

The BN Expediter

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The official publication of the *Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad*, the historical society focused on the Burlington Northern Railroad and the BNSF Railway

Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad

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A Not-For-Profit Corporation
Registered in the State of Idaho

The Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad (FOBNR) was formed to gather, preserve, and share information about the history, current operations, and future development of the Burlington Northern Railroad and its successors. It follows the evolution of the railroad from its inception in 1970 with the merger of the Great Northern; Northern Pacific; Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy; and the Spokane Portland and Seattle railroads, along with the 1980 acquisition of the Frisco. We are a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation.

The purpose of the FOBNR is educational. We wish to perpetuate the history of the Burlington Northern Railroad and its successors. We seek to collect and preserve any materials which help establish or illustrate the life, conditions, events, and activities of the railroad. We will disseminate this information through the publication of a newsletter, establishment of a Web site, by maintaining an archive, and by conducting an annual convention somewhere along the lines operated by the railroad. We may also publish information in other media and may restore and operate historical railway equipment.

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Regular membership is \$25.00/year; Sustaining membership is \$50.00/year; Junior membership (16 and under) is \$10.00/year. The Membership year is from January 1 to December 31. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the address above for more information.

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The BN Expediter

The BN Expediter is published four times a year and is included with membership in the *Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad*. Manuscripts, photographs and information are welcomed for publication. Materials are submitted with the understanding that no monetary compensation will be paid upon publication. Items will be returned only if requested. Otherwise they will go into the archives.

Anything published in *The BN Expediter* (including the classifieds), must be focused on the Burlington Northern Railroad, from the 1970 merger on. Information and/or pictures that give historical perspective or context are acceptable (e.g., pre-merger road numbers). The disposition of a locomotive, other piece of equipment or property is also acceptable. Further information is available from the Editor.

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Feature Articles Needed

The *BN Expediter* is currently looking for articles for future issues.

This issue of the *Expediter* is not a twenty page issue; you may have noticed that quite a few issues of late have been less than twenty pages. There is an old saying in publishing (especially in railfan and historical publishing) that goes, "I can't print something I don't have."

What the *Expediter* needs the most is for everyone to share their experience, their expertise with the rest of the FOBNR— all types of articles are needed covering all aspects of the Burlington Northern Railroad.

If you have any question, comments, suggestions, or need any ideas, you can contact me at the email address below.

-Editor

New Member

Thomas Jenner 11-120
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Front Cover

On July 13, 1995, westbound train No. 23 is at Shirley, MT. Shirley is on the former Third Subdivision between Forsyth and Glendive.

-Brian Ambrose photo

Corrections

On page 15 in the July issue there are two items that need to be corrected.

First, on trains 199 and 198 it should have been noted that NP buffet-parlor-lounge cars 492 and 493 were assigned to those two trains.

Second, on the caption for the Beverage List it should have been page 14 and page 15.

A special thanks to John Strauss for bringing those items to my attention.

-Editor

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President's Message



One of our most important goals as an organization is to increase our membership. We strive to do this for a number of reasons. With more members we will be able to better document the history of the Burlington Northern and BNSF Railway; be able to share more information, improve the quality and quantity of the *Expediter* and our Web site; and maybe even hold down the cost of membership. I feel one of my chief responsibilities as President of the organization is to encourage our membership to find new ways, and new energies to accomplish this goal.

This month brings two suggestions. The first suggestion is to be persistent. My example is a sixteen-year-old here in Lafayette who is actually trying to get me to start an N scale modeling club here in town. He is involved with CINtrak in Indianapolis and invited me to join him and his father for a work session down in Indy several weekends ago. Because of a prior commitment (moving my step-son out of his apartment so he can start school at the Commercial Diving Academy in Jacksonville, FL – but that's another story), I was unable to attend. Undeterred, he has now invited me to their next show in September. Maybe it is his youth, but I admire that he accepted my initial rejection and continued to offer the opportunity. All of us can take a lesson from this, as I'm sure we have all mentioned the FOBNR to somebody we thought might be interested and then accepted their initial refusal to join as the endpoint. Maybe we all need to follow-up and offer the opportunity again. We have a great organization, a constantly improving publication and a terrific Web site. By continuously offering membership opportunities we can encourage others to join.

Secondly, I have always thought we could use our common interests in modeling the BN and BNSF to strengthen our organization. This interest in modeling the BN was probably one of my initial reasons for joining the FOBNR. When the merger with ATSF occurred, I was particularly excited that things would be even better, as I knew the ATSF group had a very organized modeling group and thought we could join forces, but that really didn't come to pass. Recently we tried to encourage members to share their modeling efforts in the *Expediter*, but we have had little luck there.

I can certainly understand the hesitancy to share our modeling efforts. I know MY excuses – my

modeling skills are limited – I don't really model the BNSF exactly - my photography skills are limited – my computer skills are limited in sending Kris information – I fear criticism of my efforts, etc.

Well, by the next issue I personally promise you I am going to get past those obstacles and send Kris a history of my IMRL Railroad, a semi-fictional spinoff of the BNSF in central Illinois and Indiana. My bet is that even with my limitations Kris will make it a respectable article.

Then it will be your turn! I know lots of you are out there! Please try to follow my lead and share with us your modeling efforts – whether it is a GN-BN transitional layout, a specific BN or BNSF locomotive or rolling stock model or a diorama of some BN scene. If we can share these, even add links to personal model railroad websites to our club Web site, we can improve our organization and improve your enjoyment of membership.

My other hope would be that our modeling efforts could extend to become an addition to our annual convention. We have tried model contests, without many entrants, displays of BN/BNSF models, etc. in the past, but without a lot of success. If we have some idea of what people are doing, maybe we can really have some worthwhile way of exchanging modeling ideas at our annual meetings. Please consider this as well and send me your suggestions as to how we may be able to pull this off.

Now, to get downstairs, clean the scenery bottles off the layout, find the tripod and get to work. And plan for Amarillo next June!

-John Adams, M.D.

