

SOUTHEAST LIMITED

The Railway  
Historical  
Southeast



& Locomotive  
Society, Inc.  
Chapter

Newsletter No. 42, August 1997



# AROUND THE CIRCLE TOUR - 1997 STYLE

by Lyle Key



**ABOVE: WAITING FOR THE HIGHBALL** - Gil Wenger of Grand Junction was kind enough to send me this shot of UP 844 waiting to leave Grand Junction for Salt Lake City on the morning of Monday, June 23rd. I met Gil on an overpass west of the station, while both of us were waiting to photograph the departing train, and accepted his invitation to chase the train to Ruby Canon in his automobile. 844 and its E-9 companions left us eating their dust, but Gil gave me a great guided tour of the barren countryside around Grand Junction. Photo by G. R. Wenger. All other photos by the author.

**COVER PHOTO: THE ROYAL GORGE SUSPENSION BRIDGE FROM A UP DOME** - Against a cobalt sky, the famous Royal Gorge suspension bridge spans the chasm at a dizzying height of 1,053 feet above the river. This photo was taken on June 22 from the unlikely vantage point of UP dome diner *City of Portland*.

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For railfans, can anyplace here or abroad stir the imagination quite like Colorado? The Centennial State's heritage is rich with men of indomitable spirit who laid both narrow and standard gage railroads through foreboding canyons and across seemingly impenetrable mountains. An expansive rail network flourished amid the dizzying wealth created by bonanza strikes of gold and silver, but after the boom times ran their course, many of those legendary rail lines faded from the scene.

Today, another colorful Colorado rail line appears destined for abandonment. This turn of events hasn't resulted from gold or silver mines playing out, but rather from a series of rail mergers that has left UP with what it deems an excessive number of routes across the Rockies. UP has thoughtfully agreed to operate a "Last Passenger Run over Tennessee Pass" excursion train from Denver to Salt Lake City in conjunction with the 1997 NRHS annual convention, and on Friday night, June 20, I'm one of the lucky folks en route to the Mile High City with an excursion ticket in hand.

It's 10:05 pm, Mountain Daylight Time, when my connecting flight from Dallas-Ft. Worth arrives at Denver International Airport. The night is fairly young in Colorado, but my body still thinks it's in Jacksonville where it's after midnight. Like other huge new airports, DIA has shuttle trains connecting the concourses with the main terminal. Denver's Stapleton Field wasn't too far from downtown Denver, but the new airport is 29 miles from downtown. I'm very pleased to discover that DIA has Super Shuttle service, and the ride on the blue and yellow van costs me one-third of the \$45 cab fare.

My hotel has seen its better days; the carpet is worn and stained and worst of all, the air conditioning system is out hotel-wide. Under the circumstances, however, I'm thankful to have any room at all. The Summit of Eight has all the major downtown hotels booked solid, and little do I suspect that the Summit will cause me further inconvenience on Saturday.

## DAY ONE: DENVER TO CANON CITY

The hotel does have a free shuttle van which

delivers me to Union Station along with a friendly couple from Buena Vista, Colorado. Mary purchased their excursion tickets as a surprise 50th birthday gift for husband George. Like many aspiring riders, Mary learned of the trip after its virtually instantaneous sell out and sweated out several weeks on a waiting list. Mary and George tell me that we'll pass very close to their house on Sunday.

Upon arrival at Union Station, we learn that Hillary Clinton is taking a group of "Summit Spouses" on a rail excursion of their own. The First Lady's group will travel over the Moffat Tunnel route to Glenwood Springs and return aboard the Ski Train equipment. Our train's departure will be delayed until Mrs. Clinton's train departs, and rumors abound that we may leave after noon rather than at 10 o'clock as scheduled. The station is packed with passengers for the UP steam train and Amtrak's westbound *California Zephyr*, and during the wait, I run into retired NS steam boss Jim Bistline and Editor/National Director Bill Boone of the Heart of Dixie Chapter of NRHS.

