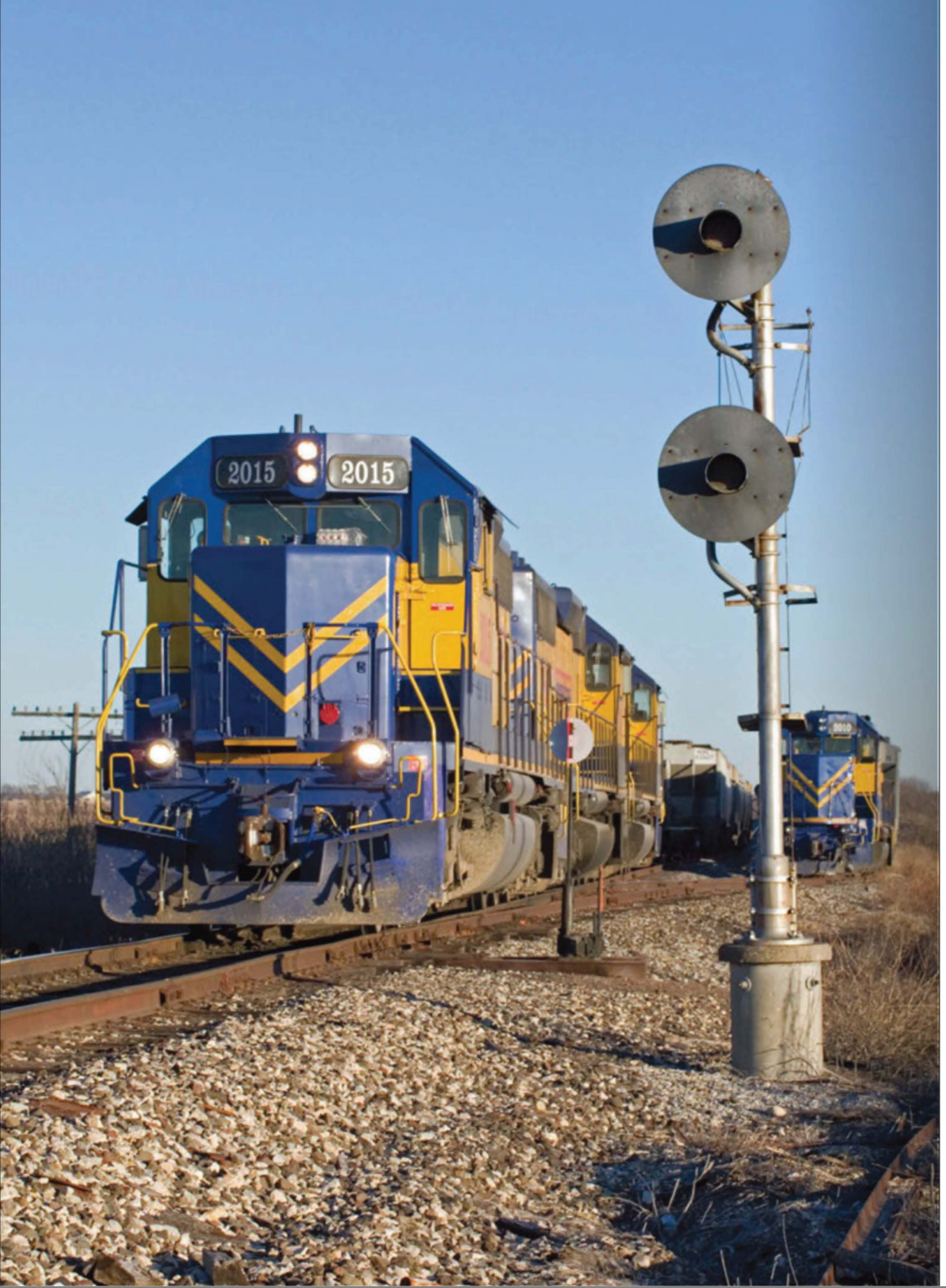
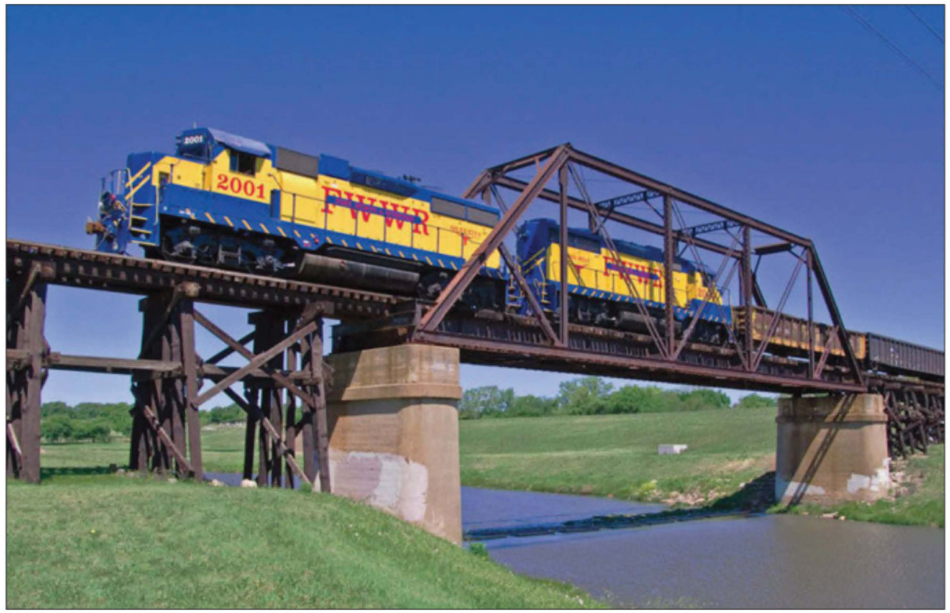