New 2012 Convention Date

The board decided to change the date of the FOBNR 2012 convention in Amarillo, TX to June 13-16, 2012.



THE YELLOWSTONE DIVISION STORY: FROM 1973 THROUGH 1980

A story of failures, transitions, and ultimately success...

My recollections as Superintendent of the Yellowstone Division between
June of 1973 through April of 1980.

by *Mike Martin*

MERGER

March 3, 1970 marked the beginning. The beginning of the Burlington Northern Railroad as a corporate entity to be sure, but also a beginning for the myriad organizational units and parts of a new railroad. From the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Burlington and its subsidiaries, and the Spokane, Portland, and Seattle came the fruition of a long-sought dream: merger into a single railroad from Chicago to Puget Sound, to Denver and south to Galveston. (As a historical footnote, the original proposed name for the new company was to be the Great Northern Pacific & Burlington, later shortened to "Burlington Northern.") Whether in the general office at St. Paul or sales office in Pittsburgh, the hump yard at Lincoln, or a section house at Yardley, things were about to change. Oh sure, not on day one; in fact most of us were a bit taken aback by how little actually did change on "day one," but there was soon a certain sense of things actually being different, perhaps at least incrementally, after that early cold beginning day in March, 1970.

One place where change was contemplated was on the former Northern Pacific's Yellowstone Division—but in a different way. On this particular division things were envisioned to change—only to the downside after merger. To amplify somewhat on this point, one needs to go back to the original merger planning efforts which preceded the actual merger date of 1970.

Merger planning prior to 1970 envisioned a so-called "preferred route" on parts of the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific between the Pacific Northwest and the gateways of the Twin Cities and also Chicago. The idea was simply that solid blocks of mainline trains could be grouped and run quickly and efficiently over the best grades and shortest combined routes of the NP and the GN. Under the merger, the so-called preferred route would be primarily over the GN between Seattle across the Cascades, the GN across the High Line of Montana down to Fargo, and the double-track mainline of the Northern Pacific between Fargo and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The double-track main line of the Burlington would of course continue as the route between the Twin Cities and Chicago gateway.

One operating division that would *not* see an increase in train-miles was the Yellowstone Division. While an important link between the Pacific Northwest and the Twin Cities on the old Northern Pacific, the new Yellowstone was simply not on any of the preferred new corridors for the new company. The old Yellowstone Division of the Northern Pacific ran from Mandan, ND on the east to Livingston, MT on the west, with a few branch lines in between. Its old role was of a mainline link between the more densely populated areas of the Northern

Pacific in the west and the eastern connections in Minnesota. The new Yellowstone was to be an expansive conglomeration of secondary mainline trackage extending from Jamestown, N.D. on the east, including various branch lines to the north, westward through Glendive and on to and including Laurel Yard on the west; and then also including the former Burlington southeast through Sheridan, Wyoming and on to Edgemont, South Dakota.

Coal Not A Factor

It's vitally important to pause here and reflect on the context of the times of the 1950s and 1960s while merger planning took place. Coal was *not* a factor *at that time* in the merger planning process. Mainline freight trains consisted of 40-foot freight cars being pulled by 3000 horsepower locomotives on mainline rail that weighed in the range of 112-pound to 115-pound, was bolted and jointed every thirty nine feet. In addition, there were passenger trains. At least on the NP with its substantial curvature in Montana and North Dakota, this required a considerable amount of super-elevation of curves in order that higher speeds could be maintained around those curves by both passenger and freight trains.

Train densities on both the GN main line and the NP mainline across Montana averaged about four freights west and four freights east, generally speaking. In addition there were, basically, two westbound passenger trains and two eastbound passenger trains a day on each road. That was it! That was the operating environment that existed generally on the mainlines of both the GN and the NP prior to 1970 at least in Montana and North Dakota. After merger on the new Yellowstone—now a secondary mainline across Montana and North Dakota—it was envisioned that there would be two passenger trains each way, daily. Freight service, however, would consist primarily of one expedited time freight each way, and one clean up freight to handle all mainline pickup work essentially between Fargo and Laurel, Montana. Road switch assignments would handle towns such as Bismarck or Dickinson.

Switch engines would be on duty at Mandan, Glendive, Sheridan and of course Laurel Yard. Grain season would alter some of this, but generally, this plan of two passenger trains and two freights a day, each way, was what the future seemed to predict. Essentially this same pattern, minus the passenger trains, was contemplated on the former Burlington line between Billings-Laurel, Gillette, Alliance, and on to Lincoln. It was to be light-density prairie railroading. With this in mind, the new Yellowstone was expected to be more or less a low-event, long mileage, operating division with relatively few trains operating on a daily basis—at least when compared with the new "preferred route" operating over the high line of Montana via Havre.

In 1970, the onset of low-sulfur coal was about to rock the world of the Yellowstone Division... and impact Burlington Northern for years to come.

Could or should the dramatic increase in train-miles have been foreseen? After considerable thought, my answer to the above question is emphatically that management could not have seen the low-sulfur coal growth coming prior to merger. I'll soon explain why. Instead, managing the individual properties as functioning main lines in an era of declining rail traffic and declining net income (thus the reason for the merger to begin with) was on the mind of top management. If indeed there was a strategic error in planning it was the continued extraction of dividends in the face of declining net income from the former Burlington, paid to both the GN and the NP, which should have been questioned. It is a fact that the sudden demand for low-sulfur coal essentially emanated from a single legislative edict: The Clean Air Act of 1970. The law was not an incremental development that stretched out over a decade or more. To be sure, the build-up of coal was indeed an incremental event, but the impetus for the monumental change, the act itself, came rather quickly by legislative fiat.

The Clean Air Act required the nation's coal fired electric utilities to clean up their emissions of sulfur and other oxidants either by retrofitting expensive scrubbers—or burning low-sulfur coal which happened to be just below ground level in Wyoming and Montana. The nation's coal burning utilities, first in the Midwest, then in the South and East opted to burn low-sulfur coal. In the course of a year, the world suddenly changed for Burlington Northern.

