

Cedar Rapids & Iowa City Trip
March 26, 2011

Saturday, March 26, 2011

This spring, the club decided to head to Eastern Iowa for our annual spring day trip. Prior to the trip, contacts were made at the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway (CRANDIC) as well as the Hawkeye Model Railroad Club and tours were pre-arranged. The club departed Ames around 6:45AM for Cedar Rapids. Patrick Johnson, Jeff Brown, Steve Lavrenz, Adam Lind, and Ben Hucker were along for the ride. Courtesy of ISU Transportation Services, we all traveled in style in a 2009 Dodge Minivan. We arrived in Cedar Rapids about 30 minutes early, so a quick pass was made by the Union Pacific's Beverly Yard and CRANDIC's Smith-Dows yard, both located immediately south of US 30 on Edgewood Road. A new bridge on Edgewood Road allows good views of both yards. On our way to the CRANDIC shops, we spotted a crew at work in the yards near the ADM corn processing plant along US 30. We arrived at the CRANDIC shops right on time for our 9:00AM tour. Upon arrival, we were greeted by Mr. Fred McCoy, chief mechanic, and Mrs. Elaine Duvall, senior communications coordinator. Mr. McCoy gave us an overview of the railroad's operations and passed out CRANDIC ball caps to everyone before heading out into the mechanical shop. The current shop was built in the mid-2000's and contains two tracks capable of holding about three cars in length. Once in the shop, we were allowed to explore the locomotives which were in for servicing. There were two MP15DC's, one slug, and one SW1500 in for maintenance. One of the MP15DC's, CIC 131, was in for cab modifications and traction motor work. CRANDIC has begun a cab modification program where they are insulating and re-upholstering the inside of the cabs to reduce noise levels. Additionally, they are also modifying the engineer's area and installing new adjustable Caterpillar Comfort Seats and adjustable foot rests. The finished cabs are very nice! Another project CRANDIC is close to completing is mating each of their eight MP15DC's with slugs. All but two locomotives currently have slug mates. By carefully and evenly ballasting each locomotive and slug to around 286,000 lbs and using sand for traction as necessary, CRANDIC has been able to use just one locomotive/slug pair for all of its trains, even loaded 54-car coal trains. Through the use of slugs and after replacing the grease in the gear boxes with a newer, more viscous type, the mechanical department has seen significant fuel savings, as most jobs are assigned a single MP15DC+slug set, rather than multiple powered locomotives. CRANDIC is leading the industry in their use and development of slugs, and many other Midwest railroads are starting to take notice.

After having plenty of time to explore the shop area, we moved outside and explored the yard, looking at some of their stored equipment. CIC 116 and CIC 120 are currently in storage awaiting sale, and CIC 100 (a GP9), a coach, and a caboos have been donated to the City of Cedar Rapids, but are currently stored on the CRANDIC's property. Additionally, CRANDIC recently purchased three SD40T-2 locomotives at auction from the Union Pacific Railroad. Two are being parted out and scrapped, but one, UP 8803, was rebuilt a little over a year before the sale, so it is being fixed up a bit

and re-sold. A few other relics appeared in the yard as well, including this Rock Island flat car, currently in CRANDIC's MOW fleet.

No trip would be complete without a group photo, which was taken outside of the shop on CIC 123. As we were preparing to leave, Mr. McCoy offered us the opportunity to ride along with a crew that was just coming on duty. Of course, we all jumped at the opportunity and piled into the cab of CIC 123 with the engineer. We rode with the crew from the shops complex, approximately ½ mile south to just past the Wilson Avenue crossing. We thanked the crew and they went on their way while we grabbed our parting shots.

After our CRANDIC tour, we made a brief stop by the UP's North Yard and the CN/IC's downtown yard, both near the Quaker Oats plant. The only interesting action was Quaker's critter shuffling about in the yard. Then, the club proceeded on to Box Karr Hobbies, and some members lightened their wallets a bit. At the suggestion of some Cedar Rapids natives, we stopped at the Flying Weenie for lunch. On our way out after lunch, we spotted a CRANDIC job working Penford Products. From there, we headed for Iowa City and followed the CRANDIC's Cedar Rapids – Iowa City line, although the line was devoid of action this day. Once we reached Coralville, we were met with a westbound Iowa Interstate local led by IAIS 704.

Our afternoon activity was a tour and operating session with the Hawkeye Model Railroad Club, housed in the Antique Car Museum of Iowa building in Coralville. Upon arrival, we were greeted by Tom Persoon, HMRC President, Alan Merta of the Eastern Iowa Division of the NMRA, and several club members. Mr. Persoon gave a tour of the layout, explaining the history, operations, and future plans for the layout, and then turned us loose with throttles in hand! The layout employs NCE Digital Command Control with both tethered and radio throttles. The mainline is largely single track with sidings for passing. With the exception of the "Iowa City" portion of the layout, no particular theme, era, or prototype railroad is strictly modeled. Rather, "the layout is designed to allow prototypical operation and has a Midwestern theme in an era that is flexible."

Each ISRRC club member was paired up with an HMRC club member and allowed to operate any train which was on the layout. This led to many different trains being operated including: a manifest led by a Great Northern "Big Sky Blue" F45 operated by Patrick, the Great Northern Empire Builder operated by Steve, and another manifest led by a pair of Great Northern high-nose GP20s operated by Ben. Additionally, the Milwaukee Road Hiawatha, a Union Pacific manifest, the Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy Pioneer Zephyr, and an Amtrak Superliner trainset saw operation as well. Some key points along the layout include a scratchbuilt, double-track, curved trestle, the Gilbert Street underpass at Iowa City, and the layout's main yard.

After operating on the layout for a couple hours, it was time to say good bye and head back to Ames. As we were in a hurry to get back, no additional rail-related stops were made on the way back. A fun day was had by all!