

DW&P: Local logger to international link

Canadian National's "back door to the U.S." has undergone quite a transformation



Steve Glischinski

Three SD40's, the first two run-throughs from CN, plus DW&P 5909 (ex-GTW), cruise the West Duluth trestle, heading for NP trackage and downtown Duluth with interchange on May 7, 1981.

Early railroads were ambitious entities, frequently using their names to advertise lofty corporate ambitions. One was the Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific, which directly reached only the first word in its title, Minnesota's big port on Lake Superior. DW&P in effect did get to all, though, thanks to owner Canadian National. Born as a logging railroad, "the Peg," as it was called, evolved into a 167-mile link between Duluth and Fort Frances, Ont. Today as a key part of CN's Chicago-Pacific Coast route, the

DW&P's tracks are busier than ever.

DW&P is a relatively new railroad, tracing its ancestry to the Duluth, Virginia & Rainy Lake Railway, begun in 1901 by Wirt H. Cook and William O'Brien to haul logs to the sawmills in Virginia, Minn. By 1903 the DV&RL extended north 27 miles from Virginia to Cook and had lines west into logging areas. To the north, meantime, Canadian Northern Railway (CNor) had reached Fort Frances from Winnipeg, and its founders, William Mackenzie and Donald

Mann—who had formed railway construction giant Mackenzie-Mann, Ltd.—looked south toward Duluth. They bought DV&RL in 1905 and renamed it Duluth, Rainy Lake & Winnipeg Railway. By 1908, new construction closed the gap between Fort Frances and Cook, and Canadian Northern bought the DRL&W's stock on November 18, 1908.

On March 19, 1909, Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific Railway was incorporated (in Maine!) to build from Duluth to Virginia; it opened in 1912. On paper, both DRL&W and DW&P Railroad (a Minnesota corporation, formed to acquire and build the line, whose stock was held by DW&P Railway) were leased to the latter, controlled by Canadian Northern. CNor fell under government control in 1918 and became part of Canadian National when it was formed in 1919.

The most scenic and rugged portion of DW&P was its Duluth end. Heading southwest from the city, the line followed the valley of the St. Louis River, but to swing north, rugged hills required building a 520-foot, curved tunnel through Ely's Peak at milepost 7.4. Northbound trains faced a 1.15 percent grade as they climbed through the tunnel. Yard and roundhouse facilities were built in West Duluth, but the primary engine repair facility was the roundhouse 77 miles north in Virginia, Minn., at West Virginia Yard.

In Duluth, trackage rights over Northern Pacific and the Omaha Road allowed DW&P to interchange with other railroads. To reach the NP, DW&P built a huge wood trestle through West Duluth's neighborhoods. Trains also used NP's Grassy Point Drawbridge to Superior, Wis., to reach switching road Lake Superior Terminal & Transfer, owned by Great Northern, NP, Omaha, and Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic.

DW&P's steam power was small. Ten 2-8-0's, delivered by Brooks in 1916-17, provided mainline service until diesels came. Also on hand were five 4-6-0's, a lone 2-8-2 (Grand Trunk Western 3425), and, after 1928, four more Alco 2-8-0's from CN family sibling Central Vermont [GTW's "Fallen Flags Remembered" was in Summer 2004, CV's in Winter '04.]. CN also sent down several class N-2-b Consolidations; some carried DW&P emblems, while others kept their CN iden-



Franklin A. King

Green-and-yellow RS11 3600 passes the West Duluth station en route into Duluth in 1962.



Louis A. Marre collection

Some 2-8-0's, such as the Coffin-feedwater-heater-equipped 2455 (above, in 1955) carried DW&P markings. Sister 2478's front-end plate bears the lettering "DULUTH WPG. & PAC."

