



The GRAND CANYON LIMITED



By Ken Rattenne

Author's Note: This is an expanded version of an article that appeared in the August 2012 Railfan and Railroad magazine. No names have been changed to protect the innocent.

Between May 14-19, 2012, Central Coast Railway Club in partnership with Trains and Travel International and the San Bernardino Railroad Historical Society (SBRHS), operators of Santa Fe Northern 3751, operated the *Grand Canyon Limited* between Los Angeles and the rim of the Grand Canyon.

I was one of over 20 car hosts on the trip, working the train four of the five days it was on the road in dome car *Silver Splendor*. This was my third car host gig in 10 months (I also worked our *Northern California Explorer* of June 2011 and the August 2011 Trains and Travel-sponsored *Feather River Express*). However, with six excursion days and two travel days this was by far the most ambitious trip I had embarked on to date.



Top: The eastbound *Grand Canyon Limited* rounds Sullivan's Curve on Cajon Pass May 14. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Above: Earlier that day, Santa Fe 4-8-4 No. 3751 simmers softly in the morning air on Los Angeles Union Station's Track 12 moments before departure. (Ken Rattenne photo)



Prelude: Water Car Blues

Prior to the trip the SBRHS made arrangements with the SP 4449 folks in Portland to borrow their auxiliary water tender for the excursion across the desert. This key piece of equipment was needed to allow 3751 to make minimal water stops during some very long days over some very challenging trackage. Carrying extra water was estimated to shave over two hours off each day's trip.

In Portland, the tender was inspected by BNSF and given the green light to ship south. A week prior to the trip the tender was placed on a California bound freight for shipment to Los Angeles. However the train's conductor – for reasons unknown – "bad ordered" the car's coupler and set it out at Sakima WA, about five miles out of Vancouver. Shortly afterward BNSF car inspectors drove out and re-inspected the car – but they could find nothing wrong! While there has been much speculation as to the actual reason the BNSF conductor set the car out, suffice it to say the much-



Top: Santa Fe No. 3751 approaching Cajon Summit with the *Grand Canyon Limited* on Monday, May 14. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Above: Climbing Cajon Pass as seen from the dome of *Silver Splendor*. Inside: Eating lunch in the cool, air-conditioned car. Outside: Railfan pandemonium. (Ken Rattenne photo)

needed auxiliary water tender never made it to California.

This would impact our schedule keeping for the entire trip, forcing 3751 to double the needed water stops and push timekeeping out the window. Fortunately, the L.A. BNSF management team approved the extra stops and our trip was a “go.”

**Day 1
Sunday, May 13
Travel Day**

While many of the excursion staff were already in Los Angeles for National Train Day, the majority of us used Sunday as our travel day to get to the Southland. For this author and newly minted member/car host Barbara Roehrick, it was a long six-hour trip on the *San Joaquin* and its bus out of Modesto.

That evening we had our safety meeting where we were given our vests, radios, hats and the heads-up on the auxiliary tender situation. We were also informed that there



Top: At Cadiz on May 14 we waited for a westbound A&C freight led by PR30C 3004, a rebuilt SD40-2 originally constructed in 1972 for Canadian Pacific.

Above: At Parker, Arizona, on May 15. We’ve loaded passengers and our lunches: It’s Go Time! The former Santa Fe depot was built in 1909 and is used by the Arizona & California as their headquarters. (Ken Rattenne photos)



would be a 15 MPH slow order during our first day on the Arizona & California, but more on that later.

Day 2

Monday, May 14

Los Angeles to Parker, Arizona, via BNSF to Cadiz, California, then on the Arizona & California to Parker.

Distance: 337 Miles

The *Grand Canyon Limited* consisted of 13 privately-owned passenger cars and a single Amtrak Horizon Fleet cafe car. Power for the special was Amtrak Heritage P42 No. 66 and P40 No. 809; and of course, Santa Fe 4-8-4 No. 3751. (See sidebar for the entire consist). I was assigned to former *Denver Zephyr* dome-coach-diner *Silver Splendor* as was my traveling companion Barbara.