THE COLORFUL FORT WORTH & WESTERN

Texas Tarantula

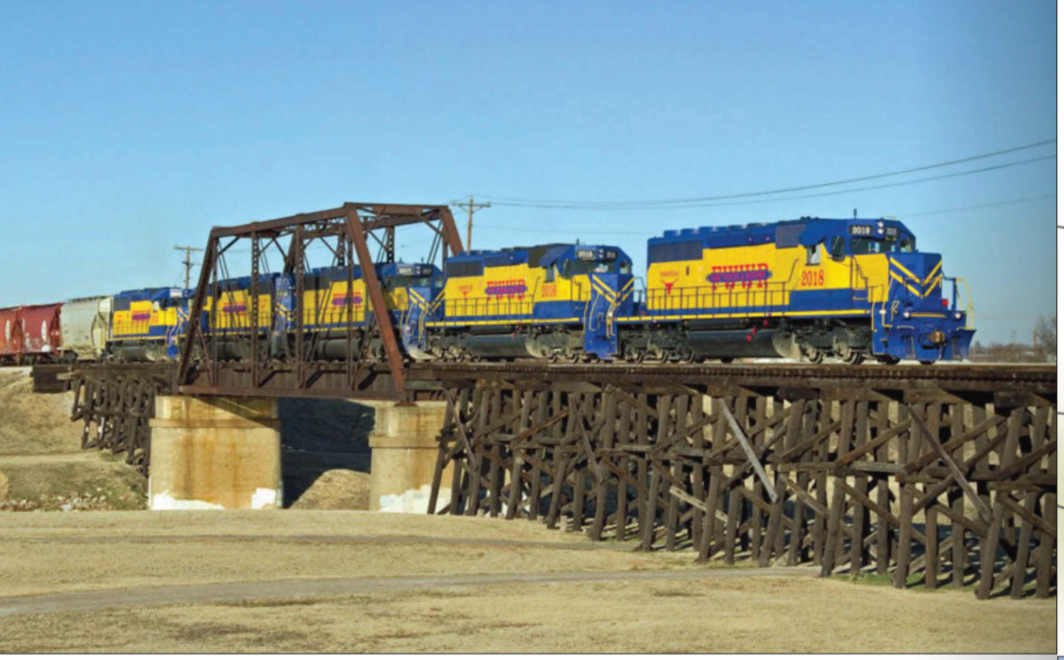
BY JOHN LEOPARD/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