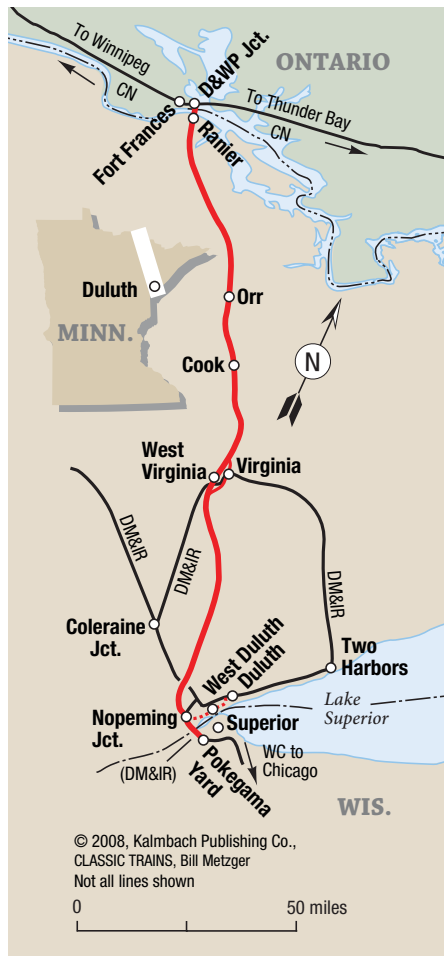


Philip R. Hastings

tification. In both the steam and diesel eras, engines often would swap among CN's U.S. roads: GTW, Grand Trunk (of New England), CV, and DW&P.

DW&P's passenger service was minimal, in 1950's *Official Guides* not even rating separate mention, just a Fort Frances-Duluth timetable deep in the CN section. The overnight train, CN cars pulled by a CN 4-6-2, carried a tri-weekly sleeper from Winnipeg. The engine went back the next night, because regulations required locomotives not leased to DW&P to spend a maximum 24 hours in the U.S. A new Budd RDC3, DW&P D-301, replaced the steam train in April 1957. As the steam train did, the self-propelled car used Omaha Road's passenger station in Duluth, next to Duluth Union Depot. Its last run occurred on July 1, 1961, but after the Lake Superior Museum of Transportation (today the Lake Superior Railroad Museum) was established in the old Union Depot in 1973, DW&P ran several passenger excursions to benefit the museum.

DW&P steam power was eliminated virtually overnight in 1956 when 15 dynamic-brake-equipped RS11's arrived from Alco. Although built in the U.S., they rode on Canadian Dofasco trucks. They were the Peg's main power through the 1960's, supplemented occasionally by CN GP9's. Six of the Alcos were sent to Central Vermont in 1965 and relet-



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Not all lines shown

0 50 miles

tered, but returned three years later. In 1969, rules were changed to allow Canadian locomotives to remain in the U.S. for 72 hours without being leased, as long as they returned via the same route and did no local switching, so in the 1970's as traffic grew, CN SD40's began running through on the DW&P.

Swap time returned in 1977. DW&P sent 10 of its RS11's to CV, which sent 10 GP9's to GTW, which sent 8 SD40's to DW&P. In spring 1983 the remaining five Alcos, by then kept in Duluth transfer service, went to CV, which sent four GP9's to GTW, which sent four ex-Rock Island GP38-2's to DW&P. Got all that?

Two more GTW SD40's arrived in 1989. GTW power by then was painted blue, not black, so DW&P kept that and added slanted initials and the slogan "Delivered With Pride." The four GTW



Fallen Flags Remembered



Steve Glischinski

Three run-through CN Geeps trail DW&P RS11's 3609, 3607, and a sister on a northbound train at Ash Lake, Minn., on September 22, 1974. The 15 Alcos wore six DW&P color schemes.

GP38-2's returned home in 1986, and the Peg made do until February 1992, when GTW sent GP38-2's 5726-5727 (ex-Missouri Pacific) for Duluth local work.

I first became familiar with DW&P when the March 1974 *TRAINS* arrived in my St. Paul mailbox. Stanley H. Mailer's article, "CN's Back Door Entry to the U.S.," promised the delights of notched-hood Alco RS11's burbling along northwoods right of way in a part of Minnesota I had not visited. That August I finally trekked north, and I remember standing in the Peg's West Duluth yard looking at the Alcos as, high on the hill above, Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range SD9's filled the air with the sound of lugging 567's as they pulled an empty ore train up Proctor Hill. To borrow a

line from the film *Field of Dreams*: "Is this heaven? No, it's West Duluth!"

Later that year and next, I teamed up with friends John Larkin and Ed Robinson to explore the north end of DW&P in summer and winter. We found the West Virginia roundhouse alive, servicing diesels, and the dispatchers in the yard office were happy to give us train information. Train-order offices were still open at Cook, Orr, and Ranier, all classic wood depots of Canadian design. The trains ran slowly enough to keep up with, and as Mailer's article promised, trains were pulled by the RS11's, along with CN GP9's and SD40's.

