

West Coast Train Trip

By Saul Wilson

Introduction

This is my train trip this summer up and down the west coast.

Chapter 1: Washington State

We arrived from Japan at Sea-Tac Airport after a tiring day. We visited with my dad's brother that afternoon who we stayed with in Tacoma. The next day, Friday, we went to a large shopping complex near the University of Washington where we met some of my dad's friends who are mathematicians. We came back to Tacoma and went to the Sound Transit offices which had closed an hour earlier, but the door was open so I went in. They had information on quite a few light rail projects and commuter rail projects.

Saturday we spent with our Rolfer (a healthcare worker who does body work) who had just moved to Washington State. Her son, Jacob, really likes trains. We went to look at the outside of the Museum of Glass and Union Station (now a Court House). We saw the light rail tracks, the Coast Starlight, and a Cascade train while on the Glass Bridge over the train tracks and highway. The Glass Bridge has displays of beautiful glass art work and other items. Then we went to Freight House Square, an old freight warehouse turned into a store complex. We ate lunch and looked at Sound Transit's plans for both its Tacoma Link light rail and its Sounder commuter rail Tacoma Dome Station. Then we went to the Tacoma Link maintenance center which was closed. We walked to the Amtrak station to see the Sounder commuter trains and collect some schedules. They told us to go to the temporary Sounder station. I took some photos of the blue and green waved trains. After that we went home to a great dinner.



The Sounder commuter train.

That Sunday we went out to lunch for fish 'n chips. After that we drove through a park near the zoo and saw the short train that ran in the park.

On Monday we took a Cascade train to Vancouver, Washington. The Cascade trains were built by the Spanish company, Talgo. I have ridden on other trains made by Talgo such as the train that is capable of switching gauges. The conductors and mechanics were quite interesting and updated me on the ever worsening rail system. I had a nice microwaved pasta lunch in the dining car which had been designed very well with soft seats and lights above the tables. The Bistro / Cafe car was very interesting with a map of the Sound on the ceiling. We went along the Sound for a while and it was scenic.

Chapter 2: Oregon State

We arrived in Vancouver nearly on time! Vancouver is on the border between Washington and Oregon. We met my dad's friend Royce whom he has known for fifty years. He had planned a day full of trains - the Tri-Met light rail (MAX) and the Portland Zoo Narrow Gauge Railway. We went to a park where there was an anchor which they had dug up in that area. Then we went to his huge mansion which was decorated with great woodwork from Guam and with other interesting details. We drove across the bridge to Oregon where we got on a MAX light rail train and rode it to the zoo. Royce told us that the tunnel which the zoo station was in was built as a race between miners and a machine. The miners won!



Here is the Tri-Met light rail.

We went into the zoo and went directly to the train station. The nar-



row gauge railway at the zoo stopped at both the zoo and the Japanese Garden / Rose Garden. We took the Zooliner to the Gardens and went to see the Japanese Garden. It was very nice but we thought it just felt too big and there were no temples. We got back on the Zooliner. There were other trains, but none were running.

Then we got back on the MAX and went to Royce's car and drove up to the seventh largest waterfall in the U.S. which was just up the highway in Oregon. We went up on a bridge above the river and looked at the waterfall. The waterfall was amazing. It was huge. Royce told me that some of the stones on the waterfall had fallen lately. I noticed some holes



This is the Zooliner.

in the waterfall. We went back to the car and drove to the Portland train station. The station was very big and felt like it was oversized because there was nobody in it except one station attendant. We went to a very nice restaurant in the station with a view of the trains and great food.

The next day we had a relaxed morning and had a burger lunch. After lunch we went to the train station to get on the Coast Starlight which was one hour late. This train is often three to five hours late, so we considered ourselves lucky. We got on the coach car and rode down to Eugene, Oregon. I met some people in the lounge and wandered around the train as I always do.

We got off at Eugene and had a great dinner with my dad's friend who is a mathematician. We stayed and had lunch the next day



The Cascade train in Portland Union Station.

and got on the train that night.

Chapter 3: California State

We had a Superliner sleeper. The Superliners are double-decker and make up the Coast Starlight, as they do for most trains. We were on the top level compartment and I took the bottom bunk. All the stations on the west coast are low level so they have exits on the bottom level. We ate dinner on the train which was very good - a pork chop with a great sauce and cheese cake with strawberry topping for dessert which was great!! I had a good sleep even though I woke up in Redding early around four or five. We had a nice breakfast and lounged around in the Pacific Parlor car. The Pacific Parlor car is a Superliner I lounge car (ordered by Santa Fe RR about 50 years ago) and is much more luxurious than the modern lounge cars. It is only open to people in the sleeping cars. We got off two hours late at San Jose which is a very busy station and serves Caltrain, Altamont Commuter Express (ACE), Amtrak California, and the Coast Starlight. We went into the station and picked up some schedules, our luggage, and tickets for the Caltrain from San Jose to Redwood City.



One of the Amtrak California F59PHIs in Oakland Jack London Square Station.

On the trip to Redwood City I saw the ACE trains which are painted beautifully. The conductor and engineer were very friendly and allowed me to go up into the cab which offered a great view. From the cab I was able to see the Valley Transportation Authority's (VTA) new light rail cars. We got off at Redwood City to see my great aunt.

Corinne served us lunch and we showed her some of our pictures. Later we went to dinner



A Caltrain cab car.

at a great restaurant with my dad's cousins. The next day we left on the Coast Starlight from San Jose and went down to San Luis Obispo, California. When we were going around Horse Shoe Curve (a mountain pass just outside of San Luis Obispo) I met another rail advocate and we talked for the rest of the trip. There were three interesting private cars on the back of the train.

My aunt and uncle picked us up at the train station in San Luis Obispo and drove us to a great restaurant in a neighboring town. The steak I had was great. We went to their house in Santa Maria. I was quite surprised that they had partially implemented the plan which my uncle and I had made on my last trip there. The plan was for a garden which would take up his whole field. It had a patio, a bridge, and bushes which the deer liked eating. We went to their ranches, Babe Farms, on a few occasions. One time we stole some green peppers for our



The Coast Starlight in Santa Barbara Station.

home-made taco dinner. We also went up a plateau near Guadeloupe where we ate the best of all steaks. My Uncle Greg and Aunt Cherrie have six cats.

That Tuesday we boarded the train to return to Tacoma. We had a sleeper all the way north. We had got on in Santa Barbara so we could go through Vandenberg Air Force Base (AFB). Vandenberg AFB is where they launch satellites, missiles, and where NASA was supposed to, but did not, launch the Space Shuttle. On our return trip, we met a women from Santa Maria who was going to Tacoma too. She told us that there was a train museum in Santa Maria which she had donated items to. I was furious I had missed it. We got off in Tacoma only three hours late! We had great meals on all the trains.



Some Sounder cars that were bought by Caltrain for their Baby Bullet Service.