



Reno by Rail or Bust

by Alan DeMaison



My plan to attend the Expo in Reno was met with many challenges, least of which was my insistence on not flying. My traveling buddy, wife Elaine, was stuck at work and I was not about to drive the 2,200 miles from Cleveland to Reno by myself. I tried to recruit riders to share expenses, but no one was ready to commit. Greyhound or Amtrak remained my only options and after doing my homework, Amtrak was my choice. Round trip from Cleveland was only \$347, but I would have to rough it for that price. No sleeping car for this guy who had more important use for the money, maybe a nice flask or two. A little discomfort for a bottle, that was a no-brainer. Upon entering the train, I instinctively looked for the cord, made famous by countless comedians that brought many a train to an instant stop. I remember watching the comic genius of Lucille Ball on the *I Love Lucy*

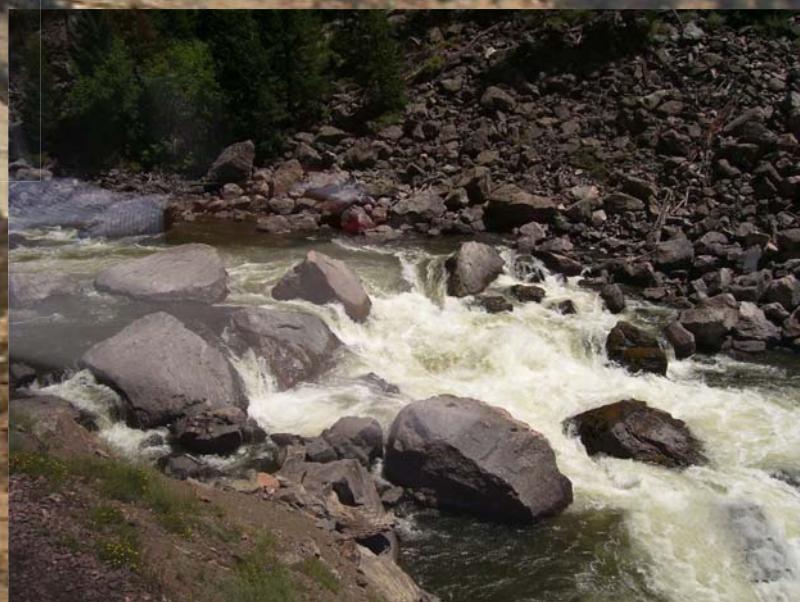
Rafters on the Colorado had a history of mooning the train and we were not disappointed.

Show pulling the cord. Sorry, no cord.

The trip from Cleveland to Chicago was nice. There was a lounge car with snacks and drinks. The side-to-side rocking of the moving train seemed almost hypnotic when you were in your seat, but moving around the train was another story. As you walked, the side-to-side rocking made it impossible to walk a straight line. I would need some practice to develop my "train legs."

Arriving at Union Station in Chicago, I switched trains to the California Zephyr. Upon entering the coach, the difference was instantly noticeable. Nice double decker cars with all passengers on the upper deck for great sightseeing. This coach had restrooms to accommodate actually getting cleaned up morning and evening. Everyone was instructed to take their seats while the conductor walked the aisle calling, "tickets." Within minutes of taking our tickets, it seemed like everyone was gone. Where did they go? I soon found out that the California Zephyr had an observation lounge with tables for games and conversation along with nice seats designed for optimum viewing. That car also contained the snack bar and it took no time to determine this was the place to be.

The scenery from Chicago to Denver consisted of fields of corn, soybeans, and more corn, soybeans



with an occasional town. It was between Chicago and Denver that I got my first experience at sleeping on the train. This will not go down as one of my more restful sleeps. Some passengers seemed to adapt to the conditions better than others and certainly better than me. Not only were the seats uncomfortable sleeping for these old bones (I am unable to sleep in a Lazy Boy, either), but also the coach seemed to get colder as the night progressed. I needed both a sweatshirt and a blanket to stay warm.



Leaving Denver, the train started climbing the Rockies. It was obvious that the boring scenery was about to change. Twenty-eight tunnels greeted us as we made our way through the mountains. Between Denver and Grand Junction, Colorado, we paralleled the mighty Colorado for 238 miles. Three hours west of Denver, we started through the Upper Gore Canyon. A sheer rock face greeted us within feet of the train with only sensor wires between the rocks and us. The sensor wires are needed to provide advanced warning of a rock slide. Lower Gore Canyon followed with many of the same spectacular sights. The landscape surrounding the tracks could have inspired many a postcard. The trip provided one awe-inspiring scene after another. Rafters on the Colorado had a history of mooning the train and we were not disappointed.

From Grand Junction through Salt Lake City was another challenging night with little sleep. This night I slept in the observation lounge where I found three adjacent seats that almost formed a bed. I just reminded myself that this was the price for a nice bottle and that seemed to ease the discomfort. The landscape east of Reno was out of a western movie,

with all the sagebrush and desert with the mountains in the background.

