

Trip Reports from 2001-02

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November 9, 2001-Union Pacific Engineering Special For the second time in two weeks, the Union Pacific's last remaining operating Centennial unit, 6936, came through the area on an engineer special. Last week the unit operated from Council Bluffs to Kansas City via Kansas City Junction and the Spine Line. After spending the last week visiting Texas, Oklahoma, and Illinois the train returned to Council Bluffs. The morning began with the train in Peoria. The train operated north on the former Minneapolis and St. Louis line to St. Louis and turned west on the Overland Route at Nelson, IL. Using information from UP's public trace it was determined that the train would arrive in the area around at 2:00pm. Club members Paul Duncan and Clayton Johanson headed east to meet the special at Colo, IA. The two arrived at Colo at 1:30 to red signals. At 2:05 a westbound double stacker led by a UP SD70M passed through at track speed. Five minutes later the special arrived running wrong main. UP 6936 looked slick with its wings as it blasted through town at 70mph, hot on the heels of the double stacker. The time was 2:10pm.

Many club members are familiar with the train chasing stories of Duncan and Johanson and this one was no different. Before the train was even clear of the town, the two were on the move to catch the train.

The speed of the train would make catching the special at Ames virtually impossible, the plan was to again catch the train at Beaver, 22 miles west of Ames. The two would catch up to the train by Ames Yard, 15 miles west using US 30. The special ran around the double stacker at the East Ames crossover and continued west.

Duncan and Johanson arrived at Beaver at 2:45 and waited for the special. At approximately 3:05 the special arrived at Beaver. Between Beaver and Grand Junction the railroad runs within fifty feet of US 30 making for excellent pacing opportunities. With the sun in the right spot it was perfect for pictures. The train hit the lone Beaver crossing and the chase was on. The train was doing 65-70mph, unfortunately the traffic was not. A slow moving truck impeded progress and soon the special was overtaking Duncan's Ford Ranger.

Nevertheless, traffic does not come in Duncan's way when it comes to trains. Soon enough the truck was behind them and the chase was back on. The train looked slick in its matching yellow, shining in the afternoon fall sun. When pacing a train not only do you get to hear all the beautiful sounds the train emits, but it also affords a chance to get a good detailed look at the equipment at work.

Just before Grand Junction the train hit a crossing on the outside of town doing track speed. At Grand Junction the railroad crosses beneath 30 and runs on the south side. The train streaked by tiny Grand Junction at 70 while dense traffic and a stop sign temporarily brought the chase to the halt. Never intimidated by a challenge the two trekked forward to again catch the train. While the railroad and 30 still run parallel they are separated by 500 feet, making pictures harder to take. With the a low gas tank and poor road conditions it was decided to beat the train to Jefferson and end the chase. Within minutes

they were speeding down a gravel road on the east side of Jefferson to get to a crossing and grab on final shot before saying goodbye to the Centennial's latest visit to Iowa.

November 11, 2001-Amtrak's *California Zephyr* detours With track work shutting down BNSF's mainline in southern Iowa, Amtrak detoured trains 5 and 6, the *California Zephyr* for two days over the Union Pacific main. On Sunday, November 11, club members Paul Duncan and Clayton Johanson chased number 6 east.

On the point was UP 6455 and three Amtrak engines in the new phase V "Shamu" scheme. The train was running fairly on-time despite being restricted to 70mph vs. 79mph on the Burlington. The two paced UP 8119 with a westbound coal train into Boone and caught up to it at the new crew change point in downtown Boone. They headed over to the "Hard Road" to wait for Amtrak. Before number 6's arrival at Boone UP 7150 arrived with the eastbound Oakland-Chicago 'Z' intermodal train and a westbound coal train with a C&NW AC4400CW on the point.

Soon enough the CZ arrived with one baggage, eight passenger cars, and seven express boxcars. After snapping some shots the two treked east to catch the train at Colo. At Colo the Zephyr overtook a manifest, got a track permit through a work zone and came through at 40mph to prepare to cross over at Clear Creek and get through the work zone. At Clear Creek sat the Oakland-Chicago 'Z'. Many railfans will claim that Union Pacific does not give any priority to Amtrak. Not this day, not this UP, number 6 zipped around the hottest train on the railroad and gunned it for Marshalltown.

At Marshalltown the Zephyr made a quick stop for some supplies. The radio interaction between the UP crews and the Amtrak crews is much more different than you would normally hear. The entire time the train was referred to as "UP 6455 on the Amtrak 6" versus the normal id by engine number. The conductor on 6455 got the ok from the conductor on number 6 as they gunned it out of Marshalltown.