But not necessarily for the better, not necessarily at corporate headquarters in St. Paul, not necessarily for the better out in the field at places such as Alliance or Glendive.

This is the essence of the story that will now unfold: The near failure of the railroad to manage the tsunami-like growth of coal in the beginning, starting approximately in 1970 up through a decade later when track structure dramatically improved, as did motive power and most importantly, cycle times for coal trains. It was stressful at many levels within the company both at the executive level in St. Paul, but also out in the field on the operating divisions. (For an excellent read on stress at the corporate level see Lawrence Kaufman's *Leader's Count*, chapter 8, "A new golden age?" Not quite!) What you will read with this story is a first person account of how it was on one operating division out in the field.

Eastbound coal train east of Terry, MT on July 15, 1995. -Brian Ambrose photo



1973: Gross Ton Miles explode on the Yellowstone

My arrival at Glendive, Montana occurred on June 1, 1973. The growth from coal trains had already begun: Unit coal trains had increased between Coalstrip, Montana and Northern States Power in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The line from Nichols, MT near Forsyth had at one time served as a source for coal for Northern Pacific steam locomotives. Now the line was being revived to haul Montana coal to be burned for the production of electricity in Minnesota. On the same line, in 1973, coal loading operations began out of Peabody Coal's Big Sky Mine.

This coal moved from this source to an existing plant at Cohasset, Minnesota in northern Minnesota. To the west, a forty mile line extending south from the main line at Sarpy Junction wound its way up Sarpy Creek to Kuehn, Montana where a new mine, operating on a new right of way with a new loop track, with new coal car equipment and new locomotives began operations in the summer of 1974. Out of the new Decker Mine, north of Sheridan, Wyoming, train movements quadrupled within a year as Commonwealth Edison in Illinois geared up for a new source of its coal to be burned throughout the Chicagoland area. Finally, also out of Decker Mine six new trains were added to haul coal from the Sheridan area north to Billings, then east the entire length of the division back to North Dakota and ultimately to Superior, Wisconsin where the coal was transloaded to lake boats for movement to Detroit Edison. What's been described here is just what I recall happening between the summer of 1973 and the summer of 1974. The build-up had started soon after 1970 but was now fully under-way.

*Westbound coal train RC061 pulls into Forsyth in July 1995.
-Brian Ambrose photo*

1970 - 1975: Impact by the numbers

From 1970 to 1975, trains per day increased by a factor of five. The growth was entirely from coal. More importantly to the physical condition of the railroad, ton-miles shot up by a factor of ten. Instead of 40- or 50- ton boxcars, 100-ton coal hoppers now moved regularly across the entire division main lines between Gillette, Wyoming to Billings to Mandan, N.D. on the east. (As a side—note, in 1971 the Alliance Division which was undergoing even more explosive growth had its division limits changed to and including Gillette to bring it in line with the movements coming off the line running to Amex - later the Orin Line. In 1974, the Yellowstone Division limits to the east were moved from Jamestown to Bismarck.) Coal growth had forced the realignment of several division limits, system-wide, to reflect the changing train mile levels.

To be sure, things had changed for those divisions not on the original preferred route, where light density railroading was envisioned. Life had suddenly changed in Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota as mile-long coal trains moved continuously between high production strip coal mines and utilities to the east.

Devastation to the Track Structure

Ton-miles are the basic metric for railroad production. Remember the main characteristics of coal: Not only did the tons per car go from around 50 for a boxcar up to 100 for a coal car, but with the vast number of train movements added, the mileage factor greatly increased also. Gross ton-miles exploded.

Meanwhile, the track structure was simply inadequate.

Most of the main-line rail was jointed and weighed either 112- or 115-pounds, whereas 132-pound continuously welded rail was needed to adequately support the heavier movements.



Not only the heavier weights but the removal of rail joints was crucial to a better rail infrastructure.

On the Yellowstone Division, numerous curves had super-elevation of up to three to five inches in order to maintain higher passenger train speeds. With heavy coal movements lumbering around some of the curves at low speed, those elevations only increased as the coal loads pushed the elevation higher as they pounded down the low rail. Not only pounded the low rail downward—but flattened it to a corrugated surface.

Tie condition was inadequate for the increased ton miles. Joint tie condition (those ties directly under the joint bars) immediately deteriorated as did most of the ties which were expected to last longer under much lighter train mile conditions.

Ballast condition was simply not adequate for the new reality. It quickly broke down as to its fracturing quality, and drainage became a problem.

Of a more long-term nature, wooden pile bridges began to show increased wear.

All these factors, taken together, produced a railroad operation with numerous track-related derailments as surface conditions and rail componentry failed repeatedly. Track-related derailments were usually due to one of three conditions: (1) broken rail, (2) harmonic rocking as joint surface condition worsened, and (3) running rail due to inadequate rail anchorage. New 132-pound ribbon rail cured most of these problems, but of course was in short supply as the entire railroad struggled with the problems enumerated above.

Occurrences of derailments were often and they were severe. New coal cars were destroyed or damaged almost at the same rate as they were being brought on stream new.

The capital requirements were immense. In the early 1970s, there was a real question as to whether the nascent Burlington Northern could really accommodate the new coal growth in a manner that would satisfy the lenders or indeed the customers. I know from having lived through these early years on the division that most maintenance-of-way personnel along with the operating officers viewed the track deterioration as a personal failing. We were simply not maintaining the railroad the way we should and we were therefore inadequate. In time I have come to realize that the game was simply a function of capital expenditures for track structure: new rail, new ties, and ballast. As time went on and we did in fact get more capitalization for new and better track structure, the improvements were dramatic. Derailments were significantly reduced; slow orders were basically eliminated; and cycle times improved exponentially. At the time in the middle 1970s, myself, my own track officers and track employees were not able to grasp the positive impact capitalization

would have on our outlook. We often felt the sting of criticism and despair in the face of slow orders or derailments.

The Road to Redemption: Addressing the Issues; 1975-1980.

