

IN THE AUGUST, 1977, ISSUE of the Newsletter, we presented coverage of most of the Chessie Steam Special's trips on the C&O's lines in Michigan. This issue presents an account of the trips made by the Special on the lines of the C&O proper—with a little back-tracking to take in Gene Huddleston's account of the round trip from Grand Rapids to Plymouth, Michigan, and return. Once again, it probably would have been quicker and easier for us to just present a summary of the events of the Special, but the feelings conveyed by Society members who actually saw or rode the trips do them much more justice.

When I learned that a trip would be made from Grand Rapids to Plymouth and return, I became excited about where the photo runby would be. I discussed the matter with Don Riel, former trainmaster over the territory where the excursion would take place. We decided that a call to Lynn Stollings would be in order. Lynn, a native of Peach Creek, West Virginia, moved to Michigan in his teens, and after attending Michigan State University, went to work for the C&O; he is now in the claims department. Lynn was one of the leaders of the group of volunteers from the West Michigan Railway Historical Society managing the excursion out of Grand Rapids. Don discovered from Lynn that the runby would be at Snow Road, the first road crossing east of McCords. They didn't want this widely known, Lynn reported, because they had enough to handle with those already on the train.

After studying the location on a topographic map, I took off on a cool and sunny Saturday morning for this rural location. The map I had studied was over fifty years old, and was not compatible with the roads today, so I had to do some back-tracking and I became anxious lest I miss the train. But luckily I soon found the crossing, and walked west about a half mile to a good photo spot, where I could see the road crossing at McCords, about another half mile away. Soon the quiet of the morning was broken by the sound of sharp exhaust and a whistle for McCords. And there it was—beautiful smoke and sound effects that one would have to go back more than 25 years to see previously at this spot. I got it going by and took off in a trot back to the road crossing. I had plenty of time, for the train had to unload those who wanted to observe and photograph the runby. The railroad police and stewards on the train were attempting to keep everyone on the south side of the tracks. Jim Thomas [Gene offers his apologies for incorrectly identifying this gentleman as Jim Young on page 2 of the August issue of the Newsletter], another photographer, and I remained on the north side for the first runby (better composition and lighting), despite commands for us to leave our position. We couldn't move into a neighboring field off railroad property because the fence was electrified. Jim Thomas wanted to know if I visited this spot often, and I told him it was the first time in my life I'd been there. I told him how I had learned about the runby. He had learned about it that morning in Grand Rapids. The first runby was spectacular; the engineer opened up wide on the grade (he had backed up a half mile or more), and when he cut off going by me the engine was bouncing and creaking at every joint like I'd seen few steamers ever do! For the second runby I was on the same side (south) as the riders, but was ahead of them, hidden with five or six others in a small, patchy cornfield with just our heads sticking up. As I rushed to leave after the second runby, I ran into Lynn Stollings at the road crossing. He and the other stewards were trying to keep the passengers on the south side for re-boarding the train. He asked what I thought of the spot he had picked, mentioning something about the sun being not quite right. But I said I thought it was great. Where else would have

been better? A curve, a grade, and several vantage points above track level were all one could ask for. Jumping into my car, I got ahead of the train and shot it going through Lake Odessa. Here, as at every point in Michigan that I saw it, it seemed that about half the town (more old folk than young, I'd say) were on hand to see, photograph, or record the train. The next point I got it was approaching the impressive bridge over the Grand River at the "ledges" in Grand Ledge. I figured I didn't have time to drive to the east approach of the bridge (where, I learned later, Don Riel and a small army of photographers were on hand to shoot it). At the west side, where I was, there were only about three others. And I barely made it! The last place I shot it was leaving Lansing (with a 90 mm. lens) from an overpass about a mile and a half from the station.

The next contact with the 2101 was that evening, when it limped through Lansing with a broken "eccentric strap" (which is what the Southern engineer called it, as recalled by Thomas Wolfe). That was the only frustration I had encountered with it. On our way home from eating out, we stopped at the tree-lined cut off Pennsylvania Avenue, where many people were waiting. We finally left and drove to Okemos, where we found ten or twelve people waiting at the Okemos Road crossing. My wife drove on home, and John and I waited until a car drove by with a woman telling everyone the engine had broken down and was still at Fowlerville. Most of the crowd dispersed, and we started walking home, about a mile away. Just as we came to our yard, John heard a whistle. We grabbed the keys from the house, jumped in the car, and John helped me make a no-stop exit to the main road. We made it just in time to shoot the 2101 coming and going, at around 7:15.