Fortunately, the First Lady's group is whisked aboard the Ski Train equipment prior to 10:00 o'clock, and her special departs just after the hour. The steam train pulls onto track 2 at 10:05, and the big crowd that has been milling around the waiting room surges into the subway leading to the platforms. This is my first experience with a UP excursion train, and as we climb out of the stairway onto the platform, I'm awed by the stunning sight of the long, perfectly matched consist. Everything is yellow with scarlet and gray trim from the rear of dome-lounge-observation *City of San Francisco* to the front of 844's auxiliary tender, and the train looks resplendent in the bright morning sunlight. UP 844 is clearly the star of the show, but one also has to admire the A-B-A set of rebuilt E-9's behind the second tender. The beautiful sight takes me back three decades to my days as a young Naval officer homeported in Long Beach and captivated by the *City of Los Angeles* and the other magnificent streamliners serving Southern California. UP's meticulous attention to detail even extends to silvered trucks on everything behind the main tender.


This morning's all-UP consist is:

844	(4-8-4 Northern type steam locomotive) plus tender and auxiliary tender	
949	E-9A (rebuilt)	
963	E-9B (rebuilt)	
951	E-9A (rebuilt)	
904304	Baggage (tool car)	<i>Art Lockman</i>
209	Power car	<i>Howard Fogg</i>
205	Power car	
—	Baggage (souvenir car)	<i>Sherman Hill</i>
5480	Coach	<i>Sunshine Special</i>
5486	Coach	<i>City of Salina</i>
8004	Dome diner	<i>Colorado Eagle</i>
5486	Coach	<i>Katy Flyer</i>
4808	Diner	<i>City of Los Angeles</i>
7011	Dome diner	<i>Missouri River Eagle</i>
5714	Baggage	<i>Pony Express</i>
5473	Coach	<i>Portland Rose</i>
8008	Dome diner	<i>City of Portland</i>
208	Power car	
7015	Dome coach	<i>Challenger</i>
5483	Coach	<i>Texas Eagle</i>
7001	Dome coach	<i>Columbine</i>
9009	Dome lounge observation	<i>City of San Francisco</i>

I find my seat in former dome diner *City of Portland* which is appropriately decorated with vintage ads for and menus from the UP domeliner of the same name. Car hosts carefully check boarding passes, and after welcoming me aboard, Hal Lewis from the Central Coast Chapter of NRHS gives me my trip badge. At 10:47 am, the steam train backs out of Union Station and leaves the westbound *California Zephyr* loading on track 1. Given the quick sell out - travel agencies snapped up 70% of the tickets - all of us 600 passengers are thankful to be on board. We ease back past Coors Field, home of the Colorado Rockies, and at 11:05 am, we begin moving forward. As we head south past downtown Denver, we see the *CZ* departing for its long climb up the Front Range.

The original "Around the Circle" tour provided an incredible railroad journey of over "1,000

**PRIZED BOARDING PASS - Though not as sensational as the 500 silver filigree passes Otto Mears commissioned to celebrate the completion of his Rio Grande Southern on December 20, 1891, these more conventional paper boarding passes were highly prized by the 600 passengers lucky enough to obtain them. Thanks to surprising demand from travel agencies and marketing via the internet, the Tennessee Pass excursion was close to an instant sell out.**



**Boarding Pass**  
**Royal Gorge Steam Special**  
 June 21 - June 23, 1997

R. Lyle Key  
United States of America

This is your boarding pass for **one person** on the Royal Gorge Steam Special trip from Denver to Salt Lake City. This boarding pass is required for train admission:

**Confirmation Number: 250/1 - person #1**

**Segments:**

Saturday, June 21, 1997  
 Denver - Canon City  
 Departs from Denver Union Station  
 Departs at 10:00 am


Sunday, June 22, 1997  
 Canon City - Grand Junction

Monday, June 23, 1997  
 Grand Junction - Salt Lake City  
 Arrives at Salt Lake City Union Station  
 Arrives at approximately 5:45 pm

**This boarding pass is for one River View seat in car RV4**

The only seat that you are authorized to occupy is one in the seat class and car to which you are assigned.

Ticket class color = ●



miles through the Rocky Mountains” over a combination of both standard and narrow gage lines operated by Denver & Rio Grande and the Rio Grande Southern. The research material available to me does not clearly delineate the full extent of the circle, but based upon the schedules in my reprint of the June, 1916 *Official Guide* and comments by Lucius Beebe in *Mixed Train Daily*, it appears the circle route ran from Denver to Pueblo, Salida, Gunnison, Montrose, Ridgeway, Ouray, Telluride, Durango, Silverton, Antonito, Alamoso, Walsenburg, Pueblo, and back to Denver. While making the circle, passengers could see scenic wonders such as Pike’s Peak, the Royal Gorge, Marshall Pass, Lizard Head, Cumbres Pass, and La Veta Pass.