As our train backed into Track 12 at Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal the number of “oohs and ahs” from the folks on the platform was almost deafening! It was a beautiful sight. We quickly boarded our very excited passengers and departed on time at 9:00 AM. The advertised time into Parker, Arizona was 8:30 PM that night but none of us expected to keep that schedule.



Top: With a clean stack, No. 3751 leads the special out of Parker on the Arizona & California May 15. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Above: The desert runby at Bouse, Arizona, on May 15 had the entire town out to photograph and wave at the train. The motivation for the *Grand Canyon Limited* was Arizona's Centennial celebration. But due to our late arrival times Bouse was the only Arizona town that had an opportunity to receive some steam love. (Ken Rattenne photo)



Once underway we made good time to San Bernardino for our first water stop and to load lunches. Upon departure we soon made our assault up the west slope of Cajon Pass. During our safety meeting we were told BNSF was giving us a “gold card” while on their railroad which meant they wanted to get us over the Transcon as quickly as possible. They made good on that promise and they kept everything out of our way!

On the run up Cajon we slowed for no one, passing several westbound freights while climbing to Summit. As Barbara and I passed out box lunches, our passengers were entertained watching the railfan circus outside as groups of photographers jockeyed for position to shoot us then scramble to their next location. (I must admit I suffered from some serious trackside envy!)

At Barstow we paused for a much needed water stop and to load our “dinner” lunches. We also boarded additional passengers bound for Parker and points beyond. Watering took about 45 minutes and then it was Eastward Ho!

East of Barstow we crossed the vast and very toasty Mojave Desert on BNSF's busy Transcontinental (Transcon) mainline. Passengers continued to be entertained by the gaggle of cars chasing our train on parallel National Trails Highway, a.k.a. Route 66.

We reached Cadiz (Kay-deez) at 4:15 PM where we pulled into the siding to let 3751 quench her thirst from a BNSF company

well. While filling the tender we received word we were to wait for a westbound Arizona & California freight to arrive before proceeding south. This set us back an additional 30-some minutes

Inside dome *Silver Splendor*, the outside temperature read 109 degrees and the 20-plus photographers waiting along the A&C looked mighty hot, thirsty and tired. When the westbound A&C train finally arrived it

was lead by EMD PR30C 3004 clad in Armour Yellow and Harbor Mist Grey. Tucked in behind was a former Florida East Coast unit and a pair of green and crème A&C units.

It was 6:30 PM before we were on our way, restricted by a 15 MPH slow order for most of the 84 miles to Parker. The slow order came about from a recent FRA rule requiring a freight railroad to inspect all



Top: The photo runby with 4960 and 3751 on the trip between Williams and the Grand Canyon May 16. (Doug Scott photo)

Above: Car host Henry Bender chats with passengers aboard the former Santa Fe dome-lounge *Sky View* on the way to the Grand Canyon. (Ken Rattenne photo)



Above: Arriving at the Grand Canyon on May 16. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Below: The special's steam power on display in front of the Santa Fe Grand Canyon depot prior to the return trip to Williams. (George Royer photo)

Below Right: Car host and excursion hotel manager George Royer in his working space onboard the *Overland Trail* lounge car. (Photo by George Royer's camera)



welded rail joints at least 30 days before a passenger train operates over the line. That inspection didn't take place. Our arrival into Parker was at 11:40 PM where we quickly offloaded our tired passengers to busses which took them to area hotels. Most of the crew and car hosts didn't get to bed until 1:00 AM.

**Day 3
Tuesday, May 15
Parker to Matthe on the Arizona &
California, then to Williams via
BNSF's Phoenix Subdivision.
Distance: 256 Miles**

Departing at 9:48 AM, the first leg of today's journey would continue on the A&C as far as Matthe where we would switch to BNSF's Phoenix Subdivision,

commonly known as the Peavine, for the run to Williams.

As we plodded along at 30 MPH we watched as several cars pacing our train – at 30 MPH - were pulled over by local constables for holding up traffic. We all smiled as these bozos were handed tickets and left in the dusty heat while we continued east.

At the tiny burg of Bouse (rhymes with mouse) we announced our first photo runby. While the location and time of day were less than optimal, most of the train enthusiastically emptied into a photo line and snapped away as 3751 raced by -- at around 30 mph! Everyone had fun.

