

# Carolina Conductor



Volume 3, Number 12

Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc.

December 2016

**Preserving the Past.  
Active in the Present.  
Planning for the Future.**

**Web Site:**

[hubcityrrmuseum.org](http://hubcityrrmuseum.org)

**Meeting Site:**

**Woodmen of the World Bldg.**

721 East Poinsett Street

Greer, SC 29651-6404

Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 pm

**Hub City Railroad Museum**

**and SOU Caboose #X3115:**

**Spartanburg Amtrak Station**

298 Magnolia Street

Spartanburg, SC 29301-2330

Wednesday 10-2 and Saturday 10-2

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Newsletter articles and news due by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of month.

## Grand Canyon Railway

Geoff Duncan

When my wife and I decided to take our vacation this summer to the Grand Canyon, the transportation choice between a “road trip” vs. a “train trip” was a no brainer. Making our decision even easier by the fact the Grand Canyon Railway (GCR) provides the only rail service to the Grand Canyon.

After exploring the excursion options offered by the GCR, we chose the Canyon Discovery Plus Package. Features of this itinerary included an overnight stay at the Grand Canyon Railway Hotel next to the depot in Williams, Arizona, the night before our trip, an overnight stay at the GCR’s Maswick Lodge at the Canyon’s South Rim, as well as an overnight stay at the GCR Railway Hotel in Williams the night of our return. Also included were most meals, a guided tour at the Grand Canyon, National Park admission fees and all luggage transfers. This suited our purpose of wanting to have more time for self exploration at the Canyon than is allowed on the regular 130-mile round-trip daily excursion. Per the GCR timetable, the *Williams Flyer* departs Williams daily at 9:30 am and returns at 5:45 pm.

Among our ticketing options we chose to travel to the Canyon in a luxury



Train departing the Williams, Arizona, depot.

dome car and return the next day in a standard coach to broaden our experience.

Trains initially began traveling to the Grand Canyon in September 1901 on a 65-mile spur built and operated by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company (ATSF). For nearly 50 years this railroad line operated profitably from both passenger and freight service, but shortly after World War II revenues began to decline. The popularity of the automobile and implementation of the Interstate highway system had its impact on the line and caused the ATSF to discontinue passenger service to the Grand Canyon National Park in July 1968 (there were only 3 revenue passengers on the last train). The ATSF continued freight service until late 1974.



Scenic view from dome car.

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# Arrivals



**Description** The N.C. Department of Transportation is investing in the modernization of the state's railways through a series of railroad and highway construction projects and enhancements known as the Piedmont Improvement Program, or PIP. The outcome will make train travel safer and more reliable, enhance opportunity for greater job growth and commercial development and better connect the economic regions of Raleigh and Charlotte and the cities, towns and communities in between.

These projects are largely funded through federal stimulus money through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Federal Railroad Administration awarded the state a \$546.5 million grant from that program in 2010. A cooperative agreement with the agency specifies that \$520 million of the money goes directly to PIP. The rest of the money is helping to improve reliability of existing freight and passenger service from Raleigh to Virginia.

**Project Overview and Purpose** The Piedmont Improvement Program includes adding up to two daily passenger train round-trips between Raleigh and Charlotte – making a total of five round-trips daily, building new bridges for trains to cross over or under vehicular traffic and closing some railroad crossings. Additionally, roads will be constructed and parallel railroad tracks built along parts of the corridor that move freight and passengers through the heart of the state.

North Carolina has nearly 3,300 miles of track used by passenger and freight trains alike. PIP also will benefit Class One railroads, such as Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation.

"Since all trains use all tracks,

these improvements will ensure more opportunities for businesses and our freight partners," said NCDOT Rail Director Paul Worley. "Safety and efficiency on the tracks allow freight railroads to get more goods to communities in our state to bring about job growth and economic development."

To complete the work, NCDOT is partnering with the North Carolina Railroad Company, the owner of the Raleigh to Charlotte railroad corridor, and Norfolk Southern Railway and CSX Transportation, which are performing the track construction.

**Project Highlights** Subject to Federal Railroad Administration cooperative agreements, the Piedmont Improvement Program will specifically:

Add 12 new bridges that will carry roadways over or under railroad tracks to separate traffic from trains and improve safety for motorists.

Add 31 miles of parallel, or second track, and passing sidings, to help freight and passenger trains move in a more reliable and timely manner.