In 1873, a Fort Worth newspaper published a visionary map portraying the Texas town as the railroad center of the Southwest. On this map the then trackless city was represented as a large black dot with nine rail lines radiating outward. Looking much like a spider, this map became known as the "Tarantula Map." Three years later in 1876 the first rails were spiked into the city from the east by the Texas & Pacific, with other companies soon to follow. By the early 1900s the map's early projections were realized.

Fast forward to 1988 when two local businessmen formed the Fort Worth & Western Railroad (FWWR) and purchased from Burlington Northern six-miles of industrial trackage running along the city's near west side. In addition to a serving a handful of freight customers, FWWR operated a passenger train serving the growing tourist destination of Fort Worth's "Cowtown" that pays homage to the city's history as a livestock and meat processing center. From this humble start, through a series of purchases and leases the FWWR has grown to operate 276-miles of track and the company's network in its own right now resembles the Tarantula Map.

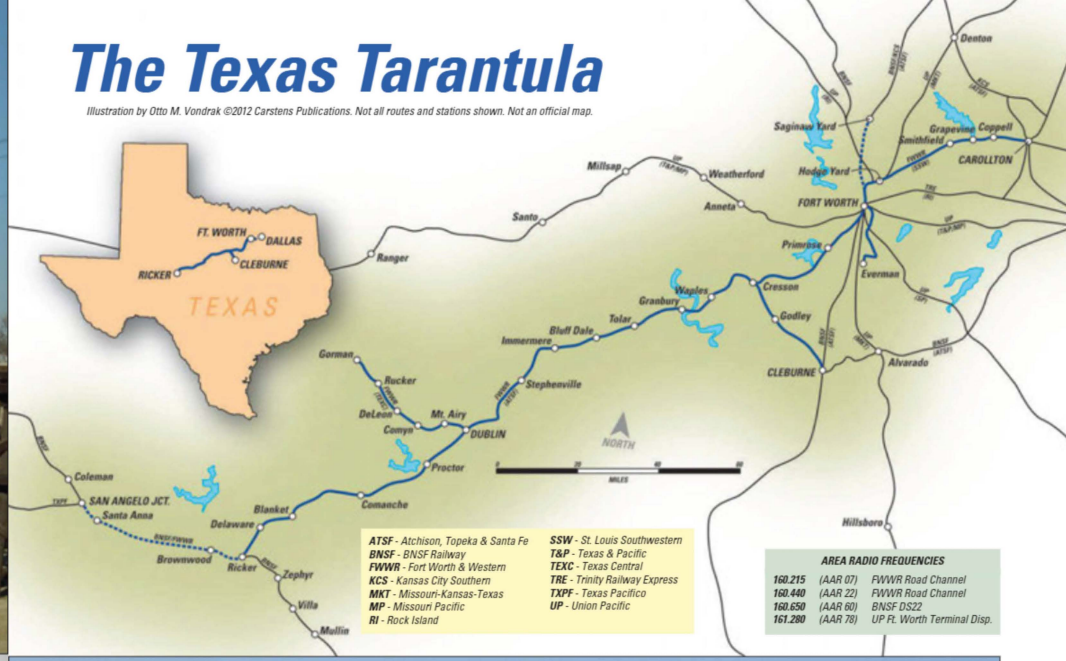
For its first ten years of existence the Fort Worth & Western was more like a small spider in terms of the size of their operation, existing in the shadows of its much larger neighbors in Fort Worth. However in late 1998 the line grew into its Tarantula nickname, a name that one normally associates with an arachnid of great size. On December 12, 1998, FWWR acquired the former Santa Fe Dublin Subdivision between Fort Worth and Ricker, just east of Brownwood on BNSF's Clovis, N.M., to Houston route. The Dublin Subdivision was made expendable when Santa Fe secured trackage rights over Union Pacif-

OPPOSITE: The crew of train FWDU has just completed a set out at the west switch of the Cresson siding and are about to continue their journey to Dublin. The CTC system installed by the Santa Fe was deactivated in 1994 with trains now authorized for movement by track warrants. ABOVE: The fine sping day of April 11, 2011, finds Job 103 crossing the Trinity River bridge just north of downtown Fort Worth. This crew will switch an array of customers along the main line through the city.