We ended our tenure on the A&C at Matthe where we encountered a 49-minute delay waiting for track authority from BNSF to occupy their Phoenix Sub. We

then crept onto a little used leg of the Matthe Wye while BNSF employees kept careful watch on 3751's big drivers for any sign of disengagement from the rails.

It was 4:35 PM by the time we rolled onto the Phoenix Sub, picking up speed for the short dash to our next stop at Congress. We arrived at this tiny desert outpost at 5:00 PM where we boarded passengers from Phoenix and Wickenburg and watered the engine. Due to an additional delay (including an opposing freight) we didn't depart Congress until 7:10 PM. Once on the road we soon got up to track speed, which was significantly faster than 30 MPH: At last! No. 3751 was able to stretch her long legs after 100-plus miles of slow orders. While our original scheduled time into Williams was set at 7:00 PM we didn't actually pull in to Grand Canyon Railway's former Santa Fe depot until 11:35 PM.

To the disappointment of railfans hoping for an impromptu night photo session of 3751, the Grand Canyon Railway decided to pull the 3751 off the train at the railroad's wye prior to entering the Williams depot. In fact, the GCRy folks opted to keep steam away from the public eye for the duration of our stay in town.



Day 4
Wednesday, May 16
Williams To Grand Canyon Village
roundtrip over the
Grand Canyon Railway.
Distance: 127 miles

Today was the day this trip was all about: A double-headed steam train with 3751 and Grand Canyon's ex-CB&Q Mikado 4960 on a special train to the Grand Canyon South Rim! Amtrak 66 was tucked in behind 3751's tender in order to supply hotel power to the train and to lend an assist with some of the line's steeper grades.

We quickly loaded passengers and departed Williams at 8:15 AM, just ahead of GCRy's regular morning train to South Rim. When we stopped for our first photo runby the sight of the two steam engines was awe-inspiring. With most of the train emptied for this rare opportunity it became apparent that organizing everyone into a single cohesive photo line was going to be like herding kittens. We did our best but there were photo lines at either end of the train with several more passengers standing a few hundred feet from the tracks in be-



tween. Still, the runby went well and the two steam engines looked superb in the morning sun as they stormed by, smoke pouring from their stacks.

After reboarding everyone, we continued due north to the siding of Imbleau, at MP 52, to allow the GCRy morning train to get

by us. Our arrival into Grand Canyon Village was at 12:15 PM.

We had approximately 3.5 hours of lay-over time to get lunch and sightsee. Barbara and I opted for the cafeteria then headed back to the depot via the free shuttle bus where we talked to a few visitors



Top: Grand Canyon Railway's former Santa Fe log depot at Grand Canyon Village on May 15. This is the last station in the West with log-faced architecture.

Left: ATSF 3751 South rolls through the horseshoe curve at Corva, Arizona, on May 18. (Ken Rattenne photos)



Top: Literally chugging past the Ash Fork BNSF depot on May 18, No. 3751 puts on a show for the small gaggle of railfans patiently waiting for the special to roll by. (Ken Rattenne photo)

Above: A short time later, the Grand Canyon Limited rolls over famous Hell Canyon Bridge. It took a long hike, including the dodging of cacti and a barbed wire fence, to get to this location. (Ken Rattenne photo)

Opposite top: No. 3751 leads the train into the curve at the south end of Hell Canyon Bridge. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Opposite bottom: Passengers relaxing aboard the *Overland Trail* lounge car. (George Royer photo)



**Day 5
Thursday, May 17
Layover day at Williams**

from different countries. Back at Grand Canyon Railway's former Santa Fe log depot, both steam engines were parked on adjacent tracks, slightly staggered, affording one incredible photo op for the crowd of passengers and visitors alike.

After waiting for the GCRy's afternoon train to depart at 3:30 PM, our train crew attached the two steam engines to Amtrak 66 and we departed the Village at 4:10 PM. The second photo runby was executed out along the rolling sagebrush land away from prying (and non-paying) eyes. With a couple hundred passengers stretched out along a barbed wire fence, everyone had plenty of room to photograph what had to be the best runby of the entire trip, in perfect afternoon sunlight. (The only criticism heard was that neither engine blew its whistle.)

