

USA CROSS COUNTRY TRIP APRIL 2013.

This trip was to involve flying to LA on the west coast and then travelling by rail to the east coast and flying back to the UK from Miami. For this trip I was joined by my father and our Amtrak validity was a 15 day/8 sector pass (\$439) with commuter railroad tickets purchased as and when required. As usual train/flight IDs are in brackets, winners are underlined.

Friday 12th April.

An early start with a 0500 bus to Heathrow. The flight with Virgin Atlantic was on time but seemed to take forever. Once in LA an hour wait took place to get to the immigration desk where we were soon stamped in by a friendly agent. From the airport we took the storming (viewed from front seat the speedo reading a consistent 74mph for a while in the express lanes) "flyaway" bus to Union station - cost \$7 each - can only be paid by card - and there we collected our pre-booked Amtrak tickets which was done with ease. I then proceeded to buy a couple of California passes for a future trip with Anthony Flynn, this cannot be done online and turned out to be a long and complicated job, with two passes and a total of 30 tickets proving to be a bit of a challenge for the agent, mostly due to the quirky Amtrak computer system playing up. All in all an hour was spent at the ticket desk, during a busy period with queues building up while I hogged a third of the ticket windows. Eventually with all tickets in hand we took the short walk to our hotel and after checking in we spent a couple of hours at Spring Street Smokehouse before calling it a night.

Virgin G-VROC (VS007) 1130 London Heathrow to Los Angeles LAX

Saturday 13th April.

As my father hadn't done the line to Lancaster we decided we would take a trip there first, and then just see what was about after that. We obtained a Metrolink weekend rover for \$10 each. The loco for the Lancaster train was a winner meaning I now needed just 11 of the Metrolink fleet, however upon passing by the shed 5 of them were parked up and with a 6th winner laid up at Lancaster for the weekend prospects on scoring anything later were low. By the end of the day I managed to score one more loco on the last train we covered, after this we took the gold line light rail one stop from Union station to visit Weiland Brewing, I don't think they do any brewing on site but they do have a good selection of beers on tap. After we were suitably refreshed we took the light rail back to Union where we viewed the Coast Starlight arrival with locos 22 & 510, hopefully they would go north tomorrow. We finished by having a quick beer at Spring Street before going back to the hotel.

M.link 885 (261) 0855 LA Union to Lancaster
M.link 885 (264) 1125 Lancaster to LA Union
M.link 880 (364) 1345 LA Union to Pomona North
M.link 859 (367) 1449 Pomona North to LA Union
M.link 882 (267) 1605 LA Union to Glendale
Amtrak 462 (784) 1632 Glendale to LA Union
M.link 853 (368) 1735 LA Union to El Monte

M.link 878 (373) 1809 El Monte to LA Union

Sunday 14th April.

As there were no Metrolink moves available before our 1010 departure on Amtrak we decided we'd have a walk round the area near the hotel after breakfast. We hadn't got far when we came across Warner Brothers filming a car chase scene which required several takes to be done, so in the end we just ended up watching this for an hour or so and didn't see much else. One of the production team told us the name of the TV programme that they were filming for but it wasn't anything I had heard of and its name escapes me.

At the station we boarded our train, the northbound Coast Starlight, I didn't bother checking the engine numbers before departure as the train takes a sharp left turn on departure and I'd be able to see what was up front from my seat, typically the P32 had been replaced by a P42, and not even a winner either. Once we'd had our tickets checked by the conductor we made our way to the lounge and took in the views from there, the ride along the Pacific Coast was as good as ever. Near San Luis Obispo we passed the southbound train which was 166 & 503, so another P32 out and about on the circuit. We arrived at our destination of Oakland just a few minutes late and booked into our trackside hotel, the Jack London Inn, shortly afterwards. The hotel doesn't have the best online reviews I've seen and is certainly in need of refurbishment, however our room was clean and satisfactory for our needs. After dropping off our bags we went out for a meal and some beers in a nearby diner before calling it a night.

Amtrak 22 & 6 (14) 1010 LA Union to Oakland Jack London Square

Monday 15th April.

One of the biggest complaints that are posted about the hotel is the noise the trains make, certainly from early morning there was plenty of horn blowing going on, however if people are booking into a hotel where a railway runs down the street right outside the door what do they expect? The trains woke me a couple times but it was no big deal as I soon dropped off again.

