

Off to never never land

The main trip for this year was to Canada, this was decided when Via announced it was cutting some services for the winter of 2012/2013, as predicted with the exception of the Canadian those cuts have not been reversed now the summer is here.

My aim for the trip was to complete the Via network, requiring Prince Rupert – Jasper, Sudbury – White River, and London – Sarnia. This left time for other things so I intended to cover West Coast Express, Go Transit as time allows and also go see a couple of Avro Lancaster bombers that I haven't previously.

Day 1

Set off to Manchester for my flight[s] the next day, I am flying Manchester – London – Vancouver as it was about £150 cheaper than from London. I know with "market forces" there are so many cheap seats to/from origin/destination but the sanity of Air Canada paying BA to fly me to London when I could simply have gone to London escapes me.

Day 2

I have a BA A321 to Heathrow for an Air Canada Boeing 777 forward. I thought service on Air Canada was better than I have experienced on other airlines in recent years, the cabin crew seemed to genuinely want to help/please passengers rather than the "do what I have to" attitude of those other carriers. It all rather fell apart at Vancouver when baggage was delayed by 20 -30 mins.

Manchester Pic	323232	05.35 Manchester – Crewe
Manchester Airport	G-EUXC	07.20 Manchester-London BA1385
London Heathrow	C-FIVM	10.25 London-Vancouver AC855
Vancouver		

Once through airport/immigration formalities I took the airtrain downtown and headed to my hotel a 15 min walk from the Waterfront station. After checking in I go to the Via station to pick up my railpass tickets a process that was much more efficient than Amtrak. I am informed that I have 1 ride left on the pass as the Skeena is only counted as 1 segment despite Via's UK agent telling me otherwise. Next I return to Waterfront station to cover the afternoon trains on West Coast Express. I had previously cleared WCX but they then bought a spare loco a MP36 which is out so I again clear WCX.

I do 906 to Port Moody for a connecting bus to a nearby airtrain station to return to downtown.

Vancouver Waterfront	WCX906	17.30 Vancouver – Mission
Port Moody		

Day 3

Back to Vancouver airport for a flight in a noisy vibrating DHC dash 8 [new builder]. I take the morning flight so I have time to look round Prince Rupert. It is early in the tourist season so not much is open however while walking round I get some of the best views of bald eagles I have ever had.

Vancouver	C-GABP	08.00 Vancouver – Prince Rupert	AC8278
Prince Rupert			

Day 4

First of several days on a train on this trip, it starts wet but improves as the day goes on. Scenery is as expected rivers, lakes, mountains, trees ect but also the unexpected with farmland later in the

journey, wildlife included bear, deer, moose, and again the unexpected pelicans !

Prince Rupert Via 6415 08.00 Prince Rupert – Jasper 6
Prince George

At the hotel in Prince George that night I find another unexpected a mild and not a bad one either, from Prince George's North West Brewery Canterbury Dark Mild.

Day 5

Second day on the train, both weather and scenery improve as the journey progress finishing in the stunning setting of Jasper, however the town is something of a tourist trap charging over the odds for most things I see, my 2 star hotel is charging 3 star prices for no better reasons than they can, every other hotel is marking up, and where else can you go. Walking back from the brew pub after eating there were elk grazing in the middle of town !

Prince George Via 6415 08.00 Prince Rupert – Jasper 6
Jasper

Day 6

The Skeena misses the Canadian at Jasper by about 4 hours next train 4 days, so I take Greyhound to Edmonton where I pick up a rental car for 4 days. I would have picked up the car in Jasper but the rental company's want \$300 extra for a one way rental, the Greyhound fare is \$60. I will not bore you with a rant about Greyhound but I will tell you I would pay more than \$60 to not use Greyhound another time but not \$300.

Over the next 4 days I visit a selection of museums to see some vintage aircraft mosquito, seafire, hurricane, sea fury, bolingbroke but the highlight is seeing 2 more Avro Lancaster's, I also manage to photo a couple of freights and sample a few beers.

Driving south from Calgary to Nanton to see one of the Lancaster's I experience one of those sublime moments which ingrain upon the mind. I am on an empty highway, the sun is shining in a clear blue sky just like everyone's childhood memory's, the snow topped Rocky Mountains are visible to the west. I have the local rock station on the radio Metalica's "Enter Sandman" has just finished next on is Led Zepplin's masterpiece "Stairway to Heaven" matching music to mood and emotion both tranquil and inspirational, might not be your cup of tea but for me it dose not get any better than that.