Our arrival back in Williams was at 7:18 PM where once again the two steamers were removed at the wye resulting in our train being pulled into the station by Amtrak 66. As we detrained our tired passengers into the cool evening air we saw nothing but smiles.

Thursday was a layover day to allow the train to be serviced and give passengers an opportunity to go "touristing" either on their own or by utilizing one of several package tours available through Trains & Travel International.

For myself and fellow car hosts Barbara Roehrick and Michael Carney, the day was spent renting a car out of Flagstaff and driving to the south rim of the Grand Canyon. The three of us agreed: That is one *big* hole in the ground! Our day was punctuated by meeting up with fellow Central Coast member Elrond Lawrence (who spent the day chasing Alcos). Elrond was kind





Above: The special about to pass under Highway 93 north of Wickenburg, Arizona, and the junction with the A&C at Matthie on May 18. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Below: Later that day, the special is westbound at Wenden, Arizona, on the A&C doing 30 MPH. Note the classic Santa Fe station sign to the right of the locomotive. (Ken Rattenne photo)





enough to give us a ride back to Williams where we all celebrated a fantastic day with a meal to die for at Rod's Steak House.

**Day 6
Friday May 18
Williams to Matthie on the BNSF,
then Matthie to Parker on the A&C.
Distance: 256 miles**

It's Day 5 for the *Grand Canyon Limited*, Day 6 of my overall trip. The GCL will retrace its route west to Parker, where the train will again tie up for the night. Your author, suffering from three days of trackside angst, was excused from car host duties for the day in order to spend the day with fellow Central Coast member Elrond Lawrence, chasing the train all the way to Parker-on-the-Colorado (River).

Despite railfan rumors to the contrary (circulated by wishful-thinking railfans), the *Grand Canyon Limited* did not depart

Williams an hour early but left almost on time at 10:10 AM. (Rumor Central neglected to take into account that our train actually carried passengers — passengers who would have no way of knowing of a schedule change. Other even more outrageous rumors abounded but are best left unreported.)

Unlike the eastbound trip, the westbound (geographically southwest) journey to Parker remained close to the revised estimated schedule. After photographing the train at the platform, Elrond and I made a beeline for our first photo stop: The horseshoe curve at Corva. Then it was on to Ash Fork for a quick shot of the train passing the depot and finally, on to famous Hell Canyon Bridge where Elrond parked farther away from the bridge than he thought.

This resulted in a near half-mile trek to the bridge location. We weren't alone, however, and as several of us walked along

Above: Near Hope, Arizona, May 18 as the excursion passes through the Harcuvar Mountains on the A&C. (Drew Jacksich photo)

Left: With crew chief Michael Carney looking on, Jeff Blackmon, the excursion's emergency medical technician, opens the "Cadiz Café" for business May 19 during our water stop at Cadiz. We sold excess lunches to hungry, thirsty railfans waiting patiently in the hot sun. (Ken Rattenne photo)





Above: It's the GCL's final day on the road as 3751 creeps across the Colorado River into California moments after departing the Parker, Arizona, depot. (Elrond Lawrence photo)

Below: Back in California, Elrond Lawrence chased down the train as it raced across the Mojave Desert at Rice. Next stop: Barstow. Then on to Los Angeles and the conclusion of the *Grand Canyon Limited*. (Elrond Lawrence Photo)



the roadbed I felt like singing one of those boot camp cadenced marching songs. "Here we go along the tracks, cameras 'bout to break my back!" Finally, one barbed wire fence and several cacti later we were there: Hell Canyon Bridge. *Oh look! There's the train!*

I barely had time to set my borrowed video camera on the tripod and frame the train with my Nikon D200 before the 3751 rumbled over the trestle, black smoke trailing behind her. After hiking back to the car we headed for Congress, driving through Prescott and over Quartz Mountain where we photographed large plumes of smoke from Arizona's latest wildfire.

