

UP 844 – A PERSONAL VIEW

- Tom Carter

I was feeling pretty homesick after three weeks of working in Jamaica last February and still had just over a week to go. I was bored, sitting in my room at Corporate Lodging and about ready to just go to bed early as my finance Alicia was visiting her daughter and not online to talk to. My allergies were killing me, I had an upset stomach, and I just wanted to be home. I had always wanted to visit Jamaica, just not for 32 days! Although I was having a great time teaching my client's train crew (who were a fun bunch), I was exhausted and just wanted to be back in familiar surroundings.

Just as I was about to log off, close the laptop and hit the sack, I got an interesting e-mail... I was invited to be one of a small group of car hosts for three legs of the Union Pacific 4-8-4 844's Western Heritage Tour trips over the old WP! This famous engine was coming out with her train for several special events and, since it was the Centennial year of the WP, the Feather River Rail Society was graciously allowed to invite guests aboard the UP's flagship steam train in thanks for their monetary donations to the Society. The chance to thank our donors and supporters in such a high profile way was exciting enough, but I was ecstatic and honored to be a part of the trip.

I arrived home from Jamaica on February 18th, but, call it what you want, it was work. Fun, but hard work. I had already considered taking a vacation, so I planned it around the two week stretch that 844 was going to be out and eagerly anticipated the arrival of this grand steamer.

On April 21st, I went to Oakland, California to meet the train. We had a job briefing with Conductor Reed Jackson of the UP Steam Crew and an orientation for the 12 car train that Tuesday afternoon in preparation for an early morning departure on Wednesday. My nephew Dustin, brother Timmy and Alicia were paying passengers, so Dustin and Timmy rode Amtrak to Oakland and met Alicia and I at the hotel prior to going to the yard for the briefing.

On Wednesday morning, Bill Parker and I went to the yard to get the train and have the vestibule traps open and ready to receive passengers at the Jack London Square Depot. The looks on the faces of waiting Amtrak passengers and employees was priceless as we glided into the depot with that big Northern. They didn't know what to think, but we all felt a little twinge

of pride knowing they wouldn't be traveling in the class and style we would be!

After whistling off, we headed south to Newark, where we made our way over to Niles Junction and onto the route of the Western Pacific over Altamont pass. Before tackling the pass though, we paused for a few minutes at Hearst siding where the Pacific Locomotive Association and Golden Gate Railroad Museum had Southern Pacific 4-6-2 2472 and Robert Dollar Lumber 2-6-2T 3 parked on their interchange track and siding waiting for us, along with a couple hundred railfans. The sight of these three engines all steaming together was an epic one, and a big thanks goes out to the UP, PLA and GGRM.

After leaving Hearst, we headed for Stockton and over Altamont Pass, making great time. A huge highlight of the trip happened near Pleasanton, where an entire elementary school was waiting along their back fence to wave us by. Those kids all had huge grins on their faces and had probably never seen anything like the mighty 844 in their lives. Our guests enthusiastically waved back from the dome car and the open dutch doors on the car vestibules.



FRRS President and UP Engineer Rod McClure works the Fireman's position on UP 844 in Oakland.

- Mike Coen photo

Upon arriving at Stockton yard, the passengers boarded a waiting bus to take them back to Oakland while we uncoupled the 844, diesel (we had a Gen-Set tag along, after all, this was Earth Day and UP celebrated by running a steam engine in the Bay Area!), and the tool cars and concession car for movement to the Stockton Altamont Commuter Express station.



Rod McClure confers with UP Conductor Reed Jackson during the stop at Hearst. Sadly, this 844 tour was Reed's last trip as he unexpectedly passed away in August. (see Issue 149)

- Mike Coen photo

After a brief welcome ceremony with the City of Stockton, the engine was backed back down to the yard, coupled to its train and the crew tied up for some well deserved rest. For those of you that think the Steam Crew is a glamorous job, you should have seen our President, Rod McClure after the train arrived. He had fired the big engine most of the day and was the most tired I had ever seen anyone. Yes, it IS hard work.

The train spent a few days in Stockton and Roseville doing PR work for UP (as that is its primary purpose) and then deadheaded to Oroville, California. On Friday, May 1st, we met the 844 and her train, which now included WP Heritage SD70 1983, and prepared for an early morning departure up the Feather River Canyon, the highlight of our trips. We awoke to a light rain that drizzled all the way up the canyon, making for amazing steam shots. Not enough rain to cause problems and ruin photos, but just enough to amplify the steam cloud emanating from the 844. Railfans were everywhere and the Highway Patrol was out in force, thanks to a heads up from FRRS Vice President Steve Habeck. The CHP kept things smooth and orderly and many beautiful photos and videos can be found all over the internet of UP 844 on her way to celebrate the Centennial of the Feather River Route at Keddie.

Upon our arrival at the bridge, Conductor Jackson and

his crew of FRRS car attendants helped the passengers detrain for a ceremony celebrating 100 years of the Western Pacific. FRRS President McClure, Vice-President Habeck, UP Steam Boss Steve Lee, Fireman Ed Dickens and Conductor Jackson performed the honors, using the same ceremonial Spike Maul that was used during the Ruby Jubilee Celebration, held at the same spot some 60 years earlier. A Gold Spike was driven to mark the occasion, but not without a typical "WP" moment. Like Leland Stanford 140 years prior, McClure took a mighty swing at the spike... and missed. Fireman Dickens then took over swinging the maul like a machine, rapidly driving it into history to kick off the next 100 years of the Feather River Route. After a photo run-by for the crowd, 844 took off for Portola, her next stop.

