

One day at . . .

Hermosa, Wyo.

By Doug Harrop • Photos by the author

When Lucius Beebe, the noted historian-photographer-writer, wrote in the June 1952 *TRAINS* magazine about the magic of railroading on Sherman Hill in eastern Wyoming, it was strong stuff for this pre-teen railfan, for I was familiar with the Union Pacific to the west, in Weber (WEE-ber) Canyon, Utah. Why, the passenger trains Beebe described storming

west out of Cheyenne and climbing to the 8,000-foot summit at Sherman were the same ones Dad and I watched at Ogden Union Station! Oh, how I wanted to see them on those high Wyoming plains, but during that Korean War period, Sherman was a world away, and for me would remain so.

By September 1957, I had a driver's license and my own car, earned by working long summer hours in the Ogden Valley hayfields. Before high-school football practice started on a Monday, I set out for a weekend in Wyoming. I would finally reach Sherman Hill. After spending an exhilarating day at Granger, junction of the Oregon Short Line with UP's main line, I threw my sleeping bag down 50 yards from the tracks just east of Green River. UP was once again using a dozen of its famous Big Boy steam locomotives between Green River and Cheyenne to protect the fall perishable rush, so all night long, the trains pounded upgrade, headed by steam; sets of F3, F7, and GP9 diesels; or gas-turbines. Talk about variety! I didn't sleep much.

By the next afternoon I was being mesmerized by the same parade of trains and motive power as they climbed eastbound out of Rock River, northwest of Laramie. I thought about football





starting the next day, though, and realized I would not make it to Sherman Hill this trip.

I finally first saw Sherman Hill in July 1960 . . . from a locomotive cab! I'd boarded No. 104, the *City of Los Angeles* streamliner, to begin a trip to Boston (east of Chicago, I rode New York Central's *New England States*). At Evanston, Wyo., I followed the prompting of my neighbor, a UP engineer, and ran up to the locomotive. I yelled up to the hoghead, "Hey, you know Wells Stoker?" "Sure," he replied. "He said you would give me a cab ride," I said, full of hope. "Well, climb on up," he yelled back.

It was my first cab ride, and what a trip. Twice we topped 100 mph on the fast track east of Rock Springs and Rawlins. After the same verbal exchange as in Evanston, at the next crew change I found myself still aboard the lead E

unit. Soon we were swinging around the big curve out of Laramie, so my first visit to Sherman Hill would be in the cab. It was almost to good to be true.

I saw Sherman in the gathering dusk, and what I remember most are the signboards of the fabled stations: Hermosa, Dale, Buford, Borie, and so on, by then just sidings, mostly, but filled with trains, generally eastbounds, in the clear for the varnish. Through the Hermosa tunnel we went, and on to Dale Junction. It was all a blur, but a wondrous one. All day I'd been looking for steam, but finally a crewman told me all the steam was stored, available if needed for the fall rush. It wasn't used—1959 had been UP steam's last year. I was grateful for my 1957 trip.

I climbed off the engine at Cheyenne, very hungry, wondering how much farther east I could have ridden. Probably

not much. By then, I'll bet no one would have heard of Wells Stoker. Still, it had been quite a ride.

On the ground on Sherman Hill, at last

I finally made my first visit on the ground to Sherman Hill in 1970. It is a unique place, not like the other great mountain crossings in the West. It is boulder-strewn, desolate, high country with its own beauty, vastness, and charm. Trains must work hard to cross the summit, then and now. The grades, only 0.82 percent eastbound at Hermosa, coupled with the incessant winds and the seemingly never-ending parade of trains, immediately made it a "favorite place" for me. I revisited Hermosa and east to Dale Junction for several days every year until 1985, when to me, the interesting motive power was gone.

Waiting on the bluff above one of the



As expected, not long after the eastbound *San Francisco Zephyr* passed, westbound counterpart No. 5 (top left) popped out of the tunnel. After the Amtraks, Harrop set up facing the east portals and was rewarded with a flurry of 10 trains. First was Extra 855 East (left center) with a GP30, two SD40's, and an SD45 on a boxcar train. On his block was Extra 6913 East (above) with more boxcars behind two Centennials. The rear of the next train, Extra 3276 West (left), a run-through to Western Pacific at Salt Lake City, had two classic UP cabooses behind trailers whose blue U.S. Mail placards identified this hotshot as the OMW, Overland Mail West.



Following the OMW was another hot train for WP, the “Ford Fast” (top left), bound for the auto plant at Milpitas, Calif., with three WP GP’s among its six units. Harrop crossed to the north side of the cut, just in time for the best consist of the day, on Extra 3629 East (center left): two SD45’s, one of them SP; two DD35B’s; and a GP9B. As the caboose cleared, a third WP train showed up (left): UP 3074 West with a UP SD40 and four WP units. On his block was Extra 6912 West (above), two 6900’s with another UP office car, this one right behind the power, a better place than the rear for handling in a freight train.