We arrived just outside of Congress in time to set up and catch the train as it appeared from behind a distant cut. As the GCL steamed past, 3751 slowed then came to a stop at 3:20 PM adjacent to a fire truck which had the honor of pumping water into 3751's 20,000 gallon tender. In addition to watering the engine, a group of passengers were off-loaded to buses for Wickenburg and Phoenix. Departure was at 4:05 PM.

At Matthie, where the train interchanged to the A&C, the move took mere minutes in contrast to the eastbound trip. However, slow orders on the A&C continued in effect, which worked to Elrond's and my fa-



Above: Grand Canyon Railway's retired former Canadian National FPA-4 6773 heads the railroad's boneyard at Williams on May 18. GCRY's five Alco cab and booster units were replaced by a trio of F40PH engines from Amtrak. (Ken Rattenne photo)

Below: Car host Barbara Roehrick, author/car host Ken Rattenne, and car host Doug Petersen during the stop at Congress, Arizona, May 15 to take on water for Santa Fe 3751. (Barbara Roehrick collection)

vor as we played Chase 'n Pace along Highway 72 for 30 some miles until just past Hope. At the tiny desert outpost of Salome, Elrond and I set up at a grade crossing and watched as 3751 approached, slowed down and then stopped literally three feet from where we stood (at a safe trackside distance of course). From the radio chatter it appeared the steamer had set off a hotbox detector.

Continuing our Chase 'n Pace strategy, we bagged the train several more times before we lost usable light. My day ended in Parker when I recorded the train creeping past an illuminated grade crossing just prior to its arrival at the A&C depot at 9:16 PM. As for my day of chasing, thanks to Elrond, it was awesome!

Day 7
Saturday, May 19
Parker to Cadiz on the A&C, then
Cadiz to Los Angeles on BNSF.
Distance: 337 miles

Our final day on the road would be a long one. We departed Parker close to the advertised at 8:05 AM and within minutes crept across the Colorado River and into California. Once again, we were saddled with our pesky slow order. However, just like Day 1, our snail's pace across the desert was a gold mine for the chasing fans. Also, it was a good 8 degrees cooler than our eastbound

trip, the temperature hovering around the century mark.

After passing out lunches Car Host Central discovered we had a large number of bagged meals leftover. What to do? Why not sell them to hot, thirsty railfans at Cadiz while we water the engine? Thus the Cadiz Café was born.

Upon arrival at Cadiz at 1:48 PM the trap door on the Amtrak café' car was lowered and the Cadiz Café opened for business! By the time we departed at 3:20 PM we had taken in well over \$100 from selling lunches and ice cold bottled water to the waiting fans on the ground. Upon departure we quickly attained BNSF's Transcon for some fast running across the Mojave to Barstow, where we again watered the engine and off-loaded passengers.

We left Barstow at 6:30 PM, and like our eastbound trip, had green signals all the way to Cajon Pass and the L.A. Basin. Our crossing of Cajon was around dusk and every dome on the train was packed with passengers, eyes glued to the glass. As we descended past Summit, the Mormon Rocks and Sullivan's Curve the only sound to be heard was that of snapping cameras and whirring camcorders. After a final water stop at San Bernardino we arrived at Los Angeles Union Station at 11:07 PM. After a quick car cleaning we all made it to our hotel around Midnight.



Above: This is what the *Grand Canyon Limited* was all about: The South Rim of the Grand Canyon!

Below: Car host Barbara Roehrick's "Bunny" became the unofficial mascot of the *Silver Splendor*. Bunny was quite popular by trip's end! (Ken Rattenne photos)

Day 8

Sunday, May 20

Travel day, Los Angeles to Modesto via Amtrak's *San Joaquin* and bus connection.

After a fitful night at the Miyako Hotel in Japantown (where the rooms have those hi-tech pushbutton Japanese toilets!) most of the Central Coast crew made their way back to Union Station in order to catch trains back home. While many were taking the *Coast Starlight* north, Barbara and I boarded our bus connection to Bakersfield for the final leg of our trip to Modesto aboard the *San Joaquin*.



Epilog

Despite challenges to our schedule keeping, BNSF and the A&C did their best to keep our special moving over their respective routes. To the credit of the 3751 team, their engine performed magnificently, as did their people.

