

CZ Dome “Silver Lodge” Arrives in Portola!

By Eugene John Vicknair

On Thursday, August 25, 2005, the FRRS welcomed its second California Zephyr car in to the collection. CBQ dome-coach “Silver Lodge” finally arrived in Portola Yard at the end of its long journey from San Antonio, TX. The car was soon pulled in to the museum and placed on track 6 where it would be visible from the parking lot for Railroad Days. Although not open for display, the car was seen by everyone coming in to the museum.

This ends over 1 year of negotiations, repairs and movement to bring the “Lodge” home. In February, 2004, I became aware of several CZ dome coaches that were being auctioned by D. F. Barnhardt on behalf of Denver Railcar. These cars, 2 DRGW and 2 CBQ, had been used in various services, including Copper Canyon trains in Mexico and Arcadian trains in Canada. All were sold at the auction in July 2004, however the deal for the “Silver Lodge” fell through and I was contacted by Randy Robbins of D. F. Barnhardt concerning the car’s fate.

An inspection conducted in San Antonio revealed the car to be dirty and in need of care and repair, but very complete and intact. Only a few interior parts were missing, as well as 1 window and all the underframe skirts, which had been removed during its Amtrak days. Like the “Silver Hostel”, the “Lodge” was found to be structurally sound.

Several discussions finally resulted in an offer to purchase which was approved by the FRRS Board in October 2004. Doug Morgan and Hank Stiles traveled to San Antonio in early 2005 to make mechanical repairs to the car and prepare it for movement to Portola. During this trip, Mr. Morgan discovered several panes of dome glass at the Trans-Texas Railcar shop, where the “Lodge” was stored. A quick negotiation secured these panes for us and they were loaded into the car.

After several false starts and many phone calls by FRRS President Rod McClure, the “Lodge” finally left San Antonio on July 31 and made its way across New Mexico and Arizona. After stops in the LA area and Fresno, it was finally on the home stretch. It was switched out in Roseville at the same time the Union Pacific’s WP Heritage SD70MAC-2 was in town. The left on successive trains, the “Lodge” going first, and arrived in Portola on the same day. So far, the only transit damage seems to

have been the loss of one of the dome windows. Unfortunately, this was one of the expensive and rare teardrop windows. As we have already been exploring window replication on the “Silver Hostel”, we now have the engineering means to replace it, however we still needs enough funds to make the window order.

Cleaning efforts on the car will begin shortly, then it will be evaluated for the first steps in restoration. Since work is occurring on the “Hostel’s” dome area, current plans are to do the dome of the “Lodge” in tandem, since much work will be common to the two cars. The exterior of the “Lodge” also needs much paint stripping and reapplication of the CZ and car name. The computer files for this work have been completed and the lettering for both cars will be made once the cleaning and letterboard repairs are complete.

While these cars represent a major restoration challenge and expense, the CZ story is too important to the overall history of the Western Pacific to allow these cars to be lost. More and more former CZ cars are being rebuilt for excursion and charter service and, as a result, are losing their CZ history and character. As the “Lodge” retains most of its interior details, marred only by Amtrak’s application of faux wood paneling and its typical 1970’s carpet and fabric, this car is in a fine position for an accurate restoration. Paired with the “Hostel”, they will make an excellent display train behind restored CZ locomotive 805-A.

But to make this happen we need your help! Donations for the Zephyr Project are always welcome. They can be mailed to the museum at Zephyr Project, P O Box 608, Portola, California, 96122, or made on-line at www.WPLives.org or at www.ZephyrProject.com. There is also a CZ on-line store at the Zephyr Project website with proceeds to benefit the restorations.

Also, watch the Train Sheet and the upcoming 2006 Calendar for ZP work parties. While work on the “Hostel” has been slow this year, due to my commitment to complete several other projects at the museum, including the “Silver Debris” crew lounge and the Volunteer Deck, I hope to have those wrapped up before the end of the season. At that point, I will be devoting most of my attention to our Zephyr cars. If you have any questions or would like to help, please contact Eugene Vicknair at info@zephyrproject.com.

