached its southernmost terminus at Burney in 1955. Trains hauled logs to the mills at McCloud, and lumber and products out to main line railroads. During the early part of the 20th century they also provided passengers a connection from McCloud and points east to the main line at Mount Shasta. Declining with the timber industry in the last years of the 20th century, railroad operations east of McCloud ceased in 2006, opening the possibility of conversion of the railroad corridor for trail use.



# Settlers & Towns

The era of westward expansion and exploration in the 19th century brought explorers, trappers, and other adventurers seeking fortune to the region. Discovery of the rich timberlands and other natural resources quickly brought the timber industry, the railroad, and finally more settlers and communities.



## McCloud

Hudson Bay Company trappers and explorers, led by Alexander Roderick McLoed, came to the area in 1829 and settlers quickly followed. The timber boom brought lumbermen, mills, and eventually the McCloud River Railroad, established in 1897.

McCloud became a true company town, with the McCloud River Lumber Company (known to the community as Mother McCloud) keeping the town secure and prosperous. In the mid-1960's the town was privatized. Houses were sold to the occupants and a Community Services District was formed. Ultimately, changes in the timber industry brought changes to McCloud, and by the end of 2002 the last mill had closed.

Today, McCloud residents are working to strengthen their small local businesses through tourism projects like the GSRT. Set amidst vast timber stands on the flanks of Mount Shasta, McCloud, with its National Historic District, retains the character of its past within a scenic wonderland. It is the perfect place to begin or end a Great Shasta Rail Trail journey.

## Bartle

The Bartle Brothers came west with the gold rush and settled in an area east of McCloud where they built an inn and stage stop. From 1905 to late in the 1920's, Bartle served as the eastern terminus of the rail line and provided a rail to highway transfer point for both freight and travelers. The Bartle Café and Bar, begun as a service stop and gas station on State Route 89 in the 1930's, continues to serve travelers today.



## Pondosa

In the 1920's the McCloud River Lumber Company built Pondosa, the first of a new style of logging camp. With the main line connecting Pondosa to Hambone and Bartle, Pondosa became the new eastern hub. There are numerous stories of the community rescuing derailed and stranded trains along the line. Pondosa was a thriving village with a mercantile, a post office, a bank, a cookhouse, a church, and a school that employed three teachers. A fire destroyed the last mill in 1976 and the timber companies abandoned the town; however, a few families still live in Pondosa today.

## Hambone

On a 13 mile long spur off the then main line to Pondosa, and connecting to the Great Northern/Western Pacific Lookout extension, in 1928 Hambone became the new eastern terminus of the rail line and, for a time, enjoyed a prosperous timber community and logging camp.

