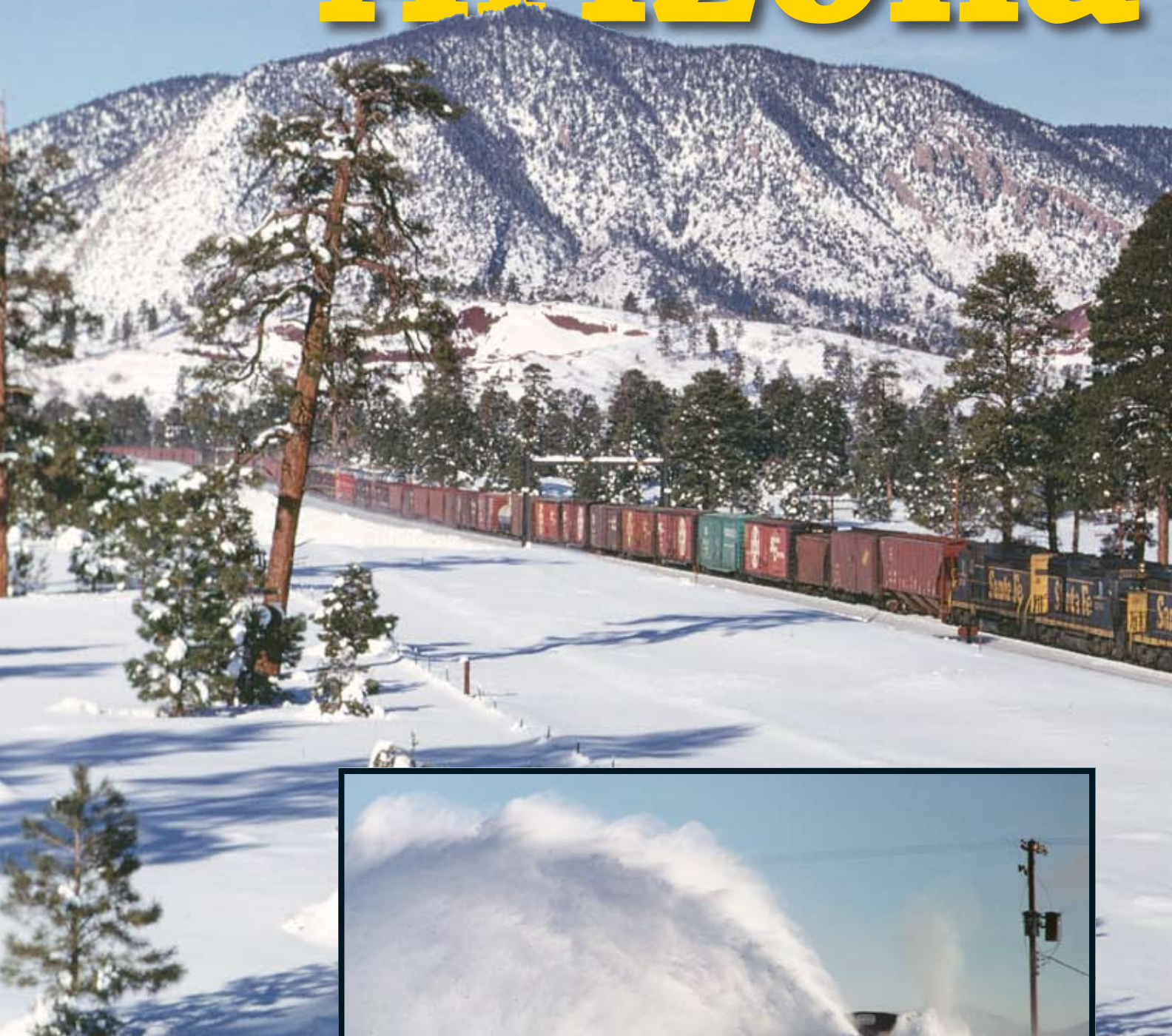


Arizona



Santa Fe rotary plow 199361 creates its own snowstorm as it clears the yard tracks at Williams on December 24, four days after the blizzard had subsided.



aftermath



A southern Californian got a rare look at winter railroading when he headed east on the Santa Fe main line after a blizzard

By Gordon Glattenberg • Photos by the author

On Christmas Day, 1967, six units—an SD40, SD24, RSD15 “Alligator,” and three GP30’s—are just east of Flagstaff with an eastbound freight heading down-grade toward Canyon Diablo.