My 1997 “Around the Circle” tour will cover only 724 miles, and it’s all standard gage, but I’m mighty lucky to have that big a circle available. This is slated to be the last passenger train over Tennessee Pass, and if Union Pacific carries out its plan to abandon the Tennessee Pass line between Canon City and Gypsum, there’ll be no more

“Around the Circle” routes available on Colorado railroads. The steam train will follow the first 215 miles of the original circle route to Salida, and I’ll cover 166.8 miles that weren’t available to the old circle riders since D&RGW didn’t open up the Moffat Tunnel route until 1934 when it completed the Dotsero Cutoff.

We’ll be following a southbound coal train down the Joint Line toward Pueblo. The steam train will have a steady uphill climb to Palmer Lake where double track ends and a descending grade begins for southbound trains. At South Denver, we parallel the new light rail line and spot a couple of Denver’s contemporary streetcars. We also meet a northbound BNSF train of empty coal gons with another one right behind it. Both are powered by three six-axle units in BN’s pre-merger wintergreen color scheme. The coal trains are closely followed by a BNSF merchandise train with two “warbonnets” and two blue Conrail locomotives.

As we leave the Mile High City, we begin to see the snow capped mountains that will become a common sight over the next three days. Interstate



**A CLASSIC CAR TO CARRY THE MARKERS - Dome lounge observation *City of San Francisco* finished off the excursion train’s consist in the classic manner. This shot was taken at the Grand Junction passenger station on the morning of Monday, June 23rd.**

25 generally parallels the Joint Line, and it's jammed with the usual pacers' caravan as we pass Castle Rock at 12:25. The steam train reaches the end of double track at 2:09, and we roll by the U.S. Air Force Academy - "Academy" on the railroad - at 2:23. Castle Rock was on our left, and as we near Colorado Springs, we can see Pike's Peak on our right.

In the mid-'80's, I attended a seminar in Colorado Springs and thought wistfully of the passenger trains such as the *Royal Gorge*, the *Texas Zephyr*, and the *Colorado Eagle* which had once operated over the Joint Line. I never dreamed that I'd have a chance to ride a train through Colorado Springs - much less a steam train - and it's gratifying to roll by the jogging trail I used, the hotel where I stayed, and the restaurant in the old stone passenger station where I ate. Between Colorado Springs and Pueblo, a young man in cowboy garb brandishes a rifle while galloping beside the train on horseback. He has a big grin so I guess he doesn't plan to start shooting.

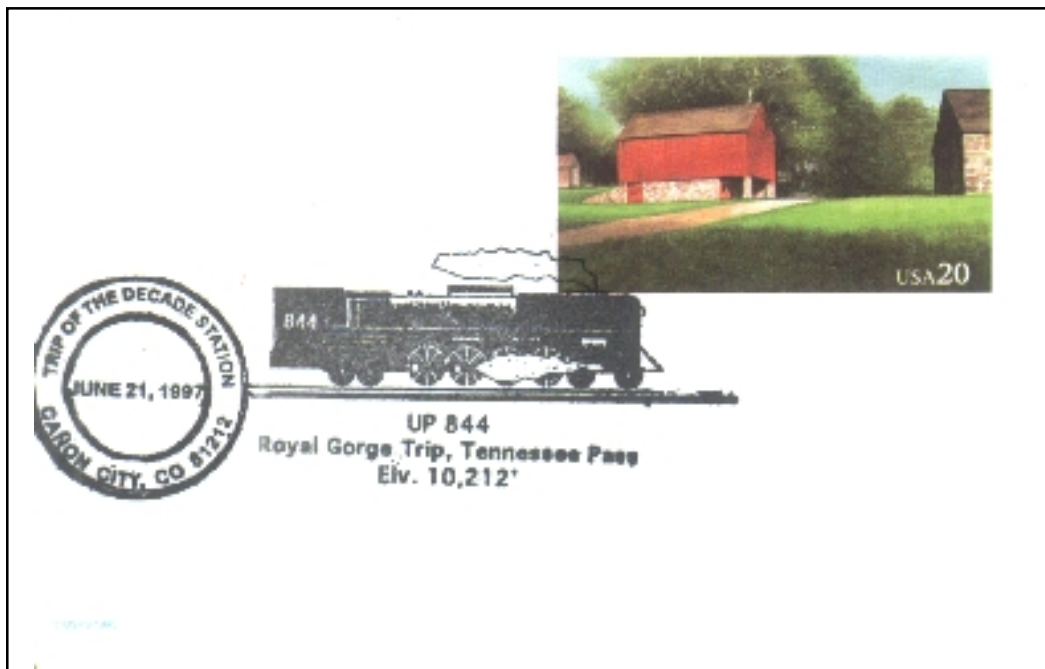
At 4:03, we pass Pueblo Junction where the BNSF splits off to the east toward La Junta. Santa Fe operated a local passenger train between La Junta and Denver during the pre-Amtrak era, but at least in its latter years, neither the northbound nor the southbound was scheduled for a conve-