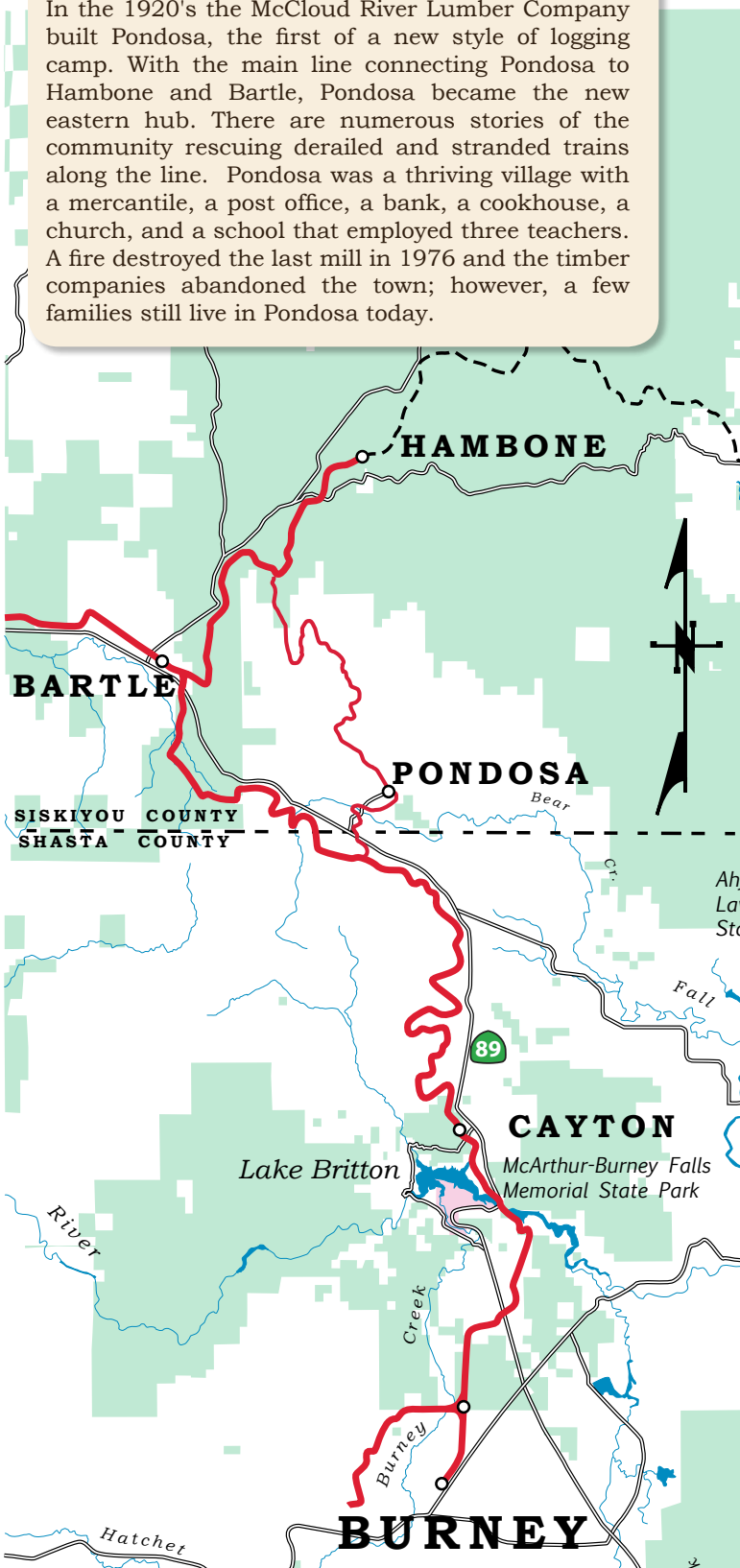
## Cayton

By the turn of the last century, the Cayton Valley was a bustling ranching area with schools, a post office and store. As the rail and timber industry moved eastward, ranchers hauled freight to and from the trains and providing staging areas for the building of the tracks. Additional lines brought supplies for the construction of Pacific Gas & Electric's Pit powerhouses and the Pit River Bridge. Today, the Cayton Valley remains a ranching area with some of the old ranches run by the descendants of those early settlers.

## Burney

In 1880 Burney Valley Township was established, although until 1887 the area where Burney now sits was one big farm with orchards, potato and hay fields, and a huge garden. The vast timber resources of the Burney area drew the railroad, which arrived in Burney with a Golden Spike Ceremony to celebrate the true end of the line on July 3, 1955. Three special trains came to celebrate the day, one all the way from San Francisco, and one drawn by the last operating steam locomotive on the McCloud line. It broke through a paper banner "opening" Burney, and its timber to the mills in McCloud and the world.

Today, Burney is actively working to bring 4-season tourism to the community. Burney lies within miles of premier trout streams, lake fishing, Nordic skiing, as well as camping and other recreation in nearby California State Parks and Lassen National Forest. Through new murals of the history of the town and the surrounding natural beauty, information kiosks, and new plantings of trees and flowers, Burney welcomes visitors with a great place to begin an adventure on the Great Shasta Rail Trail.



“The clearest way into the Universe  
is through a forest wilderness.”

— John Muir

