



UP THE HOLLER

Newsletter of Division 9
THE COAL DIVISION

Mid Central Region NMRA

August, 2011



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HEAD OF THE HOLLER

Bob Weinheimer MMR

Every month as I sit down to write this column I wonder what the subject will be. At the last minute it almost always seems that something comes up to help me fill this space. This month is no exception. In the time since our last meeting Tony Puccini has taken on the task of developing a program to assist Boy Scouts with their railroading merit badge. Gary Burdette has agreed to be Tony's assistant in this effort. Tony and Gary hope to start slowly with one or two scouts but eventually hope to grow the program to handle larger numbers. Unlike all of our other activities where we welcome the help of all, this program will be a bit more selective. Due to the acts of some unsavory characters, the Boy Scouts have found it necessary to do a background check on anybody who will come in contact with the scouts. This means that you cannot just decide at the last moment to step forward to help. If you want to help Tony and Gary in this effort, please let them know what is you must do before you can work with the scouts.

Our biggest event of the year, the annual meeting at Mark Maynard's home in West Portsmouth, Ohio is coming up very quickly on September 10. This year we are trying something different, a joint meeting with Division 6, the division that serves the greater Columbus, Ohio area. Superintendent Bob Lee and I are preparing a meeting agenda that will have the officers and committee chairs of both groups report to the members of both divisions. I have always found it interesting to attend the meetings of other divisions to get ideas and to see how they do things. I trust you will be attentive and look for ideas that we might apply to the Coal Division. Of course, the day also includes the flea market, Mark's great barbecue, and a visit to his layout. Mark tells me that big changes have been made: you will see much more scenery. He is now working to clean up the layout and make sure it is operating well during our visit.

A couple of our regular Up The Holler contributors are vacationing the week this issue is being prepared so their reports are missing this month. Don't worry, Dan Mulhearn's reports on the NMRA National Convention and his trip to California and back via Amtrak provide interesting reading. After reading Dan's story about the train trip, I, too, wonder whether I want to see my tax dollars flowing into such a pathetic operation.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The August 13 meeting will be at 2PM at West Virginia Hobbies and Crafts in Teays Valley. Nobody stepped forward to offer a clinic so you get to hear Bob Weinheimer tell you all about the Achievement Program. Actually, this may not be so bad as it has been almost three years since the AP has been the topic of a Coal Division Program. The contest will be Traction.

September 10 will find us back to Mark Maynard's in Portsmouth, Ohio for what has really become our annual picnic. This year the meeting will be a joint meeting with Division 6. Of course we will have the usual good food, swap meet, photo contest, and general good time. Portsmouth is at one corner of the Coal Division, much like Bluefield and Parkersburg. Yes, it is a long way for some but car pools help pass the time and spread out the cost. Start planning now for the September meeting.

October 8 we will meet at West Virginia Hobbies and Crafts in Teays Valley. Bob can present a clinic on AP judging but you sure don't want to hear him drone on two meetings in a row, do you? If not, offer a clinic. The contest will be Open Loads.

November 12 we will make the annual trip to Bluefield. The NRHS Pocahontas Chapter's train show makes the trip worthwhile and we plan to have our meeting at the train show. The contest will be Non Revenue Equipment.

December 10 we will meet at West Virginia Hobbies and Crafts in Teays Valley. The clinic is not yet determined but the contest is Modeler's Choice so bring something that you have that may not fit the usual contest categories. Also, plan on doing your Christmas hobby shopping.

NEWS FROM NATIONAL NMRA INFONET

This year's Sacramento convention attendance topped the 2,000 mark -- the continuation of an upward attendance trend.

The folks at the NMRA Membership Booth at the National Train Show signed up 243 new members in three days!

Many of the clinicians at the Sacramento convention have uploaded their handouts or full presentations as PDF files to the x2011 website at www.x2011west.org. Anyone can download them. Just look for the Clinics tab, then Clinic Handouts.

Based on two big proposals for the 2015 National NMRA Convention, the Board of Directors selected Portland, Ore. as the winner. Details and exact timing of the convention will be announced in the coming months.

The "Carpet Cutting" at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento marked the official start of fundraising for a scale model railroading exhibit in the museum's Gallery area. No NMRA dues or regular revenue streams will be used to fund this project, so its construction will rely entirely on donations. For more details about the Gallery Exhibit, see the article in the May 2011 issue of *NMRA Magazine*.

The Board continues to review the timing of all future conventions. While a mid-summer date has been traditional because of lower hotel and convention center rates over the July 4 weekend, many NMRA members have voiced the concern that it conflicts with family functions. Constructive suggestions may be directed to the Convention Committee, headed by Pacific Director Peter Jensen.