nient connection with any of the main line trains between Chicago and California. Another big Northern, ATSF 2912, is on display at the handsome old Pueblo station. For comparison, the May, 1962 schedule for Rio Grande's *Royal Gorge* called for a 2 hour 50 minute run from Denver to Pueblo while today's leisurely run has consumed 5 hours and 20 minutes. After a servicing stop at Pueblo Yard, we proceed to the barren, wide-open environs of Swallows, Colorado, for our first photo runby.

After 844 performs the runby for her admirers, we're off again to our overnight stop in Canon City. We tie-up at Canon City at 6:55 pm, and due to a paucity of hotel rooms, most of us are bused back to Pueblo for the evening. After the dump I stayed in last night, the Pueblo Holiday Inn feels like the Ritz. As I walk back to the motel from a nearby restaurant, a big orange moon rises over the distant horizon to the east.

#### DAY TWO: CANON CITY TO GRAND JUNCTION

Back at trainside on Sunday morning, we're pleased to see members of UP's steam team washing the dome windows with long handle squeegees. Our departure from Canon City is 12 min-



**SPECIAL POSTAL CANCELLATION FOR A SPECIAL TRAIN - On Saturday, June 21, a U.S. Postal Service clerk offered these special commemorative postal cancellations to passengers on the UP steam special. His temporary post office was conveniently set up on the table behind me in dome diner *City of Portland*.**



**IN THE CANON OF THE ARKANSAS - On Sunday, June 22, the UP special winds along the Arkansas River in the spectacular confines of the Royal Gorge. This was once the route of Rio Grande's *Scenic Limited* and *Royal Gorge*. Notwithstanding UP's abandonment plans, the line through the Royal Gorge may survive as a tourist railroad.**

utes late at 8:42 am, and five minutes later, we pass the old ATSF depot turned restaurant west of downtown. Another five minutes brings us into the lower reaches of the Royal Gorge, and our ride along the bottom of that natural wonder lives up to all my great expectations. The Arkansas River is a raging torrent this morning, and it's hard to imagine building a railroad in this environment. Virtually every railfan knows the story of the wild West battle over the Gorge between Rio Grande and Santa Fe, and as if the rock cliffs and raging river weren't enough to contend with, the rival track gangs had to worry about gunfire from hired gunslingers including Bat Masterson of Dodge City fame.

All of us are enthralled by the awesome sight of 844 leading the long yellow train through the tight curves dictated by the rushing river and the towering rock walls of the Gorge. Rio Grande's *Royal Gorge* was equipped with a "Vista Dome Chair Car," and, as one might imagine, the six domes on our steam train are in great demand this

morning. The Gorge is inaccessible to even the most intrepid vehicular pacers, but to no one's great surprise, a blue and white helicopter hovers alongside 844 until the canyon walls really begin to close in.

At 9:10, we make the first of two stops alongside the old platform used by the *Royal Gorge* and its predecessor the *Scenic Limited*. Rio Grande timetables prominently proclaimed that those trains stopped 10 minutes in the Royal Gorge. High above us, one can see the suspension bridge that spans the chasm. I saw the Gorge from that bridge about 25 years ago, and I never expected to see it from river level in a UP dome!

We leave the Gorge about 9:40 and rejoin our escorting motorcade. At 10:23, UP provides not one but two runbys at Texas Creek. Car hosts take advantage of the nearly empty consist to distribute five gallon jugs of drinking water throughout the train.