There were primarily four areas where a major transformation took place on the division between about 1975 and 1980. They were:

- (1) Track Structure
- (2) Crews
- (3) Motive Power
- (4) Dispatching

First, consider track. To tell the story about track structure improvement one has to tell the story of George Lamphier who sadly passed away in 2010. I think George Lamphier's title was something like Director of Rail or something close to that within corporate engineering in St. Paul. During the early 1970s as coal trains were tearing up the railroad with derailments, slow orders, etc. financial conditions for the railroad were also in trouble and top management was under terrific pressure I am sure to perform with better cash flow. (Once again I recommend Kaufman's *Leaders Count*.)

George Lamphier had a critical job: The carrier had limited funds particularly for expensive new rail which had to be allocated correctly. Top management counted on George, I am sure, and had full confidence in him to know and understand every milepost on the railroad—at least on the coal routes where the situation was deteriorating and desperate. But what about the field officers? Would he get the cooperation and respect—and input—from the field to help allocate ribbon-rail efficiently and effectively?

*The former Northern Pacific depot at Miles City, MT
-Brian Ambrose photo*



Remember this is perhaps a question long lost on the history of Burlington Northern that could have gone differently. Remember also that the divisions were not as fully integrated as was the general office insofar as former GN, NP, and Burlington officers were concerned.

Because of sheer numbers of officers, the operating divisions were not necessarily fully integrated operations and, yes, some old jealousies still existed. Could George Lamphier, a roadmaster on the former Northern Pacific get the respect of maintenance-of-way officers who were from the GN, the Burlington, the SP&S?

The answer to that question was an absolute "yes." The super-gandy, as he was affectionately called, did a magnificent job of gaining the respect and adoration of all who came in contact with him. He hi-railed the divisions constantly. While many in management in St. Paul truly saved the railroad by providing the financing for coal during Burlington Northern's infancy, I feel George Lamphier was the one who, through his wise and friendly demeanor with the operating divisions, saved the railroad in a physical sense by getting enough ribbon-rail to the field in the right places.

There were a lot of divisions desperately needing new rail. It could have been allocated wrongly or inefficiently or even withheld to some by malice. It wasn't; and the railroad survived. It survived in great debt to George Lamphier.

In my opinion, the distribution of welded 132-pound rail bought us the most time in the field in which to recover in the handling of coal traffic. It provided the most bang for the buck and solved most of the rail related problems that were producing slow orders and/or derailments. But along with the distribution of welded rail came more tie gangs. In some areas, particularly where ballast and tie condition were totally obsolete, sled gangs were employed which renewed ties and ballast at the same time. As new rail was placed down along with new ties and new ballast, surfacing conditions dramatically improved each year. It was exciting to contemplate next year's capital improvements to the division; to plan and then to implement improvements and finally to ride over a new and improved, freshly broomed and regulated section of track, where but a few years before you had picked up a major derailment caused by poor track conditions.

One interesting engineering project that was fairly unique to the Yellowstone Division involved the resetting of curve elevations to reflect the dominance that coal trains now had on division operations. Many of the more severe curves on the main line had super-elevation of several inches on the high rail to accommodate higher speeds for passenger trains. By April of 1971, Amtrak took over the nation's rail passenger business and with it went the elimination of the *Mainstreeter* on the Yellowstone. But there remained what was left of the former



Westbound passes under the Milwaukee Road east of Terry, MT. -Brian Ambrose photo

North Coast Limited - later to be called under Amtrak: The *North Coast Hiawatha*. As more curves on the division were relayed, retired, and resurfaced it became apparent that the new curves should be elevated to reflect the coal division that the Yellowstone had now become in the late 1970s—not the boxcar/passenger train division of yore.

But what to do about the one Amtrak train each way remaining? Designing the curve elevations to reflect loaded coal operations would necessarily mean lowering the speed of the one remaining passenger train—and would Amtrak stand for this? It posed an interesting political dilemma.

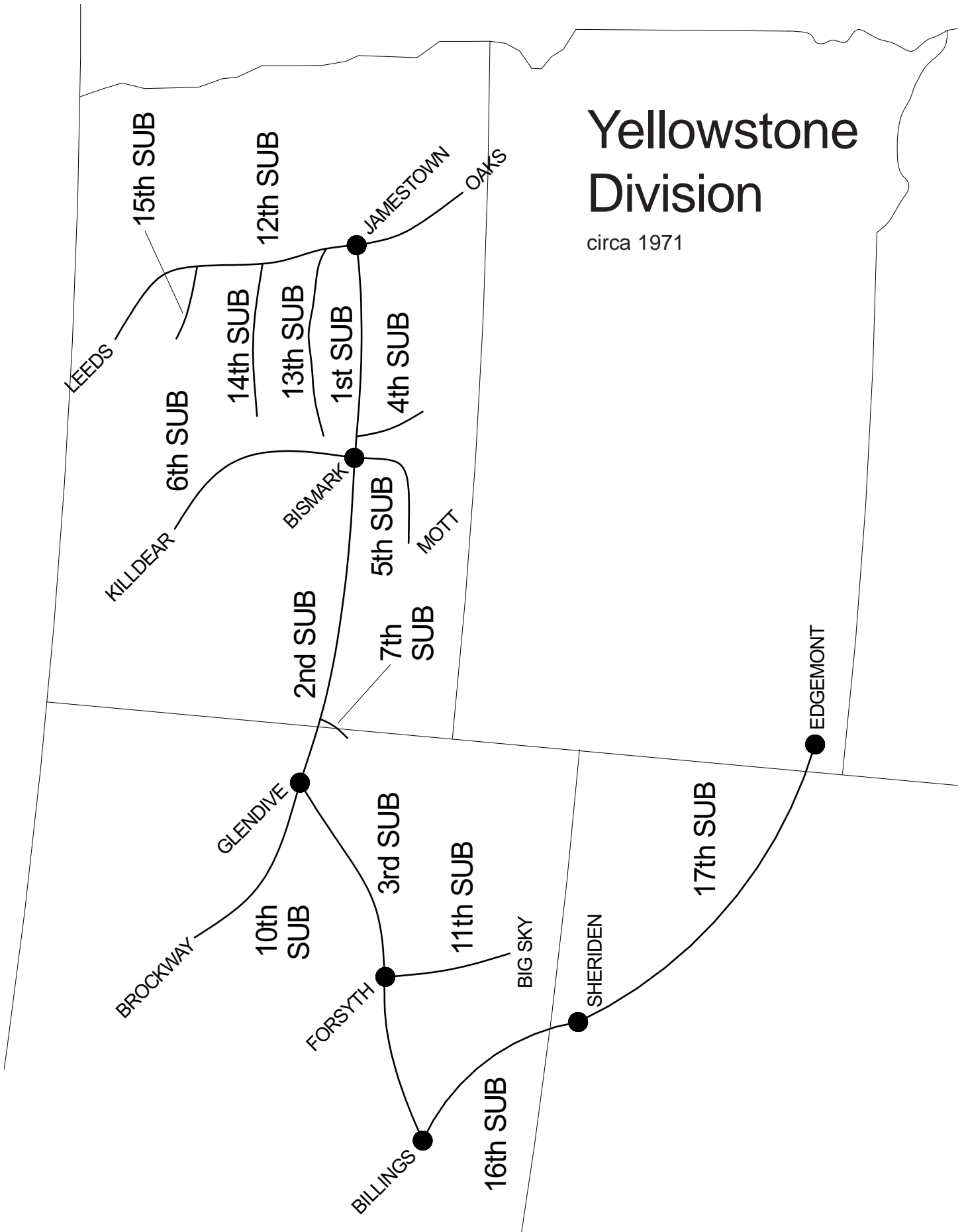
It was not a rational dilemma for obviously the curves should be lowered in elevation to reflect the slower speeds of the far more numerous and far heavier coal trains. The savings in rail wear were real as were the savings to tie and ballast condition. We just had to have the curves reset to reflect coal, not Amtrak.

