

Twin Cities, MN
March 23-25, 2007

Friday, March 23

After leaving Ames, the first stop for the Club's spring trip was Mason City for dinner and to do a quick spin around town to see what was moving. We stopped by Flint, where a coal load was recrewed and a local switch job was doing a little work. A couple of the motors of the Iowa Traction were also resting for the afternoon in the area. After a drive by of the UP yard, we headed for the Twin Cities. Our lodging for the weekend was member Ted Hotvet's parents house. Lucky for us, the Hotvets are avid modelers. We were able to have fun on their layout during the evenings when done with our activities for the day.

The layout is based on a freelance version of the Santa Fe/Rio Grande Colorado Joint Line in the transition era. While the real Joint Line travels in a north-south direction, the layout's joint line goes east-west.

Saturday, March 24

On foggy Saturday morning, our first stop was the Minnesota Transportation Museum's Jackson Street Roundhouse. We worked our way through the museum complex, with many exhibits. The public portion of the roundhouse also houses the privately owned GN 400 'Hustle Muscle', which was still looking amazing a couple months after it received a fresh coat of paint. We also walked through the shops part of the complex and the shed that houses equipment being worked on. We were also given the opportunity to take a spin around the parking lot in a 1950-something Greyhound Scenicruiser bus which will be undergoing restoration at the museum. (Minnesota Transportation Museum website: <http://www.mtmuseum.org/>)

Next stop was a tour of the Minnesota Commercial shops. MNNR is home to a large fleet of mainly GE and Alco power not normally seen these days. We were able to see most of the railroads locomotives at the shop due to it being a weekend. The roundhouse being an old building, there were plenty of interesting details such as this old board for keeping track of maintenance. After grabbing a club photo, we headed to a local Subway for lunch.

At Subway of all places, we ran into Steve Sandberg of the Milwaukee 261. He invited us to come over to their shops, which was an offer we were not going to refuse. Heading into the shops, we were greeted by the gorgeous 261. A couple tool cars were also inside the shops. Stepping into the cab was a great experience, as crew members told us about all the controls. Walking on the lower level, you can experience 261's running gear at eye level. The crew was busy replacing some flues before the start this year's steam season, so the smokebox was opened up. It was a memorable experience for all. (Friends of the 261 website: <http://www.261.com/>)

Driving from the 261 shops towards Dayton's Bluff, we stopped at the Saint Paul Union Depot. Like so many big city depots, SPUD has a restaurant in the old main hall and was set up for a wedding on this day, so we didn't stick around too long.

At Dayton's Bluff, our first train was the returning CP Ford job that we had passed under while down by the depot. They had an attractive duo of CP and Soo geeps. The next train through was an eastbound BNSF manifest with a repainted GP60M leading the way. That clear signal on the bridge in the last shot was for a UP transfer job with 4 GP39-2's. While that train was clearing, we missed the head end of a BNSF company fuel train. The webmaster has never seen a photo of a unit train comprising of all BNSF diesel cars, so I took this photo of the string of tanks. Next train through was a CP yard job that was dragging a sizable cut of large diameter pipe and other traffic out of Pigs Eye Yard with a Soo MP15AC. The last train we saw at Dayton's Bluff before moving on was a high-wide train with two candy-apple red Soo SD60's.

Leaving the Bluff, we decided it was about time we visited a hobby shop. We headed towards Scale Model Supply, where many members made their wallets a little lighter. After eating dinner, we headed to the Mall of America. No, not to shop, but instead to get on the relatively new Hiawatha light rail line, which runs between the mall and downtown Minneapolis. The off-peak fare isn't bad at all, \$1.50 for 2 1/2 hours of riding time. After riding a full round trip, we headed back to home base to play with the layout some more.

Sunday, March 25

On Sunday, we drove up towards Northtown to see some BNSF action. While action was what we were looking for, it was not what we got. We only saw one moving train, which had a pretty nice all-warbonnet consist, including a GP40X. After taking a spin on the overpass near the Northtown diesel shops, we decided to call it a trip and head back for Ames. Many thanks for all the folks who allowed us to tour some of the facilities up in the Cities and to the Hotvet family for hosting us, it was a great trip.