

A VISIT TO SHERMAN HILL AND THE CHEYENNE DEPOT

by

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In 1995, Mary Ann and I rode Amtrak's Pioneer over Sherman Hill, but we had never visited Sherman Hill by car. I laid out our 2017 visit to Sherman Hill, this time by car, using Google Earth and a Wyoming Atlas & Gazetteer. I planned to approach Sherman Hill from Laramie and run east following the Union Pacific track to Cheyenne. What looked so easy using Google Earth and the Atlas/Gazetteer turned out to be anything but; roads that led from here to there on Google earth were fenced off or had signs posted reading "Private Road, Trespassers will be shot."

In working my way from US 287 over to the Union Pacific track, I became somewhat disoriented and was thrilled when I stumbled upon a Union Pacific Signal Gang working trackside. One saving grace was that as I pulled up to them, the one and only Union Pacific train we were to see at Sherman Hill thundered by. Yes, we arrived as Union Pacific was shutting down for a four-hour signal upgrade of the line.

After explaining my predicament to the Signal Gang, their foreman informed me that he was heading over to check on his other work crew and I could follow him over to Monument Road. The next 20-minutes saw Mary Ann and me driving at 60 MPH along railroad right-of-way, over hills, on roads marked No Trespassing, past wildlife and cattle, and through clouds of dust as I attempted to follow our Union Pacific guide. Mary Ann spent the entire time shouting, "Slow down! Look out! The car is going to be destroyed! We are going to skid over a hill or into a ditch or, even worse, turn over and roll down a hill and we will never be found." All in all, this drive would have been a fitting feature in a Chevrolet television ad touting "A Tahoe can go anywhere." No ride at Kings Island could touch our ride across Wyoming to Monument Road. Our guide informed us when he stopped at a railroad grade crossing that we were now on the top of Sherman Hill, at least as far as Union Pacific was concerned, and the Ames Brothers Monument was a couple of miles up the road.

After taking some photos at what we were told was Union Pacific's Sherman Hill, we drove north over Monument Road, a dirt road, to the Ames Brothers Monument. This monument is a large stone pyramid designed by Henry Hobson Richardson to honor brothers Oakes Ames and Oliver Ames, Jr., Union Pacific Railroad financiers. When built in 1882, the Ames Monument marked the highest point, 8,247-feet, on the then route of the transcontinental railroad. The monument is a four-sided, ashlar pyramid, 60 feet square at its base and 60 feet high. The monument is constructed of a light-colored native granite. However, since 1882, Union Pacific has twice relocated its track further south from the Ames Brothers Monument for an easier grade over the hill. Today no Union Pacific rail can be seen from the monument, and the town of Sherman, that was once co-located next to the monument, is now a ghost town.

It was an easy 2-mile drive north over Monument Road to I-80. When we reached I-80, Mary Ann exploded. I was shocked at the words she, a good Catholic girl, used to describe me for

putting her through that near-death ride over Wyoming landscape when we could have reached the Ames Brothers Monument in 10-minutes instead of spending an hour wandering all over creation. I told her to calm down and just imagine all the stories she could tell once we got back to Frankfort. This reignited the flame. Oh well, such is married life.

I gave up trying to follow the Union Pacific track to Cheyenne after reaching I-80 and instead just took I-80 east. From the interstate we could see Union Pacific trains sitting on the track waiting to roll west once the Signal Gang was done working.

In Cheyenne, just after 3:00 PM, we stopped at their 1886/87 Union Pacific Passenger Depot. This magnificent Victorian building is the crown jewel of downtown Cheyenne. When we rode Amtrak's Pioneer from Seattle to Denver, the train did not stop at this Depot but instead at an Amshack located at Borie, 10-miles west of Cheyenne. When built, the Cheyenne Depot housed both a passenger station and Union Pacific offices. Today the depot building is home to Accomplish Beer Company and the Wyoming Railroad Museum. The museum is open from 10:00 Am to 5:00 PM. We visited both facilities and found both worth visiting.

The Wyoming Railroad Museum's focus is the Union Pacific Railroad. Its first floor tells the history of Union Pacific Railroad while the second floor contains a scale model of Union Pacific's Wyoming rail operations, and a trackside viewing area. Cost to visit the museum was \$7. The historical timeline of Union Pacific Railroad housed in the museum along with associated artifacts is outstanding. The model railroad layout gives one a nice visual clue to the terrain the railroad runs through in Wyoming. The trackside viewing area consists of a floor to ceiling window 20-feet long. There are also six chairs to sit in. I was disappointed that the viewing area did not have a computer display of the immediate rail line nor did they have a radio scanner in operation. The view was of Union Pacific's four mainlines immediately adjacent to the viewing area, with a locomotive service area off to the left, and the Yard to the right.

A stream of east bound freight trains soon had all four tracks filled as they were finally given permission to head east with the Signal Gang's work completed. During my 45-minute stay in the trackside viewing room, at no time were there less than three of the tracks next to the viewing area occupied with trains trying to head east. While in the viewing area I talked with a former Union Pacific Yard Clerk who now volunteered at the museum and visitors from Canada, California, Missouri, and Utah. All were dye in the wool Union Pacific raconteurs. Mary Ann had informed me when we reached the Cheyenne Depot parking lot that she had had her daily fill of Union Pacific for the day and would remain in the car reading a book. However, she was willing to have a beer at the Depot brewery before we looked for a motel.



This is the location where we found the Union Pacific Railroad Signal Gang. The dirt road on this side of the train is the road from where we would start our “adventure” following the Union Pacific Signal Gang foreman to Monument Road. In the lower photo on the left-hand side can be seen the road we were driving on when we reached the track. In both photos are UP 7853, a GE C45ACCTE; UP 4797, a GM SD70M; and UP 4706, a GM SD70M.





This is where our Union Pacific guide left us after telling us we were looking at the Union Pacific crest of Sherman Hill and the Ames Brothers Monument was off to the left.



The Ames Brothers Monument as we saw it upon our approach



Reliefs of the two brothers as seen on the west and east sides of the monument. Both face south toward where the track used to run.





The Cheyenne Depot from street side. The brewery is on the left and the museum on the right.
The center section is used for events.



A view out from the railfan viewing area



This page and the next are of photos taken from the trackside viewing area of the Cheyenne Railroad Museum.