We resolved the issue as follows: Working with regional engineering we figured out the new curve elevations—which were primarily between Mandan and New Salem, ND; much fewer along the Yellowstone River between Glendive and Billings. We found that by designing the new operating speed at 30 MPH for freight/40 MPH for passenger between Mandan and New Salem continuously for about ten miles, we would not slow Amtrak to such an extent that they might not object. The net loss in minutes amounted to around five as I recall.

There were a few extra minutes in the schedule anyway, and that could act as the absorbent for the somewhat slower speed for the passenger train. This way we could have our coal train railroad designed and elevated correctly and still keep Amtrak happy with the *North Coast Hiawatha*. All this became moot of course in early 1979 as the *North Coast Hiawatha* was discontinued. We were finally liberated from the political dimension to the problem of curve elevations. Things were

Yellowstone Division

circa 1971



starting to get better. The track structure from ballast to ties to rail was beginning to improve.

Employment Growth

Unfortunately, I do not recall ever seeing actual data changes in employment numbers between 1970 and 1980 on the Yellowstone Division. I do know the State of Montana kept some sort of metrics in this area, and perhaps it could be researched. My anecdotal recall is that for train and engine crews, employment probably quadrupled for the decade. For mechanical personnel located at Mandan, and Glendive, probably a tripling of personnel occurred. At Laurel was located a system car maintenance shop which also expanded but that was controlled and staffed by system mechanical management. At Glendive, the number of coal hauling diesel units escalated along with the new coal sets added to the coal fleet. At merger in 1970, my guess is that there were likely a handful of geeps assigned at Mandan and Glendive for locals and switch assignments. Ten years later Glendive would be the assignment headquarters for coal road power for the corridor.

Maintenance-of-Way employment also expanded, although it was primarily to seasonal programmed maintenance. Of course as rail relay gangs and tie gangs and sled gangs became commonplace on the division during the spring, summer, and fall seasons, the number of employees expanded as each of these gangs had between 50 and 100 employees at a time. Although these gangs spent most of their time

exclusively on the Yellowstone Division during the early years of rebuilding, they were in effect regional gangs and the numbers were not counted as part of the division's employment. Interestingly, it is my recollection that the normal section maintenance gangs did not expand significantly.

This I think was due to the fact that the miles of old bolted jointed rail was decreasing—which produced an ancillary beneficial effect on tie condition and surfacing hence less day to day track maintenance. The Bridge and Building work force also stayed about the same over the decade although on various specific bridge or culvert capital expenditure projects, force would be added for that particular capital project. On reflection, I think the fact that the Yellowstone Division was home to some of the largest former Northern Pacific steam engines several decades earlier had produced a bridge and culvert infrastructure that was actually in place and ready for the heavier coal traffic. A small victory of good fortune in a sea of crisis.

Nowhere was the impact of explosive train miles more evident than in the area of dispatching. Once again, it helps to go back to grasp the contextual environment of the division on "M" day. The Yellowstone Division, like other divisions on the former Northern Pacific, was almost exclusively train order dispatched with automatic block signals in the field. This system worked on the NP prior to merger and was certainly

The depot at Glendive, MT. -Brian Ambrose photo



expected to suffice after merger, given the expected four trains per day boxcar operations of a secondary mainline.

On the former Burlington territory, between Huntley, MT and Gillette, WY there was no signaling whatsoever because of the traditional light density of operations. This territory was also train order dispatched with open telegraph stations located about every 50 miles or halfway between terminals. In truth, it was the right configuration for the times and the right configuration visualized after merger.

Train dispatching districts within the Glendive dispatching office were roughly 200 miles of main line track plus branch lines. (Mandan to Glendive; Glendive to Laurel; Gillette to Huntley with Centralized Traffic Control on to Livingston.)

Coal operations changed all that as the 1970s unfolded. While CTC was contemplated eventually, in the short term the right configuration was to reduce some of the districts in size and span of operations—plus add shifts of train order operators at key stations along the line. Many intermediate stations became around the clock operator points where once they were but day agency stations with little to do. Adding train order operators made sense. While it was more labor intensive in the short run, CTC over much of the division as a capital expenditure simply could not have been realized quickly and probably was not justified in terms of a rate of return on very scarce capital dollars.

