

U.P. STEAM EXCURSION TRAINS!

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"...UP Steam Crew commented that they would look forward to working with the FRRS in the future."

"...the tremendous success is primarily due to the professionalism and competence of all of the FRRS volunteers..."

"...the performance of our FRRS crew was top-notch and impressive..."

Report to the FRRS Membership on the Steam Excursions of 1991

by Wayne Monger

Before I go into the details of just how our first railroad passenger excursion was put together, I would like to state that the tremendous success of this great undertaking is primarily due to the professionalism and competence of all of the FRRS volunteers that worked on this event. Without the effort each of you put out to make sure that the passengers were comfortable and that the trip was successful, we would not have been told by the Union Pacific's steam crew that we "had set new standards of performance for excursion service that all other groups would be measured against." Thank you, and let's hope to do it again in '92, "on the way to San Jose." The FRRS had been informed by the Union Pacific in December 1990 that we would be the sponsoring organization for one leg of the 844/3985 steam excursion, most likely the May 13 Sacramento to Portola excursion, while most other legs would be handled by the Tourist Railway (TRAIN) organization. Just prior to the Jan. 6 FRRS Board of Directors meeting, the TRAIN organization dropped their sponsorship of all sections, leaving the field wide open. Norm Holmes offered to the UP that the FRRS would sponsor not only the May 13 Sac. - Portola segment but also the May 14 Portola to Winnemucca segment, plus the April 27 Portola to Sacramento segment if no other sponsoring group could be found for that day by the end of January. As it worked out, Norm Holmes contacted Hal Lewis at the Central Coast Chapter NRHS in San Jose about the April 27 trip and the rest is now history.

It was a quick start for the FRRS in the massive task of organizing such a project once the excursion was approved by the Board of Directors on January 6, 1991. Many decisions that would later reflect in the organization of the project were made that day. Norm Holmes and myself volunteered to run this project for the FRRS. I also insisted, and the Board of Directors agreed that the May 13 trip be initially offered strictly to Active FRRS members as a way of thanking them for their support of the FRRS in the past. Due to having only 220 seats for sale each day, having over 600 active/family/ life members and knowing just how fast any excursion through the Feather River Canyon would sell even to a limited number of people, we decided to sell only 4 tickets to each household. Both Norm and myself had several different ideas as to the number and type of ticket options we should offer to the members and the public. The evening of January 6, I spent time looking over Train Sheet editor Ed Warren's shoulder as he generated both the information sheet and the ticket order forms on his Macintosh. Much progress was made the next day as I scouted out what would later become the first photo run-by location for May 14 at the old siding of

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FRRS Steam Excursions Successful

by Steve Habeck,

FRRS Steam Excursion Train Manager

a.k.a. "Feather River Steve"

By all accounts, the Union Pacific Steam Excursions on May 13, and May 14, 1991, sponsored by the FRRS were unqualified successes. The sold-out May 13 trip up the Feather River Canyon from Sacramento to Portola, although dampened by cool, wet weather, and delays in the valley, featured 2 fine photo runby stops, without rain, and a welcome home at Portola in the form of our F7, 921D, and ALCO S1, WP 512, at Malfunction Junction. The May 14 trip across the high deserts to Winnemucca gave us much improved weather, and 3 outstanding photo runby stops.

As the FRRS Train Manager, I was the one carrying 2 radios, and my primary job was communicating with Steve Lee of the UP Steam Crew, and other UP personnel, as well as maintaining contact with the FRRS crew on board the train. Although I initially approached being train manager with some reservations, the performance of our FRRS crew was so top-notch and impressive that my job became easy. We particularly impressed the UP people on 3 counts:

1. The energetic and thorough cleaning of the cars assigned to us after each day's run;
2. The discipline of our photo lines (expeditious unloading and loading of passengers, and keeping them together during runbys);
3. The professional attitude which everyone displayed throughout both days.

These items plus innumerable small details that were promptly attended to, lead the UP Steam Crew to comment that the FRRS would hear from them again regarding future excursions, and that they would look forward to working with us.

These excellent results were not achieved by accident. A great deal of planning and forethought went into these excursions. Many thanks are due to Norm Holmes, Wayne Monger, the FRRS Board of Directors, Mardi Vincent, Hank Stiles, Vic Neves, and many others for weeks of work in advance of the trips. We must thank the Union Pacific Railroad for extending the invitation to us, and to Steve Lee and his crew for putting on a fine show for us.

All the advance preparation, plus the performance of each and every car attendant, and our support personnel both on-board, and at the museum, resulted in the FRRS being recognized as a professional and capable organization, and we made some money for the museum in the process. I want to thank everyone involved with these excursions for their enthusiasm, long work hours, and personal sacrifices made in support of this project, and I am proud and gratified to have been involved with it. Thank you all!

