

Chicago
September 3-6, 2004

The Club left Ames on Friday at about 1630 after everyone was done with class for a long weekend of railfanning in the Chicago area. First stop was Iowa City for dinner, but before we got supper, we stopped in to see the Ski Train. The University of Iowa (all kinds of Hawkeye insults come to mind...heh) leased the train for the football season to shuttle people between parking lots in Coralville and Kinnick Stadium. The consist is an F40 at each end with Ski Train passenger cars in the middle. We were just happy they didn't deface the train with Hawkeye logos. Upon arriving in Chicago, we met up with Alumni members Paul Duncan and Paul Chleboun and headed out to the BNSF Racetrack for some nighttime action. After seeing a couple Metra dinkies and some BNSF freight action, we called it a night.

Saturday morning started off with the club stopping at Dunkin' Donuts, then waiting in customary Chicagoland traffic in Northwest Indiana. Taking a detour, we arrived in Chesterton, IN via the back roads. Chesterton is located at the convergence of the NS (former Conrail) Chicago Line, the CSX Plymouth Sub and the Amtrak Michigan Corridor. The NS was busy that particular morning. We didn't have to wait more than 3 minutes for our first train, a westbound led by a single C40-8W in Conrail paint looking a little worse for the wear. A few minutes later, a light power movement came through EB. I checked the signal over on the CSX line and found that there was a westbound lined up. What showed up was a CP train, led by CP 9579. These CP trains will soon be gone off the old Pere Marquette line, with CP recently choosing a shorter, all NS route to Chicago. A surprise awaited us on the CP train. A Roland and Nevada Coop Hopper was in the consist. Years ago, this car would have been based just a few miles from Ames. Back on the NS main, a westbound manifest, led by two BNSF SD70MAC's passed by. Eleven minutes later, another westbound, led by new NS SD70M 2603 rolled through town. Four minutes later, eastbound NS 8710 hauled a unit train of coiled steel. Dare I say the Chicago Line is busier than the UP main? It sure seemed like it. As another westbound with an NS primer C40-9W on the point passed, B32-8 NS 3555 went eastward with a manifest.

After lunch, the group drove a few miles west to Pine Junction, site of CSX, NS, and EJ&E trackage. As we arrived, a pair of EJ&E switchers was working the small yard at the site. The first train to pass on the mains was a CSX stacker led by two C44AC's. We received word that NS would be running a bottle train. The bottle train handles hot metal cars, carrying molten steel. You will never see anything like it on the UP main in Iowa. As expected, the train doesn't operate at high speeds, but it arrived a short time later with a Conrail painted GP15-1 on each end. There were 3 hot metal cars, braced by hoppers and gondolas serving as buffer cars. You could see the glowing molten steel on the top of the cars as well as feel the heat coming off the cars. Next train was a CSX empty hopper train, probably for interchange to the UP. All the smoke is coming from the second unit, whose brakes were sticking. The train stopped just past the crossing and corrected the problem. By the time the hopper train got back underway, 3 trains had stacked up behind him. Immediately behind was a South Shore freight. Just behind the

CSS freight was a small CSX manifest led by SD50 8551 and a FURX lease unit. Behind that manifest was yet another CSX manifest, this time with a consist exactly the reverse of the previous train; FURX 3047 led a CSX SD50. The CSX was providing a vast majority of the action during the afternoon, as the NS trickled off. The first train after the bottle train on the NS was an Amtrak, led by AMTK 27. The trailing unit, AMTK 30 is one of just a few P42's left in the Phase III paint.

After agreeing that we had seen all we could see at Pine Junction, we loaded up in the Silhouette again and pointed it towards Blue Island. Blue Island is the site of the diamond between the IHB and CN, as well as the tracks of CSX, Metra and IAIS. If you want to see a large quantity of trains in Chicago, you go here. There were times when we had 3-4 train moving at the same time. A manned tower controls the interlocking and a second manned tower controls the crossing gates for the street which passes across all of the eight main tracks at the junction. As you might expect, it didn't take long for the club to bag it's first train, an IHB NW2 hauling a transfer. Shortly after, a Metra Rocket rolled over on the Rock Island District. After a short wait, a CN train came off the IHB taking home rails southward. Tacked onto the rear of the engine consist were two WC SD45's. The Iowa Interstate transfer run was running late that evening, so we were pleased when we saw the train pull over the overpasses. As the IAIS passed overhead behind us, another IHB train pulled southwards. This time, the consist was an SD38-2 / SD20 consist. As we walked over to the west side of the street crossing, a CN train approached from the south with a nice C44-9W / SD75I / SD75I consist. The Interstate transfer had 3 units on the rear for the reverse move which were now leading down the connection track to the IHB. After waiting about 40 minutes for the IAIS train to clear the crossing we made our way back to the van. After eating in Homewood at Aurelio's Pizza (pizza is the official club meal, this stop didn't disappoint), the club walked over to the Amtrak Station. After a few Metra Electric trains went by, the City of New Orleans stopped on it's way south and the Illini pulled up northbound, making for an odd opportunity to see two Amtrak trains at the same time. The night ended in Westmont once again along the Racetrack with Metra 402, the "State of Illinois", pausing for just long enough to pose for this shot.

Sunday started out back at Blue Island. Alumni member Clayton Johanson joined the rest of the group on our Sunday travels. We stopped by the Metra ready tracks and caught a nice line up of trainsets. Back at the junction we were treated to seeing the one and only IAIS caboose, obviously of ATSF heritage. BN 9579 passed eastbound on the CSX a short while later. We waited along the BNSF Transcon for a little while, only bagging the NS 9546 pulling stacks out of Willow Springs after dropping off it's pigs. We were invited to tour a caboose undergoing restoration near the bridge we were standing on, so we took the opportunity to get a group picture (everyone putting on their best football face). For lunch we ate trackside in LaGrange, seeing 3 or 4 BNSF freight trains, as well as the California Zephyr.

Calling it a day on the Racetrack, we headed up towards Des Plaines Hobbies and lightened our wallets a bit. After making a vain attempt at watching trains on the old WC (we mostly watched planes on final for O'Hare), we headed to the layout we would be

operating on. Paul Duncan had arranged for us to help out in an operating session on Mike Ritschdorf's stunning full basement layout. The setting was N&W and Virginian steam in the 50's. I think everyone was amazed with the quality of the layout. Some of the features were full DCC, two operating coal tipples using sandblasting grit for 'coal', an operating rotary dumper, a phone based dispatching system and signaling. We would estimate that 12-15 persons attended the session, with 8-10 trains running at any one time. Tim ran 3 road freights, Chad and Lee shared some switching and yardmaster duties in a steel mill yard and Paul Chleboun and myself (Justin) also handled 3 freights. It was the first operating experience for most of us, and I think we are all in a modeling mood after the experience. As became the nightly tradition, we ended up on the BNSF Racetrack for nighttime action, although this time in Downers Grove.

Monday morning we got on the road, taking the Interstate to DeKalb and grabbed breakfast in Rochelle, eating it at the Railroad Park. A few trains went through during our short stop including some MoW equipment on the BNSF. Taking the back roads all the way to US 30, we saw a few trains on the UP Geneva Sub. At Cedar Rapids, Iowa Interstate's ICCR came into town after we ate lunch with the set of four SD38-2's. The trip ended with a rare standard cab SD60 leader on a manifest going over the Grand Avenue overpass as the van drove under.

The club was pleased with the quantity and variety of the action Chicago provided. We thank the generosity of our alumni members for guiding us around town and giving us some super cheap, as in free, lodging.