

Camas Prairie's First Operating Session

By Bill Beranek

On Saturday, March 5th the Camas Prairie Railroad held its first op session. For those of you who are not familiar with my layout, you can check it out in the August 2004 **DISPATCH**.

From the beginning I designed this layout (not my first) for operation.

One of the advantages of holding a layout tour is the encouragement you get from club members and guests. Bob Sobol commented "It looks like you're ready to operate, now!", when I thought I was still a year away. Charlie Inghram invited me to operate on his layout so I could see how he uses a computer program called "Ship It". Operating on Dave Stewart's A&O made me realize you didn't need to have a 100% of the layout completed to host a successful operating session.

How was I going to "move" goods on the layout? Would I use the time tested "car card/waybill" system, the computer generated switch list program that Charlie uses or the "tab-on-car" system? I wasn't real keen on the "tab-on-car" system (isn't very prototypical). Charlie's "Ship It" program works very well on his large layout (with over 300 cars), but with slightly over 100 cars on my layout, I felt it was overkill. I settled on the "car card/waybill" system. However, I didn't want to have to write out (by hand) every car card and waybill. I found a computer program called "Ship It Car Cards" (yes it's made by the same company), after you enter the information into the computer it prints out a very readable (and nice looking) waybill plus it's very easy to edit existing waybills and reprint them. For the "car



First operators. Photo and Photoshop work by Craig Linn

cards", I made my own program using a computer database program. I then came up with a simple number and color code system for each train. With the train number and color code added to the waybill (by hand), all the yardmaster has to do is look at the color coded number and he knows which train a particular cars goes with. By adding two separate color coded numbers you can easily route the car across the system. I decided against using a fast clock and timetable, felt it put too much pressure on operators, would they be worrying about the clock and not operating.

I invited Dave Stewart, Bob Sobol, Craig Linn, and Mike Command to the op session. Having operated with all of them on Dave Stewart's layout, I knew they all had a good understanding of operating procedures and would give me an "honest" assessment of my system and first op session.

The crew arrived at 1:00 P.M. sharp. We did a general walk around as three of the crew members had never seen the layout. I described the general concept of the layout, how I thought it should operate, how the car card and waybill system hopefully would work and answered any questions they had.

Mike Command volunteered to be yardmaster, Bob Sobol, Dave Stewart and Craig Linn were assigned jobs (trains) based on a predetermined list I had made up before hand. A little after 1:30 the first trains started rolling. Because of a shortage of cars, we started the session with no cars in the classification yard. The first problem occurred when I had the first three trains terminate at the yard. I wanted to give Mike some work, but he was quickly overwhelmed



Mark Linn goes spelunking. Photo by Bob Sobol



One of the first meets. Photo by Bob Sobol

with cars. In less than 30 minutes, the yard was full and we had trains waiting out on the mainline for clearance into the yard. At this point, I knew we had to get some cars moving out of the yard. So the first (of many) “adjustments” were made to the schedule. Within a short period of time Mike had the yard cleaned up and operating like it should, we were operating again.

We ran approximately fifteen trains during the 3 1/2 hour session. The car card/waybill system worked well. Mike liked the color coding, said it was a big help in sorting and classifying cars. One of my main objective was not having people feel rushed or hurried. The idea was not to see how many trains we could run within a certain amount of time, but how much fun we could have “operating” trains. The

most important thing I did during the session was to stay out of the way and let the operators operate.

After the session, the group discussed what was needed to make the next session run smoother. Mike was kind enough to write down a list of things he thought would improve the yardmasters job. In my opinion, the op session went better then expected. There were no major problems with the DCC system, we had only one engine act up, we had small problems popup, but nothing that can't be corrected, all in all the first session was a success, and I think the guys enjoyed themselves.

I want to thank, Dave, Craig, Bob and Mike for helping me get the Camas Prairie RR from a “layout in progress” to an actual “operating railroad”.

Thanks again guys! I



David Stewart switches Spaulding. Photo by Bob Sobol



Bill Beranek's First Operating Session

Perspectives of a Boomer Operator

By Michael Command

After February's club meeting in Loveland, fellow NCMRC member Bill Beranek mentioned that he was holding his first operating session on his new layout. Without any hesitation I said if he needed any help with operating the layout I would be more than happy to volunteer as the Lewiston Yardmaster. On Saturday, March 5, I met up with fellow operators Dave Stewart, Bob Sobol, and Craig Linn. After lunch we were on our way to Bill's layout north of Fort Collins.

After enjoying the spectacular views from his deck, Bill gave the four of us a short tour of the layout and a tutorial on his car forwarding system. Bill uses carcards and waybills (CC/WB) which I find very forgiving compared to computer generated switchlists. CC/WB tends to be self correcting if a car is not forwarded to the correct destination. (I should know, I goofed a couple times, sending out cars on the wrong train.)

The four of us put Bill's layout through its paces while Bill played the "Dispatcher" and observed how the trains ran. Though some glitches did pop up, it was clear that Bill had done his homework to ensure that trains ran as flawlessly as possible. The layout ran quite smoothly. This was the first time that four trains ran at the same time!

I appreciated Bill's hands off approach since it allowed me to determine the most efficient way of classifying trains. This is akin to the prototype in which the trainmen make daily business decisions on



Michael masters the yard. Photo by Bob Sobol

running their trains as efficiently as possible.

The trains were run in a sequential manner without any time constraints. When starting operations on a new layout, this is a good way to determine what works and what might need improving. The overall pace was well balanced with no rush to get things done by a set time.

Bill uses DCC by Digitrax to power and control his trains. The particular model he uses has a large knob to control speed along with a toggle switch to control direction. Bill also set the top speed of the yard switcher to a scale 25 MPH. This throttle control/speed limit combination worked out very well. I was able to couple and uncouple cars without "jack rabbit" starts and stops.

Since Bill's layout is in a garage, he used inexpensive rubber pads on the floor. Having shock absorbing flooring makes a huge difference on operator comfort. Operators tend to stand for hours at a time. Even though I stood for three and a half hours in mostly the same spot, I could have easily operated for a couple more hours.

As we left we thanked Bill for allowing us to play with his trains and the feeling that we accomplished something. That is, forwarding freight as part of a transportation system. The old adage, "time flies when you are having fun" definitely applied to this case. Operations add a whole new dimension to model railroading, something that is unique to this great hobby of ours. **I**