

RIDING THE CUYAHOGA VALLEY RAILROAD

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One of the railroads Mary Ann and I had always wanted to ride was the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. This year we planned to fulfill this wish. We would leave early for Summerrail 2019 and ride the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad before reaching Marion, Ohio. The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad operates over 26.5 miles of single, ex Baltimore & Ohio Railroad track between Akron, Ohio, and Independence, Ohio. The station for Independence is Rockside; it is a covered platform with limited seats and an outhouse for those needing relief.

We had decided to board the train at Rockside due to the fact that the last round trip for that day was at 1:00 PM from Rockside. We had not bought advance tickets as we were not sure if we would reach Rockside by 12:45 PM. We arrived at 12:15 and immediately went to the ticket office to purchase two 1:00 PM round trip tickets. When I tried to purchase tickets to ride in the dome car, I was told that the car was being used by a charter group. Darn it!! I therefore asked the ticket agent for a recommendation on which car we should ride in. She said, "I have two seats available in the *Silver Bronco* at a cost of \$46. This is where I would ride." I purchased these two tickets and was told boarding would start at 12:40 PM.

The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad traces its heritage back to 1880 when the Valley Railroad opened service between Cleveland, Ohio, and Akron, Ohio. In 1895, Valley Railroad entered into bankruptcy and came out of it as the Cleveland Terminal & Valley Railroad (CT&V). In 1915, Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) purchased CT&V and merged it into their organization. In 1973, B&O became part of the Chessie System. Then in 1980, Chessie became part of CSX Transportation (CSXT). In 1985, CSXT filed to abandon the former Valley Railroad track from Cleveland to Akron. In 1987, the National Park Service bought the former Valley Railroad track from CSXT and in 1988 began to offer passenger train service from Independence to Akron.

With our tickets purchased, we walked 100 feet north of the depot so I could take a photo of the train arriving. The train operates with diesel locomotives on each end. Leading the train into Rockside was #6777, a Montreal Locomotive Works FPA-4 that was built in 1959 for Canadian National, and pulling us for Akron would be #1822, a Montreal Locomotive Works RS-18 built in 1958 for Canadian Pacific.

With my photos taken of #6777, we walked to the boarding platform. Some 100 men, women, and children boarded the train with us. There were eight cars in the train. To our surprise, upon showing our tickets to the Conductor, he said we were in the dome car. Wait a minute. The ticket agent said the car was sold out to a tour group! We, however, made our way to *Silver Bronco* to find that it was carrying the administrative staff of the Akron School System on an outing from Akron to Independence and back and, yes, there were two unsold table seats on the lower level and these seats were ours. All seating in the dome car was at tables so we sat across from two

of the Akron School System's Central Office staff. Interestingly, in back of our table seats were two unoccupied seats that did not face a table and had a wide window to look out. I asked the Conductor when he took our tickets if we could sit there. He said, "Yes," so we moved. Since I was wearing my TTI hat, the Conductor later came back to talk with us about what the status of TTI was. I told him it was not operating between Paris, Kentucky, and Maysville, Kentucky, but was still providing switching and warehouse service at Paris. We then got to talking about the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. During this conversation I mentioned I was a conductor and Mary Ann a car host at Bluegrass Scenic Railroad. This led to a long discussion concerning Halloween and Christmas trains. During this conversation we learned that the seat bench we were sitting on was reserved for the car host. However, our car host was working two cars so the seats were open.

During our conversation with the Conductor we learned that *Silver Bronco* had been built in 1948 by the Budd Company for the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad for use in California Zephyr and Rio Grande Zephyr service. As part of the California Zephyr consist, *Silver Bronco* traveled from Chicago, Illinois, to San Francisco, California, over Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad track from Chicago to Denver, Colorado; then Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad track from Denver to Salt Lake City, Utah; and, finally, Western Pacific Railroad track from Salt Lake City to Oakland, California. A ferry ride from Oakland got the passengers to San Francisco. In 1983, *Silver Bronco* became the property of Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad's parent company, AnSCO, which in 2006, sold *Silver Bronco* to a private car owner. In 2011, Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad bought *Silver Bronco* from its owner and in 2012 placed it in train service.

