

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