

# Merv's Train & Festival Trip

## August 2016

### Day One-Tuesday, 2 August

Despite my fears, I was able to find a parking space in Union Station's lot. Then I only had to wait a couple of hours for the train. I gave myself plenty of time to handle any parking problems.



Donner Lake California. Here the tracks are on the opposite of the lake from I-80.

After passing Reno it was time for lunch. I had a burger, rather dry but otherwise OK. I shared a table with a younger fellow, Steve, and his two boys Lucas and Nolan. This made for a very enjoyable meal.

After lunch we went speeding along across the high desert between 70 and 80 mph most of the time.

Once past Winnemucca it was dinner time. This time I had the crab cakes stuffed with shrimp. Very good. My dinner companions were a fellow named Phil, an accountant from Boston, and a man and his wife from Sweden.

This made for another lively conversation over the meal. It got dark during dinner, but provided some beautiful views as

the twilight came on.

As I came back from dinner, I found that Chevon, the coach's attendant, had made up my bed. Unfortunately, she had made it up so the head was near the outside wall. I promptly turned it around so I could see out the window in the morning.

### Day Two-Wednesday, 3 August

The sleep wasn't great. It took awhile to get used to the rockin', rollin' and bouncin' of the coach, but the real problem was my ongoing numbness and pain in my left arm that had me up several times during the night.

For breakfast I was joined by pop, daughter and grand-daughter, all adults who were on their way to Omaha for a big family reunion. Others were aboard and going to the reunion as well. With all these extra riders, the train crew said the train was absolutely sold out, not a seat left and they had never seen this train completely full.

Today we travel along side the Colorado river where we see bunches of rafters along the way. Slow going most of the way, only 30 to 40 mph.

A sorta minor problem is the only forward facing chair in my compartment is kaput. The front edge of the seat tilts downward so I tend to slide out of it. Yesterday the conductor came by and looked at it and said "Yep, it's broken".

Today we were pulled into a hold siding to let the west bound train pass.



While waiting for number 5 train to come by, the engineer drew our attention to a pair of bald eagles nesting high in a dead tree across the river.



A rather poor picture of one of the bald eagle in the tree (highlighted). This guy was a long way away and shooting through the train's window is less than ideal.

We just got mooned by a fisherman on the Colorado. Oops, another one. This is becoming a habit.

We were keeping pretty much to the



The Colorado river, in Colorado, with rafters, fishermen and mooners.

schedule until the long siding stop and then a delay in Fraser, Colorado where we were given several go slow commands from Union Pacific dispatch (Amtrak leases track in these areas from other rail roads). These required us to go either 10 or 15 mph for several miles. The reason given was high air temperatures had caused some distortions in the rails.



The Red Rock area of Colorado

## Day Three-Thursday, 4 August

Slept much better last night, no issues with the train, but still had issues with my left arm. I had breakfast with a young couple and their five year old son, Roger. I didn't learn dad's name, it turns out he has worked in television for a long time, so we had some things to talk about.

Today we have been rolling through the farm lands of Nebraska and Iowa. Just miles and miles of corn fields, and everything else so green. So unlike California this time of year. So far the whole trip has seen clear and sunny weather, a few far off thunder showers around Denver.

They just made the first call for lunch in the dining car, but since this is near the end of the trip and it was such a full train all they have left are burgers and vege burgers.

## Day Six-Sunday, 7 August 2016

I started the day, after a late breakfast, by driving the little Nissan rental car back to Galesburg to catch a 5:35 train. The car started out Thursday with a little less than half a tank of gas and the mileage display said we were making 34.9 mpg, so when I left about noon Sunday the gas gauge showed a little less than 1/4 of a tank. Surely, that would be enough to make the 45 miles back to Galesburg. I hadn't been on the road five minutes before several annunciators started warning me of a low gas situation. I mentioned earlier about the lack of billboards on Illinois freeways, well there's a dearth of gas stations as well. I drove on with white knuckles for miles before I spotted one little sign saying "Gas next exit". Relieved, I pulled off and found another sign indicating gas to the left, over the highway. When I got to the other side there was no gas station to be found. I continued ahead until I had gone the better part of a mile, still no gas station in sight. I then rang the bell on a farm house.