I got up in time to go out and photograph the southbound Coast Starlight, and for the third day in a row it was a P42/P32 combo, this time 55 & 505. I then had breakfast with my father in the same diner we had eaten in the previous night. As we came out of the diner we were just in time to photograph a freight and an Amtrak California service running down the street before we picked our bags up from the hotel. While we made our way to the station another Amtrak California service rumbled by and also the ECS for the Bakersfield service which we would be catching, with one of the Amtrak California P32 locos which made me happy. We arrived in Bakersfield about 30' late due to engineering works and as our return train was retimed to leave an hour earlier than usual we had just 40 minutes to kill before our departure to Sacramento, and so we waited on the station in the hot sunshine. Our arrival in Sacramento was at about 2315 so we just went to the hotel and crashed out.

AmtCal 2051 (714) 1005 Oakland Jack London Square to Bakersfield

AmtCal 2051 (703) 1720 Bakersfield to Sacramento



AmtCal loco 2051 brings the empties for the Bakersfield service into Oakland JLS station.

Tuesday 16th April.

Quite a late start on the trains today so we had a wander around Sacramento Old Town and a look round the back of the railroad museum before heading to the station. Today we were heading to Reno on the eastbound California Zephyr, and an on time run over the superbly scenic and snowy Donner Pass got us to our destination at just about 1600. Our hotel, Harrah's, was directly over the road from the station and we were soon checked in to a rather high quality room with superb views on the 24th floor, not bad as this was the cheapest hotel of the trip and had cost just over £20 between us. After dropping off our bags we ate in the casino buffet, another bargain at less than \$10 each as we'd received a two for one voucher at check in. Once we had ate we spent the rest of the evening visiting a few casinos where my modest gambling budget came near to becoming exhausted before a last minute winning spree saw me break even.

Amtrak 153 & 97 (6) 1109 Sacramento to Reno

Wednesday 17th April.

After a lay in we checked out of the hotel and left our bags in storage before another session in the casinos. At 1400 we paid a visit to the Brew Brothers microbrewery in Harrah's, our arrival timed to coincide with the start of the happy hours where beer was \$3 a pint. The stout and the IPA were both good, as was the cheap burger and fries meal.

All too soon it was time to collect the bags and head to the station, from where we would continue heading east on the California Zephyr. As we had our tickets checked on the platform we were informed that due to an avalanche in Colorado the train would divert between Salt Lake City and Denver, going via the original transcontinental route through Wyoming, which is one of the four US states not served by Amtrak. After a few hours in the lounge car I went back to the coach where I had some sound sleep in a double seat until the stop at Salt Lake City where the bright station lights and general noise of passengers leaving and boarding the train woke me at about 0300. I stepped out into the cold night air just to get a stretch, and watched the departing coaches taking passengers off to the places where the train wouldn't be calling at due to the impending diversion we were taking from here.

Amtrak 41 & 114 (6) 1606 Reno to Salt Lake City

Thursday 18th April.

At just before departure time the HEP went off and I thought I felt something buffer up to the train, but with the doors shut and departure imminent I couldn't investigate. When I had heard about the diversion that we were going to take I hoped that it may involve a pilot loco being used and as we departed SLC I could indeed see the outline of an extra loco through the darkness. I wandered up to the lounge car where I found the conductor and I sat chatting to him for about an hour and he told me we now had a UP loco (8355) on front in multi with the Amtrak pair, this was for signaling purposes and the UP loco would be removed in Denver. After my chat with the conductor I grabbed a bit more sleep before a smoke break was announced, and so for my purposes that meant photo stop, luckily UP had agreed that passengers could be let off at the disused station during a crew change. Once back on the move we took a late breakfast in the diner before spending the day watching miles and miles of snow covered fields roll by, noting the westbound Zephyr that was also diverted was running with just the usual pair of P42 locos. Eventually we reached the outskirts of Denver, and before finally arriving at the station the UP loco was removed in a freight yard. Despite the diversion we were a little ahead of time, I had hoped that we would go all the way into Union station as there is a brewpub over the road, but the temporary station that has been used for a long time is still being used, luckily we found a shop nearby to stock up with supplies. Once again for the night some good sleep was had, again in a double seat, which the coach attendant had kept open for us despite the train by now being very well loaded, which was nice of her to say the least.

