The Comet: Living in a Photograph
by Christopher J. Garcia

It's impossible to say which is cooler: the reality of a photo or the surreality of its connection to the real world. I have experienced many great moments through photos that I could never have been at. The photos of the Falling Man from September 11th, the evacuation of the American Embassy in Vietnam, the greatest sports moments recorded by incredible photographers from around the world. I can tell stories about how things went down at events I was not born for simply because I've examined the photos. It is in this vein that my love for a certain train that had been dismantled years before I was even born.

Emerson College bought the Little Building: 180 Tremont Street, right on the corner of the Boston Common. It was a lovely building built in the past and forgotten until what was then the present. Emerson bought it and we moved in my junior year. It was a beautiful building, not quite completely finished when we moved in, but it was delightful. To get us into the mode that this place had a history they put up a series of photographs. There were photos of Boston celebrities, a recreation of the Boston Massacre from the 1970s, a big photo of the Building as it was being finished, and then a photo of a train pulling out of a station. It wasn't a regular photo, it had obviously been touched up. It was like something from the not-so-distant future. This was a train obviously pulling into South Station, but it looked like no train I'd ever seen. And, as a budding Historian, I now had a quest. The only writing on the photo said The Comet- 1940.

The chase beginning at the Emerson Library, a former brownstone that had been converted into a library, which was a really nice thing. It was actually Mrs. Gardner's, that is the same Mrs. Gardner who founded the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum, first house, right up on Beacon Street. I had been a regular on the internet from the Library, but they'd gotten tired of me printing out long lists of Wrestling Champions so they banned me from the computers. I had to use the Card Catalog. I was nowhere near sure where to start, as I figured The Comet would lead me to everything from the first Fanzine to the worker's periodical that was the biggest thing in Lithuania. I decided to start with the general study of trains. I found a book that listed train lines from around the world. I was amazed at the detail they went into. Every line had dozens of details about everything from departure stations, number of stops, number of
The New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad paid for The Comet to be made by the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation. It cost a hundred thousand dollars, which is a lot of money. It weighed about 100k pounds, which was considerably lighter than the average locomotive. It made heavy use of aluminium, which led to the light It featured two Westinghouse Diesel engines, 400 HP and all. It was something of a marvel. There were three cars, and they shared couplings, so as to save weight. The train moved on hydraulic shock-absorbers, so it gave a gentle ride, which is always a pleasant thing. The early promotional material said that it ‘floated around bends in the track’, which may be a slight exaggeration.

They put a ton of other features, including stairs that came down with the door, so there was no way to close the doors if there was someone on the stairs and the train couldn’t move unless the doors were closed. This did lead to occasional problems, but it was a nice safety feature. The whole thing was very futuristic, including little touches like no visible light sockets and air-conditioning. That’s a nice touch when you’re trying to make things look magical to simply hide the plugs and cords.

I was in love with this thing. I found tons of references to it all over the place. When I could access the internet again, I managed to find a couple of sites that featured information about the Comet, which was awesome. It was the earlyish days of the Internet. so knowing that you could find this kind of info was still an amazing thing. I read all I could get my hands on and then I noticed something. It was a line between Boston and Providence, and I was in Boston. While it ended its run in the early days of WWII (after running from 1935), it was put into local Boston service until 1951. Someone around town that I could talk to must have had some experience of the train. I had one feeling, a professor who had a wicked bad Boston accent. He was in his 70s, so he must have known something. Tony, as he insisted all his students call him. He was my history of Jazz teacher, my favorite class, so it wasn’t weird that I hung out after class.

“Tony, you ever take trains when you were a kid?” I asked.

“All the time. Haven’t in 30 years.” He answered.

“You ever ride The Comet?” I asked.

“44 miles in 44 minutes.” He said.

“So you rode it?”

“I loved that thing. I used to go to Providence with my dad. sit up front. Everyone dressed up to ride it. It was the nicest train I’d ever been on.”

I loved talking with Tony about stuff, and he got this odd look in his eyes. I wasn’t sure what it was, but it had something behind it that I had to call beautifully distant.

“One thing about the Comet,” Tony said, that look still on his face, “is that it was a moment in time when that could have been the Future.”

I totally got where he was coming from then.
My grandparents, my dad’s parents, lived in a terraced council house in Fareham, Hampshire, one of the towns that line the Solent between Southampton and Portsmouth, which even in the 1970s formed a continuous link between those keen rivals. They had bought a house in the 1930s, but its proximity to Lee-on-Solent airfield led to its destruction in an air raid (my grandmother used to tell a story of an earlier raid spent sitting inside the Anderson shelter in the garden, my father in her arms, as the machine-gun bullets bounced off the corrugated steel roof). They’d never been able to buy again. Margaret Thatcher’s council house revolution, well-intentioned in theory, but put my grandparents felt their allegiance was to Portsmouth.)

But what excited us most was that there was a railway line at the bottom of their garden. We were young boys, and we were into trains. The line ran on a raised embankment across from the track that ran along the back of the gardens, and provided access to the road for their garage. Looking back, part of the appeal was the mystery of the spot. We couldn’t see the track, and had only a brief space of about two hundred feet in which we could see the trains, before trees or other buildings hid them again. Since we never actually travelled on the local trains, I had no idea what Fareham station, which lay to the west of my grandparents’, looked like until much later. I used to have dreams about what I might find if I ascended the embankment and explored along the trackside; great vistas of multiple tracks, station platforms and locomotives (none of which, incidentally, was borne out by the reality, when I later found what it was). I remember an exotic variety of trains – Inter-City services going into or out of Portsmouth, late-night Freightliners and goods trains of continental rolling stock, which had come over on ferries in the days before EuroTunnel. I have one clear recollection of seeing a locomotive run past in the dark with a pantograph on its top – one of British Railways’ Southern Region’s locomotives that could run off third-rail electricity on the mainlines, or off overhead power in yards, where third-rail was too dangerous to staff. I recall the locomotive being large and box-like, which would make it a Class 70, one of three locomotives built between 1941 and 1948 to a design by legendary lunatic Southern Railway locomotive designer O.V.S. Bulleid, best known these days for the Merchant Navy, West Country and Battle of Britain Pacifics, and (and James won’t thank me for bringing this up) a peat-burning steam locomotive for Irish Railways. But my memory can’t be trusted; the Class 70s were all scrapped in 1969, so it’s a very long time ago. Furthermore, I recall the locomotive pulling the train, but as the line between Portsmouth and Southampton wasn’t electrified until the 1980s, it isn’t possible for any of the Southern Region’s dual-voltage locomotives to have hauled a train over that line back then.