During the upcoming climb to Tennessee Pass, passengers will be encouraged to drink plenty

of water as a means of preventing altitude sickness. While helping a car host carry some water jugs to dome lounge observation *City of San Francisco*, I have a chance encounter with Reverend Steve Morse, former editor of the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum's *Cinders*. Steve turned out high quality newsletters for many years prior to his relocation to Erie, Pennsylvania.



**PRESERVING THE PAST  
WHILE  
SERVING THE FUTURE**

After the runby, we continue up the Arkansas and begin to see legions of whitewater rafters. We also have seen all manner of livestock, and east of Red Hill Tunnel, we spot several ostriches in a pen across the river. During this part of the trip, I have brief visits with *Trains* Editor Kevin Keefe and Editor/National Director David Hayes of the Louisville Chapter of NRHS.

UP steam czar Steve Lee has graciously offered me a cab ride from Salida to Minturn, and it's easy to choose between the ride on 844 and the sack lunches that are being distributed during the servicing stop in Salida. This is my first ride on an oil burner, and it's hard to get use to the small round hole in the area of the backhead where I'm accustomed to seeing butterfly doors. The backhead is huge and the valves, gages, and pipes are neatly spread over its vast expanse. Steve Lee is a big, burly man with a neatly trimmed black beard, and he looks very much at home on the right

hand seatbox of his massive 4-8-4. After giving the standard two blasts on 844's deep throated whistle, Steve notches back the long, vertically mounted throttle lever above him. The big Northern surges back into action with the rhythmic exhaust cadence that bespeaks a steam locomotive in motion, and we're back on the road to Tennessee Pass.

We briefly enjoy some relatively fast 45 mph running out of Salida, and among other things, I note that 844 operates with about 260 pounds of steam pressure. I quickly discover that while it's mighty hot in the cab, it's very pleasant in the space on the side between the cab and the tender. I've been fortunate enough to ride in the cabs of several smaller steam locomotives such as Mississippian 96, Little River 110, and L&N 152, but none of them had anywhere near the size and power of 844. Those previous cab rides featured considerable rocking and rolling, but 844 truly rides like a Cadillac.

Before long, we're down to speeds in the 20-25 mph range, and that's where we'll stay for most of the remaining run to Minturn. Steve notes that UP Challenger 3985 would be better suited to this mountain railroad. "844 is more in her element on our main lines through Nebraska and Wyoming where she can run at the high speeds she was built for."

In contrast to this morning's run through the narrow confines of the Royal Gorge, we're now loping along through a broad valley lined with majestic, snow capped mountains. As the train goes through curves, it's fun to look back at the perfectly matched E-9's and passenger cars. This train clearly qualifies for "domeliner" status since no less than six of its 18 cars are domes.

844 has about 600 fans on board, but many more are deployed along today's route. One has driven his 4-wheel drive vehicle out onto a rocky promontory above the railroad, and the sight looks like something out of a jeep advertisement. People stand on housetops as well as mountaintops, and rafters, campers, backpackers, and rock climbers pause to pay homage to this last passenger train over Tennessee Pass. Most people are content to wave or shoot pictures, but one backpacker greets us by mooning the engine!

As we proceed upriver, we see more and more snow capped mountains including 14,433 foot high



**ABOVE AND REAR COVER PHOTOS: MOTIVE POWER TO PLEASE BOTH STEAM AND DIESEL FANS -** These two shots show the excursion train's steam and diesel motive power shortly after the special's on time departure from Grand Junction on June 23rd.

Mt. Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado. An eastbound merchandise train is waiting for us at Malta, the junction for the branch to Leadville and Climax, and before long, the curves become tighter and more numerous as we follow Tennessee Creek up the final miles of the long ascent to Tennessee Pass.

A good crowd is on hand at the east portal of the tunnel at Tennessee Pass where we reach our peak elevation of 10,212 feet above sea level. When 844 enters the 2,550 foot long bore, the cab instantly becomes oppressively hot and smoky. It's quite a contrast to the cool, clean air we were enjoying before going underground. Steve later tells me that his big locomotive was just coasting through the tunnel, and it's hard to imagine what we would have experienced if 844 had really been working.