The hard working Men & Women of the Western Pacific Railroad Museum were proud to host the legendary steam engine and met us at the interchange in the yard with the WP GP7 707 and a special banner welcoming the steam crew. The museum shined like a new penny and Manager David Epling reported later that we did a very nice amount of business in the gift shop. Foot traffic at the museum was pretty heavy and everyone had a great time despite the rain.



Members of the UP Steam Crew and the top FRRS Officers pose with the 844 at the site of the WP Gold Spike on Keddie Wye. L to R: UP Steam Boss Steve Lee, FRRS President Rod McClure, FRRS Vice-President Steve Habeck, UP Fireman Ed Dickens and UP Conductor Reed Jackson.

- Alex Ramos photo

While in Portola, the UP Steam Crew toured the museum and enjoyed a couple of days with us. They were genuinely impressed with the facilities, the collection and the "Willing Spirit" of the volunteers of the FRRS. Randy Quinlan, manager of the UP's passenger car fleet, toured the California Zephyr "Silver Plate" and UP Business Car 105 with Eugene Vicknair

and I, giving us many useful tips and a lot of information about restoring and caring for the passenger cars in our fleet. Several of the steam team mechanics inspected the boiler of the 165, helping the restoration of our steamer tremendously. UP Steam Boss Steve Lee and his lovely Boss, Lynn, held court in the Board room for hours visiting with FRRS members, answering questions and telling stories of his experiences with the UP Steam team. A great time was had by all.

On Tuesday, May 5th, we left Portola with the 844, running solo, headed for Winnemucca, Nevada with yet another trainload of gracious donors on a stretch of trackage that most folks never get to see. After some

long, slow running due to a signal issue, the 844 really stretched her legs, reaching speeds of 70 miles per hour in some stretches. After a brief stop in Elko, we set out for the last leg of our trip, Winnemucca, where our journey with the 844 came to a close.

The Feather River Rail Society would like to extend a big thank you to the Union Pacific Railroad Steam Department for their hospitality and generosity. This was a huge shot in the arm for the FRRS and we had a great time on a trip none of us will likely forget. Also, a huge thank you to all our volunteers who took the time to work the train, clean the museum and perform all the other tasks that were needed to make our end of these fantastic trips possible.

OCTOBER TRACKWORK

- Wayne Monger, Assistant Roadmaster

The FRRS volunteer track crew (Bill, Bill, Dwayne, Rick, Slim, Seth, Matt, others and myself - I left the crew list at the museum the other day) gathered at Portola on Sat Oct 3 and Sun Oct 4 for 2 days of track repair work on the Balloon Loop track between Milward Switch and Malfunction Jct.

After 1 PM on Sunday, we were working with intermittent snow flurries falling. Starting at Milward Switch and working from there, we only made it approx. 1/4 around the track to where the "yard limit" sign is located. Any rapid inspection and repair work is seriously hampered by the track structure itself being sunk down into and stuck in the (currently dry) mud and clay plus covered with a heavy thick layer of the fine ballast that we dumped out on that track within the past 10 years but never tamped under the ties - all cemented together by that 1/3 car of gypsum that was dumped around the balloon loop a few years before we took over the Portola site. We were having to hand shovel the fine ballast off of the top of the ties to reduce the weight when jacking the rails/ties up out of the (currently dry) mud.

Without shoveling off the overbearing ballast, rails were coming off of the ties or the ties were breaking when the track was in the process of being very slowly jacked upward. I was placing all of the ballast we were shoveling off of the track in a pile in the wide area at the apex of the balloon loop curve as we will need to use this to reballast and tamp the track when we are finished. As I feared, around 1 of every 3 ties we found as we jacked the track up high enough to inspect and work on (including tamping ballast underneath ties)

have failed/rotted under the center or on the outer end under the high stress outside rail of the balloon loop track. We replaced 8 ties at strategic locations under rail joints, as this seems to be the primary locations where ties have failed under high stress. Many others that were still somewhat strong enough to support the outer rail, we pulled the old spikes, plugged the holes and respiked with new spikes. There are sections I found as long as 20 feet where there are no whole spikes remaining against the outer rail, as they have either been sheared off by the rail or worked out of the ties and only gravity and 1 or 2 gauge bars are holding the track together.

It should be noted that I showed all members of the track work party the existing surveyed centerline (steel rebar) markers (from the 1987-88 track survey by original FRRS Roadmaster/Chief Engineer Roger Hepkema and myself) that are placed about every 75 to 100 feet around the Balloon Loop track. At one location where the track had straightened out over the years, the marker showed the track has moved sideways about 5 inches, so we used the back-hoe to pull 3 inches out of that and bring the track back into a smooth curve (but still not exactly centered).

Another track work party weekend has been scheduled for Sat Oct 24 and Sun Oct 25. We will continue from where we stopped on Sunday. The next section we work on from the yard limit sign to the end of the fence at the apex of the curve will be the worst, as this is where the most clay/soil from the sidehill plus the access road has washed down and infiltrated into the track structure, causing wood rot and tie failure. Once we get past the end of the fence out onto the fill over to Malfunction Jct, we should not be finding as many rotted ties sunk down and stuck in dried clay/mud, and thus it should be easier to jack the track