The Texas Tarantula

Illustration by Otto M. Vondrak ©2012 Carstens Publications. Not all routes and stations shown. Not an official map.



ABOVE: Train FWDU has just began its journey towards Dublin and is vaulting across the Trinity River bridge at Fort Worth on February 10, 2011. RIGHT: At the east end of Cresson Yard, former C&NW GP50 2011 looks on as FWDU arrives with a heavy cut of loaded "frac" sand cars. The sand is transloaded into trucks for final delivery to the numerous drilling sites that dot the surrounding landscape. OPPOSITE: With the Fort Worth skyline in the distance, Job 103 switches at the 8th Street Yard on March 1, 2011. A steel finishing plant and a plastic pellet transload facility are the major customers switched in this area.

ic's more direct Baird Subdivision to Sweetwater, Texas, where West Coast-bound trains reconnect with the former AT&SF main. The Dublin Sub was initially sold to Cen-Tex Rail Link (a subsidiary of the South Orient Railroad) in May, 1994. Also sold at this time was the 18-mile Cresson Sub between Cleburne and Cresson. With the South Orient having tough times, FWWR purchased these lines from them in December 1998, including trackage rights from Ricker through Brownwood to San Angelo Junction.

Current Operations

Operations are conducted seven days a week with weekends tending to be lighter traffic days. Corporate headquarters for the company are in Ridglea Place Tower in West Fort Worth where dispatchers authorize main line movements by track warrant control. Train crews are based out of Fort Worth, Cresson, and Dublin with each job designated with a three number symbol. Fort Worth crews are based out of Hodge Yard, a former Cotton Belt facility located on the city's north side underneath Interstate 35W. Locomotives are serviced here in an open-air type structure.

Jobs operating out of Hodge Yard include yard Jobs 101 and 201 that build local freights which serve customers in the Fort Worth area; interchange runs are made to exchange cars with the BNSF at its nearby North Yard, and with the UP at Peach Street Yard just north of downtown Fort Worth. The large Carter Industrial Park in south suburban Everman is served by Jobs 102 and 202 serving such customers as Green Bay Packaging and a large Miller Brewing plant. Each weekday morning Job 103 leaves Hodge Yard serving customers along the main line through Fort Worth and the southwest side industrial area surrounding 8th street yard. An X203 job is called as needed, primarily to go east on the former Cotton Belt line to Carrollton once or twice a week based on customer needs in the Valmont Industrial Park. Rounding out the regular Hodge Yard based crews is Job 301 that has a primary purpose of switching the large Purina grain milling operation located just east of the downtown area. And of course a service driven railroad company such as the FWWR will operate extra trains to serve customers as demand dictates.

Cresson, Texas, 15 miles southwest of Fort Worth, is the next crew base. Up to three shifts operating Sunday through Friday (Jobs 501-502 and 503) are used here to switch local customers and make a run up the Cleburne Branch. Cresson has a seven track yard and a wye connection with the Cleburne Sub; the wye switches are operated by the train crews with radio-remote control. The 18-mile Cleburne sub was once the Santa Fe's western outlet for Dallas traffic and BNSF has retained the line east of Cleburne toward Dallas and operates it as a stub-end branch line. There are numerous customers served by FWWR in a large industrial park west of Cleburne and recently a three-track yard was completed to support them.

