



A BUSY SHORTLINE ON THE KANSAS PRAIRIE

Cimarron Valley

BY GEORGE PITARYS/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

SOMETIMES you just have to go back. In September 2013 I took a trip with my wife Candy that encompassed Mesa Verde, Arches and Canyonlands National Parks in Colorado and Utah, and included a day and a half railfanning the Cimarron Valley Railroad. That yielded an amazing chase of a trio of GP30s westbound from Dodge City, Kan., in simply spectacular light. I hadn't been able to rid myself of the thought of that chase, so in June 2014 I decided it was worth a second visit.

The Cimarron Valley Railroad (CVR) operates two former subdivisions of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. The first is the C.V. Subdivision between Dodge

City and Boise City, Okla. The other is the Manter Subdivision between Satanta, Kan., and Springfield, Colo. The Cimarron Valley purchased the lines from Santa Fe successor BNSF in 1996. The line gained fame for operating locomotive consists of classic EMD GP30s (mostly ex-Denver & Rio Grande), all painted in an attractive blue scheme. The roster has since been supplemented with GP26s from the Southwestern Railroad, a sister operation under the Western Group umbrella.

It appeared I'd be doing my 2014 trip solo, as all of Candy's vacation time was already committed, and none of my regular traveling companions appeared

to be available. I made my roomette reservations on Amtrak's *Lake Shore Limited* and *Southwest Chief* to travel from Worcester, Mass., to Dodge City and return for early September. Late in August my friend Hal Reiser was able to free up some time and was able to join me in the adventure. I made motel reservations in Sublette, Kan., and made arrangements to pick up and drop off the rental car at the Dodge City station.

DAY 1: Saturday, September 6

My daughter Jodi picked us up at 10:30 a.m., as Candy was working, and took us to the station at Worcester. In what became rather routine, Amtrak

OPPOSITE: It's nearly 6:00 p.m. on September 9, 2014, as the westbound CV job passes the elevator alley at Sublette, Kan., returning to Satanta from Dodge City with 45 cars in tow behind GP30 No. 3014. ABOVE: A brief ray of morning sunlight illuminates the pair of GP26s on the Manter job at Milepost 1 of the Manter Subdivision as the crew prepares to haul the train into the yard at Satanta.



departed on time, and we ate dinner with a very pleasant couple from Michigan as we crossed the Mississippi River in to Fort Madison, Iowa.

DAY 3: Monday, September 8

We were pleasantly surprised to awaken and discover we'd actually arrived in Dodge City on time at 5:10 a.m. The Hertz rental car was in the parking lot, and we departed for the CVR's office in Satanta, Kan., by 5:30. We arrived by 7:00, and once I reintroduced myself we soon learned the Dodge job would be leaving about 9:30 into the beautiful morning light. What was not so beautiful was that a General Electric B39-8, albeit nicely painted, would be leading, with our desired GP30 trailing. We also knew that the Manter job would be leaving westbound at about 11:00 and would shortly be headed into very nice light as well, while the light deteriorated on the dreaded "techno toaster" Dash 8.

We decided to chase the Dodge train for a couple of shots, and then wheel around and catch the Manter job. We followed him as far as Sublette, and then vectored in on the Manter job at Ryus. We knew he had work at the carbon black plant so we went ahead to Ulysses, looked for, and found a trestle upon which I'd seen shots. We hiked into it and then waited about 90 minutes, but the result was worth it.

We walked back out and sped through Ulysses to Sullivan, a location Candy and I had scouted last year. We really liked the shot there, but had been unable to get a train. This time we knew we had one. Well we checked in with grain company, and began waiting... And waiting... When it seemed too long, we headed back to Ulysses, and found they had stopped to do some work. A minor service interruption had occurred, trapping the units, and requiring immediate rectification. It proved quite time consuming, and when they were able to get back underway we realized the chase we'd hoped to make to Manter was going to fall well short, due to darkness. It appeared we'd still get the Sullivan shot, but another location we hoped for at Big Bow was now very uncertain.

Bear in mind that this can be a frustrating chase, because it's the prairie; you can see from town to town, but the train speed (everywhere) is 10 m.p.h. In any case you can see the train coming, and see the light going. Such was the case at Big Bow. We watched him coming, but by the time he got there we had to settle for the "going away glinter" shot.

It was a fairly quick ride back to Sublette and the motel. We discovered the Cattleman's Cafe with the winning feature of coconut cream pie for desert.

Bed was soon thereafter, and after the short night on the train and the busy day, sleep was instantaneous.