Paul and Clayton arrived on the east side of Le Grand after making the drive from Colo. At first the two set up on the Quarry Rd. bridge over the track. The arrival of a slow westbound required the need to make a last minute change and move to the near-by US 30 bridge with just minutes before the arrival of 6. Just as the two were setting up Amtrak appeared to the west. Had the two stayed at the Quarry Rd. bridge, their shot would have been ruined. Number 6 leaned into the curve, throttle wide open, and blew right by them at track speed, 70 mph. On this day the God of the West Wind was on the the "Route of the '400' Streamliners".

February 2, 2002-Iowa City and the Iowa Interstate The first of four trips for the club for spring 2002, The Iowa State Railroad Club paid a visit to the Iowa Interstate Railroad headquarters in Iowa City. Allan Hunt from the Iowa Interstate was kind enough to offer us a tour of the yard and offices in Iowa City.

The day began at noon with our departure from Ames. At 1 o'clock we arrived in Newton, IA to satisfy the hunger needs of club members Mike Endres and Chad Crawford. Upon departing McDonald's we began to explore the town to find the Newton Intermodal Terminal. Upon arrival we found IAIS 600 and 408 switching grain hoppers onto the evening's eastbound Chicago train. After the engines backed on to the train we left for Iowa City.

Upon arriving Iowa City we met with Allan Hunt and entered the headquarters which is

on the east end of the yard. Paul, the dispatcher on duty, gave us an overview of the dispatchers board with the trains currently on the system, including the train in Newton that we saw plus a westbound that we missed on the way to Iowa City (d'oh). We discussed the railroad operations with Paul and the challenges of dispatching a railroad. After talking with Paul, Allan showed us the computer system the railroad uses to track cars, produce waybills, and for other documents and information that any railroad needs to keep. Allan showed us some of his pictures that he taken of the railroad's equipment. We proceeded outside to visit the Iowa Interstate's locomotive area. IAIS 625, 483, and 303 (the "Green Machine") were together in the facility. Note the bell above the headlights on the 303, this is reflective of its C&O heritage. The club posed on GP10 483, conveniently blocking out the "Inter" to make this locomotive an "Iowa State" GP10!

The club looked inside the cab of 625 and talked a little more about the railroad. Alas, our time at the Iowa Interstate was over and it was time to leave. We didn't leave without getting the status on the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway's train to Iowa City and of the eastbound for Chicago.

Allen told us it would be at Homestead, IA by 5:15, and he was on the money. At just a few minutes past 5:15 CIC 111 and three other engines led a train of 60 cars east towards Iowa City.

After the excitement of seeing the CRANDIC's train we headed west to Grinnell in hopes of seeing the eastbound IAIS train. After about twenty minutes of waiting and enquiring about the last train to come through with the attractive hostess at the restaurant in the old Grinnell depot, the train with IAIS 628 now on the point rumbled by. Two additional engines were added to the train complementing the earlier 600 and 408.

After Grinnell we headed back to West Ames. We finished the day of local Iowa railroading and making jokes at each other with four eastbound Union Pacific trains. The Iowa State Railroad Club wants to send its heartfelt thanks to Allan Hunt and Paul from the Iowa Interstate Railroad.

February 23, 2002-Kansas City and Argentine Yard and In-between By far the earliest start of all of our trips. We began our trip to Kansas City at 6:30am. After making the rounds of Ames gather members we hit the road and headed straight from the Show-Me State.

We arrived at 10:45, found the BNSF offices and then headed over to a nearby overpass to grab some shots of the yard. The yard is on the Kansas side of Kansas City. A number of engines were over sitting on the yard engine tracks. Among them was Santa Fe 1299 and Santa Fe 1352. On one side BN 9411 was on a flatcar after being destroyed in a crash.

At 11:00 we met Mike O'Neill, Assistant Superintendent for the Kansas Division, and began our tour. Mike first took us to the Kansas City area dispatching center that is shared with BNSF, UP, and the KCT. There we met the Chief Dispatcher who showed us the workings of the center.

After the dispatching center we took a tour of the yard. Our first destination was the yard tower. The tower afforded the members great views of the entire yard. To the west is the hump bowl and to the south are the mainlines and refueling tracks. From every direction you could see cars. In the tower is a engine fleet manager who plans out the power

requirements for the day and another man responsible for keeping an eye on the cars. The yard uses cameras so people in the tower can zoom in on sections of the yards to check the tracks and cars.

