

Highway Crews Open Up 230 Miles of Roads

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After getting the 230 miles of state-maintained roads in Whatcom county all open, as of late Saturday and early Sunday morning, the state highway department loaned its rotary snow plows to the county engineer and commissioners, to help clear county roads.

One of the rotary plows started out Sunday at 8 a. m. on the county job, and the second Sunday night at the same hour. They began battling the hard-packed drifts in the Mountain View and Everson and Sumas areas.

A third rotary plow was brought in Monday from Marblemount, where particularly heavy snow had engaged it, and went to work on the roads in the Lynden district.

By mid-morning Monday all county primary roads in the first and third commissioner districts were open.

PHONE POLES DOWN

Everett Baxter, district highway supervisor for the state, said all state roads are now open to two-way traffic except a section between Lawrence and Sumas where 30-40 poles of the Farmers Mutual Telephone company were down, and could only be moved to open the road one way.

The state highways are Highway 99, Guide Meridian, Mount Baker and Austin Pass, Blaine-Lynden-Sumas highway, Lawrence to Sumas road, Deming to Sedro Woolley road and Chuckanut Drive.

Baxter, whose crews went to work Tuesday night when the first heavy snow of last week's storm descended on the county, said he had 55 men and 22 pieces of equipment working. Some of the men worked around the clock in the beginning of the battle, but as soon as more men could be brought in they went on 12-hour shifts and stuck to that where possible.

Six men and four trucks were pulled down from Glacier, four men and four trucks came from Marblemount, and one truck came from Stevens pass when the situation became critical Thursday and Friday. The Stevens pass truck, which got here Thursday, was able to return Saturday night.

They augmented others already in the area. The trucks are equipped with push plows, or rotary blades.

By Saturday, when the snow was hard-packed, the rotary plows were the babies that went after the big drifts. And even then, at times, a bulldozer had to go in to make the first onslaught.

The huge plows bit into the choking drifts, throwing snow 150 to 200 feet as they pitted their power against nature's

obstacle in the form of drifts several hundred feet long and ten to fourteen feet deep.

The men in the plows had a tough time of it. Snow blew into the cabs and with that and the heat of the motors, the men's clothing was soaked, while eyebrows and faces were encrusted with snow. There were no instances of injury.

They worked under the most trying conditions, as did all road crews

and the power and telephone crews.

Two state men, who with their truck and push plow got stuck Thursday morning a quarter of a mile west of the Nooksack Valley high school, went to a farmer's home and were marooned there until Saturday.

"We've worked around the clock since Tuesday night, but we're all clear now," Baxter said Monday morning.

County crews accompanied the rotary plows. By the time the rotary plows got onto the county roads, the snow was so hard packed in some places a bulldozer was sent in first to smash the drifts.

The county crews have been working under the same rigorous conditions since Tuesday night. Some of the crews, County Engineer Ralph Knutzen said, have worked 56 hours without letup.

It is, with the whole army of men on state and county roads, telephone and power crews, a tale of unsung heroism.