

Historical/Archive Department News - Q1 2024

- Kerry Cochran  
Archive Manager

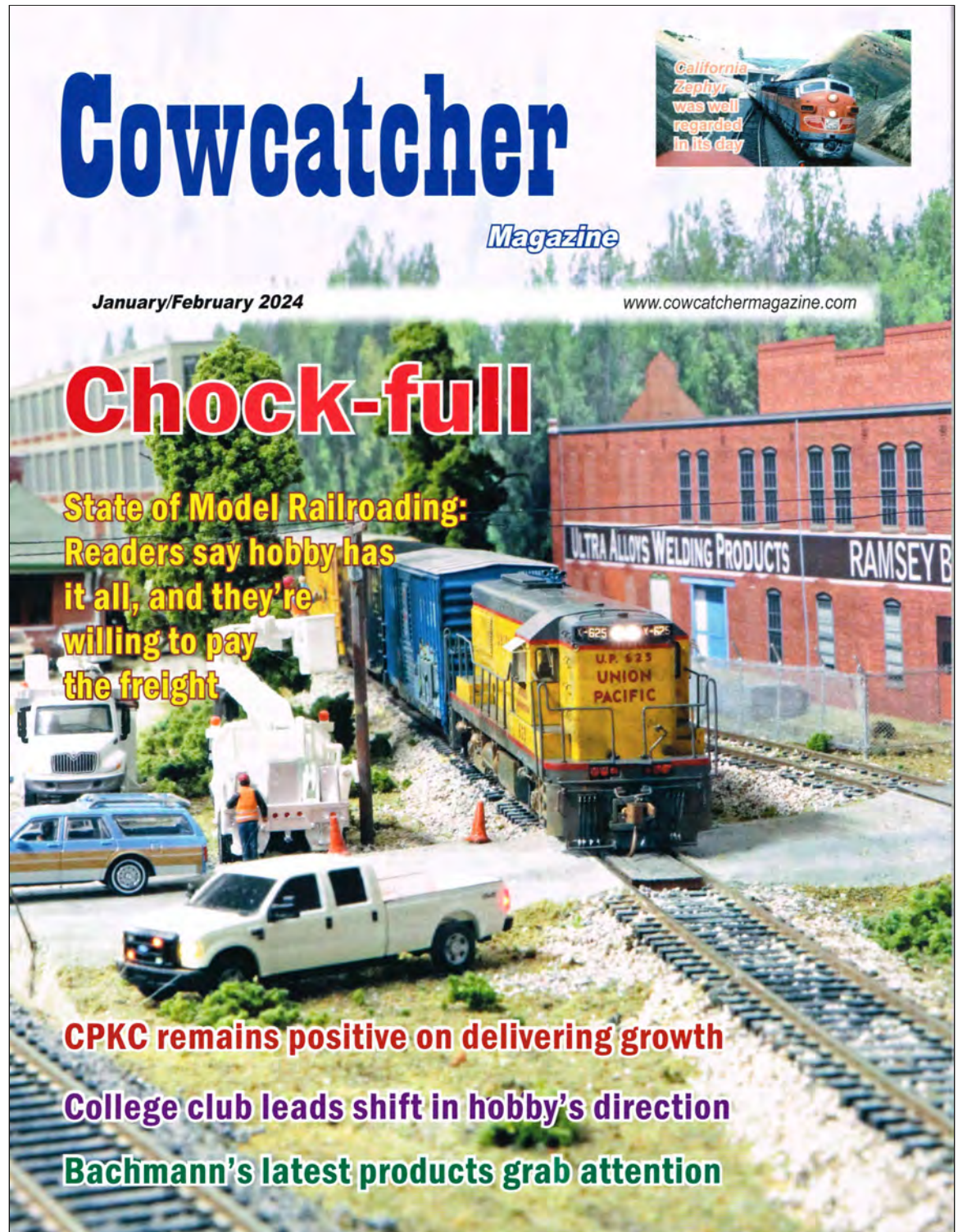
FRRS/WPRM  
Archives in action,  
the department  
helps out another  
magazine.

In mid-November  
2023 the archive  
department was  
contacted by Patrick  
Hiatte of the  
Cowcatcher  
magazine on an  
upcoming article to  
feature the  
California Zephyr  
and specifically on  
the Western Pacific.