UP 8355 & Amtrak 41 & 114 (6) 0330 Salt Lake City to Denver

* via Ogden (Utah) and Green River, Rawlins, Laramie (Wyoming)

* UP 8355 removed at Fox Jcn, Denver.

Amtrak 41 & 114 (6) 1910 Denver to Naperville



UP8355 leads Amtrak train 6 at Green River (Utah). Lovely job!

Friday 19th April.

After waking from my reasonably good sleep breakfast was taken in the diner and our last few hours on the train were spent relaxing in the lounge. We bailed off at Naperville where arrival was at about 1400. At Naperville we spent an hour and a half photting various movements which included some freight, Metra and the inbound and outbound Southwest Chief plus the outbound Zephyr, which one woman managed to miss despite being on the platform, never mind dear, next train is in 24 hours. We then moved on to Downers Grove and spent about an hour there, however an hour was enough as it was freezing cold with some hail falling and the odd snow flurry. We soon warmed up when we got to Emmett's Brewpub, where we had a few beers and a meal before getting a taxi to where we were staying.

Metra 211 (1270) 1533 Naperville to Downers Grove

Saturday 20th April.

We got a taxi back to the Metra station and headed downtown to Chicago, where we checked in our big bags for the evening departure to New Orleans so as to save having to drag them about all day. I was on the hunt for my last 13 Metra locos for haulage, however 111 was the spare thunderbird at Union so that was one I wouldn't be having today. Over at OTC there was one winner, 167, in platform 3 but there were no departures for that platform showing on the screen.

We did a quick out and back anyway but still there was no scope for any winners once we got back. At this point dad went off to do some sightseeing and I popped into Union where winner 402 was on the 1230 departure, so that would be one for later. I made my way to LaSalle station hoping for something there and found winner 407 on the train I came to cover, so that was good, but the odds of having a winner on the way back were low as two more winners were spare in the station, 179 the thunderbird loco and 406 on stock. Dud 204 was my loco back to Chicago where I met back up with dad and then went for 402. My plan after doing 402 was to head back over to OTC to cover the unknown loco on the 1530 from there, however 402 was late and we ended up only just making the 1530 from Union instead, viewing the 1530 ex OTC as it crossed above us outside of Union, luckily with a dud loco. As we were now out of plan with our move we decided to head to Franklin Park and spend 40 minutes there, hopefully seeing some freight action - of which we saw none. Another winner, 158, was noted on the dead road at Western Avenue with stored 611 & 614. Once we were back at Union we called it a day with Metra and spent a couple of hours in the station bar. Next up was the fun of boarding our train to New Orleans, predictably the whole boarding procedure was as shambolic as ever, even the sleeper passengers joined in the fun as they were sent out too early and were then told to get back in the sleeper lounge. As the train was starting its journey by propelling out of Union there was no messing about trying to get the loco number as it was on the blocks and we had to walk past it to get on the train. Within about an hour of departure I went to sleep.

Metra 196 (1306) 0845 Downers Grove to Chicago Union
Metra 166 (703) 1030 Chicago OTC to Clybourn
Metra 148 (805) 1043 Clybourn to Evanston Main Street
Metra 131 (812) 1102 Evanston Main Street to Chicago OTC
Metra 407 (213) 1230 Chicago LaSalle to 119th Street
Metra 204 (214) 1312 119th Street to Chicago LaSalle
Metra 416 (2711) 1430 Chicago Union to Western Avenue
Metra 402 (2716) 1459 Western Avenue to Chicago Union
Metra 420 (2713) 1530 Chicago Union to Franklin Park
Metra 416 (2718) 1638 Franklin Park to Chicago Union
Amtrak 53 (59) 2000 Chicago Union to New Orleans

Sunday 21st April.

After a reasonable kip I woke up to find the train stood in Memphis station where arrival was quite well ahead of schedule, so plenty of time to get a picture of the loco once it had been fuelled. Once back on the move breakfast was taken followed by a couple more hours sleep and then the rest of the trip was spent in the lounge. On the final stretch into New Orleans the train passes some marshes, and apart from various birds spotted, there were also plenty of turtles seen basking and even more interesting again I managed to see three alligators. Arrival in New Orleans was about 40' early, a little before 3pm and our bags were soon delivered to us. Since I was last in New Orleans the streetcar system has been extended to the railway station, so we decided to take it to near our hotel, in the event it would have been quicker if we had walked directly there as it turns out. Once we had checked in and freshened up we took a walk to the French quarter of the city and Bourbon Street. The main part of the street is full of pubs, most with some live music going on, and usually some sort of performance going on in the street as

well, the buildings which are not pubs are strip joints, all in all a very lively place and completely bonkers. We then visited the Gordon Beirsch brewpub followed by Harrah's casino before retiring for the night.