Snowstorms are not unusual in northern Arizona. The elevation in the area around Flagstaff, Williams, and the Grand Canyon's South Rim averages 7000 feet, and every winter brings cold and some snow, but usually nothing like the depths typical of Donner Pass or the Cascades.

However, in early December 1967 a winter storm formed in the Gulf of Alaska and followed the Pacific coast to southern California, where it dumped heavy rain. It then headed east, and for 10 days the snowfall across northern Arizona, New Mexico, and west Texas was unrelenting. Thirty-nine deaths were reported, and the Hopi and Navajo reservations were isolated, requiring rescue missions by Air Force helicopters, which also dropped feed for livestock.

Most transportation in the area was paralyzed, with Interstate 40 and most other roads closed throughout the storm. The Santa Fe

Railway's main line across the Arizona Divide (what BNSF now calls the "Transcon") was also shut down for a time, but the use of two rotary snowplows kept trains moving the rest of the time, albeit with delays.

The storms subsided around December 20, and my employer shut down for the holidays at about the same time, so I headed east from my home in San Gabriel, Calif., on the 23rd to see what I might find in Arizona. Crossing the Mojave Desert between Barstow and Needles, Calif., I noticed snow on many relatively low hills. At Needles, train 17, the *El Capitan*, was leaving in mid-morning

Delayed by the snow to the east, Second 17, the Los Angeles-bound *El Capitan*, makes an unusual daylight appearance just west of Needles, Calif., on December 23. Behind the last Hi-Level car (one of the two tapered-side prototypes built in 1954), a pair of GP30's helps the A-B-B-A F units up front recover some time on the grade out of the Colorado River valley.



Southern Pacific steam-powered rotary plow SPMW 208, borrowed by the Santa Fe to fight the Arizona blizzard, is seen at Kingman, Ariz., on December 23. Its AT&SF work done, the plow is being hauled back to Roseville, Calif., to await a call to duty in its usual bailiwick: Donner Pass.



The final task in Arizona for Albuquerque-based plow 199361 (built in 1959 from a 4-8-4 tender and an 1892 Cooke rotary) was to clear the yard tracks at Williams on December 24. Propelled by a GP30 and two GP35's, the rotary put on a dramatic show for photographer Glattenberg, who found himself on the receiving end of the plow's efforts at one point (right). The plow took a break as eight EMD's rolled by the depot with a train from Phoenix (above right). Today, BNSF freights pass here, sharing the scene with Grand Canyon Railway passenger trains.



instead of its scheduled 2:05 a.m.—8 hours late. Two GP30 helpers pushed on the rear to make up some time on the 30 miles of 1.5 percent grade to Goffs.

The next surprise was waiting at Kingman, Ariz., where a westbound extra with SPMW No. 208 was halted in front of the station. This was Southern Pacific's last steam-powered rotary, on its way back to Roseville, Calif., after helping to open Santa Fe's main line! I have since wondered whether anyone photographed it crossing the Tehachapis.

Up into snow country

Going east across Arizona, the highway and railroad climb steadily for 220 miles, from desert at an elevation of 400 feet at the Colorado River to pine-covered mountains at 7000 feet at Riordan, just west of Flagstaff. From that summit they descend to desert at Winslow, 4850 feet above sea level. I first found snow just east of Kingman, and the ground was fully snow-covered from Seligman eastward, with the depths increasing to the summit. The official snow depth at Flagstaff was 89 inches, and I expected it to diminish on the descent toward Winslow.

But there was yet another surprise: As I headed east, the snow continued to get deeper, with drifts towering above my car near Canyon Diablo. On my arrival at Winslow around noon on a sunny day, the temperature was 21 degrees F., the coldest daytime temperature of my trip.

Road conditions didn't lend themselves to chasing trains, so my photography consisted of driving to scenic spots and waiting for a train, which rarely took long. Fortunately for this spoiled Californian, the picture-taking conditions were surprisingly good, with no clouds and little wind.

By December 24, trains were mostly operating on time, although a 45-minute maintenance window backed up five eastbounds just west of Flagstaff. The line was busy back then, but its freight traffic didn't compare with the intermodal volume, or train frequency, of today's Transcon. One distinctive operation at the time was a daily unit coal train for Kaiser Steel that ran from the mine at York Canyon, N.Mex., to the mill at Fontana, Calif., using mid-train helpers most of the way.