Adding train order operators and shortening dispatcher's districts proved effective. New recruits were young and received their baptism rather harshly. Remember, we not only had young inexperienced operators out in the field—but perhaps more worrisome, we had young inexperienced dispatchers putting out train orders to young inexperienced operators with train orders which were then to be executed by young inexperienced train service employees.

As I look back on the growth during the decade of the 1970s, I am struck by the relative success in which raw recruits were absorbed into the railroad milieu. Not only on the Yellowstone

Division, but to an even greater degree on other divisions, line operating officers from trainmasters to road foremen of engines to agents to roadmasters, pulled this task off and kept the railroad running. As division superintendent, it just seemed to happen - which means a lot of other people were making it happen at every point on the division. In addition, I will state the system Engineer's Training Program was an absolute success in producing trained personnel on a timely basis. The design and implementation of this program amazes me even to this day in the job they did for Burlington Northern.

While the sheer numbers are a tribute to the work put in by many, suffice it to say, there were some significant problems which developed as the work force changed from "old heads" to young highly paid employees with time on their hands. Either you were in an age cohort group in your fifties or sixties; or you were in an age cohort group in your late teens or early twenties. There was just not much in between. I will say unequivocally that drugs were a problem though we did not know the extent of the problem mainly because it was not that visible. Under the "old" culture of railroading, alcohol was the issue within the ranks. Under the new culture, recreational drugs could be consumed to varying degrees with little or no outward effect. The problem was to persist throughout the 1970s and on into the 1980s on the nation's railroads until random drug testing was introduced and backed up by Federal law.

Train number 19 at Rosebud, MT. -Brian Ambrose photo.



THINGS GET BETTER: 1976-1980

Capital improvements to the division (and on other coal divisions) continued unabated throughout the middle 1970s. Burlington Northern's two coal originating divisions as well as other operating divisions on the main coal corridors were making striking comebacks. In the late-1970s as the physical plant got better, coal cycle times improved dramatically. Track slow orders were reduced to where large chunks of main line now operated with no slow orders as an expectation rather than as an exception. In addition, the opening of the Orin Line provided a huge improvement to efficiency. New motive power was brought on line particularly with the new SD40-2. While viewed today as an anachronism, these units were dependable and would stand up and pull in the depths of a Montana blizzard.

New loop tracks at mines were being built—further improving cycle times. It was exciting to witness what truly was a comeback from the abyss—not only at the corporate level but out in the field. Planning shifted to more forward-thinking projects: a new yard at Mandan designed to handle 500-mile inspections of coal sets more efficiently; new main line fueling facilities at both Mandan and Glendive; a new connecting track at Huntley where, now that a new run-through agreement had been negotiated, trains ran nonstop on or off the former Burlington line over on to the former NP line. Planning began—and grading was started—for strategic siding extensions where before old sidings simply could not accommodate the long coal trains with five units on the point.

The tide of battle had turned by the end of the decade. Improved capitalization at all levels produced improved cycle times, more efficient use of crews, fewer catastrophic derail-

ments - all with great positive impact on the bottom line for the company. Burlington Northern was heralded as the "merger that worked." Indeed it had, but remember, the battle had been fought on cold winter nights by many men and women, now gone; a battle whose outcome was not at all assured soon after merger.

I GUESS WE DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER...

Although there were indeed difficult times on the division, these experiences like so many in railroading, were marked with episodes of humor and worthwhile human endeavor. They bear worth telling.

One such story involves the legendary Joe Stiffarm whom I became friends with one late fall afternoon at Yates, Montana. This true story takes place in the year 1979, during the time when the division and the company as a whole were clearly on the road to recovery. Many of the improvements mentioned earlier were in place and operations and corporate earnings were improving noticeably. As part of the capital improvement program for 1979, certain key sidings were to be upgraded with new rail and more importantly extended in length to accommodate the longer coal trains. One such siding was at Yates, Montana located right on the state line between Montana and North Dakota, located maybe 25 miles east of Glendive. Earlier in the fall, grading had been completed and culverts placed for the new siding extension perhaps a distance of about a quarter to a third of a mile. The job to be done with cold weather just ahead was to construct the new siding—and to do it in a hurry. My boss at the Billings Region had just the answer!

Bring in Joe Stiffarm's tie gang from off the division. Joe Stiffarm's gang of about 150 Blackfeet Indians was out of

The depot in Billings, MT. -Brian Ambrose photo



Browning, Montana. Nobody quite knew how Joe got such high production out of his group, but these guys could clearly get impressive footage of new track laid per day. Well, on they came, to Yates, Montana with a special train of gang outfit cars (bunk cars, kitchen cars, etc.) and equipment given damn near passenger train preference from northwest Montana 800 miles east to Glendive and Yates. It was going to be quite a week. I had been warned that in exchange for high production on the gang, I might have to worry about certain alcohol-related conduct at night both in and around the outfit cars located at nearby Beach, North Dakota. This zone of danger even included the innocent citizenry of Beach. You see, nobody quite questioned Joe Stiffarm or his gang off duty in exchange for high production. It was sort of the railroad's version of hear no evil, see no evil. If various lacerations, multiple contusions and assorted bruises occurred somewhere in the vicinity of the outfit cars, it was up to Joe to handle—which he did most effectively and without the division superintendent's knowledge nor interference. This was the Faustian bargain that was in place.

As I recall some thirty years later, Joe's gang arrived and began work late in the week at Yates. The weather was mercifully warm and he got off to a good start on building new siding track. That Saturday afternoon in Glendive, I decided to ride my motorcycle east on Interstate 94 over to Yates and see how things were going. Production for the day had ended and the gang was finished and back in the outfit cars in Beach. I rode out to Yates and simply ran my motorcycle up on the new grade at Yates and headed back toward where the new track construction was beginning to commence. The sun was now setting in the west and it was really a beautiful western scene that often takes place in the late fall before winter sets in. Lo and behold, I ride up to the roadmaster for the district, Frank Kincaid, and the legendary Joe Stiffarm, whom I have never met nor has he met me. Kincaid introduces me to Joe who of course is somewhat surprised at the introduction to a 39-year-old superintendent dressed in jeans and workboots riding a hot new motorcycle. Joe likes it. We hit it off. I can see that the legendary Stiffarm is making progress on the new siding construction. After about five minutes of pleasantries between Frank Kincaid, Joe Stiffarm, and myself; Joe says, "Mr. Martin, would it be ok if I took your motorcycle for a spin down the new grade and back?" I was at first taken aback, but Joe seemed like a good guy, so I said, "Sure!" My assumption was that Joe would run down the siding and back over what was a quarter mile of smoothed dirt grade.