Hermosa tunnel portals was an amazing experience. During that decade-plus, any one of two dozen locomotive models might be leading a train out of the bores. Imagine the anticipation. To me, there was nothing like it anywhere else, and the best catches were the “double units.” The GE U50C’s were used on the point as late as 1974, and back in consists until 1976. The earlier U50’s (a.k.a. U50D’s) were retired by 1973, and the unique Alco C855 trio, built in 1964, was gone by 1970, but the EMD DD35’s and DDA40X Centennials all lasted into the 1980’s.

For my “one day” at the Hermosa tunnels, I’ve selected Monday, August 5, 1974, the final day of a three-day visit. (At the time, I was in my seventh year as a Southern Pacific official.) I broke camp down at the Hermosa county road grade crossing and shot a few morning

trains prior to the selection of photos you see in these pages, all of which were taken between 11 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. I sat down above the tunnels’ west portals to shoot Amtrak’s *San Francisco Zephyr*, trains 5 and 6, running daily through Wyoming at this time. First, a long intermodal train came through, Extra 841 East with a GP30, two double units, an SD40, and a GP20. It would probably take the No. 2 main track at Dale Junction to free up the No. 1 main for Amtrak 6, close on its tail.

A UP business car brought up the rear of Amtrak 6, which meant the engineer would have to be on his “A” game, as it was not unheard of for a UP vice president to call the hogger on the radio from the business car to comment on any slack action at the rear. (This comes from first-hand experience. In 1977, I’d entered engine service for SP at Ogden,

and I had pulled my share of “brass” in office cars who, either on the radio or while riding in the engine, never hesitated to remind the engineer of who they were. It was when they asked to run the train that often they were brought down a peg or two, as these instances sometimes would end with the official jumping up from the right-hand seat, saying, “Maybe you better run this thing.”)

As expected, Amtrak 5 soon popped out of the tunnel. It probably had come up from Cheyenne on the “new” (1953) No. 3 main to Dale so nothing was delayed. With CTC and three mains between Dale and Cheyenne, the dispatcher had several options. The SDP40F’s on the *Zephyr* were new, and some immediately entered service at Chicago on this train. During my earlier visits, these trains were still hauled mostly by



To work another angle, Harrop next went to track level for an eastbound leaving the tunnel, which turned out to be Extra 2880 East, with a fairly new U30C in the lead on a lumber train off the SP at Ogden. After firing a telephoto coming-on view (top left), he moved away from the track for a going-away shot of the power (top center), and soon Extra 1401 West rolled around the curve at him (above). As the trains passed on each side of him, he vowed—railroad employee or not—he'd never be caught in that position again. The conductor in the SP caboose of the 2880 East just gave him a bemused look.

former Union Pacific E units.

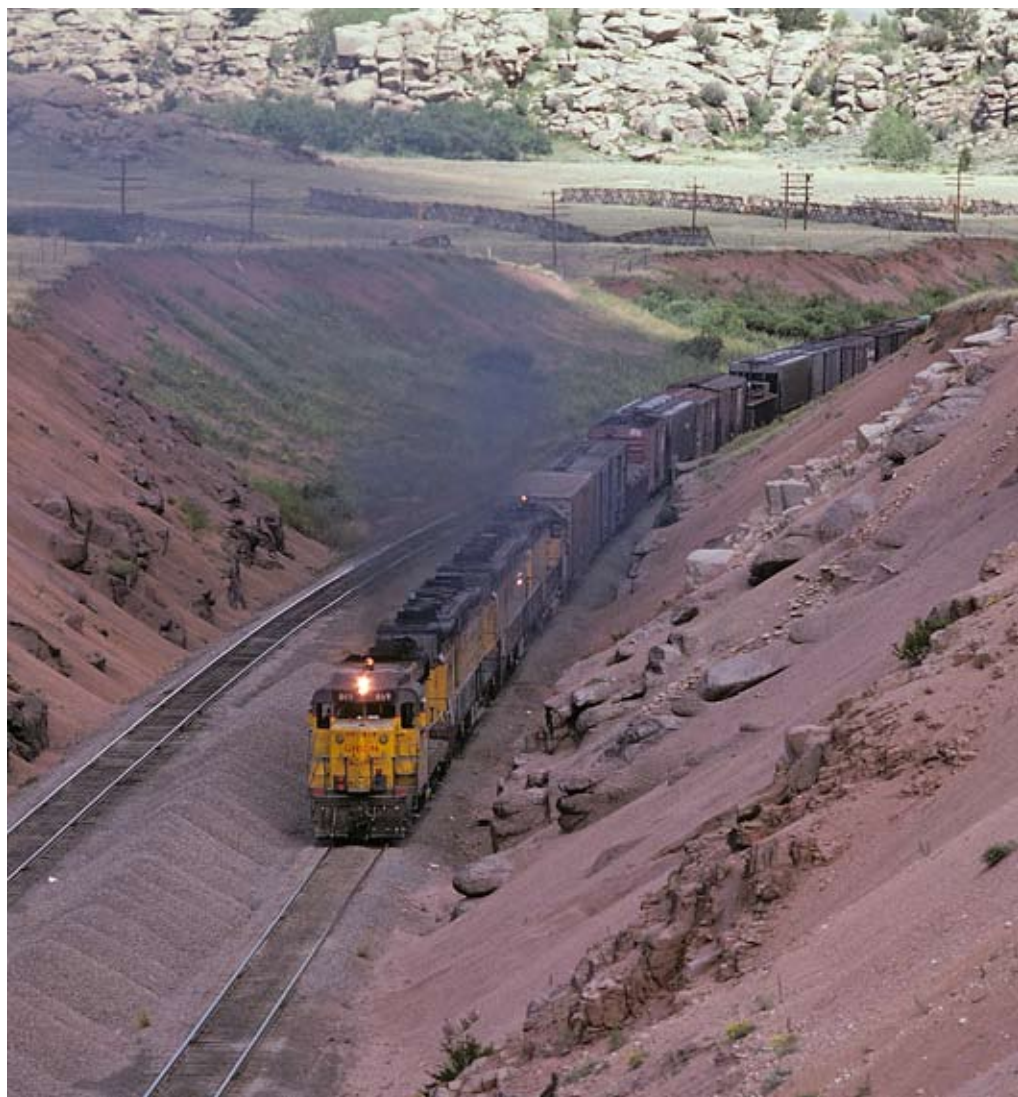
I next set up at the east portals of the 1,800-foot tunnels, and after the Amtrak's were gone, was rewarded with a flurry of 10 trains. Interesting to me was the types of trains that did *not* pass—no coal, soda ash, green fruit, ore, or automobiles, mostly just general merchandise. First was Extra 855 East with a GP30, two SD40's, and an SD45 on boxcars. On his block was Extra 6913 East with more boxcars behind two Centennials.