Kansas and Iowa is just miles and miles of corn fields with an occasional Soy bean field. As you can see, the corn fields stretch, literally, as far as the eye can see.

Upon arriving at Galesburg, Illinois, I rented a car and drove up I-74 to the Davenport, Iowa area. On the way up I noticed the freeway was completely free of any advertising signs of any kind. No "Eat At Joe's", no billboards, electronic or otherwise, just road signs and wonderful green scenery. So far I haven't been able to find any of the locals that know of any law prohibiting commercial signs, but it seems there must be something like that to keep the roadside so pristine.

Later that night, in the hotel, I was treated to spectacular mid-west electrical storm and reports of a possible tornado.

### Days Four and Five-5 & 6, August 2016

I attended the Bix Biederbecke Jazz Festival in Benntendorf, Iowa (next to Davenport). I had a wonderful time, heard some of the finest musicians who play the music of the 1920's and 30's. I also got a chance to talk to some of the fine musicians I have met over the years.

My room looked out over the Mississippi river. I didn't see much traffic on the river, but an occasional line of barges would come by. Even this far north the river is about a 1/2 mile wide.



After hours jam session at 1:00 a.m.



That thin strip of light blue, beyond the parking structure, is the mighty Mississippi at over a 1/2 mile wide. The barges were the few signs of commercial traffic that I noticed.

The friendly farmer said "Yep, another two miles down this road you'll find a station". It was a small mom and pop operation, but at least I was able get gas. I only put eight gallons of gas in the car, but the fuel gauge then showed "Full". It must have one small tank.

While waiting around for my train, I saw a old guy, but still younger than me, and we struck up a conversation. It seems he's retired, lost his wife a while back and his kids live far away. Turns out his name is Denny and he's a rail fan and having nothing else to do on a Sunday afternoon, but drive 60 miles to watch the trains come through Galesburg, it is the main transcontinental rail line.

When I boarded the Southwest Chief, Brian, my car's attendant had already made dinner reservations for me. I had the flat iron steak that is always on the menu and it was great, cooked exactly as I wanted it. And so I'm headed homeward.

### Day Seven-Monday, 8 August 2016

I must be getting my rail legs, I slept the night through as well as I do at home. Breakfast was with three ladies returning from a big sorority convention in Kansas City, and lunch with a couple returning to Albuquerque from a school reunion in Illinois.

In La Junta, Colorado we put on a couple of more engines for the climb over the



The train rounding a curve in New Mexico with the extra engines and baggage cars.

mountains and few more baggage cars with some sort of display system to haul to LA. In all it took about an hour. It was slow climb to over 7000 feet, but once on top we were clipping along at 80 mph.

### Day Eight-Tuesday, 9 August

With the delay in Colorado and the train having to stop during the night to meet an ambulance in Needles, California to remove an overly inebriated woman, we are now several hours behind schedule.

Breakfast was with an older lady who was born and raised in LA and a young couple on a vacation trip to see LA. The lady was able to give them some of the highlights they should see.

We arrived in LA almost six hours late, had to wait in the train yard while they dropped the extra cars. They had to do this because the train was too long to fit in the station otherwise.

As a result I, along with many others, missed our connection to the Coast Starlight train going north. When we got there Amtrak had already booked all affected on a later route by bus to Bakersfield and then on the San Joaquin train to Sacramento. Many of the other passengers were trying to get farther north on the Coast Starlight and it worked out that despite leaving LA about four hours after the Coast Starlight, we beat it into Sacramento and the other passengers were able to continue northward on the Starlight.

A large contingent of these other passengers was a very large Amish family trying to get to Salem Oregon. I noticed that all the women and girls were wearing a white bonnet with long streamers. I asked one of the young ladies what they called the bonnet. Expecting some unique name, she said "a cap".

As I was making my way back to my car, in Sacramento, the Coast Starlight came rolling in, so I guess all those other folks were able to continue their journey, but I was on my way home to find a good night's sleep.