Joe gets on the motorcycle. The starter turns over and the engine fires up. Joe loves the sound of rising RPMs. I somehow sense loss of control. Joe Stiffarm wheels the bike around and ... the next scene is one that sticks in my mind from that warm day of long ago. My motorcycle is heading west into the sunset with dirt nicely billowing up, silhouetted against the reddening sun, with a crazy madman on MY motorcycle, running somewhere between 80 and 100.

My next thought was where I might find my motorcycle. No, my next thought was what day I might find my motorcycle. Would it be 800 miles to the west in Browning? Would it be found, crashed and destroyed, somewhere nearby with Joe injured or dead? Time ticks by as Frank Kincaid and I stand there wondering how this little scene is going to end. The

possibilities are endless. We walk around the area, each not mentioning if I'd been had. About ten minutes goes by, and—could it be—Joe returns in good shape with the bike. The three of us laugh about it. Yeah, Joe knew he'd just freaked out the superintendent and laughed. I told him I was wondering if I should start heading for Browning. Our first business meeting on the construction site was a great success. We talked more about where his tie gang had worked over the summer and so forth. It was getting dark now. Frank got in his pickup. Joe got in his, and off we went to Wibaux for a bourbon and ditch as they say in Montana with a steak to follow.

My second story takes place in Sheridan, Wyoming. As some people might remember, John Davies was the vice-president, Billings Region during the decade on the 70's. To put it mildly, John Davies was not exactly an urbane smooth-talking executive given to coaching younger managers. Or coaching anyone for that matter. One day on an inspection trip over that part of the division, we found ourselves in the depot offices at Sheridan. Unbeknownst to me, Davies was talking to one of the train order operators who either had written a letter or had verbally complained to Davies that one particular dispatcher in Glendive was verbally abusive and swore repeatedly at this person over the phone lines. With Davies prying away, the incident quickly became an issue that would need to be addressed which I intended to do after getting some facts straight later. After the initial questioning of the complaining train-order operator in Sheridan, Davies turned to me and prepared to deliver a rather loud lecture for all to hear to a young superintendent about repeated swearing when dealing with employees. This was going to be a stern lecture by the old man about why this was not a good way to do business on the railroad.

Now it is here that I must pause and tell the reader the defining attribute of John Davies: Poor man, he was incapable of completing a sentence even in normal conversation or otherwise, without swearing. He starts out, "Mike, you gotta understand, this Goddamn, I mean, uh, this behavior is not to be tolerated." The first sonofa... and there was another long drawn out pause, and I'm about laughing out loud this time. On the third try out of the gate, he fails again and starts stuttering with another incomplete sentence, stopped at the point where he normally would insert a swearword. I think the brief conversation ended by him saying something to the effect: "...the hell with it, you handle the sonofabitch." This is but one of the many many experiences that came my way while on the division. Come to think of it, the various events could simply be a stand alone collection of stories. of their own.

As I reflect back now thirty years later, I see to what degree the railroad has improved because of huge improvements to the physical plant and the rolling stock. I see now that the service problems of old were not caused by an inept or lazy field management as I was sometimes led to believe. The railroad was simply undercapitalized at the time and that was the determinator, not lack of division management attention. At the time, not knowing of the capital improvements ahead along with huge gains in technology, there was a tendency to see the world more a jeremiad of despair, personalized to the individual yardmaster, roadmaster, or dispatcher and even on up to the division superintendent. It was a tough time but with today's perspective; it seems ok. The natural order of things human.

Convention Report for 2011

by John Adams, M.D.

Sitting in the Denver Airport, I am just wishing I had the time to continue the activities of the 2011 FOBNR Convention in Gillette. Once again it was a wonderful experience with many thanks due to Kent Charles for overall organization, John Parker for help with the Black Thunder Mine tour and Dave Poplawski for registration.

We started with registration on Wednesday afternoon, followed by dinner at the local Applebee's. We then returned to the hotel for an orientation session for the activities of the next three days. We then were able to view slides of the historical days of the BN as well as modern BNSF pictures. Needless to say, we have some excellent photographers in the group!

On Thursday morning we started off in the rain, and then fog, to Hill City, SD, for the 1880s train ride on the abandoned branch from Hill City to Keystone. Fortunately we had the option of an inside ride because it was surprisingly cool outside. The ride went well and was followed by a tour of the South Dakota State Railroad Museum in Hill City. Our host, Rick Mills, gave us an excellent history of the line, as well as showing us pictures of the CB&Q and BN eras. It was fascinating to think SD9s had made it around those curves! The trip up and back gave us an opportunity to railfan the line to Edgemont, but was cut short by weather as well as maintenance-of-way operations on the line, although those also were interesting and photogenic. On our return Thursday evening we were again able to watch some excellent slides and prepare for our mine tours on Friday.