—Gene Huddleston, Okemos, MI

* * * * *

On Saturday, August 27, the Chessie Steam Special began the first of its series of trips out of Huntington with a trip over the Lexington Subdivision to Lexington, Kentucky. Billed as the "Blue Grass Special", it left Huntington at 8:00 a.m., with stops for more passengers at Amtrak's Tri-State Station in Catlettsburg, Kentucky, and at the C&O depot in Morehead, Kentucky.

The trip began well enough, but started to run into problems at the photo stop in Preston, where it was discovered that hundreds of the inhabitants of the region had flocked to the open area at Preston to see the train. While they didn't seriously interfere with the operation of the stop, the train's patrons were forced to detrain further east of the crossing than was planned, putting many of them into the tall weeds along the ditch line rather than the recently-mowed house track near the crossing.

All of the Reading's T-1s have been prone to throwing a lot of cinders, but the constant rain of them on this trip was more noticeable than usual. As it developed, the C&O had been unable to get good quality hard coal



2101 makes a good show of exhasut as she passes under a standard C&O signal bridge at Preston, Ky. on August 27, 1977. Photo by Robert E. Jackson.



Out of Princess Tunnel on the Lexington Subdivision, August 27, 1977. Photo by Susan Young.



Exhaust to the heavens on the Lexington line August 27th. Photo by Susan Young.



The magic city by the river - Thurmond, W.Va. - is visited once more by big steam for the first time since the H-8s were banished in the Summer of 1956. The Special is eastbound on her Huntington-Hinton trip of September 10th. - Photo by Ron Piskor

due to the wildcat miner strikes, and the 2101 was having difficulty burning what they had been able to get. By the time the train had reached Winchester, then, only two tons of coal remained in the bunker. Fearing that they would not reach Lexington before running out of coal, the train was placed clear of the westward signal at the L&N diamond, and diesels were called from Lexington to help power the train for the remaining 18 miles to Lexington. During the layover at Winchester no one was allowed to detrain, and air conditioners were shut down to conserve the cars' batteries. This resulted in some hot cars, but three cars had already developed air conditioner problems due to some of the slow-speed running. Most of the cars are equipped with air conditioning equipment that switches to batteries when the train's speed drops below 25 or 30 m.p.h. Fortunately for many of the air conditioned car patrons, many seats were available on the open cars, due to the less-than-capacity crowd on this trip.

Coal was not the only problem. An unscheduled water stop was made at Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. The Mt. Sterling Volunteer Fire Department unselfishly pitched in to help on a moment's notice, and helped reduce the delay there. However, as the train started away from Mt. Sterling, the air in the rear cars would not release, and the head end came to an abrupt halt. It was then discovered that some local juveniles had turned an angle cock on one of the rear cars. One of the special agents had apprehended them at the time they had turned the lever and were leaving the scene, but nothing could be found amiss at that time, so the youths were released—but the air wasn't.

Finally, on the return trip, the L&N added a final delay by stabbing the Special to let one of their northbound coal drags pass. While those riding in the first two cars managed to get some pretty fair shots of the L&N's big Alcos and U-boats on the coal drag, those in the rear cars could only wonder what was stopping their air conditioning *this* time!

Though the combined delays caused a 3-hour-and-20-minute late arrival in Huntington (1:05 a.m.), the trip was generally pleasant and had several highlights. The assault of Corey Hill, though assisted by a pair of diesels, was a good show. The T-1 did most of the work, though diesels were necessary (even the C&O's more powerful K-4 Kanawhas were rated at only eleven passenger cars on the hill's mile-long 2.67% ruling grade between Corey and Mountain Top. The beautiful limestone cliffs of the eastern Kentucky hills were a treat for those who would not otherwise have seen this area, due to its relative inaccessibility. West of Morehead the terrain becomes more open, and the weather cooperated quite well to help show off the beautiful farms of the Kentucky Bluegrass region. A final highlight was the brief, but exhilarating, high-speed running between Ashland and Huntington.