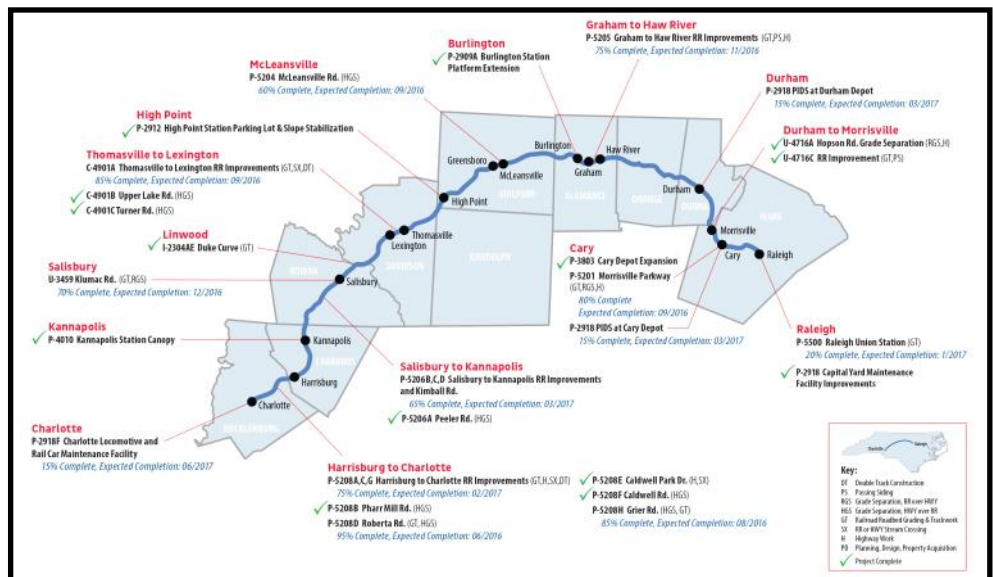
Add 12 miles of new highway construction.

Close 23 public and 15 private railroad crossings to eliminate the potential for train and vehicle collisions.

Add two daily passenger-train round-trips between Raleigh and Charlotte with seven stops in between.

Renovate train stations in Cary, High Point, Burlington and Kannapolis.

Refurbish and add passenger rail cars to the fleet.





# Departures

Continued from Page 1 - *Grand Canyon*



In 1988, the line was purchased by Max and Thelma Biegert of Phoenix. The Grand Canyon Railway was formed and was fully restored to operation one year later. Passenger service resumed on September 17, 1989, some 88 years to the day of the first passenger train to the Grand Canyon.

After an over-the-top breakfast in the hotel dining room on the morning of our departure, we walked the short distance across the street to the historic depot a few minutes early to take in the sights and enjoy complimentary coffee on the station platform. As we were walking I noticed several horses tied to the hitching post outside the Saloon at the end of the block but didn't pay too much attention thinking this was just typical for the vintage Western atmosphere around the town of Williams. We enjoyed watching our train back in to the station and the conductor and car hosts preparing for our departure. About the time we were walking down the platform to locate our assigned dome car a huge disturbance broke out over at the Saloon and a bunch of wild looking cowboys poured out onto the street. It seems there was some disagreement over a card game that had been going

on inside and the conversation grew louder and the gesturing grew more animated. Thankfully, about that time the Sheriff came around the corner by the

the GCR's collection of vintage diesel locomotives is a 1953 EMD GP-7 as well as a set of FP-4 A and B units, built by the American Locomotive Company (ALCO) in 1959. The FP-4 models are unique in that they are constructed on a longer frame to hold a steam generator used for heating the passenger cars. Locomotive No. 6776 was purchased from VIA Rail Canada

in 1990 and is one of the last of this model to be built.

The Grand Canyon Railway also owns and operates several steam locomotives that have been fully restored to working condition in their shops in Williams. The GCR car shops encompass over 28,000 sq.ft. of



GCR steam locomotive #29 an ex-LS&I 2-8-0 locomotive.

mercantile store, saw the altercation and did his best to try and resolve the issue. Well, all didn't seem to go quite as expected and after a short standoff and a sudden draw by one of the cowboys, a few shots by the sheriff and order was quickly restored. We found our car and hurried aboard just as the coroner was arriving.

The Grand Canyon Railway (reporting marks GCRX) operates a variety of vintage steam and diesel locomotives and passenger cars. The motive power for our trip was from two General Motors Electro Motive Division (EMD) F-40PH locomotives on the point, the No. 237 built in 1977 and No. 295 built in 1979. These engines were used by Amtrak until the late 1990s when they were purchased and restored by the GCR. Also among

modern mechanical, woodworking and paint facilities and more than 32 employees restoring and maintaining vintage railroad equipment. Locomotive No. 4960 is a Baldwin class O-1A, 2-8-2 Mikado built in 1923 for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q). It was used for general freight and coal train service through the 1950s and pulled many fan trips in the 1960s. It was rebuilt and placed in passenger service by the GCR in 1996. During restoration No. 4960 was converted from a coal-fired to an oil-fired boiler, a cleaner and less polluting fuel.