Everyone in the cab is relieved when we emerge from the west portal in a cloud of smoke. As the train begins its 13 mile descent on grades up to 3%, the Road Foreman of Engines and local Engineer join Steve Lee in keeping close watch on

the speed indicator and air pressure gage. The Eagle River Valley is far below us, and at several places on the mountainside, rusting remains of freight cars mark the sites of trains that got away on the grade. Steve later comments that, "The people who got in trouble on the mountain probably got 3 or 4 miles per hour above where they should have been and thought they could handle it. Unfortunately, they couldn't handle it, and by the time they did what they should have done in the first place, it was too late." So far, so good. We're maintaining the desired speed of 20 mph as the train twists through the continuous reverse curves down the steep hillside.

Near Pando, we see the foundations of the long demolished barracks at Camp Hale. During WWII, the Army's Tenth Mountain Division trained here for Alpine fighting in Europe. These crack ski troops wore white clothing, used white skis, and carried white rifles. By incredible coincidence, three pictures of railroad scenes around Camp Hale appear on page 43 of the summer, 1997, issue of *Vintage Rails*.

The downhill grade eases to 2.3% at the little town of Red Cliff, and we begin to run alongside the Eagle River. Not far down the line, we can see traces of mining operations on the mountainside to our right. In several places, rotting cross-ties mark the old alignments of tram lines that descended some almost vertical mountainsides. At the bottom of some of those ghost tramways, dilapidated tipples still stand beside the railroad. If UP carries through with its planned abandonment, the main line will soon follow those old tramways into oblivion.

After more than three glorious hours in 844's cab, I swing down during the servicing stop at Minturn. Minturn is the little railroad town made famous by Mark Hemphill's outstanding article entitled "Tennessee Pass in Twilight" in the March, 1997, issue of *Trains*. Several of us have brought that issue along for reference. I profusely thank Steve Lee for the ride of a lifetime and return to the *City of Portland* where the car hosts from the Central Coast Chapter have thoughtfully kept my lunch waiting in the refrigerator.

The balance of Sunday's trip is somewhat anticlimactic - it would be tough to top a cab ride on a steam locomotive over Tennessee Pass - but we still have a long way to go. After another photo runby at Dotsero, we head into Glenwood Canyon which likewise proves to be spectacular. We're now running along the Colorado River which is obviously higher than usual. In many places, the river has submerged the bikeway built alongside two-tiered Interstate 70. Once again, the steam train snarls traffic on a parallel highway! We emerge from the canyon in the popular resort town of Glenwood Springs, and a tremendous crowd greets the train at the old stone passenger station. After another servicing stop, we're off on the 90 mile home stretch to Grand Junction.

In the gathering twilight between Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction, one can see the fire flashing in the firebox as the big Northern heels into the long, sweeping curves along the river. Artificial lights are accented now, and soon we can see only the changing aspects of the trackside signals and the long row of lighted windows along the sides of the passenger cars. As Steve Lee predicted, it has been an awfully long day, and all of us are ready for bed when we finally pull into Grand Junction at 10:45.

### DAY THREE: GRAND JUNCTION TO DENVER VIA AMTRAK



I'm sorely tempted to sleep in since I'm returning to Denver on Amtrak's eastbound *California Zephyr* which isn't due out of Grand Junction until 11:57 am. Despite a mounting sleep deficit, however, I can't resist returning to the station for the steam train's 8:30 am departure for Salt Lake City and the 1997 NRHS annual convention. I finally give up trying to photograph 844 awaiting its departure since it's spotted behind some concrete barriers and surrounded by its adoring masses. All is not lost, however, since I'm able to get some good clear shots of dome lounge observation *City of San Francisco*. I walk to a nearby highway overpass for some shots of the train as it heads west and then work on organizing my notes for this story pending the CZ's arrival.

Amtrak #6 finally rolls into Grand Junction an hour and 13 minutes late at 1:10 with two P40's, a box car of storage mail, a baggage-express car, and the following Superliner cars: a transition sleeper, 4 coaches, a Sightseer Lounge, a diner, and 3 sleepers. I'm in economy bedroom #7 on the upper level of the first sleeper. After getting squared away in my room, I head for the diner where I select the soup and salad luncheon. My tablemate is a retired UP clerk from Hastings, Nebraska, who also is returning from the steam trip. After lunch, I repair to the Sightseer Lounge where I chance to sit beside another excursion vet, Amtrak's relief ticket agent in Tallahassee.