Anyway, I, in particular, with the selfishness only an eight year old boy is capable of, always used to resent the fact that the bedroom we slept in was at the front of the house, away from the railway – I wanted the bedroom facing the railway. Why shouldn’t my grandparents give up their bedroom so that I could watch trains long past my bedtime?

What I most associate with those days are the DEMUs, the Diesel-Electric Multiple Units.

I have to pause now for some boring technical stuff. Please bear with me; it’s
necessary, and I'll try to keep it short. There are two main methods employed in which the power of a diesel engine is used to move a train. In mechanical transmission, the diesel engine powers the driving wheels directly through crankshafts and the like, as a car engine drives a car. In electric transmission, which is more powerful, but tends to be bulkier, the diesel engine acts as a generator, and the electricity is fed to traction motors that drive the wheels. Most diesel locomotives, except for some small shunters, have electric transmission. Most first-generation diesel multiple-units, those built in the 1950s and 1960s, aiming to maximize passenger space by slinging the engines under the carriages, had mechanical.

Except on the Southern Region. The Southern Region didn't use diesel multiple units much at all; an intensive electrification project, begun and largely completed by the Southern Railway, and continued by Southern Region, meant that what were needed to cover their suburban services were electric multiple units. One or two lines, however, had yet to be included. So for these, the Southern Region acquired diesel multiple units. But instead of diesel-mechanicals, with the underslung engines, they chose, for reasons I know not, diesel-electric, with the engine filling a significant area behind the driver's compartment.

Portsmouth-Southampton was, as I said, one of the lines yet to be electrified. So every day, about twice an hour in each direction, Rail Blue DEMUs passed by my grandparents' house. (Except on Sundays, when locomotives and push-pull rolling stock, a rarity in Britain in those days, worked the services.)

A diesel-mechanical unit pretty much sounds like a bus. A diesel-electric unit sounds like nothing you have ever heard before, certainly not a diesel-electric locomotive. It's very difficult to describe (especially for a non-descriptive writer like your correspondent), but one thing that always struck me was the sheer enthusiasm of the engine sound. Your average DMU sounds like it is simply doing a mundane job – a DEMU sounded like it loved to carry passengers about. It was a sound that rose above the general morass of railway sounds; people turned their head when a DEMU passed.

Years later I discovered these units were commonly referred to as "Thumpers". The name fitted them well; there was a distinctive thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-thump when they were running, especially when they were straining.

Leaving Fareham, they had to strain. There is a significant incline out of Fareham station heading east. The trains coming from Portsmouth heading towards Fareham we had hardly any warning of – they glided almost silently down the incline, before dashing past at speed, leaving nothing behind them but ringing rails. The trains coming from Fareham were a different matter. We heard them about five minutes away as they struggled up the incline, over a distance which must have been (indeed in all probability still is) less than a mile. Thump-thump-thump-thump as they stormed up the incline, my brother and I watching as they rushed past.

Some DEMUs were Class 201, 202 and 203 'Hastings' units, built for narrow loading gauge lines running out of Tonbridge, an area I was soon to become more familiar with, as my girlfriend (now my fiancée) lived there (and now so do I). The narrow loading gauge problem was the result of shoddy construction. The tunnels along the line were built without sufficient lining, and after one collapsed, had to be relined. As a result, four tunnels ended up with narrow clearances, too narrow for standard rail
vehicles. As a result, for years special rolling stock was constructed; Richard Maunsell's highly successful 1930s Class V or 'School' 4-4-0 steam locomotive was designed for this route, and the Class 201, 202 and 203s, and the Class 33/2 diesel locomotives, all built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were the last examples. The problem was done away with in the 1980s by reducing the lines through those tunnels to single-track working, though whenever there's a points failure through a tunnel, the whole line is thrown into chaos.

Thirty years later, my grandparents are both dead, the house went to an unknown new tenant (who has probably bought it by now), and family holidays with my brother are very much a thing of the past. In 2002 I was on a train passing through Clapham Junction. Another train passed in the other direction, and I heard it, thump-thump-thump, the distinct sound of a "Thumper". And it set off the memories. And those set off the original version of this piece.

"Thumpers" had long since left the Pompey-So'ton route, which was electrified in the 1980s. But Connex, who at that time had the franchise for the south of England, still had a few, operating to obscure locations like Uckfield in Surrey and Oxted in East Sussex, and between Hastings and Ashford in Kent. Many of those still in service were

Soon enough new rolling stock sent the last DEMUs to the scrapyard. Hastings-Ashford converted to modern units in 2003, though a preserved Hastings unit provided cover until 2005; Uckfield converted in 2004. One more sound of my childhood, a sound that to me instantly says "summer", was extinguished forever.

But not quite. There's a few units preserved. One Hastings unit operates railtours across the south-east of England, and another is based on the nearest heritage railway to me, the Spa Valley Railway; I travelled on it a couple of years ago, though currently it's being repaired. And there are other sets in various preserved railways in the south of England. So I can still hear that sound if I want.

An earlier version of this piece appeared in Convertible Bus #12

(Footnotes)

1 Also, bear in mind that I don't really know what I'm talking about.

2 I leave out Diesel-Hydraulic transmission, employed with much success in locomotives on Deutsche Bundesbahn in Germany, a success BR's Western Region, always inclined to go its own way from the rest of British Railways, tried, with indifferent results, to replicate, and now used in so-called "Second Generation" DMUs – partly because I've never been quite sure how it worked.
Train Ride from the Bay Area (Saturday and Sunday, August 2 and 3)

A couple of years ago, Eric, who has a luck with raffles that defies statistical reasoning, won tickets to Santa Barbara on Amtrak’s Coast Starlight. He enjoyed the train ride so much that he wanted to take the train to Denver for WorldCon, and convinced me to do it. He convinced me to pay extra for the sleeper car so we could have our own private compartment. It costs a lot, but it isn’t as bad a deal as it sounds because it includes all your meals.

Here’s a picture of our little “roomette,” as Amtrak calls it. In this photo, you can see its entire width. There’s a symmetrical seat just like this one opposite it, except that instead of having that armrest next to it, it has a closet the width of the armrest. For one person, it would be a pretty luxurious amount of space. For two, it’s cozy, especially with all of our electronic equipment. We left our suitcases on a rack on the lower level, but obviously wanted to keep computers and camera with us. We felt like we were on top of each other quite a bit, although obviously there’s much more room than on an airplane.