Back then, in contrast to trains that today cruise straight through between Ranier and Superior, the Peg was divid-

ed into two operating districts: the 73-mile Taft Subdivision from DW&P Junction in Duluth to West Virginia Yard, and the 94-mile Cusson Sub on to Duluth Junction in Fort Frances (DW&P ownership changes at the international boundary). With a 45-mph speed limit, it took two crews to move each freight, although they seldom ran even that fast.

DW&P was undergoing a transformation. As international traffic boomed and equipment got heavier, CN launched a program to lift the pike out of the muskeg. After \$51 million and 19 years, by 1991 the entire line was relaid with welded rail that allowed speeds up to 49 mph. Cabooses, depots, and train orders are long gone, of course—DW&P was one of the first roads to eliminate train orders in favor of radio-delivered warrants, in 1979. After CN took total control, it installed CTC north of Virginia, allowing 60-mph running.

The biggest change came in 1984. On November 1, the new Pokegama Yard in Superior replaced DW&P's ancestral West Duluth home, and the trestle and the "hill line" with its grades, curves, and tunnel, were closed. To reach Pokegama (Po-KEG-uh-muh, named for an old NP point here), DW&P built a new connection to the Missabe's Spirit Lake branch at Nopeming Junction outside Duluth and got trackage rights to Superior on DM&IR's Interstate branch. When Pokegama opened, all interchange was moved to Superior, with new connections built to reach DM&IR and BN. The yard was paid for by federal, state of Minnesota, and DW&P funds because Duluth's Bridge Yard, where DW&P interchanged most traffic, was on land wanted for the city extension of I-35.

CN's U.S. subsidiaries retained their separate identities but in 1971 became part of CN's new U.S. holding company, Grand Trunk Corp. DW&P began to play an increasingly important role in the 1990's after Canada-U.S. and North American free trade pacts were passed, which helped spur increases in Canadian exports south and U.S. imports north. DW&P was CN's most direct way from western Canada to Chicago.

In 1992, CN began assimilating its GTC roads, marketing them under the "CN North America" brand, and a few DW&P SD40's received the "map" paint



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Three of the ex-GTW SD40's enter DM&IR trackage at Nopeming Junction, Minn., July 21, 1991.

scheme with small DW&P initials. This relationship continued until 1995, when CN received ICC permission to fully integrate its U.S. roads. DW&P ceased to be anything more than a “paper” railroad on January 1, 1996, when it and GTW were consolidated into CN.

CN ran more and more run-through trains to other railroads, and signed a pact with Burlington Northern in 1992 to handle its trains to Chicago. In 1998, CN contracted with regional Wisconsin Central to take over this traffic, then bought WC in 2001. DM&IR still owned the trackage between Nopeming and the WC connection in Superior, but CN closed that trackage-rights gap when it acquired the Missabe Road in 2004, completing its “iron lariat” around the Great Lakes. At the time, CN said it would run southbound trains over the former DM&IR from Virginia to Nopeming, and northbounds over the former DW&P, but in 2008 the route and direction of trains seems to be a “hit and miss” proposition. DW&P’s single-track line south of Virginia, which more than once has sunk into the unstable ground, could be an abandonment target since the parallel former Missabe Road was once double track, which could be re-installed.

Regardless of the future, the Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific main line remains a vital entry for CN into the Midwest, proving that what Mailer termed in 1974 as the “Back Door Entry to the U.S.” is still wide open. ■

DW&P FACT FILE

(comparable figures are for 1955 and 1995)

Route-miles: 167; 158

Locomotives: 13 steam (plus CN engines assigned); 10 diesels (SD40’s)

Freight cars: 161; 1,803 (CN-owned, “DWC” reporting marks)

Headquarters city: Duluth, Minn., until 1984, then Superior, Wis.

Special interest group: CN Lines Special Interest Group, 101 Elm Park Road, Winnipeg MB R2M 0W3, Canada; www.cnlines.ca

Recommended reading: *Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific In Color*, by David C. Schauer (Morning Sun Books, 2006)

Sources: *Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific In Color*, *CN Lines* (CN Lines SIG), Vol. 12, No. 2