Operationally, there were a couple of interesting items. First, the C&O had rebuilt the east leg of the wye at Ashland, allowing the Special to move onto the Lexington Subdivision without a backing move. The east leg of the wye had been removed some time ago after the demise of passenger service, since all freight runs on the Lexington line originate and terminate at Russell, so only the west leg of the wye is used any more. And second, the train was turned—by diesel power—at Lexington using the C&O and L&N trackage and a portion of the old Lexington Belt Line. As we wound through the sharp curves and the light-industry district of Lexington's east side, it was interesting to note that the C&O's Louisville passenger trains had once followed this

same tortuous route through Lexington.

—Bob Jackson, Guyandotte, WV

* * * * *

The train on the round trip from Huntington to Lexington consisted of 19 cars, which was, I suppose, the full train they took around on the tour. On this day it proved to be more than the engine should have handled, and also there were a good many unsold seats. This surprised me, because the Lexington branch is one with good scenery, and I thought the trip would have been a sellout.

Our departure from Huntington was only a minute or two after the appointed time of 8:00. Mary and I were in the forward end of the recording car—a combine with 110-volt power, fed in from the train operators' car ahead—along with Bob Jackson. Lloyd Lewis and Larry Fellure, both C&OHS members, were also close by.

We made a brief stop at Catlettsburg, and at Ashland hit the first grade of note. The engine did really well. The grade to Mountain Top, though, must be much steeper; there was a two-unit helper waiting there for us. It was cut off before we got to Olive Hill. Around 11:20 we went through Morehead, meeting an eastbound train there.

The photo runby was at a small town named Preston. As usual, the photo line was disorganized, we were on the wrong side of the track with regard to the sun, and the weeds we were standing in were infested with chiggers. On the whole, though, it was a success.

Around the top of a long grade with Ewington at the top, we began to hear disquieting information on the radio: water was low and we would have to make a stop at Mt. Sterling to fill up. A special agent who was pacing the train in a car was asked to make the necessary arrangements. Since this was a completely unexpected development, it was really surprising how quickly we were watered and on our way again. However, there was more bad news at Winchester: we had just about run out of coal! The decision was soon made to call for a crew in Lexington to come and get us to pull us in. This was done, and again with remarkably little delay, although it was long enough for the air conditioning in the more modern cars to fail.

The stay in Lexington was long enough to service the engine and turn the train, and as I recall, it was well over an hour. Leaving Lexington, we passed No. 391, which had followed us fairly closely from Winchester. At Winchester we had to stop at the L&N crossing for a northbound L&N manifest to go by. Someone remarked that the train had one locomotive each from EMD, GE, and Alco.

The trip back was uneventful. At Morehead we stopped to get water, and we again had diesel helpers for the Mountain grade. This time, the helpers stayed with the train to Ashland. We made better time this way, but even at that, it was after midnight when we arrived at Ashland and 1:20 a.m. when we finally got to Huntington.

In many respects the trip didn't go as planned, but I'd still take it again if I had the chance. The engine seemed to be in excellent shape; it was a real pleasure to look at and listen to. Coming up Soldier Grade on the westbound trip I got a tape recording better than any other on-board tape I have ever made. Everyone on board seemed to be having a good time. Wouldn't it be great if steam trips on the C&O could be made a regular summer institution!

—Robert L. Harvey, Kingsport, TN

We chased the Chessie Steam Special from Catlettsburg to Mt. Sterling last week. It really put on a good display as it took Corey Hill (Mountain Top) with a GP40/U30B helper. The helpers were picked up at Adne. The train got down to near stalling on the short grade from Stepstone to Ewington, out of the Slate Creek valley. They took on water at Mt. Sterling.

—Everett N. Young, Pikeville, KY

* * * * *

On Sunday, August 28, the Chessie Steam Special embarked on the first of its two "New River Train" trips. In contrast to the previous day's trip, this trip was relatively problem-free.

At the 8:30 a.m. departure time the 2101 barked out of the Huntington station and ran like the machine it was meant to be, in spite of the bad coal. Speeds often topping 60 m.p.h. were reached throughout the day. Stops were made at St. Albans and Charleston to receive passengers, and the train left Charleston with a capacity crowd. Stops were made at Montgomery, both eastbound and westbound, to take on water, courtesy of the Montgomery Volunteer Fire Department. Racing eastward from Montgomery, a photo stop was made at Hawk's Nest, entrance to the fabled New River Gorge. Member Lloyd Lewis manned the P.A. system during this trip, and kept the passengers apprised of the C&O's history throughout the trip.