One very important player on this trip was Amtrak, whose staff was responsible for all train operations and acted as liaison between our special and the host railroads. The Amtrak crew (there were two complete crews aboard) was professional but was obviously having fun. Amtrak also had an employee on the ground shadowing the train for the entire trip in case of emergencies or other ground level needs.

Finally, I want to thank the hundreds of passengers who rode with us over our five days of running. Without you, we couldn't have done it.

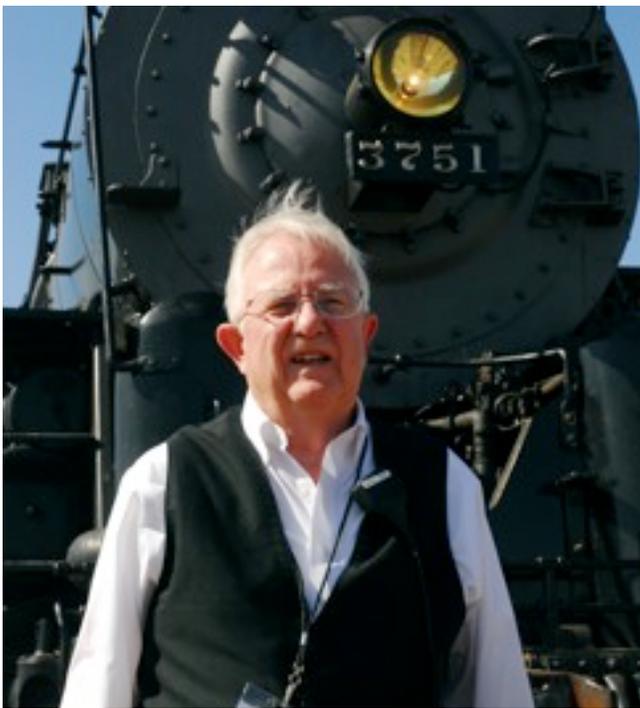
For more Grand Canyon Limited coverage see the Central Coast Railway Club group on Facebook and the trip's photo album on the Golden State Rails Excursion Facebook page. Special thanks to Eric Smith of Amtrak, Paul Prine of SBRHS, Jeff Ferrier and Steve Miller for their assistance in preparing this article.

Grand Canyon Limited Consist

1. ATSF 3751
Northern type 4-8-4
2. Amtrak 66
P42DC
3. Amtrak 809
P40DC
4. *Caritas*
Observation-lounge-sleeper (used as crew car)
5. *Gordon Zimmerman*
Baggage car (on loan from 4449)
6. *Overland Trail*
Lounge (ex-Southern Pacific)
7. Amtrak Horizon Café
Used for VIP seating and Car Host Central.
8. *Royal Gorge*
Lounge car
9. *Tolani*
Coach (ex-ATSF *El Capitan* car)
10. *Silver Splendor*
Dome-coach-lounge (ex-CB&Q *Denver Zephyr*)
11. *Sky View*
Full-length dome-lounge (ex-ATSF)
12. *Palm Leaf*
Sleeper (ex-ATSF)
13. *Pacific Sands*
Sleeper (ex-Union Pacific)
14. *Silver Rapids*
Sleeper (ex-PRR, CZ car)
15. *Plaza Santa Fe*
Dome-lounge (ex-ATSF *Pleasure Dome*)
16. *Silver Lariat*
Dome-lounge-diner (ex-CB&Q *California Zephyr* car)
17. *Silver Solarium*
Dome-lounge-observation (ex-CB&Q *California Zephyr* car)



(Designed by Martin Rice)



The Faces Behind the Excursion

Snapshots of a few of the dozens of people who made the *Grand Canyon Limited* excursion possible. (Ken Rattenne photos except as noted)

Top left: Excursion director and train manager Jeff Ferrier.

Top right: Excursion manager and train manager Steve Miller, at left, with assistant accommodations manager and car host Jim Davidson.

Center right: Car host Barbara Roehrick and author, photographer, and car host Ken Rattenne. (B. Davidson photo)

Below left: Bill Hatrick, owner of the *Overland Trail* lounge car.

Below right: Crew manager and car host Michael Carney.



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