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM Bob Weinheimer MMR

I like to use this column to let you all know about the Achievement Program progress of our members. It is common to have the pleasure of announcing that a Division member has earned an achievement certificate. Well, this month that task is a little awkward, as it turns out that I am the latest one to earn a certificate, Association Official. One earns this certificate by serving in an elected position at the regional or national level. This includes being a member of the region's board of directors. This is relatively easy in the Mid Central Region as division superintendents form the board of directors. In many other

regions the board is smaller and is elected by the region members. In my case, I served for two years as Mid Central Region secretary and a year as our Division superintendent for a total of three years. I should point out that of the eleven AP certificates; this is the only one that a modeler must look to others to earn as it is the membership which elects him or her to these offices. I want to thank the members of the Coal Division and the Mid Central Region for their faith in my ability to serve in these positions.



**The Sacramento Convention Center
Home of the 2011 NMRA
National Convention**



**Convention Center Lobby
Nerve Center of the Convention**

X2011

THE 2011 NMRA NATIONAL CONVENTION, SACRAMENTO, CA Dan Mulhearn

This was my second national, the first being Cincinnati in 2005. If you have never attended a national, think of it as a regional convention on steroids. There were trips, railfan oriented and family oriented. There were fabulous layout tours. There was the City of Sacramento and the State Capitol. There were fabulous restaurants and comfy local eateries. There were so many great clinics offered that it was hard to choose. There was the fellowship of modelers from all over the United States, Great Britain and Australia. In fact, that distinctive Aussie accent was heard in so many places it seemed they outnumbered the rest of us. The grand finale was the National Train Show and it was a beauty!!

Two members of Division 9 attended this year's national, along with our wives. Kelley Massie and Debbie along with myself and my wife Nina enjoyed the convention and were able to share some of the experiences offered. I should point out that attending a national is not cheap. In the case of Nina and me our Amtrak fare was almost four thousand dollars, (a whole lot more about Amtrak later). Hotels and restaurants in big cities are a little pricey but overall it is a great way to expend your vacation budget! We stayed in the Citizen Hotel, which was about three blocks from the Convention Center which was the convention nerve center. There was a three block stretch between these points which was kind of run down; some convention attendees staying at the Citizen called it the "DMZ". We were accosted by aggressive "street people" (politically incorrect: Bums) frequently and one convention attendee was actually physically assaulted in front of the hotel. Nonetheless, the city was beautiful. We especially enjoyed our meal in the Old Spaghetti Factory which is located in the beautifully restored Western Pacific depot.

There were so many activities available that it would take pages to enumerate them. I will give you an idea of what Nina and I enjoyed. On July 4, Nina and I took a bus excursion to the Western Pacific RR Museum in Portola, CA. On the way to the museum we traveled along Interstate 80 through Donner Pass and were treated to a thorough talk on the SP and Donner Pass by our bus host. On arrival at Portola I fulfilled a life long dream by getting my "fifteen minutes" at the throttle of an SP GP9. Although Nina had only signed up for the museum visit; they kindly allowed her to ride the cab and watch "Dan at the throttle". On the way back to Sacramento we travelled the Feather River Canyon with a different guide who was well versed in the history of this railway. We actually got to see a westbound grain train looping over itself! While perusing the different clinics available at the convention center I wandered into the Operations Special Interest Group (OPSIG) room and ended up signing up to the organization. I was immediately invited to literally dozens of op sessions in the area. There were car pools arranged and each session was charted as to type of operation; such as timetable/train order, CTC, track warrant or modified system. Each session was rated either "relaxed", "moderate" or "intense" so you could choose your level of challenge. One of the clinics I most enjoyed was Tony Koester's on the progress on his NKP layout. The main thrust of this clinic was using photos and photo shop or similar software to create authentic and beautiful photo backgrounds. The other series of clinics which have possibly strongly effected my own modeling efforts was the free software available at JMRI.org. After seeing the presentation on Decoder Pro, Panel Pro and car routing within Panel Pro; I went back to the hotel and downloaded the entire JMRI program on my laptop.

