

Ramblings of the Sagebrush Short Line
or
The Hole in the Ground Trip
By Gary Taylor



On Monday, July 14, 2014, we were all sitting in the Jack-in-the-Box in Ridgecrest with nothing special to announce except the “wonderful” breakfast had by all. The trip was uneventful, and George and Linda, Gary and Julie, Keith, and John and Dee were road weary and ready to relax at the Grand Canyon Railway & Hotel campground. We traded blue skies for grey and connected with Mike and Bessie.

On Tuesday, July 15th, it was a really wet morning, but everyone was up and excited to board the train from Williams, Arizona to the Grand Canyon. First up was a rather soggy tale told by the stuntmen and gunfighters at the station’s western town. Did I say soggy? At one point during the show, our umbrella began to leak! That withstanding, the show was great fun, and we all headed to the station gift shop to await boarding and buy raincoats.



The trip up was clear of rain as the storm had moved off, and with help from the cars purser as well as the conductor that was full of information about the building of the railroad and the use of rail traffic to the canyon, the trip was delightful. Lunch was at the station while our train was turned on the wye and parked for our return trip at our boarding platform.

While this was to be our first “Hole in the ground,” the view from the rim was truly amazing and the width seemed to make it look more like a painting than real life. We ate at one of the many restaurants, and it was wonderful. Our drinks came, and then we got the pleasure of participating in an impromptu fire alarm. NO DRILL! Firemen and everything! Evidently there was an overheated sensor in the kitchen, and it alarmed. Cleared by the Fire Marshal, we continued with our wonderful lunch.



The return trip was punctuated by the arrival of some rather boisterous cowboys wanting our valuables, but we were saved by the

fearless sheriff, and we all arrived, on time, back at the station no worse for wear.



We left Williams on Wednesday, July 16th, bound for Chama, New Mexico on wet streets. John was in the lead with five in tow. George and Linda brought up the rear for safety and to pick up anything we might lose along the way. We arrived at Chama after a short layover at the Camping World where new folding rocking chairs seemed to be the favorite of the day and an anti-sway bar for the Taylors.

Thursday, July 17th, was a day of “kicking back” and just getting the “Lay of the Land.” Everyone wandered around (allowed at Chama), looking at equipment and the rail yard, inspecting the shops and the “Bone yard,” while watching the switching operations. One of the many highlights of the rail yard is the oldest, wooden, coal tipples still operating in the United States. Due to its age, it is only used during special occasions. Of course checking out the gift shop was also a priority for all.



Friday we all climbed aboard the “Train to Antonito.” Amidst the steam hissing, flange squealing, and coal smoke we made our way up the steep grades, across green meadows and through and around heavily timbered hills and valleys. To say it was beautiful country would be a discredit. Lunch was a buffet of Turkey, and all the fixings, or you could go down stairs and find a salad bar, or if you wished, just belly up to the dessert bar and forget lunch all together! After lunch, the train continued up to Antonito. Did I mention rain? Once again the storm clouds caught up to us and attempted to wash us from the mountain. The final part of the trip was interrupted by one cow who had decided she liked the tracks and the shelter she was provided and had to be persuaded otherwise. Also several large rocks, having been washed off the mountain, required the train crew to leave their cars and locomotive cab to get wet in order for us to continue. The return trip home was a relaxing ride on a tour bus. Home was a very nice, albeit tightly packed campground, amidst the trees next to the Chama Creek.



Saturday, July 19th, found us chasing locomotives up the hill to “Windy Point,” a large volcanic outcropping where the rails climb and switch around its face. We caught the locomotive at several points along the way and captured it electronically. Afterward the trip back home involved going to the old hotel in town and having lunch.



Saturday afternoon found us aboard again, climbing the grade once more toward dinner. The Sunset Express took us about halfway up the grade to the example of a snow shed. This structure hides part of the wye the train is turned on and takes us to the dinner hall. While being serenaded by a western song and storyteller, we dined on prime rib, baked potatoes and vegetables. The trip home was punctuated by wildlife of the area; deer, bear, elk, and squirrels.



On Sunday, many of us traveled around the area, visiting sights, and were invited to visit a friend of the railroad and his amazing collection of heavy equipment, as well as military rolling stock. That evening, Harry Haas Jr. and his wife Linda treated us to a lovely cook-out at their motor home.

The trip continued to Durango, Colorado on Monday, July 21st. We set up and settled in at United Camp Ground. It was large and was split by the railroad, with wheels on one side and canvas on the other. A bus took us into town where we are able to wander around, visit the station and tour the railroad's museum. The museum was filled with local history, railroad equipment, model railroads, and even an old fire engine. After retiring, we were all given a great light and sound show from a Colorado "Mountain High" thunderstorm. At one point the lightning was low to the ground and running horizontal in the clouds, making the thunder sound more like low flying fighter jets flying down the valley!



The trip on Tuesday took us up amidst the steep mountains of Colorado. It started from the valley along the Animas River and following its course until it is far below. Lunch was on our own in the town of Silverton. As an old silver and mineral town, many of the old buildings and stores along the Main Street are still in use, though most have been “repurposed” from their original types of business into curio shops, and more family oriented businesses. We had lunch in one of the original “restaurants.” After catching the train for the return trip, we were treated to an exceptional and out of the ordinarily slow ride down due to the train in front of us having mechanical issues with a “hot box” that need nursing until they could cut it out at a siding.



The next day, we bid Colorado good-bye and headed sort of West. The trail took us first to “Four Corners” Monument. A place many of us had not been to before. After the drive I found out why. It is a little out of the way, but if you haven’t been there, it is a place that should be on your list.

After leaving the Monument we headed south for Canyon de Chelly (pronounced “Shay” like the locomotive) National Monument in Arizona. Or as George facetiously described it, “another hole in the ground.” This is another place to put on your list. The canyon is long, deep, and close examination reveals cliff dwellings deep into the canyon walls. Us equestrian types thought it would be a great place to ride into and explore. The days trek continued until we arrived at the KOA Campground outside of Holbrook Arizona. The proprietor makes a mean steak dinner at a reasonable cost. Cooked as you like it, and at the picnic grounds at the park, it was a nice surprise after a long day. We did the same place for his breakfast the next morning.



With breakfast well done and our bellies full, we backtracked a little to the gift shop at the Petrified Forest, curved our way through the awe of the Painted Desert, and connected back to Highway 40. The next stop was the 4,100 ft. diameter Meteor Crater, also known as Barringer Crater, for you scientific types. Or as George excitedly put it, “another hole in the ground.” It was a first for many of us and the beautiful museum and attached

outlooks of this site make an impressive display of what a rock 130 ft wide at 27,000 mph can do. George thought so too! We left the crater late in the day as you would expect and settled exhausted from the long and fulfilled day at the Grand Canyon Railway & Hotel where we started this grand circle.

Friday found all of us headed out on our separate ways to complete our journeys, breaking up the caravan in good old Barstow, Ca.