At Rifle, we spot an old heavyweight coach sans trucks. Glenwood Canyon is again spectacular through the Sightseer Lounge's big windows, and at Grizzly, we meet Amtrak #5, the westbound CZ, which has an identical consist. We also meet several freights including two with one CSXT unit each amid their UP and SP motive power. During my three days in Colorado, I saw locomotives from every major U.S. railroad with the exception of Norfolk Southern.

The portion of today's trip from Dotsero to Winter Park will provide more new mileage for me, and the scenery on this last leg of my "circle" is again magnificent. I won't attempt to relate all the sights on the Moffat Route east of Dotsero, but I will recount a series of scenic wonders I observed in the late afternoon when I thought I surely had seen everything.

At 5:17 pm, No. 6 takes the siding at Radium, and as we crawl down a long right-hand curve, I see some distant coal gons moving beyond the rocky point where the track disappears around a reverse curve. The CZ eases to a stop, and as we wait for the westbound freight, a family of five ducks floats by on the river below. After what seems a long wait for a train I had seen climbing the hill, the headlight and ditch lights of a former SP locomotive appear around the rocky point below us. That locomotive and a yellow UP mate lead a train of empty coal gons up grade through the curve, and as the train passes, I barely can see over the tops of the gons. Three mid-train helpers roar by, and after the last car clears, we continue our downhill journey.

As we round the rocky point where the curve reverses back to the left, the passenger train ducks into Tunnel No. 42. After the tunnel, we creep down a steep grade on a high ledge above the Colorado River then enter Tunnel No. 40 (Tunnel No. 41 must have been eliminated). Tunnel 39 quickly follows, and, on the other side, we're high on a mountainside above a green, mountain-ringed meadow.

The next siding on our long descent is Azure - which aptly describes the color of the skies since I've been in the Centennial State - then we enter Tunnel No. 38 and emerge amid the towering rock walls of Gore Canyon. Soon I can see three short tunnels (37, 36, and 35) lined up below, and we traverse them in rapid succession. The spectacular

descent that began at Radium comes to an end as we return to river level and roll out of the confines of the canyon into a wide green valley. By the time we reach Kremling, the CZ is really rolling again, and, off to the south, I can see more snowcapped peaks. The next town is Granby, where at 6:57, we meet a westbound merchandise train with two locomotives in BN's original bright green color scheme.

By the time we reach Winter Park, the azure skies have turned dark gray. A westbound train of empty coal gons is holding the main at Winter Park, and as we ease through the passing track, we pass the freight's mid-train helpers and pushers. A PA announcement advises passengers that we're about to enter Moffat Tunnel and requests that we remain in the same car during the tunnel passage in deference to the accumulated diesel fumes and coal dust. We also are told that we're waiting for the tunnel to be blown out of the fumes left by the westbound train we just met. At 7:34 pm, we enter the west portal, and at 7:45, we pop out on the east side on the Continental Divide.

I now have the pleasure of having dinner in the diner while descending the Front Range, and my tablemates are two young sisters (a 6th and a 9th grader) and their grandmother. These three ladies from Sacramento are en route to Albany, New York. The girls' grandmother tells me that she took their mother on a similar transcontinental trip when she was roughly their age. On that trip, they went east on U.S. railroads and returned through Canada. On this trip, the trio will return to California by air. The 9th grader says that she and her sister have flown cross-country several times, but that prior to this train trip, they had no comprehension of the size and diversity of our country. Their grandmother notes that they've been treated to some great mountain scenery since leaving Sacramento, and that tomorrow will give them a full dose of the prairies west of Chicago.

The lights of Denver are visible now far below us, and a powerful thunderstorm is producing some impressive lightning bolts around the city. Tomorrow morning's *Denver Post* will report that one of those bolts struck and cracked the steeple of the Catholic Basilica in downtown Denver.

We back into DUS on the station wye, and after coupling onto a mail car with the rear sleeper, the CZ posts a 9:30 pm arrival in the Mile High

City. It's only a half block walk to the beautiful old Oxford Hotel, and as I near its entrance, I turn for another look at the clock above the station's entrance and the message around it that's aglow in red lights: "UNION STATION - TRAVEL BY TRAIN."