Continued from Page 3

One of the things Nina and I enjoyed together, especially, was the Napa Valley Wine Train. We were bussed from the convention center to the depot at Napa Valley. This operation is not particularly railfan oriented as there is really no access to photograph the locomotives which are classic ALCO FPA units. On arrival you are escorted to a pleasant waiting area where there is, of course, a gift shop and a wine bar. But, my friends, the train! We were seated in a wonderfully restored heavyweight dining car. The car had a polished wood interior, heavy draperies and was immaculately clean. As the train proceeded through the beautiful grape farms, with the sun setting over the Coast Range, we were treated to one of the finest meals I have ever enjoyed! As the train prepared to reverse for the trip back to Napa, we were moved to an equally beautiful lounge car where dessert was served while the second half of our group enjoyed their dinner. We shared our table and desert with John Sing who was instantly posting pictures and “tweets” on line as part of his convention duties.

I can't say any more about the National Train Show than that it was fabulous! I was able to obtain information that I needed about Digitrax and several building manufacturers and enjoyed seeing the displays by major hobby giants such as Athearn, Atlas, Walthers and others. There were numerous display layouts, all worthy of looking over. However, there was a group from Canada with an HO modular layout which was, hands down, the hit of the show. The trackwork was immaculate, there was an operating signal system and a computerized billboard which displayed the scale speed of the last train which had passed. But, you could spend hours enjoying the little details, many of which were animated..

Saturday we had what must be the first “unquet”. Attendees were invited to have a meal at one of the many fine restaurants available downtown. Then were given an ice cream sandwich and treated to some spectacular, and funny, computerized slide shows from the Winterrail producer. Between shows we had the annual awards presented. I am already registered for the 2013 national in Atlanta and am seriously considering 2012 in Grand Rapids.

Kelley and Debbie Massie and Dan and Nina Mulhearn riding behind steam before a wonderful dinner on the Delta King steam boat.

The steam ride behind Granite Rock # 10 was part of the California State RR Museum celebration of the moving of the NMRA Library to their facility. Our convention pass was free admission the entire week to the fabulous California State RR Museum..



**Dan at the Throttle
Portola, CA 7/4/2011**



**Napa Valley Wine Train
Napa, CA 7/8/2011**



AMTRAK West 2011

Dan Mulhearn

This is the tale of Nina's and my trip to the NMRA national convention in Sacramento this year. We have taken many trips on Amtrak in years gone by, including our honeymoon trip to Los Angeles in 1986. We have taken two trips to Montana on the Empire Builder as well as numerous other trips. What follows is my account of our trip to Sacramento for this year's NMRA national. If you are an Amtrak supporter you will not like what I have to say; but I am not trying to be political just give you my impressions. We have found that there are almost always mechanical problems on any given trip. There are almost always delays. The food served on board has gone from horrible to mediocre. It seems you could always deal with all these things if you got a good on board service crew. This is not to say the engineers and conductors, although they make a difference on their particular crew district, are not a part of the equation. The car attendants and dining car crew who are with you for the entire trip make the big difference. If it is a good crew they work to ameliorate the problems encountered en route. On the other hand, a bad crew just adds to the misery. We have come across some wonderful, caring Amtrak on board people, however most we have encountered do exactly what they have to do and no more. At the bottom of the ladder are those who are incompetent, rude or a combination of both. Travel by train is a wonderful way to see the country, the neat little Midwest towns, the endless farm fields, the mountains and deserts and the cities close up. For we rail buffs it is also a chance to experience railroading close up. Passenger train travel has a wonderful history and nostalgia attached to it that is almost irresistible.

Now for our trip this year. I booked our Amtrak tickets 364 days prior to our trip to ensure we would get bedrooms on both legs of our trip. So, we were set; bedrooms on the Cardinal Hinton to Chicago connecting to the California Zephyr to Sacramento. Bedrooms on the return California Zephyr to Chicago connecting to the Cardinal to Hinton. The fare, which included the bedrooms and on board meals totaled almost four thousand dollars. In spite of that and the fact that every train is sold out the enterprise still needs government (read taxpayer) subsidy. Now, the day before we were to leave Hinton on the Cardinal; I got an automated computer voice on the telephone informing me that the train we were scheduled on from Chicago to Sacramento was cancelled and there was no alternate transportation available. I called and spoke to an agent who offered to get us on a train out of Chicago on July 5 which would have put us in Sacramento on July 7 with the convention ending on the 8th and we missing several events which had been prepaid. After some discussion we were offered a roomette on the Southwest Chief to Los Angeles with a two train connection to Sacramento; which would leave Chicago on the day we originally scheduled to leave on the California Zephyr. We settled on the LA train and a rental car to

drive from there to Sacramento. So, off we went on the Cardinal.