While you are at dinner, a steward sets up your roomette for sleeping. An upper bunk bed folds down from above. Here you can see the nighttime configuration. We found out that that armrest is really a step for getting up to the top bunk. I must admit that at first I found the upper bunk rather claustrophobic, as I don’t care for low clearances. I kept having to look down over the side to see how much room I had around me.

For a whole lot more money, you can get yourself a “room” on the train rather than a “roomette.” The room comes with a much larger lower bed, a lot more floor space, and its own private toilet/shower stall.

Although it takes about 36 hours to get from the Bay Area to Denver, the train ride is actually pretty nice. The staff is fun and friendly. There’s a lounge car with big windows where you can enjoy the scenery, and, of course, it really is all about the scenery. Why else would you take 36 hours to get from the Bay Area to Denver? But the scenery is truly spectacular.
As a matter of fact, the scenery was so amazing that we were so busy looking at it that we only played one game the whole trip! It's a beautiful country we live in, and this is one of the easiest and most comfortable ways to see a whole lot of it all at once. It's a bit difficult to take good pictures, what with the hazards of dirt on the windows, reflections of yourself on the windows (I recommend wearing black and black only), telephone lines and poles in the way, and the movement of the train. But I did get some decent ones I'd like to share.

**California**

When you get on the train, you are given a schedule and a route guide that shows all the stops and has all the scenic spots marked with a little camera icon. I found this extremely helpful. The first point of interest comes before we leave the Bay Area, a view of the Carquinez Strait. I never think of the Carquinez Strait as being especially pretty, but from the train tracks, it was fairly nice.

A few hours later, we passed right by Donner Lake. This is one of the ten most scenic recreational waterways in California, according to outdoors writer Tom Stienstra. We had put our canoe, the Weeble, in it a few years ago, and it was spectacularly pretty.

When the conductor announced the Truckee stop, I looked at my watch, and was surprised to find it had taken about six hours to get there! You can usually haul yourself up the mountain on I-80 in only about four.

**Utah**

Most of the time that we were in Utah, it was dark and we were asleep. It seems shameful, because Utah has some of the most amazing scenery in our country, but the earth rotates, and it has to be dark somewhere. For us, it was Utah. Nevertheless, I did get some pictures of some nice rock formations in the morning.
I’m pretty sure that at this point, we had passed into Colorado. We learned quite a bit about the history of the area, both human and geologic, and in particular the history of the railroad. And if you had a question, Eva had the answer. She was like an offline wikipedia for the area.

Glenwood Canyon was beautiful. (Glenwood Canyon photos by Eric Zuckerman.)

It only got better as we made our way through the Ruby Canyon. We met up with the Colorado River and followed it all the way up through the mountains to Granby, Colorado.

In Grand Junction, we got off the train to pick up a souvenir guidebook that the captain said would describe the route in detail. After lunch, we went to the lounge car, which often features volunteer guides who point out various sights. Our guide for the afternoon was Eva Hoffman Lee, the very knowledgable woman who wrote the book and took the photographs in it. We learned quite a bit about the history of the area, both human and geologic, and in particular the history of the railroad. And if you had a question, Eva had the answer. She was like an offline wikipedia for the area.

Here you can see the nifty “sky-view” windows in the top of the lounge car. The cliffs in Glenwood Canyon were so high here, you really needed them!
Next, we went through the (very) Red Canyon. Right here, just as we were coming into some of the prettiest scenery on the trip, meteorological conditions took a turn for the worse, dimming the light and making capturing the beauty of the scenery more difficult. So, I can't quite do it justice, but it was wonderful.

Fortunately, the skies cleared a bit by the time we got to the next canyon, beautiful Gore Canyon. That's still the Colorado River running through here. (Photos by Eric Zuckerman.)

I think El Dorado Canyon was one of the prettiest. We were enjoying dinner when we went through it. The Fraser River runs through the El Dorado Canyon. (Photos of El Dorado Canyon by Eric Zuckerman.)
The river has been dammed by the Gross Reservoir Dam.

It was a double rainbow. Really an amazing sight that made our dinner extra-special.

We were graced by the presence of an amazing rainbow! Eric got a picture of the entire arc of the rainbow. (Photos by Eric)

**Trains**
A very long freight train had to wait for us.

I’m going to end with a couple of relatively gratuitous pictures of the train itself, the second by Eric Zuckerman.
All in all, the ride was an enjoyable experience. I generally enjoyed the communal meals and met some nice people. The train actually has showers, hot ones, even, so we were able to maintain a reasonable semblance of cleanliness. But as experiences go, it was definitely a sedentary one. You could easily pack on the pounds while riding the train. Yes, you have much more opportunity to get up and walk around than you would on an airplane, but a day on the train is still much more sedentary than my usual day. And there’s lots of food. You don’t go hungry. And dessert. The deserts are very good. I thought about it, and it seems that whether you go by air, train or car, travel is just going to entail a lot of sitting around on your butt. I’ve decided that next time I cross the Continental Divide, in order to get some exercise, I should do it on horseback.

-- Beth Zuckerman (8/3/08)
Steam Trains Science Fictional day out
by
James Bacon

With a ragtag mob like Sproutlore, the old Robert Rankin Fanclub, now known as The Order of the Golden Sprout, you generally don’t need much of an excuse to meet up. In actual fact that could be said about most Sfnal groups, whether it be pints in a pub or slouching around a town somewhere, those who socialise usually don’t need much of a reason to do so. An excuse is just that, half the story.

So an opportunity presented itself for germination about eleven years ago, in 1998, when Robert Rankin wrote a book called Apocolypso. In the book there was much mention of bookshops, a train coming through Croydon and Russell the Railway man.

Like all things fictional there was some basis in reality for these characters and Russell the Railwayman is just that. Russell Hubner is a fitter on the Bluebell Railway, a preserved steam railway in the heart of Sussex, which is south of London. He is one of fifty employees, although they have around five hundred volunteers and ten thousand members. For many it’s a hobby, for Russell it’s his work.

Now that I am living in the UK, it allows one who organises things to be able to stretch the wings as one might say and so it was put in place that we would all visit the preserved steam train railway on St. Patricks day, with Robert Rankin having a go at the tooter instead of just talking toot at the bar. As authors go Robert is pretty cool. He has truly embraced the whole fan idea, and has been attending conventions for nearly twenty years.