Operating each weekday morning crews based out of the small farming community of Dublin serve customers along the west end of the main line and the branch line to Gorman. Job 401 op-

erates the 24-mile long Gorman Branch. This line was originally built by the Texas Central in the late 1800s and became known as "the Peanut Line" in reference to the main agricultural crop grown in this area. The TC was later leased by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (The "Katy") from 1914 to 1967 after which the line was sold and operated as a short line re-using the Texas Central name and utilizing a fleet of three Alco S2 switchers. FWWR took over the line when it purchased the Dublin Sub and continues to serve agricultural customers in the small towns of De Leon and Gorman.

The other Dublin-based crew operates as Job 402 and works customers along the remainder of the main line toward the junction at Riker, and occasionally forwards interchange traffic to the BNSF yard at Brownwood. A number of industries in the Comanche area keeps the crew busy spotting cars at two large feed mills and a drilling sand transload. This job is also assigned to switch customers at Stephenville as needed.

Operationally the main event is road train FWDU/DUFW, also known as the Dublin Turn. These trains provide a connection to the outside world for the cars handled by the Cresson and Dublin based crews. Operated Sunday through Friday the Dublin Turn can run upwards of 12,000-tons plus leaving Hodge Yard; much of this tonnage is drilling sand destined for the yard at Cresson. FWDU normally departs Hodge Yard in the early afternoon behind the roads' six-axle units and returns as DUFW, normally getting back to the Fort Worth area in the early morning hours. When tonnage warrants an extra turn job to Cresson will be operated as needed.

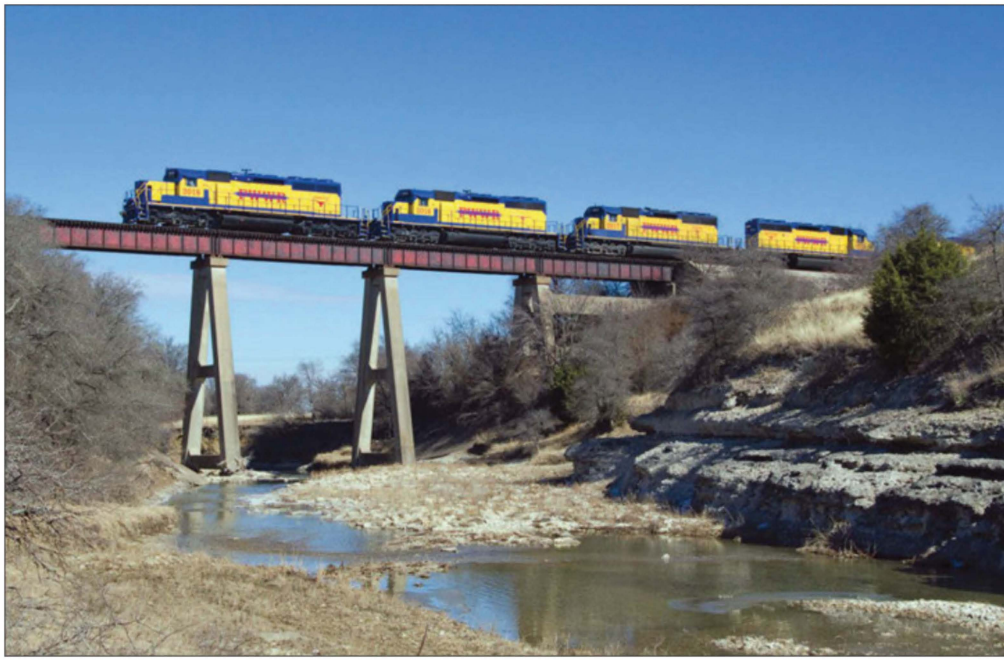
To better concentrate on their ever growing freight business, Fort Worth & Western opted to get out of the tourist passenger train operation in 1999. However the Grapevine Vintage Railroad based in suburban Grapevine continues to operate passenger trains between the old Cotton Belt depot there and Cowtown behind a vintage former Santa Fe GP7. Normal operations are on weekends throughout the year, with special holiday operations as well. For the latest schedules, check their website at *grapevinetexasusa.com* for details.