We pulled from Rockside at 1:05 PM, some 5 minutes late. We were due in Akron at 2:40 PM. Our fellow passengers talked with each other, looked at their phones, and played cards. Even those in the dome car appeared to be more interested in talking among themselves than enjoying the scenery. I must admit, however, the scenery consisted mostly of trees and more trees with an occasional glimpse of the Cuyahoga River and the abandoned Ohio & Erie Canal. (Mary Ann disagrees with this assessment and thought that the scenery was very pretty with views of the water, wildlife, and people riding and jogging along the paths.) This lack of scenery was because our ride was through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The Park Service is interested in preserving trees, not opening scenic views. Both the railroad and its surrounding land are owned by the National Park Service. The Park Service leases the railroad track to the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad who provides the equipment and crews to operate the train. The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad is a non profit organization staffed by volunteers.

Between Rockside and Akron are six stations, five of which are flag stops and one a scheduled stop. The flag stops are Canal, Brecksville, Indigo Lake, Botzum, and Big Bend, and the scheduled stop is Peninsula. On both our outbound and return trip, we stopped at all these flag stop stations boarding and de-boarding passengers who were

spending the day bike riding or walking on the path that followed the railroad track. Peninsula is a small village providing parking and various eating and outfitting establishments.

As we approached Akron, the scenery turned more urban. We were into the Akron Depot on time. Once at Akron, *Silver Bronco* was vacated by all of its passengers with the exception of Mary Ann and me. During our layover, I got on the ground and walked to the front of the train, or was it now the rear of the train, for a photo of the locomotive that had pulled us to Akron. As I shot my photos of this locomotive, I noted that just west of the track was a hobo jungle. I left them alone focusing my photo taking on the train. With my photos taken, I returned to the *Silver Bronco* and a reunion with Mary Ann. Just before we left Akron to return to Rockside, the Conductor entered our car and said, "I guess you can sit anywhere you want to as no one else has tickets for this car." With that said, Mary Ann and I moved up into *Silver Bronco's* dome for the return ride, a dome we had all to ourselves. This I must say is the way to travel.

We pulled at 3:00 PM and the return journey was a repeat of the outward journey. We stopped at all flag stops and loaded and unloaded passengers. Some of those getting on and off the train were Summer Camp kids. As we approached Independence, we encountered the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad Shops at Alexanders, located some two miles south of Rockside Station. We had not noticed the Shops on our journey south as we had sat on the east side of the train and the Shops is on the west side of the track. The equipment they had on display was impressive. The Conductor came up into the dome to point out various pieces of equipment sitting in the yard. He was particularly proud of the three ex-California Zephyr cars the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad had just purchased. Sitting in the dome gave us a superb view of the surrounding area. I must admit the scenery on the return journey was far more interesting than our outgoing trip. We had a much better view of the Ohio & Erie Canal's waterway and tow path.

We were back at Rockside at 4:35 PM as advertised. As we exited the train, we made sure to thank the Conductor for allowing us to ride in the dome. He said it was only professional courtesy to take care of a fellow railroad conductor. I told him if he got down to Versailles, Kentucky, he should come out to the Bluegrass Railroad Museum and he could ride in our new open-air car. We also stopped by to thank the Rockside Depot ticket seller, but the office was closed and she had departed. Both Mary Ann and I enjoyed the train ride and recommend it to anyone visiting the Greater Cleveland area.



The Rockside Depot where we boarded the train (2532)



CVSR 6777, a Montreal Locomotive Works FPA-4, arriving at Rockside Station (2543)



Our car, the *Silver Bronco*, at Akron (2565)



CVSR 1822, a Montreal Locomotive Works RS-18, rests at the end of its journey at Akron.
(2569)



A view from *Silver Bronco's* dome of CVSR #6777 putting out a faint trail of smoke (2603)



A view of the Cuyahoga River from *Silver Bronco's* dome (2560)



Mary Ann enjoying having the dome all to herself (2643)



The CVSR Shops Yard from the dome (2618)



The newly acquired California Zephyr equipment at the CVSR Yard at Alexanders (2625)