Many authors come along, get involved or somehow support fan clubs and fan organisations. Others, and George RR Martin and his Borders without Banners organisation comes to mind, this is where the author embraces and throws much effort and assistance towards that small percentage of readers who want to come out at night and play. Robert is that kind of author. We have auctioned thousands of pounds of his property, from Galeys to second hand Bermuda shirts to raise funds for conventions and publications, and he just turns up and gives one hell of a show.

It started on Friday of course. I had just started my train driver training course, it was going to last about seven months and was fairly intensive. That week when I was handed my roster it was pointed out to me that I had Saturday off, because of paddies day, which was prodigious indeed. So, after working in the driving cab for a shift observing line of route and gaining front-end experience, but not driving. I finished up about midnight in central London.

I blasted out in the car to Uxbridge, where I collected a Stef, another Irish James and Graham Hill, and as we listened to rock music and talked about Zombies and whether west coast smofs would support the Australian Worldcon bid or not, we whizzed round the autobahn 25 to Croydon, which is of course the central of the Sfnal UK universe.

We chatted and drank tea and talked
from Croydon.
So we headed down and found the place with Stef at the map and it was rather like stepping back into some sort of time warp. I realised I should have brought a copy of prolapse so I could do more than imagine the olden times.

The railway used to be part of the Lewes and East Grinstead Railway which in 1878 was operated by the London Brighton and South Coast Company. During the 1950’s it was closed down, then due to a statutory rule in the act that allowed the railway to operate, British Rail reopened the line and then closed it again.

In 1959 the Lewes & East Grinstead Railway Preservation Society was formed to try and arrange and run a limited diesel multiple unit service along the track, but they failed to buy all the track and also there was a general lack of interest. In 1960 the bluebell railway was borne from the LEGR and they were preserving steam trains ahead of the demise of these machines on British rail.

The line lies in a north south direction with three stations. We headed to the southern most station, Sheffield Park, to meet the rest of the guys who were turning up, as this station had a pub and this is always a good place to gather. Sheffield Park station is restored to represent a Victorian station of the London Brighton and South Coast Railway some time before the 1920’s.

Wee arrived and parked our car and immediately could see this was more than just a station. The walk from the car park was lie stepping back into time, we went along and saw pristine adverts for the oddest of items, and were astounded to see Oxo (soluble solid beef extract) being advertised as tasty with milk. The station is absolutely beautiful. I quickly sorted out the ticket situation. There was a group of 30 of us going and I had arranged a group discount. we went through to the platform and down to the modern buildings, built in a traditional style, with nice brickwork.

There was an extensive shop and offices and a bar and restaurant so we decided to imbibe some liquors. The lads tried some of the real ales that are named after railways. Sheffield park is home to the Loco sheds and workshops, and Russell had told us he would show us around them later. So slowly but surely everyone and Robert and Russell turned up. One chap went missing, Liam was late and Ian and his son went to the wrong place.

We were going on the 1 o’clock train, and had arranged to gather at 12.30. Russell gives the technical details here: We travelled up behind Southern Railways Maunsell 2-6-0 loco 1638 U class. It was built at Ashford in 1931. It weighs about 104 tons. It worked passenger and goods trains up to 1964, ending its days at Guildford. It spent 16 years in a scrap yard in South Wales before coming to the Bluebell in 1980. It entered service last year. These engines are known as ‘U boats’ I passed my firing test on its class sister 1618. We travelled in modern coaches for us, built for British Rail in the 1950’s.

We loaded into the front of the train, directly behind the steam engine and it was such a nice journey through the Sussex countryside. We dropped at Horsted Keynes, which is a bit more than halfway up the line. Thanks to the power of the mobile phone, Liam joined us, which was quite good. Jets (a fan fund in 2007)
flyers were distributed as now we had two of the candidates on board, as Jim de Liscard was already with us. We stopped here briefly as its acts as a loop and allowed a down service to arrive and pass by.

Then onto Kingscote. We had been hanging out the old railway door windows and I had a lungful of steam as we went about 700 yards though one of the longest tunnels in preservation hands. Once we got there, we all pilled out to take photos. Kingscote echoes the early British Railways period of the 1950s. Russell quickly had a word with the driver of our steam train, Bill White, and next thing Robert Rankin is on the footplate, as the train pounds off, switches across and heads down past the now empty stock and switches back to couple up to take us back down on the second leg of our journey. Ian and son managed to meet us, and with a full complement we took pictures.

Robert was as you can imagine really chuffed.

After we got in trouble for standing in the wrong place, although the station master did admit they had their signage in the wrong place, or maybe the train stopped in the wrong place, and I was amused that customer service was never meant to deal with a cheeky Sproutlore rabble.

We reclaimed a jubilant Robert and all boarded the train again. This time at Horsted Keynes we disembarked, watched trains arrive and leave, and also say some ‘Steam Train’ training on Stepney, a very famous little engine belonging to the bluebell railway. Horsted Keynes tries to emulate the style of the Southern Railway between 1922 and 1948.

Once it was qiet, Russell took us around the railway Carriage workshops, which were extensive and had about 20 carriage being worked on, in ample space by quite a lot of volunteers. He showed us different kinds of carriages from the within region. Some then went to have some food which was available on the island platform tea room and I went over to a far platform where there were carriages which house an art show and a bookshop. I walked into Heaven. After an hour at Horsted, Flick came in and told me I better get a move on, our train had arrived and would be leaving shortly, I paid for my books, promised I would be back and lurched under all the weight to the train. The books were roughly a fifth of regular prices, and there were thousands of them, an incredible amount of magazines, maps and general paperwork. I found a book so extensive about the history of the railway at Croydon, that I doubt I could ever better it.

What with the rest here we were afforded the chance to travel on the other train that was running on this day, as Russell explains. We returned form Horsted Keynes behind loco 32473 0-6-2T class E4. It was built in 1898 at Brighton. These engines worked goods and local passenger trains between London and Brighton, including using the Horsham to Shoreham line. We bought the engine in working order in 1962 and it ran till 1971 when it was in need of repair. It returned to steam in 1998. We sat in coach 971 known as a ‘hundred seater’, cos it can seat 100. It
is of a type that worked the Horsham to Shoreham line past Rob’s old house (and mine). The Driver was Tony FUNNEL! Also in the train was a very old coach (1891) which was once part of a petrol station until being repaired at the Bluebell.