Sunday 21st April.

A very early wake up was in order to make our 0700 departure from New Orleans. Once we were on the move the train soon took a sharp turn and so I could see we had very dud pair 206 & 201 on front. Despite there being just a handful of locos in the 200 series it seems compulsory that I must have some on every visit. An announcement soon came over the tannoy that breakfast was being served in the diner so we made our way there, however they were short staffed with just one server and one chef on duty we were sat down for over an hour before we got our food, pretty poor really but they were doing the best they could. Before long we were running just over an hour late and this remained the case for the rest of the day. After taking a leg stretch at Atlanta at about 9pm I called it a night.

Amtrak 206 & 201 (20) 0700 New Orleans to Washington

Monday 22nd April.

I woke up about at about 0815 during the stop at Charlottesville where we were still about an hour down. We gave breakfast a miss today and just sat tight till Washington where we got out for a stretch during the loco change. I was pleased to see a winner electric backing on and eventually we were on our way again. We reached our destination of Philadelphia about 75' late meaning we had just a 20 minute wait for a NJT train to Atlantic City, loco 4212 being the traction. Other locos on the line were 4150 4213 and 4217, they used to keep a 5th set on the line but I assume they are using a bare minimum at present while equipment damaged by superstorm Sandy awaits repair. At Atlantic City we soon checked into Trump Tower where we had a cracking view of the Atlantic coast from our room on the 30th floor, we then spent the evening visiting a couple of casinos, getting back to our room at about 0100. Pleasingly tonight's night out had netted me a profit of \$240.

Amtrak 664 (20) 1115 Washington to Philadelphia 30th Street
NJT 4212 (4627) 1347 Philadelphia 30th Street to Atlantic City

Wednesday 24th April.

Our move today would involve a double back as far as Washington, complete with the same two engines which had brought us from Washington to Atlantic City yesterday. My attempt at getting a picture of NJT 4212 at Atlantic City was binned as an NJT employee stopped me walking to the front of the train, stating they "don't allow this anymore" because of the bomb that had gone off in Boston the week before. I really couldn't be bothered to argue, I didn't have the copy of the NJT photo policy I normally carry, and I already have pictures taken at AC anyway. He followed me onto the train and then started to lecture me on leaving my bag unattended until I pointed out my father who was sat about two feet away. Things didn't get much better at loco change in Washington either, despite loads of new Genesis being in the area Amtrak had found

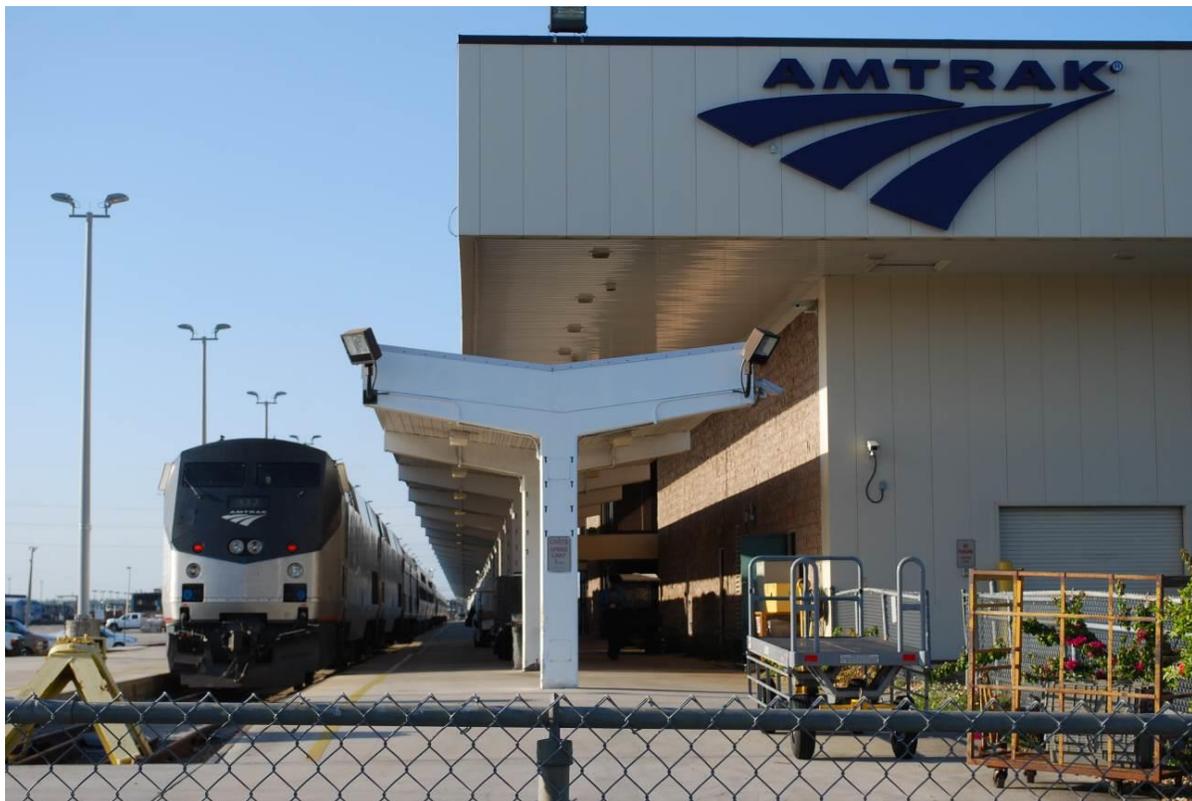
me another dud pair for the journey on my new track to Miami. Time keeping was good and at Richmond there was time enough to get pictures of another Amtrak train stabled in the station plus a northbound train which arrived just a few minutes after us.