Continuation of Report to the FRRS Membership on the Steam Excursions of 1991 by Wayne Monger

Red Rock, solved some of the financial questions by using the special account used previously for the depot fund raising raffles into which all revenue from the excursion would go toward our proposed depot/visitor center plus got John Walker of Yuba City working on getting the tickets for the trip designed and printed up. Within the week following the January 6 meeting, I had nearly 650 flyers printed up, stapled, labeled and sorted for the post office to send to the FRRS active/ family/life members. Even though it was not the most efficient way of selling tickets and handling details of the excursion, it was decided that all ticket sales would go directly to Norm in Portola first for the depositing of the money and initial bookkeeping then would be sent to me in Benicia for the main processing of ticket orders and assignment of seats. By the end of January, ticket orders for the May 13 trip were rolling in and my home phone was staying very busy all through the day. We had decided that I would use my home phone to field all questions and inquiries about the excursions, as it would help prevent conflicting answers that people would get by talking to the large number of people that normally answer the phone at the museum. This also helped keep the business of the excursions as separate as possible from the rest of the museum business.

The pace of the work continued steady through mid-February, with the time spent just on phone calls to my home averaging 3 to 5 hours daily. It was during this time that Norm and I sat down and started sorting through lists of FRRS Volunteers to try to put together a crew of car attendants and supervisors for both the May 13 and May 14 trips. Unlike almost every other organization that operates excursions, we at the FRRS are privileged to have a "large" core of people who are comfortable working around railroad equipment and can maintain a professional attitude toward their assignments and their fellow volunteers. By starting with the FRRS Operating Department personnel and using not only the above criteria but also how well someone works under stress, communication skills with others, where they live in relation to Portola and the excursion runs plus what specific skills that they have that would address specific needs of our passengers, Norm and I were able to piece together a proposed crew of volunteers for each of the two days. It was also in February that I had the chance to talk with Steve Lee (manager of the UP's steam operations) about some of the details of the train and trip while we both attended the National Railway Preservation Symposium at the CSRM in Sacramento. It was at this time that I gave him a preliminary list of photo run-by locations for both May 13 and May 14. By the end of February, most all of the seats for the May 13 trip had been sold and I sent out postcards to all of the people that got fliers earlier letting people know that the May 13 trip was "sold out" and hoping to stimulate sales of the May 14 trip, that up until this time had sold very slowly. As it worked out, the May 13 trip was "sold out" for a few weeks until we got more information from the UP and we decided to sell the seats in each car that we had reserved for the use of the car attendants - which is where those "extra" seats came from that we sold in March for the May 13 trip.

During March, the time that I was spending on the many aspects of the steam excursions was adding up to an average of 8 to 10 hours per day (a "full time job"), most of the time answering and responding to phone calls. (For all of the dozens of you who called looking for tickets for the May 13 trip and hung-up when you found out that there were tickets available for only May 14, you blew it! Ask anyone that was lucky enough to ride/work both days and they will tell you that the May 14 trip was better than the May 13 trip!) It was also during March that Mardi Vincent volunteered to take over the food aspect for the excursions (Thanks, Mardi!) . It was during this time that John Walker wrote the article for the special issue of The Lark that would be passed out to all of the passengers each day. Norm took

over the arrangements to be worked out for the various bus transportation needs and the lodging of passengers on certain options at The Nugget in Sparks. To help out with the sales and inform the public of our excursions, Vic Neves and myself put together press packets of info and photos for many of the main regional newspapers the TV crews that the Board of Directors had earlier agreed to invite along. Norm also placed ads in the Sacramento and Reno papers for the May 14 trip, which was by now starting to sell at a good rate.

It would take pages more to detail all that went on with this project between April 1 and the time when we finally were able to get all of our wet and cold passengers out of the rain and onto the train at Sacramento the morning of May 13. Some of my own highlights were the three days that Vic Neves and I spent scouting and marking photo run-by locations that would hold 250-people in organized fashion and still fit within Steve Lee's criteria for such locations (including getting my 4x4 stuck in some very deep and slick mud near Sloat as it was getting dark!), the tremendous way all of the FRRS members took care of the UP steam crew and other officials while the train laid over in Portola next to the museum on April 27 and the professionalism showed by almost all of the people in attendance for the combined FRRS/Central Coast Chapter "orientation and safety meeting" held by Steve Lee the afternoon of April 27. As for the trips, I guess that I will remember more of the things that went wrong than the thousands of things that went right each day. Included in this short list are the problems caused by the local officials in Sacramento that did not have the train ready to go at 8:30AM and forced us not only to not know which side of the train we would load our passengers at but also forced over 220 people to stand out in a cold, driving rain for over 1-1/2 hours until most everyone was soaked to the skin, the looks of near panic in some of the passengers faces as the train remained stopped for nearly 10 minutes inside Tunnel #8 as the air conditioning on each car continued to pull more and more smoke into each car until you literally could not see from one end to the other inside some of the coach cars and the mix-up with the buses when we arrived into Portola over three hours late. Some of the great things that I will remember will be how John and Mary Ryczkowski worked with the passengers with breathing problems after we got out of the long tunnels around Lake Oroville, the tremendous cooperation and organization shown by the FRRS staff and passengers at every one of the photo run-by locations plus the number of people that came up to us and thanked us for such a great trip each day.