DAY 4: Tuesday, September 9

Our regular waking time all week would be 6:45 a.m. This allowed us to be in the office at Satanta for 7:30 to find the day's prospects. The choice was relatively simple on this day with a crew taking a taxi to Dodge to bring a train back to Satanta. They would be leaving Dodge about 12:30-1:00 p.m. with the GP30 leading. The other crew was going to taxi to Manter and return to Satanta with the GP26s (rebuild ex-Gulf, Mobile & Ohio GP30s still on Alco Type B trucks). A GP30 headed west on a "clear dome" afternoon... No brainer! We made a leisurely trip to Dodge, and at 12:40 were rewarded at the east end of the Arkansas River bridge.

Pursuit began and, as previously stated, the speed limit allows for multiple opportunities. A speed of 65 m.p.h. on the highway and 10 m.p.h. on the railway allows for just about anything.

On arriving at Satanta, the crew switched out its train, and the inbound Manter job pulled into sight, and tied up just short of the yard limit. Then it was off to the Cattleman's again, and bedding down at the Golden Prairie Motel, which actually turned out to be a reasonably priced (currently \$85 per night), clean



TOP: On the evening of September 9 the westbound CV job is passing a field of sorghum and is about to enter the yard at Satanta. ABOVE LEFT: Evidence of Santa Fe heritage on the Cimarron Valley Railroad remains in the form of the classic station sign at Copeland, as the westbound CV job eases to a stop and make a ten-car pick up on September 9. ABOVE RIGHT: A ten-minute walk, and a 90-minute wait, yielded this nice shot of a westbound Manter train crossing a wood trestle over an un-named slough east of Ulysses, Kan.

was late. In this instance it was only 24 minutes, but the train was only 50 miles into the trip from Boston. We lost 40 more minutes at Albany while we waited for a yard conductor to make the hitch between the New York and Boston sections of the *Lake Shore Limited*. We

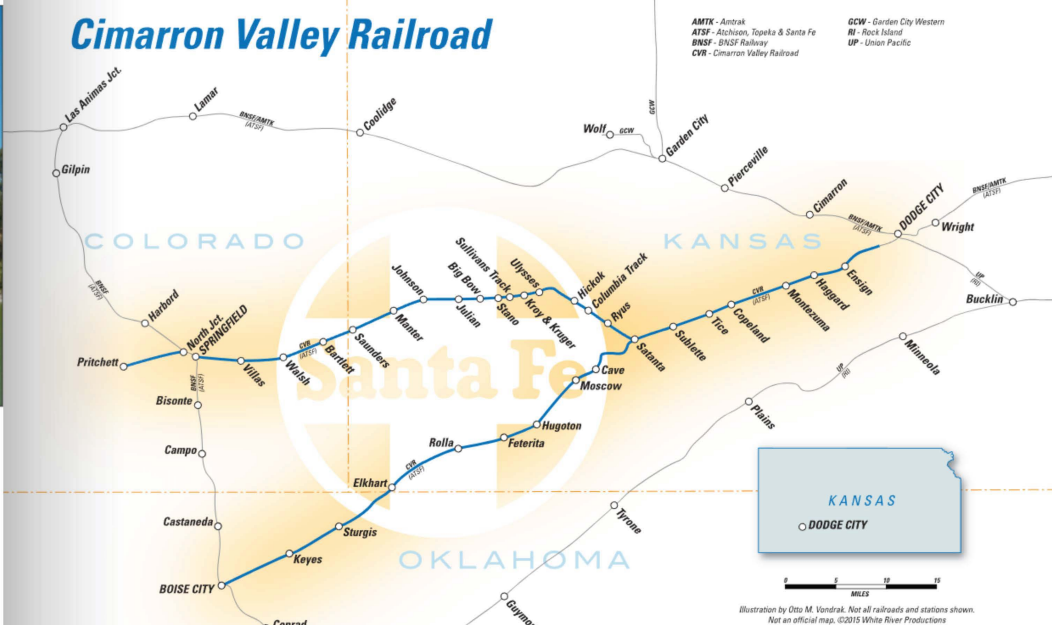
enjoyed dinner along the scenic Mohawk River and turned in around 10:00 p.m.

DAY 2: Sunday, September 7

We woke up around Sandusky, Ohio, and had breakfast at the first (6:00 a.m.) seating, and discovered (to no

one's surprise) we were late, about two hours down. Time continued to slip away as traffic was quite dense, and we ended just over three hours late arriving in Chicago. This really didn't present a problem, since we had a five-hour connection. The *Southwest Chief*

Cimarron Valley Railroad



motel with brand new Sleep Number beds — which we soon put to good use.

DAY 5: Wednesday, September 10

Once again we rose at 6:45 a.m. and arrived at the office to get the rundown. The day dawned rather murky, but the forecast promised a decent day, although Thursday and Friday now looked rather poor. I'd been beating the drum for two days about getting multiple GP30s on a train (ever bearing in mind the trio I'd shot last year) and there, low and behold, was a pair lined up for the C.V. Sub and a round trip between Satanta and Hugoton. No thought whatever was given to the other crew who would be leaving Satanta for Bartlett, Colo., on the Manter sub, again with the GP26s (which look just like GP35s). Well, almost no thought. The train which had parked at the yard limit the night before was to be hauled in by the Hugoton crew; a brief glint of light allowed for a dramatic shot.