In 2009 the locomotive was further modified to run on waste vegetable oil (WVO) recycled from a restaurant operated by GCR's parent company, the Xanterra Corporation, in Williams

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# Manifest

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Ex-Amtrak EMD F40PH locomotives.



Ex-CN ALCO FPA-4 locomotive.

and properties at the Grand Canyon South Rim. This modification is extremely efficient in reducing emissions. A second steam engine, Locomotive No. 29, was also converted recently to run on WVO. This locomotive is a Consolidation class SC-3, 2-8-0 built in 1906 by ALCO in their Pittsburg shops for the Lake Superior & Ishpeming Railroad (LS&IRR) as No.14 and later re-numbered to No.29. This locomotive was rebuilt in 1925 in the Presque Isle shops and later by the GCR when it was acquired in 1989.

The GCR restoration took over 26,000 man-hours of labor at a cost of more than \$1 million to complete. Another major rebuild was completed in 2004 to take advantage of the latest in steam engine technology by the locomotive. In an additional step by the GCR to “go green”, the tenders for these locomotives now carry “grey-water”, or reclaimed effluent, to use in the boilers.

#29 led passenger service for the GCR from 1990 until 2008 when new ownership decided to discontinue steam service on the line. The No. 29

was then placed on display at the Williams depot until just this past August 2016 when it was returned to passenger service in celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Park Service.

The first acquisition of rolling stock by the Grand Canyon Railway is a story in itself. It begins in 1989 when the company purchased 17 coaches from the Southern Pacific Lines (SP). These were Harriman-style coach cars built by The Pullman Company in 1923 and operated between San Jose and San Francisco in commuter service. GCR currently has 13 of these Pullman coaches in service. Most of these cars were retired to the Oakland yards in 1984 where they had been sitting vandalized and exposed to the corrosive salt air of San Francisco Bay. Of the seventeen cars, only seven were in good enough condition to travel in a

consist over the ATSF and SP main lines. These cars were allowed to travel with a 40-mph speed restriction and arrived in Tucson after a 5-day trip. The GCR had contracted with the Pacific Fruit Express (PFE) car yard in Tucson, AZ for space to perform the rebuilding and restoration work by GCR employees and contractors. The remaining ten cars had to be transported by truck to the PFE yards. The first seven cars were delivered to the GCR ready for service on September 10, 1989, and left in front of the Williams depot by the daily ATSF local. Although originally heated by steam, Grand Canyon Railway has modified

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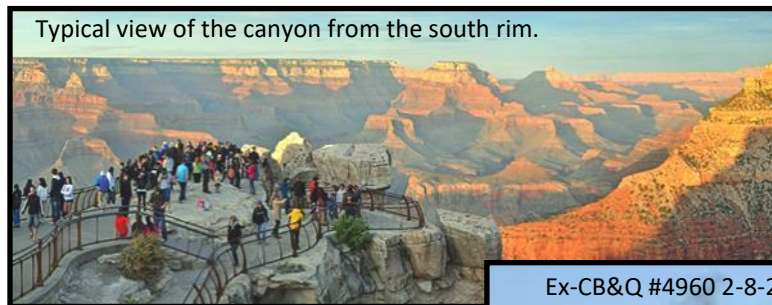


# Rare Mileage

Continued from Page 4 - *Grand Canyon*

these cars for electric heating, which is more efficient and easier to maintain.

GCR currently has 12 Budd coaches in service. These cars were originally Rail Diesel Cars, or RDCs, and were



Typical view of the canyon from the south rim.

called "Highliners" when they were in operation with the Boston & Main Railway. By 1983 they had all been converted to a non-powered configuration for commuter service by the Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority and later for commuter service in Washington, DC by the Virginia Rail Express. Interestingly, the Budd class coaches have sealed windows unlike the windows. The GCR café car is a Budd stainless steel car built originally for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1952 as a 29-seat parlor car with 5-seat drawing rooms. It was rebuilt for food service with the Penn Central and Amtrak. It was purchased by the GCR in 1998.

Our most enjoyable experience on the GCR however, had to be our ride from Williams to the Grand Canyon in the regal style of a luxury observation dome car. That car on the Grand Canyon Railway is the Grand View, a Vista Dome from the celebrated California Zephyr used on the Chicago-San Francisco run. This car was built originally for the Burlington Railroad in 1948 and was sold to Amtrak in 1974 and was then sold to the Alaska Railroad. From then the car has a checkered history of service and leases on several railroads including one in Mexico and in Canada from 1986 until 2002. The

GCR purchased the car in 2004 and put it in service as the Grand View but not before extensive restoration and customization. One of the first tasks was the installation of bullet-proof glass in the dome to meet Federal Railroad Ad-



Ex-CB&Q #4960 2-8-2 currently out of service.

ministration regulations. The car was then stripped of its wiring and asbestos and rewired. All new woodwork was installed and stained to match the original style Asian mahogany finish. The early 1950 seats were removed, sandblasted, repainted and reupholstered and as well as the wall coverings redecorated in richly colored fabrics. The original restroom was refurbished and a second one added. The bar was redesigned and rebuilt in a horseshoe shape. All in all, the GCR car shop crew spent over 6,000 man hours and nearly a million dollars readying the car for service. In its final configuration, the car seats 24 in the dome and 42 first class passengers in the lower level.