We got back to Sheffield Park and again Russell took on the task of tour guide and showed us around the Loco Yard. The Bluebell railway has about 18 steam engines awaiting restoration or just in storage, safe from the cutters torch, about six undergoing restoration at any one time and about nine steam trains in service. We went around the Steam Engine yard and thorough the sheds with the static engines on display.

Then we were led past the barriers and around the actual depot part of the yard, where engines were being refuelled and cleaned and prepared. Then we were brought into the workshop. This was an amazing spectacle, men working hard with all times of heavy equipment, hot fires burning and we got to see what a boiler looks like up close and from underneath. Russell guided us all well.

As a little thank you, I then had the opportunity to get a run in the U class 2-6-0 loco 1638 which had since arrived in, as it was St Patrick’s day and it was definitely a fantastic opportunity. The firebox was like looking into hell alright, and the levers and gauges were all a bit mind blowing, let alone the tiny piece of wood that made up the drivers seat. Of course once the lads heard where I worked, talk turned to high speed crossovers and other idiosyncrasies of the western region railway.

Afterwards the driver commented that I wasn’t bad for a westerner, so that was good.

We had some more drink and then as arranged we all got into cars and drove down to Brighton where we had arranged to meet up and have dinner, which went equally as well, it was far too civilised for the likes of our lot but everyone behaved and it was really quite a pleasant evening.

Robert hadn’t been well for a while, so it was nice just to have a relaxing day, our events are usually a bit more high octane than this, so just chatting and enjoying dinner was really quite good.

Late into the night we wandered back to our cars, we lost James Shields and the girl he was hanging out of on the way, so they could be come more familiar and then after some horseplay in the general Brighton pavilions area, and driving off without everyone in the car we had a full car load, and a Guinness Paddies day hat on my head, we did our best to get from Brighton to Croydon in as little time as possible.

Once back in Croydon, I at last had some alcohol, and passed out on the couch, as everyone and Mieke who had gone home earlier hung out to have a few beers and more chat. I was exhausted and it was just too good a day.

www.thegoldensprout.com for more Robert Rankin madness and www.bluebell-railway.co.uk for more about this wonderful preserved railway, now in its 50th year, and just about to link to East Grinstead and the national rail network.
The steam trip.

The noise, the smell, the lack of acceleration tinged with a near mystical power. The white steam, the black smoke, sulfur, coal, oil, grease, sharp metallic odors. Smoke clinging to the cess.

Smoked tunnel, a darkest night, a Bizarre bygone byzantine underworld. The obscured architecture disappear in a wash of smoke and steaming swirls. Shunted into a timeless siding.

The moving gargantuan that pushes noisily so much effort to move the metal beast. Pistons pumping, steam hissing. The brakes are unwelcome but controlled smoothness. The machinery taking a strain to pick up again.

No wifi, or gadgets or infernal intrusions to the comfort of a proper seat, headrest and arms tables to every four, space to walk and to store. The melodious clink clack now unusual with continuous rail, real wooden interiors not petroleum fakeness.

Steam issuing from one hundred portals as we slow and perfectly picturesque red bricked, Victorian station adorned with Jacks and bunting of blue white and blood. A horrible marketing reality in the distance.

The couples strain, the momentum beating the static friction forceful energy as the heart of our dragon strains. Pace quickening, steam soon whips by. The snaking shadow seems out of place as we find ourselves travelling quite apace.

Careless stupidity forcing a collapse. Poignant modern failure.

The Cream and Brown colours a beauty compared as the blurred dirty white and blue DMU flies by at normal mundane speed, momentarily disturbed.

The Deepest Maroon of the LMS Leander Class two three one, tender, fireman, Driver, guard. Its so wonderfully attractive and feels like a dream, time stood still the journey an hour, unlike a daily commute through a hellish 32 minutes in boring suits.
Howeird’s Train Photos from Thailand
The Day I (Almost) Wrecked a Train

Kevin Standlee

I am a member of the Oregon Electric Railway Museum in Brooks, Oregon (north of Salem), and occasionally, when I’m in Oregon on the right dates, I go out to the Museum and volunteer, not so much in a public “operating” role, but with minor tasks around the place.

One of the popular pieces of equipment at the museum is the “Sydney Car” (http://oerhs.org/oerhs/roster/1187-Sydney.htm), a former Sydney, Australia tram that, with its open design, is a great favorite for summer days. A few years ago, I was there near the end of the day, after the museum had closed, and they were moving the car back toward the Car Barn. The tracks to the car barn have a tight curve in them, and operators are warned to take the approach very slowly. The driver of the Sydney car got slightly unlucky, and the tram derailed, dropping one set of wheels off the tracks.

The tram was moving slowly when it went off the rails, and the derailment was very minor as things went. Everyone gathered round to consider how to get it back up on the rails. The driver of the Sydney car got slightly unlucky, and the tram derailed, dropping one set of wheels off the tracks.

The tram was moving slowly when it went off the rails, and the derailment was very minor as things went. Everyone gathered round to consider how to get it back up on the rails. The consensus was that we should be able to build up some cribbing around the derailed truck and simply drive the car back the other way. The tram should, we figured, ride back up onto the rails, and we applauded our success and congratulated ourselves as we removed the chains.

We were still faced with the problem of putting the tram back into the car barn, since the car’s motor was burnt out. We couldn’t use that electric locomotive on the adjacent track because a piece of at-the-time immovable equipment was blocking it. We didn’t have to move the very far – possibly thirty or forty feet down the track and inside the barn. I said, “Why don’t we just try pushing it? It’s on rails, after all.” Everyone agreed that this was worth a try, so we all got behind one end and began pushing it. To our cheers, the car began to roll forward down the track.

This was when we realized that we hadn’t thought about how we were going to stop it.

It was not obvious to any of us that the approach track to the car barn slopes slightly downhill. When we stopped pushing, the car kept rolling. A little over a car length inside the barn was the former Muni Boeing Vertol unit (http://oerhs.org/oerhs/roster/1213-MUNI-LRV.htm) parked further down the same track. I had visions of two irreplaceable pieces of rolling stock crashing into each other.