TOP LEFT: The "Tarantula" name adorns the rear flank of No. 2018. TOP: Switching at the west end of Hodge Yard, snoot-nosed SD40-2 2018 is teamed with the two GenSet locomotives on Job 101 on January 22, 2011. After making up their train this crew will exchange cars with the BNSF at their nearby North Yard. ABOVE: The Everman Job 102 is threading its way through the busy Tower 55 junction in downtown Fort Worth. Union Pacific's Fort Worth Terminal dispatcher supervises movements through this busy junction that is located under the interchange overpasses of Interstates 35W and 20.

Barnett Shale and Rail

A recent surge in traffic has been provided by hauling in supplies, namely sand, needed to support the drilling of natural gas and oil wells in what is known as the Barnett Shale. Some experts have suggested the Barnett Shale may have the largest producible reserves of any onshore natural gas field in the United States. It consists of sedimentary rocks and the productive part of the formation is estimated to stretch from the city of Dallas west and south, covering 5000 square miles.

The gas of the Barnett Shale is not easily extracted. The shale is very hard, and it has been virtually impossible to produce gas in commercial quantities from this formation until recent years when improvements were made in hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling technology. Hydraulic fracturing of the Barnett Shale is done by pumping a mixture of water, sand, and various chemical additives into the well bore at a sufficient pressure to create a fracture in the surrounding rock formation, thus exposing more of the well bore and releasing greater volumes of gas. It is the sand used in this process that is of importance to the FWWR as most of it is brought in by rail from the upper Midwest and transloaded into trucks for final delivery to the drilling sites. Up to 75 cars of sand are brought into Cresson six days a week to be distributed to transload facilities by the Cresson-based crews. In addition, several unit trains of sand have been received from the BNSF at Fort Worth and operated with run-through BNSF locomotives.



ABOVE: All four of the road's six-axle units soar above Mustang Creek with a heavy FWDU train on February 6, 2011. Concrete piers support the 250-foot long deck girder bridge. LEFT: On March 3, 2011, Job 402 passes the former Santa Fe brick station at Comanche. This location also sports one of the few Santa Fe-era station signs remaining along the line.

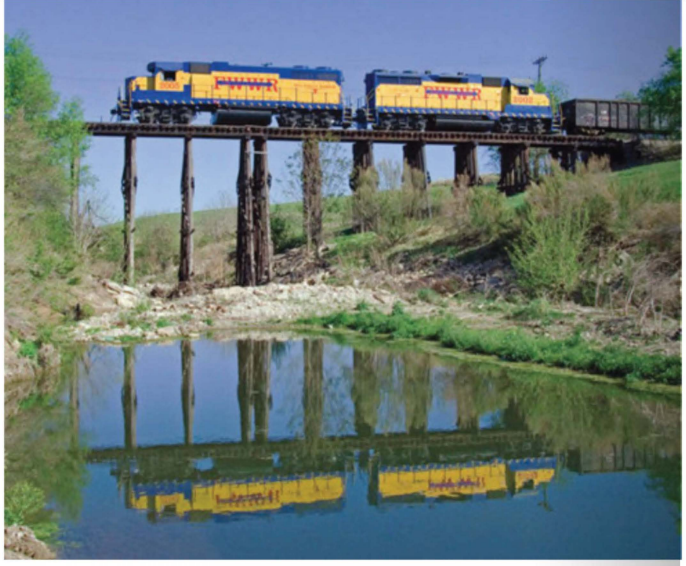
Motive Power

During the company's early years a variety of smaller GP7s and 9s and CF7-type units were leased and purchased as traffic levels dictated. With the purchase of the Dublin Sub additional locomotives with greater horsepower were needed to tackle the saw tooth profile of the former Santa Fe line. At first three GP20s were leased from the BNSF, and these were later replaced by four leased ex Norfolk Southern GP38-2s of Illinois Terminal heritage. A longer term solution for motive power came in February 1999 with the purchase of three former Canadian Pacific GP35s. They arrived painted in the FWWR blue and yellow and allowed for the return of all leased locomotives. By late 2000 the GP35s were tired iron and their failure rate was climbing.

