
Dierks' Private Railways in Oklahoma

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There are approximately 5,800 miles of railway lines in Oklahoma. This figure, however, does not include those designated as private or those exempt from rules and regulations of the Interstate Commerce Commission. The actual mileage of these rail lines is small, but their impact is particularly strong in the economy of southeastern Oklahoma.

At present, one private line exists in the state. Dierks Forests, Incorporated, owns and operates this line (Fig. 1) which is 33 miles long, located entirely within McCurtain County, between Wright City and Clebit. At Wright City, it connects with the Texas, Oklahoma, and Eastern Railway, one of the Dierks owned lines classed as a common carrier.

Construction of this railroad began in 1910 at Wright City and extended to a point nine miles north. This point was the location of Dierks' initial timber exploitation in this area. Timber cutting continued there until 1920 when the timber was exhausted. Timber rights were then acquired and an additional nine-mile extension northward to Alikchi was built. This was the northern terminus until 1938 when additional timber rights were obtained and the line was lengthened northward another 18 miles to Clebit, which is the present northern terminus. In addition, several spurs and branches (tram lines) were constructed. These were in use when mules and wagons transported timber from the cutting area to the tram. They were temporary and could be moved when the timber was exhausted. From 1938-1940, trucks began replacing the team and wagon and the trams were subsequently abandoned.

Rolling stock and equipment consists of a caboos, approximately 45 log and pole cars, and a 900-horsepower diesel-electric locomotive which recently replaced the only steam engine operating in the state. This engine is used only when the diesel is being repaired. The line is standard gauge, with 90-pound rail which results in rather slow movement particularly with heavy loads.

The village of Clebit is actually a Dierks-owned lumber camp and the main focus of timbering operations. Logs are transported in by trucks where they are stockpiled for daily shipment by rail. During rainy weather, the responsibility of supplying timber to the mill at Wright City falls entirely upon the railroad as it is difficult for heavy trucks to negotiate the roads from the cutting area to Clebit and from other areas furnishing timber to the mill.

The Dierks line has one purpose: to transport pine timber, along with a limited quantity of hardwood (predominantly gum, transhipped to Paris, Texas), to Wright City, the location of Dierks' only softwood mill in Oklahoma. The line supplies the mill with some 40 percent of the timber utilized, and transports daily (five days per week), an average of 15-20 carloads of timber. This amounts to about 1,600 pine logs resulting in approximately 50,000 board feet of lumber daily. The mill's capacity is

125,000 board feet daily. Other timber required for capacity production is transported by truck from eastern and northeastern locations in McCurtain County and southern Pushmataha County.

There is nothing to indicate the discontinuance of this line in the future. The reasons are: (1) the Dierks reforestation program which will guarantee the line a permanent supply of timber, and (2) the economic infeasibility of truck transportation. In 1959, for the first time after extensive replanting and selective cutting, Dierks was actually growing more timber than was being harvested. In addition, the company recently began harvesting second-growth timber. Truck transportation is not feasible due to the railroad's early start and also to the fact that approximately four trucks would be required to transport the amount moved by one railroad log car. In addition, the railway has an advantage over the trucks during rainy weather particularly where muddy roads now serve as arteries to the mill.

Lumbering is southeastern Oklahoma's only important industry, with the exception of agriculture. Dierks employs about 500 persons in the mill at Wright City, in addition to approximately 100 in the cutting area near Clebit and the railroad is the most economic link between the two areas.

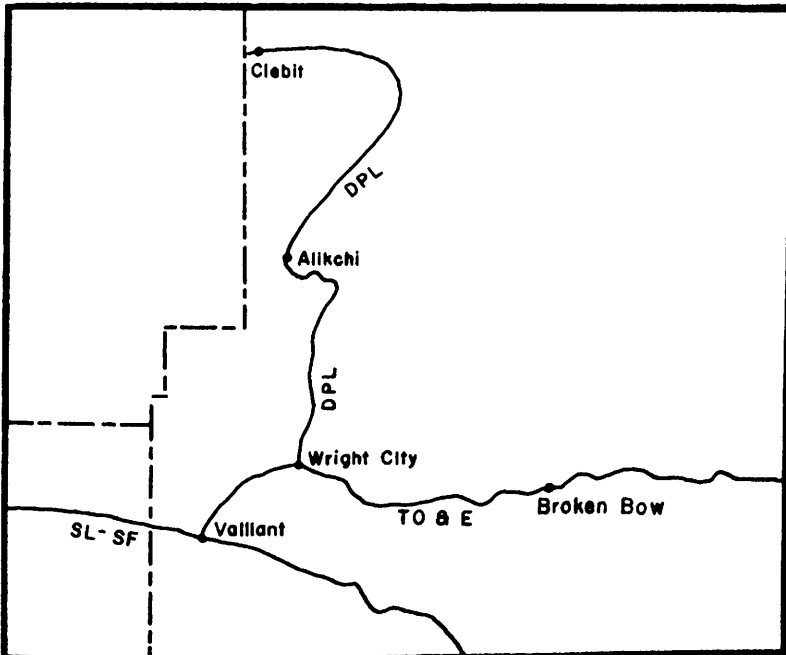


Figure 1. Map showing location of Dierks' Private Line (DPL) relative to connection with the Texas, Oklahoma, & Eastern (TO&E) at Wright City and its connection with the St. Louis-San Francisco (SL-SF) at Valliant.

REFERENCES

- Broken Bow, Oklahoma. Personal interview with Monroe Dale, Logging Superintendent, Dierks Forests, Incorporated, November 26, 1961.
- Wright City, Oklahoma. Personal interview with R. L. Wallace, Mill Superintendent, Dierks Forests, Incorporated, November 26, 1961.
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