In addition, there was still a respectable



amount of passenger traffic. Albuquerque Division Timetable No. 10 showed five trains scheduled in each direction on the main line: the *Fast Mail/Express*, *Grand Canyon*, *Chief*, *San Francisco Chief*, and *Super Chief/El Capitan*. The latter train ran as two sections during the summer and Christmas holiday seasons, and it was one of those sections that I'd seen leaving Needles. There were also daily trains on the branches from Phoenix and Grand Canyon that connected with mainline trains at Williams Junction. The *Super/El Cap* schedules survived to become today's Amtrak trains 3 and 4, the *Southwest Chief*.

A few blue-and-yellow F units were still in use on work trains, and Alco road power was still in evidence, hauling both freight and passenger trains. However, the vast majority of locomotives on the through trains were EMD's, with Warbonnet F's on most passenger trains and fairly new SD45's at the top of the freight-power food chain.

When I arrived on December 23, the mainline tracks were open and the railroad was cleaning up around the edges, with section gangs still busy and an occasional Jordan

spreader in evidence. That evening, while warming up in the station at Williams Junction, I heard a crew planning their final cleanup job: Clearing snow out of the yard at Williams (now the southern terminal of the Grand Canyon Railway).

Front row for the rotary show

The next morning was bright and sunny, and Santa Fe rotary snowplow 199361 was sitting in the Williams yard on the point of three units, two GP35's and a GP30. This plow was normally based in Albuquerque, since Jordan spreaders and a wedge plow usually were able to deal with the snow in Arizona.

There were a half-dozen tracks to clear, and as the plow began working, the only noise was the diesels that pushed it and also supplied the electric power to drive the rotor. While the sound was ordinary, the sight of the huge plume of snow was spectacular. I stayed on the sunny side while taking pictures, as the snow was blown away from me. Eventually, though, I was in a plowed-out slot with the rotary approaching and blowing snow to my side! There was nothing to do but

In a feast for the eyes and ears, seven Alco RSD15's roar toward Flagstaff at the head of a unit coal train on December 24; partway back in the consist, three more "Alligators" and a lone EMD SD24 lend a hand as mid-train helpers. The daily train is bound from Kaiser Steel's mine at York Canyon, N.Mex., to the company's mill at Fontana, Calif. York Canyon supplied power plant coal for years after Fontana shut down, but closed recently.



Although F7 230C and its mate appear to be snow-bound at Flagstaff, they're in fact switching cars on a siding. The two main tracks, dirty from the passage of trains, are in the foreground. This local and four other eastbounds were held west of town for a time on December 24 while maintenance crews cleared the tracks.

By Christmas Day, the railroad's operations across Arizona were nearly back to normal. Coming and going views from a bridge east of Flagstaff show four Warbonnet F7's with train 1, the Chicago-Amarillo-Oakland *San Francisco Chief*, racing toward the Bay Area.





take the pictures and then crouch down and let the plow pass by. As it did, the fireman leaned out of the first diesel cab and said, "Wet, isn't it!"

My car at the time was a 1966 Dodge Coronet, with a 318-cubic-inch V-8, three-speed manual transmission, and a limited slip differential. Despite a scary moment trying to

climb a motel driveway, I never had to put chains on the tires.

By the time I'd arrived in Arizona, snow was melting during the days and freezing at night, so the car's wheels would be frozen to the ground each morning. On starting, I would let out the clutch, and the wheels would break free with a nasty crunch. Other cars without a limited slip could be seen with one wheel spinning wildly.

One morning in Williams, I backed out of the parking space with the usual crunch, but the car wouldn't move forward. Investigation revealed ice frozen around the parking-brake cable. A few minutes' chipping had me under way for the day's adventures.

On December 26 I headed for home, with a detour through Las Vegas. Upon reaching Seligman, I found the snow had already turned to slush, and in Las Vegas I marveled at how comfortable it was to walk on dry sidewalks!

As I returned home, I was filled with memories of the deep snow and the first rotary snowplow I'd seen in operation (to this day, still the only one). In retrospect, though, witnessing Santa Fe's passenger fleet just 3½ years before Amtrak started, as well as seeing the parade of freights behind blue-and-yellow diesels, were equally memorable. ■

Three SD45's, the top freight power on the Santa Fe in 1967, roll boxcars east across the desert at Sunshine, Ariz., on December 25. Because of the storm, airlifts were required to drop hay to feed sheep and cattle on the Navajo reservation in this area.