From Denver, my thoughts frequently reflected on the hardships the early settlers endured to settle this part of the country. It seemed appropriate to view the land the early settlers conquered to make possible the western bottles that many collect.

Arriving at Reno, my attention turned to bottles. After four days of Federation meetings, the awards banquet, early admission, the Shoot-out, and days of exploring tables along with a little gambling, I was ready and excited to board the train for home.

The train was on schedule as we arrived in Salt Lake City at 3 a.m. I actually got some sleep, two \$6 pillows from Walmart and three adjacent seats on the observation lounge certainly made life better. The trip from Grand Junction to Salt Lake City was at night on the trip to Reno, but the schedule indicated that most of the return trip should be during the morning. The on-time schedule didn't disappoint with the train winding through mountain canyons and across the barren plains. Every turn exposed another photo opportunity. Three and a half hours of amazing landscape for this tenderfoot from the Midwest. Be prepared with your camera, since you might only have seconds to get that perfect picture. About an hour north of Grand Junction, we began to parallel the Colorado. Eroded mountains exposed layers of multi-colored rock. Just beautiful! There are no roads here; Amtrak was the only way to see these scenes. Amazing!



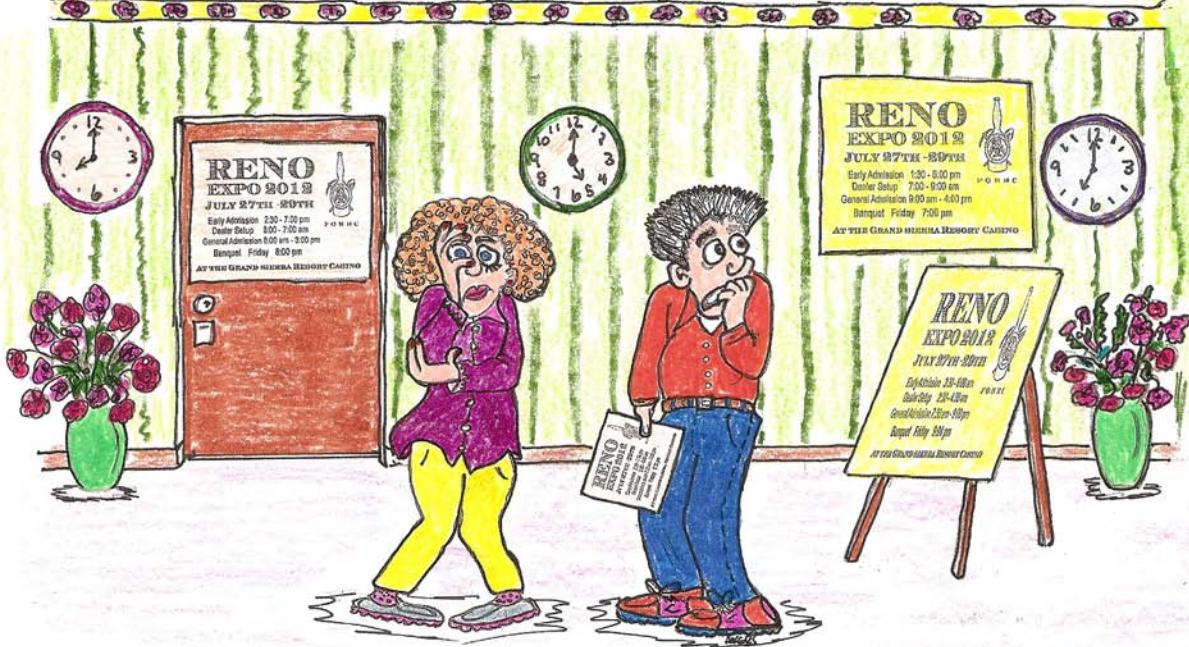
Four hours from Denver, we once again entered the lower Gore Canyon. This time the sensor wires brought the train to a stop. Was it a single rock or a major landslide closing the tracks? Slowly we forged ahead ever cautious of a rock slide. False alarm, I really didn't need that much excitement. The beauty of the train ride from Denver to Reno is one I will not soon forget.

The western FOHBC shows, Reno and Pomona, will for all time be special for me due partly by the magnificent scenery I encountered getting to those shows. Armed with my sweatshirt, blanket and the two Walmart pillows; I'd take the California Zephyr again.

P.S. I hear the trip west from Reno on the California Zephyr is great through the Sierra Nevada Mountains and Donner Pass.



[FOHBC] Well...we had some serious scheduling issues at the Reno Expo with a missing Events schedule in the program and conflicting event times on the web site and follow-up print-outs. We asked our Federation friend, John Akers to address this in a cartoon. Well done!



We're either early, late, on time or we've missed it altogether.

John Akers