Fortunately, none of us had the Extremely Bad Idea of trying to get in front of the tram to push it.
stop it. I tried grabbing the car from the rear and pulling, but this only succeeded in digging a furrow in the track ballast as the tram dragged me along. Other people with more presence of mind grabbed the various bits of wooden cribbing and started throwing them on the tracks ahead of the runaway tram. Under the circumstances, derailing the tram again seemed like a better idea than crashing it into the Boeing car. The tram crunched over several of the pieces of wood and kept rolling. I envisioned being tar and feathered by the other museum members for having wrecked their workhorse equipment.

Fortunately for everyone, the tram rolled to a stop on its own just before the car barn entrance, where the track slopes slightly upgrade again. Whew! This time, in order to complete the storage move, Lisa boarded the tram and stood with her hands on the parking brake while the rest of us nudged the car forward again. With the car safely parked where it should be, Lisa screwed down the brakes. Aside from the burnt-out traction motor (which turned out to be a relatively minor repair, I learned later), everything was okay and nobody got hurt.

We got pretty lucky, actually. Railway equipment, even small trams like the Sydney car, is large and heavy, and while it’s sometimes difficult to get it moving, once it’s moving, it doesn’t really want to stop. Playing with trains at full scale can kill you if you do it wrong, and that day, we were definitely doing it wrong. We all learned a valuable lesson that fine summer day, and fortunately, did so without leaving blood on the tracks.
Howeird’s
Train Photos from
The UK
Irish Trains in Lego
by
James Shields

Like many young boys, trains fascinated me, and I probably went through the usual phase of wanting to be a train driver when I grew up. I had the usual pull along train toys (including a wonderful wooden one that has been in the family for generations), and trips on the “big trains” were always to be relished.

I was lucky enough to have a 4.5v Lego train with red wheels and blue track, although I was slightly too young to really appreciate it and eventually got mixed into the general Lego box, becoming many fantastic trains over the years (or at least as long as there was enough track to make a circle and enough wheels to make a train).

I remember looking at the wonderful Lego trains of the 1980s with envy, but by that stage I was “too old for Lego”, and the only additions were pocket money sized sets I could afford myself. At that stage I had a fairly large HO scale (and later N-gauge) train set, and the idea of replicating the local Irish trains fascinated me. As Ireland is quite a small market, very few train manufacturers bothered making Irish trains, so I was keen to acquire the few that were available. Perhaps it’s a little unconventional running a 4-6-0 CIE tender engine alongside a Santa-Fe shunter, but I had fun.

Fast forward a few years, and with the advent of eBay and some disposable income, I have collected quite a few of the “classic” Lego trains, but like in my model train days, there’s something missing. Of course, there are no Irish trains available, but unlike model trains there’s the simple solution of building my own.

The driver’s cab and windscreen went through quite a few iterations. The first attempt used a 2x4x2 car windscreen between a pair of 1x2x3 slopes, but I was never happy with it, as it didn’t capture the look of the real train. I tried a few variants using a yellow 1x4x3 train window, sloping it on a hinge brick. Finally, with quite a bit of help from Brickish members, I settled on a design using panel windows separated by plates and tiles to give a very good impression of the real windscreen.

I found MLCad a very useful tool throughout the design for trying out ideas and estimating quantities, though one has to be careful, as it’s quite easy to accidentally create something that can’t be built, especially when using SNOT techniques. I was also very pleased with the amount of help I received from Brickish members, both in suggestions for improving the
design and in donations of parts.

For my next project, I selected a new train that has entered service on the Dublin-Cork route, mainly for its sleek and modern appearance. It’s the first Irish train to have a streamlined front, although in reality this is just a generator van and the locomotive at the other end is a blocky old one with a new paint job.

The coaches have long tinted windows, which 1x2x3 panels seemed ideal for. I happened to mention this to Martin Long, and he very kindly send me a bag of them so I felt compelled to build it. As with the commuter train, I used SNOT to place a line of windows on their sides. This presented one slight problem, as the windows are only connected to the train at the endpoints, panels have a tendency to bow outwards, so some internal support was required to keep them stable.

The doors of the real train are lime coloured, so no official door was going to be available. I decided on custom doors, again using SNOT. The result is more or less to scale with the train, but is only 2 studs wide, so a minifig would have to turn sideways to board it.

For the roof of this train I decided to experiment. Like many trains, this one has a curved roof with grooves running along it. I thought that tiles could be used to simulate the shape of the curve and the grooves. I built it up, first using jumpers to make the outer part rise steeply and then more gently towards the top, finally capping it by using 1x2-1x4 brackets to raise the central row by half a plate. I’m quite pleased with the result, though there are some tiny gaps because of the lips of the tiles that I haven’t figured out how to fill yet.

So far I’ve only built one coach, so I need a few more BrickLink orders to complete the DVT and some more coaches.

Although I started the design after the Cork train, my next project was actually finished before it, mainly because it’s smaller and the parts proved easier to get hold of. I decided to finally have a go at something in the traditional black and orange colour scheme. In the most recent revision of that livery, the locos had a large “IE” logo on the sides that seemed ideal for brick building.

I settled on the 121 class because it was finally being retired at the end of last year after over 40 years service. The real train is just over 12m long, but it manages to look big and imposing, and I wanted to capture that and not end up with something that looks like a shunter. I decided to use a 24-stud train base to try and keep it fairly short so that it should end up reasonably to scale with bigger locos I hope to build later.

The real train has a cab at one end, and a narrower body with a walkway along each side. My first experiments made the body 4-wide, but this didn’t seem to capture the imposing look of the real train, so I widened it to 5 studs. I tried to capture the slightly pointy back with hinge bricks, but it came out a bit sharper than I hoped, so I’ll probably come back and redesign that later. The logo was a lot of fun, and I think worked out well.

The cab is a little longer than it should be, but it gives the general impression of the
real train. I’m still not entirely happy with the angled windows at the front, but the SNOT 33° slopes worked out very nicely for the rest of the nose. If the 1x3 curved slopes ever become available in orange, they would be ideal for the roof, but for now I’ve had to settle for more 33° slopes.

Overall I’m very pleased with this MOC, and I’m looking forward to building some black and orange coaches for it to pull.

Modelling any real railway in Lego will always be a challenge because train designers don’t tend to consider what Lego parts are available before designing their trains. However, I have found it very satisfying to try and work through those challenges and find new ways of achieving the detail of the real trains.