With growing traffic levels a more reliable motive power fleet was needed. Arriving in late 2000 were four overhauled GP35s of Southern Pacific and Rio Grande heritage. They were bought from Omnitrax and designated as GP38-3s. Carrying numbers 2000 through 2003, they arrived in the classy blue and yellow paint scheme and began a tradition of placing a decals on locomotive flanks with the outline of a longhorn steer and names commemorating people and places of local interest. These first four "named" units were 2000 (*Miss Molly*), 2001 (*Niles City*), 2002 (*Cowtown*) and 2003 (*General Worth*) .

Since the arrival of GP38-3s in 2001, the roster has continued to grow. Next

RIGHT: The calm waters of Marine Creek reflect a small wooden trestle that is feeling the weight of a pair of GP38s as Job 103 switches near Cowtown on the near north side of Fort Worth. BELOW RIGHT: On the rare snow covered day of February 4, 2011, GP38-3 No. 2003 passes a peanut processing factory at Gorman on the old Texas Central line. While no peanuts are shipped by rail, FWWR hauls in fertilizer used by the local farmers.



to arrive were four GP38-2s, a pair each of Penn Central and B&O ancestry, FWWR numbers 2004 (*Comanche*), 2005 (*Major Ripley Arnold*), 2006 (*General Tarrant*), and 2007 (*B.B. Pradock*). Two ex-C&NW GP50s, FWWR numbers 2008 (*Panther City*) and 2009 (*Chisholm Trail*) arrived next, with the 2009 later swapped out in January 2006 with an ex-SP GP40-2 decked out with the same FWWR name and number. Three additional CNW GP50s, came on board in 2006 with FWWR numbers 2010 (*Trinity*), 2011 (*Miss Etta*), 2012 (*Chaparral*).

With their traffic base steadily growing, the summer of 2007 brought some interesting locomotive additions including the company's first Gensets. Carrying model numbers 2GS-14B and FWWR numbers 2013 (*Luke Short*) and 2014 (*Timothy Courtright*), they were made on reconditioned frames of retired EMD Geeps with the work performed by National Railway Equipment (NRE) at Mount Vernon, Ill. Each Genset produces 1400 h.p. from a pair of six-cylinder Cummins generators. The pair was partially funded by a grant from the State of Texas in a program for Texas-based low emissions locomotives. In addition, that summer brought the first six-axle units in the form of SD40-2 number 2015 (*Butch Cassidy*) that started life on the MoPac; and numbers 2016 (*Sundance Kid*) and 2017 (*Kid Curry*) that are former Southern Pacific SD40R's. The six-axle fleet was later supplemented in late 2010 with the arrival of SD40-2 number 2018 (*Tarantula*), a former snoot-nosed Union Pacific "fast-forty" unit.

