

Lincoln / Omaha  
April 10, 2010

The Iowa State Railroad Club opted for a day trip to the Lincoln/Omaha, Nebraska, area to do some railfanning and to visit a one-inch scale live steam railroad that Club President Cliff Cessna has been involved with for 11 years.

We left Ames bright and early at 6:30AM, taking US Highway 30 to roughly parallel the Union Pacific mainline as far as Missouri Valley, Iowa. Along the way we saw a small handful of trains. Just west of Dow City, IA we met a loaded coal train with the second locomotive being SP 187, one of the very few remaining un-patched Southern Pacific AC400CW's still roaming the UP. Unfortunately, no one had a camera ready to capture the scene.

We drove all the way to Lincoln, taking some minor detours along the way to follow UP and BNSF tracks as closely as possible. Once in Lincoln, we passed by BNSF's Havelock Shops to see what was in for repairs. We then made our way to the home of Jim Culver, President of the Chippewa Northwestern Railway (live steam operation) to see his shop and his one-inch scale equipment. Jim had three steam locomotives in various states of repair – a 2-6-2 Prairie #251, a 4-6-2 Pacific #501, and a 2-8-2 Mikado #727. The Prairie had just returned from an overhaul in South Dakota that converted it from a 2-8-0 Consolidation. The Pacific received some minor work over the winter including re-plumbing of the water feeder line going into the locomotive and installation of a deck plate to prevent coal spilling onto the tracks while operating. The Mikado is not in operable condition. Jim also has two battery-powered locomotives: an F7A #1227 painted in CB&Q's "Grayback" scheme and an RS-3 #9309 painted in CB&Q's "Everywhere West" scheme.

After we left Jim's we stopped at Runza for lunch before heading out west to Goehner, Nebraska, where the Chippewa Northwestern is located. The railroad is situated on the grounds of the Seward County Historical Society's Museum. Cliff gave everyone a quick walking tour of the main railroad facilities (station, steaming bays (roundhouse), and car shed). Then, we raked up the pine cones, pine needles, and leaves off the track so that we could run a train around.

Because it was before the railroad officially re-opened for the summer, the only motive power out there was a 4-wheeled "Critter" (think 25-tonner). Nonetheless, Cliff got out a train of two riding cars and a control car for the engineer to ride. After an inspection run by Cliff, each club member got a turn driving and riding around the railroad. Because the Critter is so small, it's pulling capacity on the ruling grade of the railroad is only two adults. As such, three people always had to hang around. Cliff took this opportunity to explain the nuts and bolts of how the railroad worked (signals, pneumatic switches, etc.).

After almost two hours, everyone had a go-around, and the train was put away. We headed on back toward Lincoln, swinging past the east end of Hobson Yard where BNSF trains can either head south to Kansas City or northeast toward Omaha and

eventually Chicago. Seeing only a couple of trains there, we drove to the hobby shop where Cliff gets his goods.... Randy's Roundhouse – a fairly new store that opened in October 2009 as the owner Randy decided to open his own store, rather than work for a Lionel wholesaler (or something of the sort). A few members made purchases ranging from cars to track to switches. Next we headed to Omaha, where we ate at a Cracker Barrel for supper.

Once we left Cracker Barrel, we attempted to stop by Kennefick Park where Union Pacific Big Boy #4023 is on display along with DD40AX #6900. However, the park closed at 5:00 and was only open when we got there (around 7:00) so that local high school students could get prom pictures taken in the park. Instead, we wandered over to the Union Station/Burlington Station area where we watched an eastbound UP manifest roll by. We then swung through Council Bluffs, past the Rails West Railroad Museum, and then it got too dark to take any pictures. Thus, we hopped on I-80 and headed back to Ames.

For a rather long trip to pack into one day, everyone seemed to enjoy the day. Certainly, being able to see a different size of model railroad and ride/operate a train on it was a highlight. Should the club return to the area on a future trip, we have been invited back to the Chippewa anytime. Next time, the visit should be done in the fall before the railroad shuts down for the winter (end of October).