

A STAY AT THE IZAAK WALTON INN

by

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It had been fifteen years since we had stayed at the Izaak Walton Inn located in the heart of Glacier National Park at Essex, Montana. Both Mary Ann and I were looking forward to again staying in the Green Caboose. As one must cancel reservations 30 days before arrival to get full refund, we waited until the day before our arrival to make reservations. Unfortunately, the Green Caboose was not available but the Red Caboose was. Since it was Red Caboose or nothing we took it. Minimum stay in a caboose is three nights. While the caboose is somewhat more expensive than a room at the hotel, the ability to cook your own food offsets this price difference. In checking into the Izaak Walton, we found a whole new staff and none of the new staff recognized the names we mentioned of previous staff and locals we had interacted with in the past. The new staff was also sadly lacking in knowledge of the local rail scene and had never heard of the local railroad map the Inn used to provide to guests. The new staff was all yuppie oriented; we felt the Inn had lost a lot of its railroad charm.

We had driven out to Essex in our Tahoe knowing we needed a four-wheel drive, as I intended to drive back into some areas I had been told about but had been afraid to drive into in the past with a rental car. I should note that in the past we parked our car at the lodge and had our luggage transported to the Green Caboose by one of the staff using a Gator. This time we drove to the caboose. This is done by driving west along BN-SF track to the west end of the Essex Yard, then crossing the track by a Forestry Road, taking another one lane dirt Forestry Road, and finally taking a cut into the side of the mountain back east along the track. After a mile drive through the woods on, for us, a rain slick dirt road, one arrives at the row of cabooses. We drove out the next morning over a snow-covered road.

During our first night in the Red Caboose, it seemed like every 15-minutes or so a train rolled past beneath our windows. Our plan for our first full day at Essex was to cover the BN-SF track east of the Izaak Walton. We would, during the course of the day, set up at Goat Lick Bridge, Java East and West, Snowsheds #5 to #11, Marias Pass, Summit, Bison, East Glacier, Two Medicine Bridge, and Browning. Traffic, unfortunately, was down as major track work was being done at Grizzly. Only high priority trains would grace BN-SF track during daylight hours. This did not prevent us from driving back into some areas we had always wanted to visit. Once the road ended without warning and I had to back out; a few times the wheels spun in slush and ice, but we never got stuck. Four-wheel drive is great. To be on the safe side I had brought my Springfield Armory XD-40 and wore it on my belt as we drove back to areas where we should not have been. Bear warning flyers had been posted on the walls at the Izaak Walton, and the front desk advised us to be careful if we went walking, as bear had been seen within a mile of the lodge.

In visiting the BN-SF Essex Yard I noticed that no helper locomotives were sitting in the Yard. There was, however, the customary winter snowplow train sitting there. A BN-SF Signalman told me that helper service from Essex had been discontinued circa 2012. Helper service was no

longer needed he said because BN-SF had perfected the use of remote control helper locomotives to move trains over the mountains. The average train rolling through Essex was 120 cars plus.

We spent our second morning visiting Whitefish and chasing trains west of Essex. (See Visit to Whitefish). On our return to Essex we spent the remainder of the afternoon chasing trains between Java and Grizzly. The next morning it was up early to chase the Empire Builder east from Essex. Amazingly, Amtrak was into Essex that morning 10-minutes before it was scheduled to depart, with no passengers to load or unload. I should mention that Essex now has a nice concrete boarding platform for Amtrak to stop at, however, it has no shelter. During our second night at Essex a family group of twelve had boarded Amtrak here for Seattle.

During our run east on our last morning pacing Amtrak, we encountered the BN-SF work train at East Glacier getting ready to roll east. Yes, as we were leaving the area, so were they. The gods of railfanning at times smile on us while at other times just laugh. Therefore, I stopped at Two Medicine Bridge to get a photo of the work train crossing that bridge. Then it was on to Browning where we visited the Blackfoot Indian Casino, (I am \$1 poorer), the Plains Indian Museum, and the new Amtrak Depot. Then it was a turn south for Sherman Pass in Wyoming. On our way south, we crossed the Missouri River by ferry at Carter, Montana; this is the western most ferry on the Missouri River.



The Red Caboose was our home for three nights.



A view of the bedroom in the Red Caboose



Mary Ann cooking supper in the Red Caboose kitchen. Note the bed in the cupola. Shower and toilet are through the metal door behind Mary Ann.



The view from the back deck of the Red Caboose, however, it was too cold to use while we were there.



Caboose Row: Orange, Blue, Green and Red



Amtrak 150 and 179 head the Empire Builder east past the Izaak Walton Inn. On the hill in the background is caboose row.



A view of the Izaak Walton Inn. The locomotive in the photo's right edge has been converted into a trackside rental unit that sleeps two.



A stack train headed by BNSF 5881, a GE ES44AC, and BNSF 4171, a GE C44-9W, as seen in Essex Yard from the pedestrian bridge that connects Caboose Row with the Izaak Walton Inn.



These two snow plows were sitting in the Essex Yard waiting the call to duty.



The Empire Builder at the Essex boarding platform. The building on the platform houses signal equipment and provides no shelter for those waiting to board the train. The Izaak Walton Inn is .25 mile down the road, just around the bend.



The Empire Builder leaving Snowshed #5 and entering Snowshed #6



Above and below: The Empire Builder east bound at Marias Pass. A light snow is falling.





BNSF 5508, a GE C44-9W, and BNSF 7483, a GE ES44DC, are seen west bound at Java East. They are crossing US 2 with a unit grain train bound for Seattle, Washington.



BNSF 7944, a GE ES44DC, and BNSF 4768, a GE C44-9W, are seen crossing Essex Creek at Java East, east bound with a unit grain train.



BNSF 6865 and Canadian National heritage unit CN 4614 are being held at Summit as Park rangers check the train. I was told later by a railfan it was because the locomotive crew had reported hitting a bear.



BNSF 3834, an ET44C4; BNSF 7993, a ES44DC; and NS 7316, an END SD80MAC are seen west bound with a stack train at the western end of Essex Yard.



BNSF 8387, an EMD SD70MAC, and Kansas City Southern de Mexico 4086, an EMD SD70ACe, are seen near Red Eagle with a unit grain train. Mary Ann is happy as her wave got a friendly toot from the engineer.



We are at Nyack and again Mary Ann's wave has gotten her a friendly toot from the engineer of BNSF 5452, a GE C44-9W.



A stack train is west bound at Two Medicine Bridge. Heading the train is BNSF 3867, a GE ET44C4; BNSF 7428, a GE ES44AC; and KCS 3928, a EMD SD70MAC.



BNSF 5508, a GE C44-9W, and BNSF 7483, a GE ES44DC, are seen west bound at False Summit.



To get this photo of a west bound grain train, we left US 2 and headed back to the BNSF track using Forestry Road 1066.



BNSF 5881, a GE ES44AC, and BNSF 4171, a GE C44-9W, are east bound with a stack train over the bridge at West Java. There are two ruts that climb a small hill on the righthand side of US 2 at Java that lead back to this photo location.



The Empire Builder is seen here crossing Bear Creek at Goat Lick.



As we leave Essex for Wyoming, the work train finishes work at Grizzly and heads for Havre. Heading the train is BN 5145, a GE C44-9W, which having run around the work train at East Glacier, is now running backward. The train is seen on Two Medicine Bridge.



The new Amtrak Depot at Browning. The Amshack is courtesy of the Blackfoot Indian tribe, who have wisely spent the money Palefaces have lost playing the slots at their casino, to provide protection for guests arriving or leaving by Amtrak.