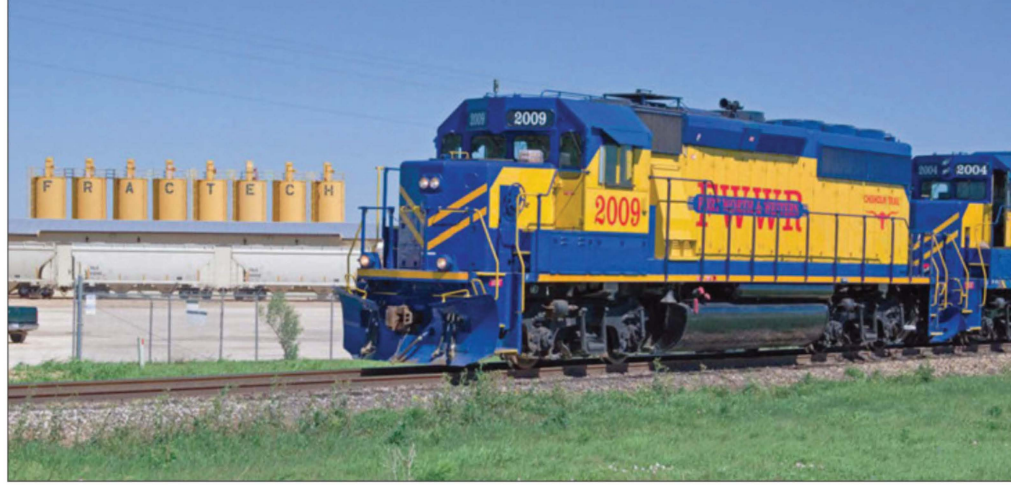
The company's latest acquisitions have been four-axle units. FWWR engine 2019 (*Apache*) is a former L&N GP38AC. Arriving in December 2011 three GP-type locomotives: GP40 number 2020, an ex-CSX/SCL unit; and two former GTW GP40-2s now with numbers 2021 and 2022.

Photography Tips

A little advanced scouting of the Fort Worth area is recommended as there are numerous photo angles and heavy vehicle traffic can make reaching them in time for the shot difficult. Highlights of the Fort Worth area include multiple crossings of the Trinity River; shots with the Fort Worth skyline; and a shot of southbound movements from the West Rosedale Street overpass. Following the road train FWDU is a bit easier, but the first 15 miles from suburban Fort Worth to Cresson is more difficult as parallel roadways are scarce or congested. A photography must is the Farm-Market Road 2331 crossing near Mustang Creek and a chase via the parallel Winscott-Plover Road west from there. Heavy westbound trains laden with sand are struggling through here while climbing out of the valley created by Mustang Creek.

South from Cresson is much easier as the line is never far away from State Highway 377, a busy, mostly four lane, affair. Notable locations in this stretch is the 840-foot long deck girder bridge over Lake Granbury, and highway overpasses just west of Granbury (Texas Loop 567) and U.S. Highway 281, just north of Stephenville. Train speeds between the outskirts of Fort Worth and Cresson can vary greatly due to steep grades and the heavy sand cars. Once the large block of sand cars are set out in the yard at Cresson, train sizes are considerably lighter allowing for trains to easier reach the allowed track speed of 40 m.p.h. Following the Dublin based jobs can provide some nice photos especially of trains passing the brick station at Comanche.

Train movements are authorized with track warrant control. There are numerous signals along the Dublin



ABOVE: Led by former SP GP40-2 2009, Cresson-based Job 502 is lining up cars in the industrial park west of Cleberne on April 11, 2011. The Fractech sand distribution facility in the background is one of a handful of customers based in this industrial park. BELOW LEFT: Job 103 with two GP38-3s grinds upgrade out of the Trinity River valley and is passing under Union Pacific's east-west main through Fort Worth which is visible in the distance. The vantage point for this shot is the West Rosedale Street overpass.

Subdivision that make for fine photo props, however the signals stand dark as the system was deactivated in 1994. FWWR radio frequencies include road channels 160.215 and 160.440, with switching operations conducted on 160.785. Listening in to BNSF and Union Pacific dispatchers will provide clues to FWWR train movements as they traverse the busy Fort Worth area. BNSF's DS22 (160.650) controls the diamond crossing at Tower 60 on north side of Fort Worth. Union Pacific's Fort Worth Terminal Dispatcher (161.280) handles jobs between Hodge Yard and the Everman Branch connection just east of Tower 55 in downtown Fort Worth.

Conclusion

Yes, it's true: Things in Texas are big. And as the Fort Worth & Western proves, even big things can get bigger. The colorful matched locomotive consists certainly stand out from their surroundings, providing a visual treat for the photographer. From the Metroplex to Cowtown to the rolling Texas hills, this short line brings out the best of the Lone Star State.

Thanks to Ken Fitzgerald for information used in this article.

Visit the Fort Worth & Western's official web site at www.fwwr.net