On the "bottom line," this excursion service has put the FRRS toward the front of sponsoring organizations in the eyes of the UP when it comes to future trips, increased our credibility with other historical groups and has given us a large profit - most of which will go into our special fund for the construction of our new depot/visitor center facility.

The success of these excursions are thanks to the following people: FRRS Train Manager: Steve Habeck

FRRS Supervisors: Wayne Monger, Vic Neves, Mardi Vincent, Norm Holmes, Hank Stiles.

Car Attendants/Hosts: May 13 - Larry & Lynn Hanlon, Jack Palmer, David Dodds, Renee McComb, David & Julie Anderson, Dave McClain, John & Mary Ryczkowski, John & Janet McCormick, Richard Canino, Mark French, Gordon Wollesen, Skip Englert, Doug Jensen, Bill & Melanie Evans, Peter Solyom and Ed Warren.

May 14 - Gordon Wollesen, John & Mary Ryczkowski, Dave Dewey, Kent Stephens, Mark French, Gary & Pat Cousin (thanks for the desert info handouts!), Dan Ogle, Jim Gidley, Brian & Cindi Challender, Errol Spangler, Bob Lindley, Jim & Janene Mathew, Lynda Monger, Barbara Holmes, Roger Hepkema, Eric Rich and Ed Warren.

Photo Locations for Run-Bys

May 13, 1991

- #1 Milepost 218.85. 1/2 mile west of the west switch at Elsey, next to Green Mtn. Quarry. (train stopped)
- #2 Milepost 236.35. Shelf/road above west portal of Tunnel #9, 2 1/2 miles west of the west switch of Pulga. (train did not stop)
- #3 Milepost 265.4. 1/4 mile east of Tunnel #25, 1 mile east of Rich Bar. (train did not stop)
- #4 Milepost 304.1. Along Middle Fork of Feather River 1 mile west of old west switch Two Rivers siding. (train stopped)

May 14, 1991

- #1 Milepost 351.18. Fill and cut 1 mile west of old west switch of Red Rock siding. (train stopped)
- #2 Milepost 391.18. S-curve 2 miles west of west switch Sand Pass siding on .4% grade. (train stopped - 3 photo run-bys)
- #3 Milepost 396.9. 2 1/2 miles east of east switch Sand Pass. S-Curve on hillside above desert floor. (train did not stop)
- #4 Milepost 483.7. 3 miles west of Antelope siding. (Lucky guess, as we did not scout this one.) (train stopped)

UP Passenger Cars in Our Portion of the Train:

Western Lodge-----Baggage/souvenir
Sunshine Special-----Coach
Texas Eagle-----Coach
Sun Valley-----Lounge
Portland Rose-----Coach
City of Los Angeles-----Diner
Columbine-----Coach
Challenger-----Coach
Western Star-----Baggage/display

Railfair '91 ... A Thank You by Hank Stiles

I would like to take a little time to thank all our members who helped at Railfair '91 in Sacramento in May. Thanks to all of you, our museum got a great deal of publicity that can only help. I was most pleased that when I asked people if they could fit working at our booth into their schedule, people jumped right in with both feet. Even members who just came to visit offered to help and I was never turned down when I asked for help. This spirit of cooperation is what makes our museum one of the best in the country and a pleasure to belong to. The following is a list of the people who helped. Please excuse me if I left anyone off of the list. Again, thank you. Hank Stiles.

Norm Holmes, Terry Decottignies, Alan Jacobson, Larry & Lynn Hanlon, Joe Hill, Bob Lindley, Sandi Spears, Dave Anderson, Kent Stephens, Wayne Monger, Brian Challender, Jack Palmer, Tom Moungovan, Gary Cousin, Mardi Vincent, Ken Roller, Jim Gidley, Sr., Errol Spangler, John Ryczkowski, Mark French, Richard Canino, John Conrad, Matt Vurek, Ed Crary, Sam Jacobson.



Top Photo - FRRS May 14, 1991 Excursion Photo Run-By #2, 2 miles west of Sand Pass, NV at MP 391.18. Center Photo - Photo line at excursion run-by location #2 for May 14, 1991 2 miles west of Sand Pass, NV while train is backing up. Notice light colored tape designating photo line placed by Vic Neves and Wayne Monger before trip. 11:30 AM, Milepost 391.18. Lower Photo - Passengers reloading onto UP coach car, "Portland Rose," following 2nd photo run-by of May 13, 1991 excursion along Middle Fork of Feather River 1 mile west of old siding at Two Rivers, CA. 7:40 PM Milepost 304.15. All Photos on this page by Wayne Monger.