Another storied passenger car in the Grand Canyon Railway roster is the luxury parlor car the "Chief". The Chief was built in 1947 for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad for service be-

tween New York and Miami. After it was retired in 1980 it was purchased by a private investor who spent \$250,000 on its restoration and then put the Chief back in service for the Texas Southern Dinner Train where it served until 1991. From 1991 until 1993 it was used as a charter dinner car in Mexico until being seized by the Mexican government in a dispute with the owners. In 1994, after a long legal battle, it was returned to the US border and picked up by the Union Pacific Railway. It was supposed to be delivered to San Antonio, TX but seems to have been lost on the way. After an extensive investigation, it was found later in 1994 in New Orleans.

The car was finally returned to its owner in San Antonio but not after being involved in a rear end collision. The car's owner put it into storage until selling it 1999. The next owner repaired the collision damage by adding an open-air observation platform at a cost of \$95,000 but put the car up for sale before the restoration was finished. In 2002 the Grand Canyon Railway purchased the car, completed the restoration and put it into service later that year as the Chief.

On our late September vacation trip, the Williams Flyer consist included 4 Observation Dome cars, a café car and a half dozen coach cars as well as a luxury parlor car. As might be expected, each car had its own passenger-service attendant as well as roaming musicians and story tellers to entertain the passengers throughout the train during the 2½ hour trip. During our return trip, just as I was lounging back in my seat sipping with a cold beverage

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# Marker Lights



## Continued from Page 5- *Grand Canyon*

looking out the large windows enjoying the view of the high plains ranch lands, when suddenly I noticed several masked horseback riders racing up right alongside our car. After watching for a moment as they caught up with the train, puffs of smoke could be seen from the pistols they were firing in the air.

There was little doubt as to what we were about to experience next. As the train slowed and stopped the riders disappeared from my view ahead. After a few minutes as the train began to move again several of the masked bandits came through our car demanding money and jewels but rejecting most offers. Actually, they were more interested in finding a cook for their gang, who hadn't had a good meal in weeks. Shortly afterwards the Sheriff came through the car looking for the desperados as the passengers directed him toward the rear of the train. Never a dull moment on the GCR.

On Saturday morning, the day after our trip, we were fortunate to be

on hand for the start of the great Man vs. Machine Race that was just getting organized over at the Williams depot. This historic event was first staged in 1991 with over 50 cyclists racing GCR's No. 18 from the Grand Canyon south to Williams. The cyclist route is approximately 53 miles along route 64, roughly paralleling the train route and experiences an elevation change of more than 2000 ft. The No. 18 suffered from various mechanical as well as operational challenges and the race was not held again until 2015. Although the cyclists were spotted a 15-minute head start last year the train led by Locomotive No. 4960 won by almost 15 minutes.

This year the race was planned to start at the GCR's Grand Hotel in Tusayan, AZ, at the entrance to the Grand Canyon National Park, and travel the same route south to the finish line at historic Route 66 in Williams. The locomotive this year was No. 29 and the riders were spotted 10 miles. Although we were unable to stay for the finish of the race, the firing up of No. 29 and its steaming out

of the Williams depot at daybreak pulling a five car consist of three coaches, a café car and an observation car full of passengers, on its way to the Canyon to start the race, was an extraordinary experience.

Oh, Did I mention the cyclists won?

### Quick Facts

**2** -Number of operable steam engines.

**6** -Number of operable diesel engines.

**30 to 40** -MPH at which the train travels.

**41** -Number of passenger cars—one of the largest fleets of any U.S. excursion railway.

**65** -Track mileage from Williams to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

**364** -Number of days per year the railway operates. Closed on Christmas day.

### Resources

Al Richmond, "Rails to the Rim, Grand Canyon Railway"

Rudy J. Gerber, "The Railroad and the Canyon"

Wikipedia, "Grand Canyon Railway"

Xanterra Parks and Resorts, Inc.,

"The Grand Canyon Railway",

[www.thetrain.com/the-train/](http://www.thetrain.com/the-train/)

## Wanted—Articles for the Carolina Conductor

Submit an article of 200 words or more with some photos and captions and see them in print. Every one of us has some unique railroad experience that would make interesting reading for our membership. With Jim Sheppard's passing your editor needs more contributions of local railroad history and news.



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