During our email  
exchanges he was  
looking for images  
to illustrate the  
article and those  
from John Endler's  
trip in 1953.

I pointed him to our  
website and the  
archive department  
section and the  
collection of photos  
we had. He came  
back to me with a  
selection of four  
photos that he felt  
would be good for  
the article and with  
our webmaster Paul  
Finnegan's help we set up a down load of the photos for him.

The results are in the January/February 2024 issue of the Cowcatcher magazine.





## Cowcatcher Heritage

# Much Ado About Travel

CZ was 'the most talked about train in the country'

Western Pacific's luxury passenger train, the *California Zephyr*, traversed the most scenic parts of its route during daylight hours. Here, the train has a meet in May 1965. — Feather River Rail Society/Western Pacific Railroad Museum Archives/Portola, CA

By PAT HIATTE  
Cowcatcher Magazine

*Another in a series of journeys that Pat Hiatte is taking on famous trains during the heyday of passenger rail.*

Our next trip begins on salt water, from the historic, and aptly named, Ferry Building in downtown San Francisco aboard a Southern Pacific ferry for a 20-minute voyage to Oakland Pier. Awaiting us there are the 11 gleaming stainless-steel cars of the *California Zephyr*, according to its publicists "the most talked-about train in the country."

There are quicker ways to get from San Francisco to Chicago (although we're only going as far as Salt Lake City): on the Santa Fe's *Grand Canyon* or the Southern Pacific/Union Pacific/Chicago & North Western's *City of San Francisco*. The CZ's schedule, however, has been designed so the train traverses the most scenic parts of its route during daylight hours.

Pulled on the Western Pacific by an A-B-B set of F3 diesels, our train has its usual consist: a baggage-express car, three dome coaches, a diner and a dome buffet-

lounge, four sleepers and the icing on the cake, a dome observation-lounge. All cars bear the name *California Zephyr* on their letterboards, and smaller initials represent the three CZ partners: WP, Denver & Rio Grande Western and Burlington Route.

All space, including coaches, is reserved, although there's no extra fare. The 125 dome seats are not reserved and are available to all passengers, with the exception of the buffet-lounge and observation-lounge domes, which are for sleeping car passengers only. Around 80

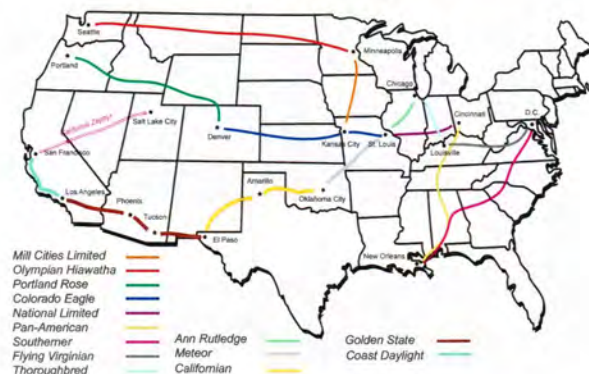
percent of the available space is reserved, although the train often sells out.

As befits a luxury cruise train, the Burlington warns sternly that "banana messenger, [livestock] caretaker and circus tickets not honored" on the CZ. We, however, have booked a snug roomette. The train also offers open sections, double bedrooms and one drawing room, as well as chair cars.

As we board, we're greeted by our Pullman porter and a welcoming Zephyrette, a combination nurse, social director, tour guide and all-purpose assistant to passengers and train crew alike. We're settling into our roomette as the train pulls out on time at 9:30 a.m.

The CZ continues a joint venture among the three railroads see WP, p. 47

## The Golden Age of Passenger Travel



The routes of Pat Hiatte's Golden Age of Passenger Travel series, which has made 12 stops so far across the U.S.

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## WP

that began in 1939 with the *Exposition Flyer*, a heavyweight steam train that originated to tap the passenger traffic generated by the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco. The train's scenic route proved so popular that it was continued after the exposition ended in 1940.

With the onset of the streamliner era after World War II, the *Exposition Flyer* partners ordered six train sets worth of equipment from the Budd Co. Included were 30 Vista-Domes, an amenity heavily promoted by the CZ partners before and after the new train made its debut with an eastbound run March 20, 1949.