NJT 4212 (4616) 0853 Atlantic City to Philadelphia 30th Street
Amtrak 664 (91) 1235 Philadelphia 30th Street to Washington
Amtrak 117 & 96 (91) 1500 Washington to Miami (via Charleston & Tampa)

Thursday 25th April.

During the course of the day we lost a bit of time but nothing too major. Highlight of the day was the high speed propelling move for a couple of miles into Tampa, can't imagine that being allowed in the UK. Also noticed new stations under construction for SunRail which is due to start operation in spring 2014. Eventual arrival into Miami was about 30 minutes late, we could have got off at Deerfield Beach where we were staying but elected to stay on to the blocks so we could do the spur into the Amtrak station. Once at Miami, it was a short walk to the Tri-Rail station from where we doubled back to Deerfield Beach, our hotel being about a five minute walk from the station. Once checked in we found a pub about 10 minutes away but the beer wasn't up to much, it was however cheap so we had a couple before getting food from Subway and a couple of decent beers from the store by the hotel.

Tri-Rail 812 (P644) 1859 Metrorail Transfer to Deerfield Beach



Journeys end. Amtrak 117 & 96 at Miami.

Friday 25th April.

I left my father at the hotel while I went out to score a few Tri-Rail engines, a stint of a couple of hours netted me 7 locos which included a bonus pair. Back at the hotel I had a late breakfast which my father had taken to the room for me before we set out to Miami for the day, using Tri-Rail to the Metrorail Transfer and then the Metrorail and the excellent “Metromover” which is completely free to use. Eventually we took Metrorail to the airport for our flight, again a flight which seemed to take forever, a goodly bout of turbulence spiced things up a bit though.

Tri-Rail 815 (P615) 0814 Deerfield Beach to Cypress Creek
Tri-Rail 803 (P614) 0834 Cypress Creek to Pompano Beach
Tri-Rail 802 & 814 (P617) 0850 Pompano Beach to Fort Lauderdale
Tri-Rail 808 (P616) 0909 Fort Lauderdale to Deerfield Beach
Tri-Rail 809 (P619) 0944 Deerfield Beach to Cypress Creek
Tri-Rail 810 (P618) 1016 Cypress Creek to Deerfield Beach
Tri-Rail 808 (P623) 1144 Deerfield Beach to Metrorail Transfer
Virgin G-VBIG (VS006) 2100 Miami International Airport to London Heathrow



Tri-Rail pair 802 & 814 pause at Fort Lauderdale with train P617

CONCLUSION.

Another excellent trip, plus another UP loco bringing my total to three. Was pleased to eventually get down to Florida on Amtrak, another visit will be in order to take the other route they use, and also to try and get a few more Tri-Rail locos in the bag.

