

Minneapolis Area 2009

March 27–29, 2009

Friday, March 27th, 2009

For the Iowa State Railroad Club's spring trip this year, we traveled to the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The club last visited the Twin Cities just over two years ago (3/25 to 3/27/2007).

We departed Ames in one of ISU's 2007 Chevy Impalas just after 3:30PM and drove straight to our destination, save for a brief dinner stop at Arby's in Owatonna, Minnesota. Around 7PM, we arrived at the home of club member Ted Hotvet's parent. It was too early to just call it a night, so we opted to stop by the hobby store Scale Model Supply before its 9PM closing. A couple club members made some small purchases, but primarily the only thing accomplished was browsing and drooling at things poor college students can't afford.

After closing the store, we headed back to Ted's house to see and run trains on his dad's (John Hotvet) immaculate HO Scale layout located, no, not in the basement, but the attic. The layout is set some 40 to 50 years ago, so club member Cliff Cessna's Union Pacific SD70M and Norfolk Southern C40-9W were oddly out-of-place when pulling a 33-car mixed freight train that consisted primarily of 40-foot boxcars. Below are a few pictures that were taken from the layout.

Saturday, March 28th, 2009

At 10AM, we were scheduled to meet with Ted's friend Phil who works for the light rail division of the Twin Cities' Metro Transit for a tour of the light rail maintenance facilities, dispatching operation, and signaling systems. Being only about 5 years old, everything in the shop was kept nice, clean, and organized. In the shop, all routine maintenance and repairs are performed on the light rail vehicles, including the placement and removal of the vinyl advertisement "wraps" that are applied to several cars. During our tour, a Canadian tourism ad was being ripped off a car by a small crew of men. Phil told us the ads arrive cut-to-size and shape and are applied relatively flawlessly. The adhesive is resistant to moisture so rain and the daily washing of cars will not cause it to peel, but when it comes time to remove the ad, a simple tug rips it off cleanly and does not damage the paint job in any way.

While much of the system is automated, there is always at least one dispatcher on duty to monitor the functions of the railroad and respond to any problems or alarms that may arise. On the weekend, a "light" traffic load of about ten trains means things stay pretty quiet. The dispatching center looked much like a miniature version of what one might see at any major Class I railroad such as BNSF or Union Pacific. Some 150 security cameras make sure that nothing dangerous or illegal takes place at the stations and other rail

facilities. Several other sensors and detectors keep the railroad safe from virtually everything from tunnel intruders to switch points being ¼” out of place to dark signals.

After the tour, the club drove to a park-n-ride location to ride the light rail. The fare is now \$1.75 for 2 ½ hours of ride time, up 25 cents from two years ago. We first rode to the Mall of America at the south end of the line to grab a bite of lunch. From there we rode all the way to the north end in downtown Minneapolis. Due to time constraints on our tickets, we immediately had to board another train to get back to the parking lot before the tickets expired.

Although it was only 40 degrees out at best, it was mostly sunny, so we decided to get some railfanning in. Dayton’s Bluff and Canadian Pacific’s Pigs Eye Yard is as good a place as any in the Twin Cities to catch a lot of train movements with BNSF, UP, and CP all sending trains through the area. We stumbled upon what appeared to be a “designated parking area” for railfans that CP had set up just inside Pigseye Yard. Rather disappointingly, only three movements took place in the 90 minutes we sat there. As we arrived, a set of Union Pacific power (SD70ACe and two SD70M’s) left their resting place on a stub siding to attach to a train and head out. The rear DPU (a BNSF SD70MAC) of a loaded Wisconsin Power coal train was situated in front of the parking area when we arrived and left during the passing of the third train we saw. This third train was a CP mixed freight being lead by an ES44AC.

After we got bored of the lack of traffic, we ventured over to the Minnesota Transportation Museum, situated in the former Great Northern Jackson Street Roundhouse, where Ted and his parents are active volunteers. Many of the exhibits and equipment at the museum were the same as at the time of the club’s last visit. However, the Burlington Northern SD9 #6234 had a nice, year-old coat of Cascade green and black. The museum also had acquired a tamper to help with track maintenance on the property and as an exhibit for maintenance-of-way work. The tamper was undergoing restoration so that it will be operable. Also, a former Great Northern passenger car was under restoration in the roundhouse. Sandblasting on the cars sides revealed evidence of many layers of paint including the original GN “Sky Blue,” BN “Cascade Green,” and GN “Empire Builder” paint schemes.

Leaving the museum, we opted for dinner at Famous Dave’s. Afterward, a brief tour of downtown Minneapolis and a trip across the new I-35W bridge concluded the running around we would do for the trip. We went back to Ted’s house and were treated with the presentation of many slides by John Hotvet, taken on various trips over the past 30-40 years. Unique and by-gone scenes that likely can never be reproduced made up a bulk majority of these slides.

Sunday, March 29th, 2009

We departed Minneapolis around 11:30AM to possibly do some railfanning on the way back to Ames or along the UP once back in the home territory. As we crossed the CN/IC at Williams, Iowa, we saw a trio of BNSF locomotives that had just delivered a loaded

coal train to be unloaded at the transloading facility there. The SD70MAC, ES44AC, SD70MAC set was running with all units long-hood forward. We hopped off I-35 and headed west until we hit a county road to take us back north to the tracks. Once ahead of the locomotives, we stopped for a photo runby, then jumped in the car again to head to the next town of Blairsburg for one more photo opp. As soon as the trio was outside of town, the leading SD70MAC throttled to Notch 8 and sped off to the west.

Upon returning to Ames, some members had other obligations for the evening, so everyone headed home instead of further railfanning.

In all, the trip was good and fun was had by all, even though the total number of trains seen was pretty low compared to our last visit to the Twin Cities.