After stops at WP's main Oakland station at 3rd and Washington streets, and at Stockton, we're off nonstop through the flatlands of the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys at a 70-mph clip. Enjoying lunch in the diner, we find ourselves sharing a table with a fellow traveler who's on the through

sleeper between Oakland and New York.

Meeting our westbound counterpart *California Zephyr* at South Sacramento (both trains are on time, of course), we pause at California's capital city and again at Marysville. Leaving Marysville, we make our way to one of the Vista-Dome seats for the scenic highlight of the Western Pacific, the Feather River Canyon.

Oroville, 200 miles east of Oakland, marks the western entrance to the canyon. A center not only of gold mining back in the day but also of agriculture, Oroville (Gold City in Spanish) is home to the "Mother Orange Tree," which, legend has it, grew from three seeds planted in 1856. All through the canyon we'll be climbing steadily, more than 4,600 feet by the time we reach Portola 118 miles away.

The scenery and engineering feats of the Feather River Canyon include some signature scenes. At Two Bridges near Tobin, the WP bridge towers high above the California Highway 70 bridge; locals say it's good luck if a train passes overhead while you're



**Crew on the California Zephyr's first run in March 1949 pose next to the train.** — Feather River Rail Society/Western Pacific Railroad Museum Archives/Portola, CA

crossing the highway bridge.

A few miles on, the famous Keddie Wye spans Spanish Creek. We emerge from a short tunnel and immediately cross onto a steel bridge. On the bridge a turnout on our left leads to WP's Inside Gateway line to Bieber, Calif., and a Great Northern Railway connection. The golden spike that completed the WP was driven on this bridge in 1909.

Fifteen miles beyond Keddie the WP crosses over itself on the Williams Loop, built to keep the eastbound grade to 1 percent. While not as well-known as the Tehachapi Loop farther south, Williams is arguably more scenic, surrounded by forests of pine and spruce and with Estray Creek running through the middle.

Our eyes are tired and we have long since run out of film by the time we reach the eastern end of the canyon at Portola, railroad division point and lumbering center, at 5:27 p.m. Our crossing of the summit of the Sierra Nevada at Chilcote Tunnel under Beckwourth Pass finds us in the buffet-lounge enjoying a cocktail or two as we cross into Nevada before our 7 p.m. dinner seating.

Targeted at coach passengers, earlier seatings offer a full meal at the budget price of \$1.10; those, like the others for dinner, are reserved by the Zephyrette on one of her frequent passes through the train. Although we're seated at a table with others, the CZ has seen to it that they're also first-class (sleeping car) passengers.

Admiring the Colorado carnations gracing the table, we peruse the menu. The braised sweetbreads sound interesting, but we settle on a CZ specialty, the Native Rocky Mountain Trout, with Banana Blanc Mange

for dessert. Dinner sets us back \$3.30 but includes soup, entrée, vegetable, potatoes, dessert and beverage.

While at dinner, we meet the westbound *Royal Gorge*, WP's only other passenger train on this route. Although grandly named and designated Train No. 1, the *Royal Gorge* is another failed attempt by WP to field a secondary passenger train. Intended primarily to move company employees and supplies, the *Royal Gorge* lasted less than a year, replaced by a Budd Rail Diesel Car and renamed *Zephyrette*.

Comfortably full after dinner, we're soon back in a Vista-Dome for the 9:12 p.m. stop at Winnemucca. From Weso, four miles east, both WP and Southern Pacific eastbound trains use WP trackage, while westbound trains use the SP. It's just after midnight when we exit the paired trackage at Alazon, almost 180 miles east of Weso.

By that time we're sound asleep in our roomette, while our *Zephyr* breezes across the deserts of Nevada and Utah. Our porter wakes us at Garfield, Utah; just time to shave, dress and pack before we leave our train – and the Western Pacific – at Salt Lake City Union Depot, where we've arrived on time at 4:20 a.m. Pacific time.

As the brochure says, there was indeed "Something to See on the W.P."

*Editor's Note: Amtrak's California Zephyr still plies the rails between Chicago and San Francisco but uses former SP trackage west of Salt Lake City. Next, we begin our journey across the middle U.S. towards the East Coast.*

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