Day 9

I catch the Canadian at Edmonton just before midnight for the 2 day journey to Sudbury Jun with 2 more dud F40's.

Edmonton Via 6426 + 6410 20.30 Vancouver – Toronto
Sudbury Jun

Day 10 +11

Two more days spent on a train crossing the prairies and the Canadian Shield [the 1000 miles of lakes, rivers, trees and swamp that separate eastern and western Canada] 1 day of prairies is enough but I do enjoy being able too see a country as I travel across it.

Even though it is low season the Canadian is load 18, 13 of which are for the "premium fare" passengers, if this train dosen't make money something is very wrong.

Arrival at Sudbury Jun is just after 01.00 in the morning [day 12] and on time, a taxi into town costs \$30 but gives a same day connection to the White River RDC's.

Day 12

Today I'm doing the Sudbury – White River remote service, it depart's about an hour late waiting for CP freights to clear the line before the RDC's can get off shed and into the station to load up. At the first passing loop 2 railfans are allowed off to photo the passing freight so I join them, I get talking to the engineer [driver] as he dose the roll by inspection and then end up spending much of the journey up front talking trains to him. Far from officialdom this train operates in it's own never never land to a loose schedule so long as it get's there dose it matter when. The crew are people who are happy with where they are and so long as it isn't dangerous or stupid then getting out and photing a passing train is ok. These are the gems of travel that are a sheer joy to blunder into. It is another scenic journey in 50 plus year old railcars that are smooth, with little vibration and superior to most if not all that have been inflicted on UK rail passengers in the last 30 years. As I suspected there is not much at White River but somewhere to wash, eat, and sleep is all that is needed.

Sudbury Via 6148 + 6215 09.00 Sudbury – White River 185
White River

Day 13

The return journey is much the same as outward, a late start, operation in a world of it's own, passing loop photo stops, travel without rigid rules or the high profile security of big city stations, another delight of travel. Arrival back in Sudbury is about 2 hours late but still gives plenty of time for a meal before a bus to Capreol for 2 more dud F40's on the Canadian to Toronto.

White River Via 6215 + 6148 09.00 White River – Sudbury 186

Day 14

Capreol	Via 6428 + 6443	20.30 Vancouver – Toronto	2
Toronto	Go 618	09.41 Oshawa – Aldershot	911
Oakville	Go 601	11.04 Aldershot – Oshawa	914
Toronto	Go 627	11.41 Oshawa – Aldershot	915
Clarkson	Go 613	13.04 Aldershot – Oshawa	918
Toronto	Go 623	16.13 Toronto – Oshawa	922
Danforth	Go 613	15.41 Oshawa – Aldershot	923
Toronto	Via 6419	17.40 Toronto – Sarnia	87

Sarnia

On arrival in Toronto I organise a trip to Ottawa to use up the railpass and pick up some Go tt's, next a day pass for Go then cover the lake shore service but only get 2 new, Via yet again give me a dud F40 six had six dud.

Day 15

A disappointing day while it was always going to be the same loco back from Sarnia, Go has either repeats or duds. I console myself with lunch at the excellent C'est What then head to Aldershot where I have a motel about 10 mins from the station. Later I manage a few photo's while looking for options for food.

Sarnia	Via 6419	06.11 Sarnia – Toronto	84
Toronto	Go 613	12.41 Oshawa – Aldershot	917

Day 16

Today I cover Go's lake shore service getting 6 winners, in the evening I go to Toronto's airport and pick up a rental car for the last 3 days of the trip.