At Meadow Creek the Special entered the west leg of the wye connection with the NF&G, and took on the assistance of four diesels to help maneuver the train through the wye and up the heavy grade on the NF&G, until the rear car cleared the north switch at Wendy. The train was then halted while two more diesels coupled to the rear of the train. It was then towed backwards into Hinton. At Hinton the 2101 was cut off and serviced, while repairs were attempted on some of the troublesome air conditioners. During the 20-m.p.h. backup move from Meadow Creek, the three cars which had suffered drained batteries the previous day again went dead.

Scheduled out of Hinton at 5:30, it was well past 6:00 before the Special actually got under way. Behind, we left a Hinton practically devoid of food. The Hinton Jaycees' table at the station was sold out, as was a restaurant that had been persuaded to open that day. Before the trip was over, the concession car was also sold out. The return trip was typified by high-speed running, but was otherwise uneventful, and Huntington was reached at 11:05.

—Bob Jackson

* * * * *

The run on August 28 was interesting, to say the most. The railroad's idea of loading all of the air-conditioned coach passengers through one car was really dumb. I never waited so long to get on a train—about 15 minutes! Only certain cars had been reserved for Huntington tickets, with the rest being for St. Albans and Charleston. We were told not to go into those cars because the air conditioning would not be turned on until Charleston. Needless to say, nobody paid any attention to this, and the air conditioning was turned on. It was rumored that the train was over-sold. The poor Charleston ticket-holders were surprised to find a nearly capacity train. Somehow everyone found seats—quite a few in the open cars, I expect.

The runby was made at Hawks Nest Bridge. The C&O had already roped off an area for photographers. It was a

fairly good shot.

The train was turned around at Meadow Creek, on the NF&G wye. This operation took about an hour. A pair of U30Bs were coupled to the rear of the train and pulled us backwards into Hinton. At this time the air conditioning on our car failed. We spent an hour in the sweltering 110-degree heat. Upon reaching Hinton, everyone piled off the train for fresh, cool, 90-degree air.

After leaving the yard at Hinton on our return trip, train speed went above 30 m.p.h. and the cooling system started functioning again. The rest of the trip was pleasant.

—Everett N. Young

* * * * *

During the two weeks between the August 28th trip and the September 10th trip, also to Hinton, the 2101 underwent some repairs. She was moved to Russell, Kentucky, site of the last operating drop-pit on the C&O in these parts, and her last driving wheel-and-axle assembly was removed. Due to a broken bearing the axle had become scored, and it was decided to send the axle to the new Cass shops for re-truing. Meanwhile, new bearing brasses were cast in Birmingham, Alabama, and shipped north for installation in the 2101. When it came time to press the wheels back on the axles at Cass, however, it was discovered that Cass' press couldn't handle the job. So, everything was packed up and shipped to Roanoke, where the N&W obliged themselves of the task.

Once reassembled in Russell, the engine had to be tested to be certain that all was in working order. Therefore, on Friday, September 9, the 2101 left Huntington for St. Albans with a 15-car coal train for its shakedown run. All went well, as far as I've been able to learn, and the engine was ready for the second "New River Train" the following day.

On Saturday, September 10, the Chessie Steam Special ran to Hinton and return, following pretty much the same procedure as the August 28 trip. However, upon reaching Meadow Creek the 2101 was cut off and allowed to run light to Hinton, with the diesels towing in the train.

—Bob Jackson

* * * * *

The run on August 28 to Hinton and back to Huntington just about "did in" the 2101, and it limped into Russell late that night. Mr. John Killoran evidently authorized sending the No. 4 driving axle and wheel assembly by truck to the shops on the Cass Scenic Railroad. The axle had a scored bearing and was running hot (too bad they weren't able to fix up the C&O's #611 [actually #614]; it has roller bearings on all axles). Other repairs made on the engine, which I gather involved feedwater pump, tubes and flues, and staybolts, required some parts which I hear came from storage at the Huntington Shops and were originally intended for the T-1 2-10-4s.

My dad, J. Earl Huddleston, of Russell (a retired C&O freight trainman), kept visiting regularly the gang who lived in the crew car accompanying the engine, to see if it was going to be able to make its next run, scheduled for September 10. In the meantime, John Killoran, in charge of the runs out of Huntington, had been kind enough to answer my inquiry about where the photo runby would be on this trip—Hawks Nest Bridge. So on September 9 my son John and I, after a 385-mile drive,