Friday morning found us on the road again to the Black Thunder Mine, where we were able to see their introductory video, as well as tour several parts of the mine itself. An unusually wet May-June did prevent us from getting into several areas, but still gave us a good look at the largest mine in North America. We were even able to see how quickly problems can be fixed as part of the loader broke loose; tearing up one hopper car, but within a very short time loading was back in action. After a run back along the Orin Subdivision we returned to Gillette, grabbed some lunch and headed for a tour of the Eagle Butte Mine on the Campbell Subdivision. Eagle Butte was smaller, but equally interesting as they were opening a newer pit and were able to show us a small blast to break up overburden. By the end of the afternoon we all had a real appreciation of the scope of activities in the mines as well as their outstanding safety record. The safety theme continued as we returned to the convention hotel to listen to a discussion of the Operation

Lifesaver and Citizens for Rail Security by Jim Schafer, the senior special agent for the BNSF in Gillette. He was able to tell us about Operation Lifesaver activities and how we can keep ourselves safe both as railfans and motorists around the railroad. To safeguard others he encouraged us to join the Citizens for Rail Security with BNSF, where we receive a number to call if we see potential dangerous situations developing on the railroad. His talk once again impressed on us that the railroad is happy to have us around if we share the goals of safety with rail management and labor.

Friday evening followed with dinner followed by a membership meeting and a Board meeting. The membership meeting once again gave convention attendees the ability to directly give their input to the Board of Directors. During this meeting we discussed the Web site, with suggestions to try to add an up-to-date BNSF locomotive roster, as well as indexing a posting the Jack Keers slides we have received and including them, possibly in a members-only section. We also discussed the option of having social media sites for the organization, without a ground swell of encouragement. A discussion of possible future convention sites and formats followed, including the idea of a moving convention where we would actually meet in several sites. There seemed to be support for the Amarillo, TX site for 2012, and a feeling by the membership that they wanted to stay in a historical BN site. All felt that the tours in Gillette had been excellent and that they were a big draw for the convention. There was also a discussion that a reception for local retirees at each convention site might increase attendance. In discussing the *Expediter*, several members felt an electronic version would be worthwhile, and maybe even become the only version. Several members also asked for a new CD with more recent back issues, and this was agreed upon at the Board Meeting which followed.

Saturday started early for a number of members, eager to do some train watching without maintenance-of-way work windows. The day was beautiful and sunny, so a lot of electrons were used to capture digital images of the many trains to be found. At 10:30 we met again to tour Donkey Creek Yard. BNSF's Marketing Director for Coal Will Cunningham, was our guide and host and provided access to the new yard, created several years ago to inspect incoming empty coal trains. At the yard office we met two very knowledgeable, and very young trainmasters, who were able to give us an insider's view of what happened in the facility. It was extremely interesting to hear their thoughts, particularly

since one had come from a management training program from college and the other had worked up from conductor and engineer. Although both agreed totally with the purpose of the facility, they each had their own unique perspective of how that could best be accomplished. It was quite interesting to learn the time pressures and amount of work that has to be done, as well as being able to see a somewhat unique, and very easily modeled, diesel fueling facility. We were also able to see how the yard is supporting the traffic detours forced by the Missouri River flooding, adapting the lengths of the coal sets to their new routes. After the tour it was back out trackside, with people scattering to get their best shots.

That evening the convention ended with our annual banquet at the hotel, followed by a more formal presentation by Mr. Cunningham. He was able to provide us a PowerPoint presentation about the history of the coal fields and how they came to be located in Wyoming, despite the even more abundant reserves in Montana. He also showed how coal is feeding our nation's insatiable appetite for more and more electricity, and yet has become markedly cleaner as the years go on. He also talked about the future of coal, both domestically and internationally as the export market expands with the hopes of delivering clean coal to foreign markets that would otherwise be forced to use more polluting resources. He presented some of the challenges that coal faces from regulatory agencies and governmental policies, as well as the opportunities. He also talked about the immediate challenges faced by the spring floods this year, and how the railroad has to adapt to almost daily routing changes.

And with that we ended the 2011 Convention. Once again we want to thank Kent, John and Dave for their efforts to make this another excellent convention. We also want to thank all of the convention attendees for their input, both during the convention activities and at the Membership Meeting. Most of all, we want to invite all of you to next year's convention in Amarillo, TX. We hope to have a new digital photography activity, where each person can share some of their favorite memories of the BN and BNSF, and many other activities and tours. Please watch for more information in the January issue of the *Expediter*.

Our FOBNR 2010 group photo. -Dave Poplawski



Glendive, Montana, Motive Power Assignments

January 22, 1997

Type: Road Number(s)

SW12: 224, 225

SW15: 301, 305

GP15-1: 1375, 1381, 1385, 1390, 1396, 1397, 1398

GP28P: 1598

GP9: 1910

SD60M: 1991 (Desert Storm Commemorative Unit)

GP38X: 2156, 2157, 2182, 2183, 2184, 2185

GP38-2: 2281, 2284, 2341, 2343, 2345, 2347

SD40-2: 6773, 6787, 6791, 6793, 6796, 6851, 7004, 7021, 7022, 7023, 7024, 7025, 7035, 7061, 7062, 7067, 7073, 7081, 7084, 7092, 7093, 7097, 7116, 7187, 7197, 7201, 7202, 7203, 7204, 7206, 7207, 7215, 7216, 7218, 7220, 7222, 7225, 7226, 7227, 7235, 7239, 7242, 7248, 7260, 7262, 7264, 7265, 7272, 7275, 7278, 7279, 7281, 7282, 7283, 7287, 7288, 7289, 7815, 7819, 7826, 7832, 7833, 7843, 7855, 7860, 7885, 7887, 7888, 7894, 7895, 7898, 7900, 7903, 7906, 7909, 7914, 7925, 7932, 8019, 8022, 8030, 8033, 8049, 8078, 8090, 8122, 8126, 8138, 8170, 8173

DF402: 7149, 7890 (Natural Gas Power Test Units)

SD60M: 9200-9254, 9256-9296, 9298, BNSF 9297 (BNSF Experimental Paint Scheme)

GP38E: EMD 748, 758, 783, 797, 808

SD42E: EMD 6040-6049, 6300-6307, 6309-6314, 6345-6348, 6381, 6382

BN's two natural gas power test units, designated DF402, had long completed their testing. BNSF sent the units to Topeka, Kansas, and converted them into normal units. Their two service tank cars have been stored at Staples, Minnesota, for almost twenty years.

Courtesy Russ Strodztz

The 7815 is about to take a spin on the turntable at Glendive, MT. -Brian Ambrose photo