The next morning as we approached Chicago we just happened to have breakfast with Bruce Knapp from Division 7, who had gotten on at Cincinnati. Bruce was booked on the California Zephyr to Sacramento and had not been informed that the train had been cancelled and he was stranded in Chicago. On arrival at Chicago Bruce went to Amtrak passenger services and was basically told, "fly or go home". Luckily Bruce connected with a hard working ticket agent who got him a coach seat on the Southwest Chief with a roomette beyond Raton, NM after a flock of boy scouts detained. The trip from Hinton to Chicago was OK although you have to shake your head at the meal service. There is one waiter/cook/busboy who takes one order at a time, cooks it and serves it before going on to the next table.

We had time in Chicago for a wonderful lunch at Berghoff's German Restaurant before boarding the Southwest Chief for LA. We had a roomette in a transition sleeper which had four roomettes for customers and the rest of the car was being used as crew quarters. Our car attendant was actually the car attendant for the adjoining sleeper and said he hoped he had trainlined the call button system so he could receive them in the adjoining car. He advised us to use the showers and rest rooms in the adjoining car as the facilities in our car were used by the crew and were nasty. The trip was wonderful, scenery wise, with the passage over Raton Pass and Glorieta Pass and early in the morning, Cajon Pass.

While at the convention, as mentioned in the story on the convention, we had occasion to dine on the Napa Valley Wine Train. I remember mentioning to Nina that this is the way it was on the "real" railroads in the heyday of rail travel; and what a contrast it was from Amtrak dining car service.

And now, the trip home. Bruce Knapp had mentioned to us that he heard there might be a problem with the Cardinal out of Chicago on our journey home. I called Amtrak and was advised there was a bridge out on CSX east of Indianapolis and that we would be bussed from Indianapolis to Cincinnati. We were assured we would have our booked accommodations on each side of the bus bridge. At any rate, on Sunday, July 10 we boarded the California Zephyr for Chicago. Again, the scenery was wonderful, Donner Pass, the Wasatch, the canyons of Colorado and the high plains. The dining car waiter had a good sense of humor as they began to run out of things during the trip. As we approached Chicago we had our last lunch on board. Several people ordered cheeseburgers and he produced hamburgers and suggested we imagine the cheese as they did not have any. I ordered a Sierra Nevada pale ale and he brought me iced

tea and suggested I imagine it was pale ale. We arrived at Chicago about three hours late with just a short time to meet our connection, the Cardinal. There was no time to get a meal in Chicago, but we were counting on dinner on the Cardinal after we left Chicago.

So, we were directed to our train at Chicago Union Station. It consisted of Horizon coaches which are glorified commuter coaches. There were no sleeping accommodations. Even worse, there was a Horizon food service car in the consist but it was neither stocked nor manned. Our conductor apologized for the poor service and said he was going to have a tee shirt made with Amtrak's 2011 motto which would be, "I'm Sorry". Although given virtually nothing to work with the conductor tried to make us comfortable by turning seats to face one another, calling them our "suites". Off we rolled for Indianapolis and suddenly there was a flash of light, the sound of pieces striking the bottom of our car, and the end of air conditioning and lights. So, we were stopped somewhere in the middle of Indiana in stuffy coaches, with no food and limited water. After consulting with Chicago, the crew told us we were going to limp along to Monon, IN where we would set out the empty lead baggage car on a siding then pick it up on the rear of the train. We then crawled into Monon, cut off the empty baggage and shoved it into the siding. The crew then backed down on our coach and attempted to reconnect the head end power. They went from wire ties to sledge hammers but no luck. The next brainstorm out of Chicago was to cut off the lead coach, the one all we sleeping car passengers were using and shove it in the siding on top of the crippled baggage car. After backing down on the remainder of the "cattle cars", the crew again attempted to get the train power up without success. At this point our locomotive quit running! We could see the conductor up in the cab on his cell phone and he eventually came over and told us that when the between car cable had blown up it tripped the head end power source on the locomotive. They were going to attempt to reboot the locomotive's computers and see if that worked. Well after a three hour delay we had our power back! The train pulled forward, backed down on our car and off we went for Indianapolis.

I have to say the Conductor and Assistant Conductor on this train did a great job dealing with our power problem, with very little to work with. They left the doors open on our cars so we could get some air, just asking us to please stay seated. They passed through the cars frequently letting their passengers know what was going on and what was being done to fix it. One passenger on our car called Amtrak about possibly having food and water delivered to the train somewhere down the line. He was politely told there was no one available authorized to make that kind of decision.