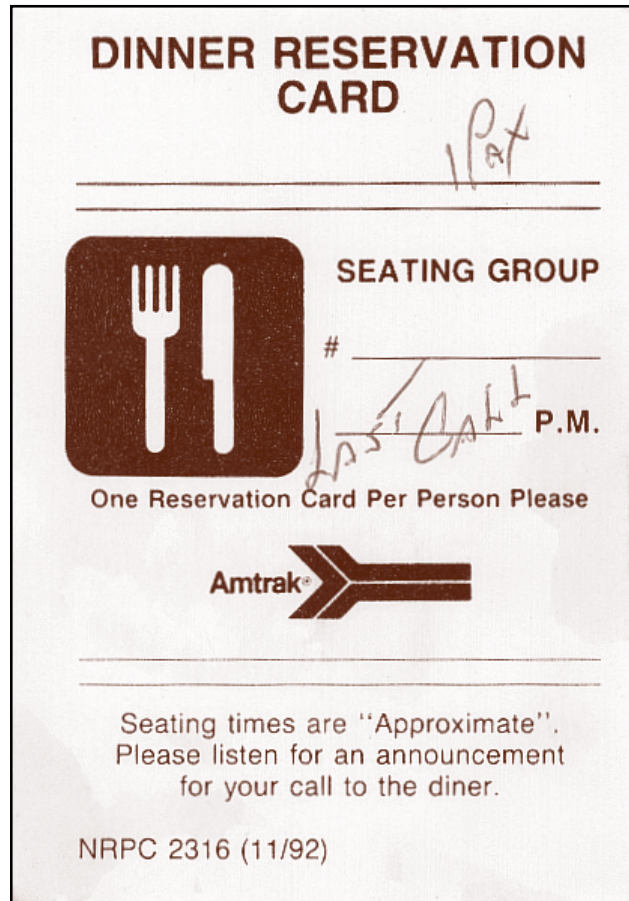
That message above Denver Union Station is good advice for everyone who enjoys train travel. Most of us tend to dwell on the great trains of yesteryear we never got to ride, but there are still many worthwhile opportunities in the forms of

Amtrak's eastbound and westbound *California Zephyrs* cover the spectacular Moffat Tunnel Route on a daily basis.

As a word to the wise, Amtrak may well be highballing toward the most formidable financial crisis of its history. It's no secret that Amtrak has been borrowing against its short term line of credit to meet its payroll and cover other everyday operating expenses. Some knowledgeable observers think that Amtrak may exhaust all of its available cash by the end of the year. It's hard to predict the



regular service, tourist lines, and special excursions. The steam train I rode was most likely the last passenger train over Tennessee Pass, but a tourist railroad probably will emerge for the line through the Royal Gorge. Also, the area already offers many notable tourist operations such as the Durango & Silverton, the Cumbres & Toltec, the recreation of the Georgetown loop, and the Leadville, Colorado & Southern. Also, for the moment at least,



outcome of this fiscal crisis, but a "blue ribbon" panel appointed by Congress recently recommended that Amtrak focus on densely populated corridors with the rest of the country receiving minimal service by irregularly scheduled trains described as "rolling national parks." Further cuts in long distance service may be inevitable, and I encourage you to make arrangements to take that Amtrak trip you've been putting off sooner rather than later.

## POSTSCRIPT: A LIGHT RAIL ADVENTURE ON DAY FOUR

My Colorado rail adventure doesn't completely end with the CZ's arrival in Denver. My flight back to Jacksonville doesn't leave until early afternoon, so after a full night's sleep and a leisurely breakfast of eggs and rainbow trout, I ride the entire 5.3 mile length of Denver's relatively new light rail system. The south end of the line is of special interest since it runs along the Joint Line and passes the former Rio Grande Burnham Shops where the gold and silver Ski Train equipment is stored. The peak fare isn't bad at \$1.00, and the off-peak fare of 50 cents is a real bargain by 1997 standards. On a layover downtown on my way to the north end of the line, this out-of-towner from Florida has occasion to explain the



automated ticketing system to three ladies from Denver who're using the light rail line for the first time. It really behooves riders to have properly validated tickets since roving transit policemen check them on a random but frequent basis. During my rides, I see them issue citations to several hapless riders who can't produce valid tickets.



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*Railway & Locomotive Historical Society*  
**Southeast Chapter**  
**P. O. Box 664**  
**Jacksonville, Florida 32201**