Aldershot	Go 638	06.03	Aldershot – Toronto	904
Burlington	Go 644	06.12	Hamilton – Toronto	490
Oakville	Go 603	07.25	Oakville - Oshawa	906
Mimico	Go 601	07.50	Toronto – Aldershot	477
Port Credit	Go 560 + 561	08.13	Toronto – Aldershot	705
Clarkson	Go 646	08.38	Aldershot – Toronto	476
Toronto	Go 600	11.43	Toronto – Aldershot	913
Exhibition	Go 643	11.04	Aldershot – Oshawa	914
Danforth	Go 601	11.38	Oshawa – Aldershot	915
Toronto	Go 605	14.43	Toronto – Oshawa	720
Danforth	Go 603	14.28	Oshawa – Aldershot	921
Toronto	Go 649	17.15	Toronto – Aldershot	483
Oakville	Go 631	17.34	Toronto – Hamilton	495
Burlington	Go 605	18.34	Aldershot – Toronto	486

Day 17

As I have the car I decide to cover the 2 lines I require Milton and Lincolnville [Stouffville] so I drive to Milton do trains in, bus back, drive to Lincolnville bus in trains back then drive to a motel at Whitby ready for my trip to Ottawa. The Milton move is a great success as I view the train and know I have 5 winners out of 8, the Lincolnville is not so successful as I only get 1 winner however I do get a few decent beers at a well placed LCBO by Markham station.

Milton	Go 602	06.23	Milton – Toronto	150
Lisgar	Go 653	06.43	Milton – Toronto	152
Streetsville	Go 656	07.03	Milton – Toronto	154
Cooksville	Go 621	07.38	Milton – Toronto	160
Kipling	Go 635	07.53	Milton – Toronto	162
Toronto	Bus			
Milton				
Lincolnville	Bus			
Toronto	Go 634	18.00	Toronto – Lincolnville	868
Agincourt	Go 646	18.30	Toronto – Lincolnville	870
Markham	Go 618	19.00	Toronto – Lincolnville	872
Lincolnville				

Day 18

Today I am using up my last ride on the railpass with a day trip to Ottawa [I pay for the return] I do one of the trains that split so I get 2 locos yet more F40's but at least or finally a winner. I have a couple of hours touring round Ottawa then return for the 12.50 Montreal – Toronto [via Ottawa] where it all falls apart ! From what I overheard or was told someone was hit and killed by a train at Smiths Falls, Via only make vague announcements saying there are delays there customer care is crap and the lack of information only frustrates people. I depart Ottawa 5 and a half hours late getting back to the motel at 1 am, I abandon any thoughts of doing a morning rush hour.

Oshawa	Via 6435	06.40	Toronto – Montreal	52
Brockville	Via 6409	06.40	Toronto – Ottawa	50
Ottawa	Via 6409	16.00	Montreal – Toronto	659

Day 19

Following the previous days disaster I get up late wash, pack and sort out ready to check out both motel and country as it is the last day. I start by going to photo freight trains without any success. I return to Oshawa to cover the evening rush hour and blunder into 4 winners almost immediately.

Last thing I return the car to the airport which puts me there ready to go home.

Oshawa	Go 624	15.38	Oshawa – Aldershot	923
Ajax	Go 601	14.04	Aldershot – Oshawa	920
Whitby	Go 651	16.08	Oshawa – Toronto	925
Pickering	Go 628	16.10	Toronto – Oshawa	442
Whitby	Go 638	16.56	Oshawa – Toronto	443
Pickering	Go 656 + 620	18.25	Pickering – Toronto	415
Rouge Hill	Go 653	18.00	Aldershot – Oshawa	928
Ajax	Go 639	18.43	Toronto – Oshawa	444
Oshawa				

Air Canada provide an A330 rather than the advertised 767 to Heathrow for another A321 forward to Manchester.

Toronto	C-GFAH	23.20	Toronto – London	AC858
London				

Day 20

London	G-EUXI	13.30	London – Manchester	BA1394
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Final notes

As I am sure has been noted I haven't put dates on this so should anyone note rules being bent hopefully those doing so can not be traced.

While I was doing my required track on Via I noted that the Skeena carried about 20 passengers each day, the RDC's only 3 railfans between Chapleau and White River on the outward and 3 railfans plus passengers between the same points on the return, I am told this would increase as the tourist season kicks in. The politicians and bean counters who instigated the recent cuts will throw these figures and cliches "financial burden on the tax payer", "ghost trains", "unused services" to justify further cuts. My understanding is the RDC's are "remote services" that have no alternate transport so would require a change in the law too cut but I have already pointed to the politicians who could change the law as those wanting to cut them. Jasper – Prince Rupert has a bus service, not a good one, but much cheaper than a train service to the tax payer. Withdrawing these train may be wrong that doesn't mean it can't happen, do them while you can.

Paul