Indianapolis, there was a treat! We arrived It was close to 3:00AM and we were told there would be Amtrak employees to help with the luggage. It seems there was one fellow with a cart but he was no where near us. We

were directed downstairs to the Greyhound bus station. There were several Greyhound buses at the gates and a large crowd of their passengers. Now, if you have not seen the type of crowd found in big city bus terminals in the middle of the night; picture the bar scene from Star Wars. There was no Amtrak person to direct us but we noticed three buses off to one side not marked Greyhound. The drivers were huddled drinking coffee and smoking. After being asked several times they finally owned up to yes they were the Amtrak charters and no they could answer no questions; ask someone from Amtrak. When asked about our luggage one driver merely pointed to the luggage compartment as if to say, there you go, load it. At 5:10 AM we arrived at Cincinnati and bid farewell to our new friend from Division 7, Bruce Knapp. Again no people or luggage carts to be seen. By 5:30 we were aboard our sleeper and were immediately invited to breakfast. As hungry as folks were; a lot of passengers went straight to bed as they were thoroughly exhausted by this point. It was just your microwave Amtrak cheese omelet but it tasted like heaven! I was out like a light in the upper berth of "Prairie View" by 6:30. As tired as I was I couldn't pass up the chance to enjoy the New River Gorge so got up at 10:15AM and enjoyed the ride. We had planned to have lunch at the Market in Hinton but the car attendant pointed out we were running about three hours late and we should partake of the lunch we had paid for aboard. Great idea, Ainsley! And so, our journey ended back at Hinton.

OK, Amtrak management, some thoughts. Your cars are old and not always well cleaned. There is almost always a light burned out or a call button that doesn't work. There is almost always problems with mechanical systems such as air conditioning in at least one car. A lot of your on board service people are "time servers" who could care less about their job or their passengers. It is sad to see those employees who do care beating their heads against a wall because you give them nothing to work with. The conductor on our "cattle cars" out of Chicago was so angry with management that he told us he was having a tee shirt made with Amtrak's 2011 motto on it in big red letters, "I'M SORRY".

We came to find out that our Chicago to Sacramento train had been cancelled but not due to impassable track. The equipment and crews had become out of balance due to the mid west flooding. So, management just cancelled the train to bring things back in to balance. The fact that this seriously inconvenienced and in many cases cancelled long planned trips for a trainload of passengers did not seem to matter. A well managed company would have made proper adjustments. To send a computerized message cancelling a train and offering no alternatives is just plain unacceptable. A well managed company would have a representative personally call with some alternatives in hand. To send a train load of people out of Chicago with no food or drink except the limited amount available in the car water fountains is simply unconscionable. How could there be no one in a major terminal like Chicago

who would have authority to do something about crewing and stocking the dining car? Good management would have hired a caterer if necessary to ensure the comfort of it's customers. We met one man on the LA train, who like us, had been stranded by the cancellation of the CZ and was able to get on the LA train. This gentleman was a long time Amtrak supporter and in fact, was a member of the National Association of Rail Road Passengers (NARP) which is a big Amtrak booster. He said he was so enraged by the poor management of Amtrak that as soon as he got home he was resigning from NARP!

Travel by train has a long, rich and nostalgic history in this country. It makes the journey to somewhere part

of the vacation, or it least that was the way it was. I love trains, I really do! Because I love trains I have come to the reluctant conclusion that it is past time to put Amtrak out of it's misery. There may be a place for high speed trains in certain intercity corridors where they can compete with flying or driving. But, the long distance passenger train? It would make as much sense to me at this point to ride a stagecoach from Charleston to Richmond thinking it was a good way to make that journey. We continue to support this tottering system for the benefit of the many railfans who use it as well as the diminishing number of old timers who simply will not fly. As I told Amtrak President Boardman in my letter to him, "next time I'll drive."



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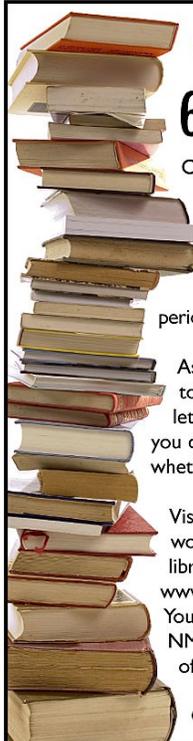
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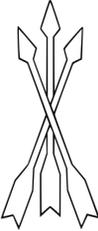


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Upcoming Coal Division Meetings

August 13, 2011

West Virginia Hobbies and Crafts
Teays Valley, WV

September 10, 2011

Joint Meeting with MCR Division 6
Mark Maynard's Home
Portsmouth, OH

October 8, 2011

West Virginia Hobbies and Crafts
Teays Valley, WV