As with all the chases this week, we nailed our train quite a few times (in all 42 photo opportunities this day) in the 28 miles between Satanta and Hugoton. It proceeded to work several locations in Hugoton, as well as just west of

there. There were some rather odd cars in the train for Haliburton; I later discovered they were built in the 1940s and were pressurized cement cars, but with current regulations they no longer met standard and were on the way to scrapping.

The chase back began, and was once again a case of "at will" shooting. Then it was off the to the Cattleman's and well-deserved rest at Golden Prairie.

DAY 6: Thursday, September 11

The weather had turned cold on what was otherwise another routine morning for Hal and me. On Monday we'd seen the temperature peak at 101. This morning it was 44. It was cloudy and windy and we were admittedly

ill-prepared. We bought into the long-range forecast before we left, which had shown temps in the 80s and 90s, so we had both packed only tee-shirts. As soon as the Dollar General opened we were there looking for sweatshirts. Yep, we got a pair of day-glo lime yellow-green ones ensuring we could be spotted from at least three miles away. But at least we were reasonably warm. The day's line surprised us as well, since we'd anticipated they'd go after the Manter job that had expired at Bartlett the previous evening. The only crew that ran was an eastbound from Satanta to Dodge. It was heavily clouded, and the bloody B39-8 was going to be leading. There really aren't any nearby options, however, and due to the monopoly on



RIGHT: The only overpass between Dodge City and Satanta is for Route 400 a few miles west of Dodge City. It comes with a wide breakdown lane and nice curve for westbound trains such as this one. **BELOW:** Our first shot of a week-long adventure was of this train leaving Satanta for Dodge City on the morning of September 8. The light was nice, but the author would have preferred the GP30 leading instead of a GE.



ABOVE: A few miles west of Satanta on the C.V. Sub, an eastbound pair of GP30s bring antique pressurized cement hoppers one step closer to their final consignee, the scrapper. **LEFT:** The author swears this was not a set-up. The crews finished their day's work and parked the power outside the west end of the shop, and this is how they lined up, no coaching. *Really!*



the Ryus shot we ran into the mobile brakeman, with whom we'd become quite friendly during the week, and he told us they had work at the carbon black at Ulysses, and they meet the other guy at Big Bow...

What other guy?

Apparently the general manager decided after we left that he would go to Bartlett to retrieve the other train (with the GP26s) before the weekend. We knew we'd only get two or three shots of the single GP30 before Big Bow given all the work he had, so we pushed a bunch of chips up to the line and made a hot run for Bartlett, Colo., about 60 miles west; we really wanted a shot of the railroad in Colorado (and Oklahoma, but that didn't happen). We found the train almost ready to leave Bartlett (whew), and began the chase east. Like all the chases, it was pick what you want, and we got him numerous times. The two trains met at Big Bow and combined into a single train.

This proved to be the last train of the trip. We found a car wash and tidied up the rental car, then drove to Dodge and had a very good steak dinner at a place the railroad folks had recommended. It was then to the station, where we had to wait nearly five hours for Amtrak No. 4, the eastbound *Southwest Chief*. Once we boarded, we hit the bunks immediately and were snoring. Another shortline adventure was in the books! 📌

car rentals in Dodge, you get 100 free miles each day and then it's 30 cents a mile, so striking off any distance would be an expensive proposition. Thus, we saddled up and began the chase. By now I'd chased several westbounds, but I'd never really chased any eastbounds. There actually isn't a lot of distinction on the prairie.

It was early, so we decided to have a look at the BNSF, and we also began seeing a few holes in the clouds. We went to the east end of Dodge, and saw the distributed power unit (DPU) on a westbound grain train being overtaken by an eastbound powered by CSX toasters on what appeared to be an empty windmill train. With a little sun breaking out, we then went to the west end of town hoping for a westbound and, sure enough, a local sped by and we got him in full sun. We decided to chase for one more photo and then it was

simply a matter of routine — Sublette, Cattleman's, bed.

DAY 7: Friday, September 12

We were up a few minutes early to pack and leave the motel, then headed down to Satanta for our last line-up. We were surprised they still weren't going after the train at Bartlett, but would be running west from Dodge, and west on the Manter Sub. Even though the GP30 would be leading from Dodge, we'd done that, and it really was an RDF (rain, drizzle, and fog) day. However, the Manter job was going to run west with a single GP30. We figured they'd eventually end up in Bartlett and come back with the other train "sometime." So we set up and got a shot leaving Satanta, and then went on to Ryus.

The precipitation had stopped, and we could do a lot worse than a single GP30. As we walked back to the car after