After the tower we headed over towards the hump. Hump set BN 6260 and BN 6299 were parked while another set worked a cut of cars. We observed a loaded lumber flat head down into the bowl. The hump is completely computerized with computers lining the tracks, determining the track capacity and working the retarders. There are 6 sets of 10 tracks for a total of 60. There are 3 sets of retarders that slow down the car. Computers weigh the car and take factors like wind and weight into consideration when determining the proper amount to slow down the cars. The retarders are LOUD. Even with ear plugs the sound was of steel on steel piercing.

After the seeing the hump we headed over to the locomotive facility. Kansas City is host to a General Electric contract maintenance shop, EMD fans are not wanted here. One building is split half for BNSF maintenance and GE work and another building is for getting engines prepped to go back out on the road. A paint shed remains but no repaints are done at Kansas City.

We spent most of our time in the BNSF/GE building. Most of the BNSF side was empty as a result of a downturn in traffic. A lone Dash 9 sits underneath a crane that used to be used for heavy repairs. Three other Dash 9's sat on the north side waiting for traction motor and wheel work. Santa Fe 845 was having its wheels worked on while we were there. Meanwhile, on the GE side there were no less than 5 Dash 8's and 9's in for work (that should make you EMD fans happy). A view from a stair case provided a nice overview of the GE area. Also in was Santa Fe Dash 7 4220. Santa Fe B40-8W 575 with a worn warbonnet was also in the shops.

From the locomotive shops we visited the Kansas City intermodal ramp. Kansas City lifts about 250,000 trailers a year. Mostly making cuts for BNSF intermodals from Chicago and Los Angeles, though a few trains to originate and terminate in Kansas City.

After saying goodbye to our hosts we headed off to Kansas City Union Station to catch the 3:05pm departure of Amtrak's *St. Louis Mule*. We arrived with about 10 minutes before departure. The train was headed by P42 43 in the new "Shamu" scheme. Right at 3:05 the train pulled. This train is supported by the state of Missouri and is threatened to be pulled in June if Missouri can not find the money to keep it, and its counterparts the *Kansas City Mule* and the *Ann Rutledge*.

Using a Rand McNally atlas given to us as a gift from the locomotive department and a map in Trains Magazine, we tried to find some places to railfan. We decided on beautiful Birmingham, MO where the Norfolk Southern's former Wabash line from Decatur meets the joint UP/IMRL Spine Line (Short Line for you purists). First through was an engine hop to the NS with a UP SD70M and CNW 8603, soon after came IMRL 230 with a manifest. NS 2851 led a transfer out of a nearby Ford facility. NS 5202 toyed with us as it came close, but not quite, as it switched the yard.

From Birmingham we treked to Henrietta, MO where the Santa Fe to Chicago parallels the NS's former Wabash. Here the two railroads share 3 mains, 2 BNSF, 1 NS with a eastbound NS Roadrailer and manifest being the first trains through. The rush continued on with another eastbound manifest, followed by a westbound vehicle train on the NS and a westbound 'Z' hightailing it for Kansas City back on the Santa Fe.

Our attempt to leave was met with resistance as the BNSF sent us an eastbound container

train to gawk at before beginning the trip back to Ames.

With the urging of club member Clayton Johanson the group stopped in Osceola on the way back to see Amtrak 5, the *California Zephyr*, call at the Osceola depot. Constant tracking of the train using a cell phone and 1-800-USA-RAIL showed that number 5 would be Osceola on the dot this night. At 9:30pm, the people came out and number 5 pulled into the station, three minutes off the advertised.

After a 5 minute stop to handle the heavy passenger loads (yes, I'm serious) the train pulled and continued for points west. This train is slated for discontinuance on October 1, 2002 if Amtrak does not get its renewed funding this year.

The club members decided to stick around, even after the *Zephyr* to see if any other traffic showed up. The biggest activity was not on the mains, but on a north-south street the passes on the west side of the depot. A couple of inebriated local girls in a car entertained the club members with inspirational messages and ritual revealing of their bodies as they drove up and down the street. Sorry, no pictures for you guys. We will try harder next time. Oh, and two coal trains came by pulled by 2 SD70MAC. By this time it was late and after being up for so many hours the club returned back to Ames. The perfect weather and plenty of trains combined to make an unforgettable trip.