As well as working on more train designs, I am now looking at the scenery they run through, and have designs for a couple of stations and bridges in the works. Eventually I would love to see a display of Irish trains running

THE FIRST IMAGES EVER EXHIBITED WERE SHOT BY THE LUMIERE BROTHERS. THE FIRST SHORT CLIP SHOWN WAS OF A TRAIN PULLING INTO A STATION. THE FEW WOMEN IN THE FRONT ROW SAW THE TRAIN BARING DOWN ON THEM, PANICKED AND FLED THE ROOM. THAT WAS PROOF OF THE POWER OF FILM.
Howeird’s
Train Photos from
Niles Canyon Railway
General Motors Electro Motive Division in Ireland.

In 1960 in Ireland something happened. Coras Iompair Eireann (CIE) decided that they had had enough of British Built Electric Diesels, and decided to try General Motors.

Ireland was quick to see the potential of diesel locomotives, the Steam fleet was ageing, and despite outside consultation and suggestion otherwise, in 1948 dieselisation began. First CIE built some locomotives with Sulzer engines, Ireland having had its own massive engine and carriage works in Inchicore, just outside Dublin, having a go at the job. These were OK, but had problems, some 12 diesels were ordered then from the Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Company these were the Class 101/B then in 1955 two types of diesel were ordered from a variety of British companies who were providing various components, astoundingly the Metropolitan Vickers class 001/A an A1A-A1A and class 201 C a Bo-Bo. A mainline loco and branch loco both with Crossley engines. Some 60 and 34 respectively were purchased, with a small number of the 101/A being built at Inchicore.

The Crossley engines were an unmitigated disaster. Unreliable, under powered, they were very problematic. Reliability in the railway is everything. CIE went looking for a solution, they had done badly with the Crossley engine, admittedly it was early days for dieselisation and the engines had been untested to a degree, in battle. They looked hard elsewhere.

They looked to our western nearest neighbour, to the US and saw General Motors. General Motors Electro-Motive Division, (GM EMD) La Grange, Illinois, USA was soon to become synonymous with rail motive power in Ireland.

Reliability was everything. It was the beginning of the sixties, American railways were huge and GM EMD had been building trains for nearly forty years and even had a specific export sales section. Reliability was a watchword, So 15 diesel engines were purchased, class 121 to test the metals. These were mildly modified ‘Switchers’ as they would be known in America, or Shunters, although a massive shunter from a UK and Irish perspective. They were an export engine, built by GM EMD, known as the GL8. Versions were also exported to Pakistan, Taiwan, Brazil and Tunisia.

In 1961 this hooded switchers, with their distinctive cab at one end, arrived and were instantly successful. Drivers initially were very unhappy about driving with the Hood leading, following an incident on the line, which may have been prevented with better visibility, so they were always driven with Cab leading and hood trainling.

These trains were being run on the mainline, at 75mph, so despite their switcher origin, they were being belted around the place at a fair clip on mainline passenger top tier services.

The Class 121 were fitted with EMD 8-567CR engines, a two stroke 875 horsepower version of an engine that was GM's mainstay for nearly thirty years. To avoid turning the units around, at the end of each journey, they were modified to work in pairs, hood to hood. They worked passenger as well as freight services. They were fitted later with EMD 645 piston and liner assemblies, and two were refitted with EMD 645E engines.

IN 1989, these consists were modified to operate in push pull mode with six BR Mark 3, Plug door carriages and a Driving Vehicle trailer at one end. They operated these for some six years, before the traction was taken over by another GM, then they were waterfalled down in duties.

Beet, wood, cement, container, permanent way duties all fell to the 121. In 2005, they saw there last official passenger duty, and by January of 2008, there were just two left, scrapping having begun in 2002. The last two, which have not been scraped were withdrawn from service in 2008. Forty seven years after they arrived. Good going by anyone's standards.
After the 121, and their instant success, a further 37 class 141's were ordered without hesitation. These were nearly exactly similar engines, but built with two cabs, overcoming the major draw back of the 121, and some 37 were ordered and delivered in 1962. They had the GM code of JL8. These loco's were the deathknell of Steam in Ireland and by 1963 steam was gone. This was five years ahead of the UK, on the mainline. These loco's could be paired with 121's.

Like the 121, they had EMD 567CR engines. Later they were fitted with EMD 645 piston and liner parts and then all re-engined with GM 8-645E engine of 1,000 horsepower, a substantial increase in power. CIE were reluctant to initially move to the 645, as the 567 had a track record.

Interestingly, two EMD 567 engines were swopped back in later, the Irish being deft at getting their value out of engines. 26 of these engines are now withdrawn, and 11 are still in use, mostly in pilot or permanent way duties. I happened to see 144 idling away, on the 30th of July 2009 at Connolly station.

In 1966 came the class 181, identical to the 141, but with the EMD 8-645E from the offset. Twelve were ordered, and their withdrawal began in the late nineties, after some thirty years service and the onset of the popularity of the ‘railcar’ the engines having been the original, they were phased out and slowly scrapped. Although one unit, number 190 is still active and on pilot duties.

So some sixty four GM locomotives had been ordered. Yet, CIE still had some ninety four Metro Vicks, which were far from satisfactory. Usually GM would not sell engines without their generator assemblies, and this was an issue in 1964. Yet it was an issue that was somehow overcome, and by 1968 following testing re-engining of the Metro Vicks began in earnest, with both types getting EMD 645 engines, all being re-fitted by 1972. The class 001 received 12 cylinder engines originally rated at 1650 horse power were later reduced to 1325 HP. The class 001 ran with these new engines until 1995, when the final one was taken out of service. An extension of some twenty five years.

A total life of forty years.

The C/201 which was fitted with an EMD 645 E engine, 8 cylinder rated at 1,100 Hp was extensively used as a suburban push pull sets, DMU's converted to operation with a locomotive, at the end of their engines life time, until 1986, the introduction of the Dublin Area Rapid Transit, an Electrical Multiple Unit with Over head electrics, saw the end of them.

In 1977, Eighteen new engines arrived, the Class 071. These looked like stretched versions of the 141/181, and were of Co-Co configuration. Built in London, Ontario, Canada, they were GM Model JT22CW, and were fitted with EMD 12-645E3C engines rated at 2,250 HP with a Top Speed of 90mph. Northern Ireland Railways having seen the success of the GM's bought three of these engines, and classed them as Class 111.

They featured on mainline Intercity services, first pulling BREL Mark 2 and then BREL Mark 3 coaching stock. The 071's were waterfalled down to second tier and then freight duties, with the arrival of the GM Class 201, from 1995 onwards. Twelve of these engines
have been recently overhauled and given a new ‘freight’ livery, leaving in doubt the future of the other six. They are currently on Freight, permanent way and occasional second tier or replacement duties.

