

RIDING THAT NEW RIVER TRAIN

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Hearing that 2018 might mark the last running of the Huntington NRHS Chapter's New River Train, I purchased three tickets. I planned on Mary Ann and our 13-year old granddaughter Grayson riding with me. I was able to obtain three seats in First Class for Saturday 27 October. First class seating included breakfast and dinner on the train. I purchased this level of tickets so Grayson could experience eating a real meal on a train.

On Friday afternoon we drove from Frankfort, Kentucky, to Huntington via Russell, Kentucky. The Russell Yard was full of tank cars, with no coal hopper in view. We stayed at the Holiday Inn in Huntington as it was four blocks from the old C&O Depot, the loading spot for the New River Train. Our car was the parlor car *Morris County*, an ex-New York Central, 56-seat coach built in 1946 by Budd. It had been converted to a 28-seat parlor car in 1977 and was again rebuilt in 2013. All those riding the train having dome car or First-Class tickets had to board at Huntington.

Loading of the New River Train started at 7:00 AM, and the train pulled at 8:30 AM. Using the hotel's shuttle van, we got to the depot at 6:45 to find some 400 people already in line. While rain was threatening, it held off until a young man in front of us said, "Well, one good thing is that it is not raining." With that, a gentle rain started to fall. Luckily, we were prepared for rain. We were in our seats by 7:15 AM and by 7:30 AM our coach was full. Our car hosts were an elementary school teacher and her eleven-year-old daughter. This young lady ran a tight ship, laying out all of the ground rules concerning riding in "HER" car. The most important rules were no popcorn in her car and no hanging out in the vestibule unless she or her mother was present. More on the vestibule restrictions later.

Our train was headed by three Amtrak P42DC locomotives: #136, #32, and #96. We pulled at 8:30 just as advertised, running past the CSXT Car Repair Shop and the CSXT Huntington Shops. Unfortunately, during this part of the trip, I obeyed the rules and stayed out of the vestibule. Breakfast was called as soon as we left Huntington. We ate our meals in the lower level of the Full Dome Car *Summit View*. This car had been built in 1954 by Budd for the Santa Fe Railroad. It was later sold to Holland American Line who used the car in Alaska. In 2007, Iowa Pacific purchased the car and returned her to the Lower 48. Our breakfast consisted of orange juice, an egg omelet with sausage patty, rolls, and fruit.

We did a 15-minute stop at St. Albans, West Virginia, to load coach passengers. Our journey from Huntington to Gauley Bridge, West Virginia, saw the weather outside the car being a mixture of overcast and rain. Once we started through the New River Gorge I had to get up from my chair seat and go to the vestibule to look out. Mary Ann soon joined me, but Grayson just wanted to stay inside. It was cold and wet in the vestibule, but what better way to view trackside scenery. I tried to take some photos, but as soon as I stuck my camera out from the train, my lens was immediately covered in drops of rainwater. A good thing I was shooting digital for I would have been crucified by Mary Ann for the cost of film I would have wasted. However, despite the inability to take photos, there is nothing like viewing the New River Gorge from an open vestibule window. I need to state that while Mary Ann and I were in the vestibule looking out the window, our 11-year car host told us that we were not allowed there. I told her I

had special permission and to check with her mother, a small fib. She left and did not return to throw us off the train, so perhaps Mom said it was OK.

We pulled into Hinton at 12:45 PM. From the Hinton Depot, we rode a school bus to the top of Hinton so we could walk downhill past the various street vendors to the depot. Based upon the advice of our young car host, we did not partake of any street food for we were told we would eat our evening meal as soon as we left Hinton. We were to be back on board at 3:30 PM for a 4:00 PM pull. Once we got off the bus, Grayson said she would find her own way back to the depot and disappeared into the crowd. Mary Ann and I skipped the street vendors to listen to some excellent live music being offered in the downtown park and to visit the local railroad museum. We were back to the train at 3:20 PM, and Grayson arrived soon after. Luckily, as soon as we boarded the train, the heavens opened.

At 4:00 PM our train pulled for St. Albans and Huntington; at 4:10 PM dinner was announced. We returned to *Summit View* and took our breakfast seating. Our evening meal was salad, green beans, mashed potatoes, prime rib, and cheesecake. The food was excellent. Our servers were all students from Marshall University working on board the train for extra credit. After eating, Mary Ann and I returned to the vestibule. It was now colder, wetter, and darker both inside the vestibule and outside. Mary Ann lasted about 15-minutes and then went to her seat. I lasted until Thurmond when the wind and rain, plus lack of visibility, drove me to my seat. After a stop at St. Albans to unload coach passengers, we were back to the Huntington Depot at 8:45 PM where we were greeted by a soft falling rain. Our hotel van was there to take us back to our hotel. Since Grayson thanked me for the trip when we got off the train and said she would be interested in another train ride, I must chalk the day up as a great family day.



6:45 AM sees Grayson and Mary Ann standing in line to board the train.



Above and below are two views of the *Morris County*.





The New River Train, as seen Sunday morning, pulling from Huntington.



Grayson and Mary Ann enjoying their breakfast



Mary Ann hanging out in the vestibule enjoying the scenery from our car as it was supposed to viewed, from an open window.



A view toward the front of the train. Since we were car 15, there were fourteen cars ahead of us.



Looking toward the rear of the train as we cross the New River to run on its northern bank



In Hinton, our locomotives run around the train to position themselves for the journey back to Huntington.



The Hinton Depot in the rain



Thurmond in the rain