The rear of the next train, Extra 3276 West, a run-through to the Western Pacific at Salt Lake City, had two classic UP cabooses behind trailers whose blue U.S. Mail placards identified this hot-shot as the OMW, Overland Mail West. A second WP train, the "Ford Fast" for the auto plant at Milpitas, Calif., followed with three WP GP's among the

six units. During the late 1960's and early '70's, these WP trains—as well as many Southern Pacific run-throughs and those to the east with other roads—often had a "foreign road" unit leading, but by 1974, a UP unit would almost always be the leader to comply with cab-signal rules.

Best consist of the day

I crossed over to the north side of the cut, and out came the best consist of the day, on Extra 3629 East: two SD45's, one of them SP; two DD35B's; and a GP9B. This illustrates why I loved the UP on Sherman Hill—variety! UP had only 50 SD45's and 27 cabless DD35's, and on some days it seemed like they all passed through Hermosa. Just as the caboose cleared, here came a third WP train in a row, a westbound running as UP 3074 West with four WP units—one



EMD and three GE's—trailing the UP SD40. During this recession year, you could drive along the WP across western Utah and Nevada and be lucky to see a single WP train (SP's, though, were frequent on the paired track), yet here were three westbound WP's in a row! On 3074's block came Extra 6912 West, two Centennials with another business car right behind the power, a placement that aided train-handling.

Next I went to track level to shoot an eastbound leaving the tunnel, Extra 2880 East, with a fairly new U30C in the lead. Bought mainly to haul coal out of the Hanna, Wyo., coalfields, this GE was leading a heavy lumber train

off the SP at Ogden, likely from Eugene, Ore., to judge by the consist. The 2880 had been added at Ogden to an SP SD40 and two SD45's that likely brought it in from the west. After firing telephoto coming-on views, I stepped away from the track for a going-away shot of the power, and soon Extra 1401 West rolled around the curve at me. The lead unit was rare, an SDP35, one of just 10 on UP, so this was a nice catch. Despite the wide track centers here—the tunnels were bored in 1901 and 1918—I vowed I'd never be caught in this position again! At least the conductor in the SP caboose just gave me a bemused look, not realizing, of course, that I was a railroad employee, albeit of the SP.

So, I headed to the top of the tunnel, where I shot the last train of my visit, Extra 869 West, a GP30 leading two DD-35B's and an SDP35. It was nearing 4

Harrop's last train photos of the day, from above the tunnels, were of Extra 869 West, a GP30 leading two DD35B's and an SDP35.

p.m., time to begin the 400-mile drive back to Ogden. This three-day visit was no different from a lot of others I spent on the hill, and this was just a typical day. I saw a variety of power, and although none of the older double units was on the point, the elegant Centennials made up for that.

At this time the country was in a recession, stressing many eastern railroads financially, but on Union Pacific on Wyoming's fabled Sherman Hill, it was just business as usual, and big business at that. Despite the lack of steam, I would wager that even Lucius Beebe would have been impressed, and I was already looking forward to visiting again in 1975! 📷

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