In 1994 again, GM was called upon, CIE was now Irish Rail and new locomotives were ordered. The Class GM 201, and yes, it is rather Irish to have two classes with the same number, but so be it, were introduced from 1995.

In 1985 the class 59 Freight Engine, was introduced to Britain by Foster Yeoman, who were just frustrated by the lack of reliability of the British Rail locomotives, and sought new loco’s by tender with a requirement of 95% reliability, British Rail could not compete. GM won the contract, and the Class 59 have had 99% reliability since then, and one of the class pulled a stone train of over 11,000 tons, making it the heaviest load in Europe. This model JT26CW-SS is based on the EMD SD40-2 although with a very different body, and cabs based on a British Rail engine. From these engines, came the freight Class 66 of which nearly some 600 have been built and supplied to the UK and Europe. The heaviest scheduled train in Europe is German operated service, using a Class 66.

The Irish Rail GM 201 were a passenger version of the freight export model EMD 66, with angled cabs and slightly smoother lines. Powered by a 3,200hp EMD 710G3B engine with a top speed of 102mph, these were the first trains with HEP or Head End Power, as up to this, all carriages were heated and powered using generators vans. They soon took over from the Class 071.

European grant had come into effect to assist transport in the republic and infrastructure between the Republic and Northern Ireland was a target of upgrading. The main line between Belfast and Dublin was totally upgraded and by 1997 the line from Dublin to the border, was of the continually welded variation. Then in 1997 special De-Dietrich coaching stock was introduced for a new ‘enterprise’ service. Until this stage, one could find a variety of types of stock being used, as the route is shared between what was then Irish Rail and Northern Ireland Railways. I was unfortunate enough once to be transported by NIR DMU’s Class 80’s which at the time were very tired and dilapidated, despite their youth. These carriages which had a Driving Vehicle Trailer at one end, in the same shape as a class GM 201 were drawn by the locomotives, giving a very symmetrical look to the train.

From the late nineties a belief in Irish Rail was that the Diesel Railcar was the future, and successive DMU’s have been introduced. The final order of coaching stock arrived in 2006 though, and these are called Mark 4, although they have no connection to the British Rail Mark 4’s unlike the previous Mark 2 and 3’s and are built by CAF in Spain. These carriages consist of seven passenger carriages and a Generator Control Car, which is a Driving Vehicle Trailer. These sets, like the DE Deitrich are run in a push pull operation, although the DVT is very streamlined and they have a top speed of 125,ph, which with current motive power, signalling and also track, is not achievable. These sets have their own livery, different from anything else, and serve between Dublin and Cork, on an hourly basis. Class GM 201 engines were painted into matching livery for this intercity service.
Currently, with the waterfelling of first Mark 2 and then Mark 3 stock, and the arrival of railcars, there are currently a number of 201’s in storage and out of use. This is mostly because there has been a massive run down of freight in Ireland. The main freight Terminal in Dublin having been sold for housing development. This is an area that there is little interest to develop, and with such an attitude it would seem that railcars are a sensible route, there is no need for the flexibility that locomotives offer. In saying that, GM have had and continue to have a tremendous reputation in Ireland, for nearly fifty years and they have become a major supplier to Europe in that time.

These are currently the heaviest, fastest and most powerful diesel locomotives operating in Ireland (112 tons, max. speed 102 mph and 3,200 hp).

_I hear the train a comin’
It’s rollin’ ‘round the bend,
And I ain’t seen the sunshine,
Since, I don’t know when,
I’m stuck in Folsom Prison,
And time keeps draggin’ on,
But that train keeps a-rollin’,
On down to San Antone._

-Johnny Cash _Folsom Prison Blues_
Sort of a Train Tale
by John Purcell

So a train issue of Drink Tank is barreling down the tracks at us, and here we lie, hog-tied to the rails like poor, sweet Nell while Snidely Whiplash, thinly disguised as Chris Garcia, cackles evilly over our prone bodies.

This begs the question: Do I have a train tale to tell? Well, sort of. When I was a wee lad back in the late 50s and on through the 60s, mom and dad used to take us back to their original stomping grounds in New York City. Dad grew up sort of on the Lower East Side of Manhattan (not too far from Gracie Mansion, to be precise), and mom grew up seven blocks from Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Most of their siblings still lived in the NYC area back then; it wasn’t until later in the 1970s that the families started spewing forth and venturing out into hinterlands such as Utah, Illinois, California, and even overseas. So whenever my family went to visit our grandparents and other relatives during the 50s and 60s, it was to New York that we headed.

Not surprisingly, our travels in the city itself were mostly spent on the subway, if not on foot. Back then, the New York City subway system was a sprawling network of subterranean mystery to me, so it was a grand adventure. I still remember the subway coming up from underground, and looking to my left out the window, we were staring into Yankee Stadium from just outside the centerfield fence. That was pretty cool. Of course, we were going to a game at the time; I believe that might have been the time when my brother Rick had pigeons pooping on his pants since the rafters at the old Yankee Stadium were nesting grounds for thousands of those gray, grease-shitting buggers. My pants were unscathed, but Dad and Rick got bird-bombed that day. Chances are I got nailed at other games there, but that’s not important right now.

On another visit Eastward, this time to Uncle Buddy’s house out on Long Island, we took the Long Island Railroad out there from the Big Apple. That was cool. I was probably only 11 or 12 at the time, but I still recall the shifting scenery from the concrete jungle to the tree-lined lanes of Where-ever-it-was Long Island. I forget exactly where Buddy lived (his real name was Daniel), but it was something like an hour-and-a-half train ride out of New York. That trip was also the first time I went swimming in the ocean. One never forgets an experience like that. I still get goosebumps thinking about how cold the Atlantic was, and that happened back in 1965!

The only other time I took a train was riding Amtrack from Minneapolis to Duluth one December, 1973 weekend for a ski trip with my brother and a bunch of his college chums. We were heading to Spirit Mountain, which is just outside of Duluth, and naturally, none of us ever really hit the slopes. Most of the time was spent drinking beer in the lodge, eyeballing the girls and laughing at the fools outside falling all over the place. Hell, we were falling off our barstools, so who were we to talk?

Come to think of it, I think the train trip home was conducted in a hangover haze. That is about all I remember of that particular excursion. Here’s the slogan for that weekend getaway: Ride Amtrack - pass out on us.