

## ROYAL HUDSON STORMS OVER SRY

- by Don Evans

May 2 and May 3, 2009 will be days that this writer will remember for a lifetime, as will hundreds of others who rode with the 2860 or witnessed her passing lineside as the Royal Hudson worked two spectacular excursions between New Westminster and Cloverdale. The route, today's Southern Railway of British Columbia, is the former BC Electric interurban line with its grades and right of way designed for an interurban electric railway back in 1910. It has been a long time since a steam train rode these rails, the last being a WCRA trip in August 1962 to Abbotsford with Pacific Coast Terminals 0-6-0 locomotive #4012 and later the BC Museum train with 2-6-2 #1077 in 1975.

The whole saga got underway on Sunday, April 30 as the WCRA consist prepared to depart Squamish for SRY New Westminster in a transfer move on CN. After a bit of a delay with the brakes on 4069 (turned out to be an electrical fault in the 2860's "modern" electronics communications system and not the F unit) we were on our way. The train looked real pretty coming out of Squamish on the sunny morning with Hudson #2860, FP7A 4069, generator car WCXX 9622 MacDonald Creek, coach WCXX 5652 Capilano, coach WCXX 5596 Paul D Roy, and open car WCXX 598 Henry Pickering. (Photo, Squamish Trevor Mills)



The trip to North Vancouver went smoothly, a stop to check things at Porteau revealed no problems, and the 2860 steamed along as she had for years. The trip evoked many memories, including these thoughts from Timothy Horton...

“Long gone are the days from 30 years ago when I used to watch the Royal Hudson make its way past Ambleside Park and the West Vancouver seawall each summer day, listening to its mournful whistle and waving at the passengers on board. Also long gone are the road trips with Dave Wilkie from twenty years ago when we used to chase the train along Howe Sound to Squamish and back, stopping at the Klahanie Inn for a burger and the obligatory butter tarts while the train laid over on Logger’s Lane. But this morning, I got to do it all over again.

“In those days I didn’t own a car, my camera was a \$30.00 Instamatic, and the highway was two lanes undivided. I found myself reflecting on the old days as I drove north to Porteau, this time in my own car, on what is essentially a brand new highway, and for the first time in my life with a decent camera at the ready. I had hoped to duplicate the B.C. Travel Bureau photograph at Porteau (a telephoto view of it coming around the bend with the snow-capped mountains behind), but where once there were weeds barely as high as the rails, there are trees as tall as the train. I would have to settle for a photo from the other side of the tracks, which was just as well because what had so often been a mid-afternoon photo was now a morning shot.

“Howe Sound looked fabulous in the morning sunshine, with sparkling water and distant snow-capped mountains. Presently the track patrol came along – not the familiar putt-putt of the old Fairmont M19 speeders, but a quiet white CN hi-rail pickup. And then I heard it – that familiar whistle not heard in so long, then the plume of crisp white steam above the trees obscuring our view, and then around the bend she came, and into my viewfinder. In a moment she was past, leaving me to revel in the smell of a working steam locomotive. This time, however, something was different. As Trevor Mills would explain to me, 2860 was running on diesel fuel instead of Bunker C, and the result was very similar to the smell of the coal-burning locomotives I frequently see back in England.

(Photo, Porteau, Tim Horton)

“After an inspection stop at Porteau the train continued on, and I caught up with it again at Sunset Beach This time I had a view of it coming towards me over some distance, and was better able to enjoy the sight and sound of a big steam locomotive out on the mainline as it advanced towards me. She was really moving this time, and all seemed well as she flew by.



“Then it was down to the West Vancouver seawall, the location of so many encounters with the engine over the years. No doubt many a West Vancouver resident was pleased to see and hear her once more. Finally it was off to the yard in North Vancouver, where at last I was able to see her standing still. The CN Police stood back and let us admire her up close as she basked in the sunshine, and the District of North Vancouver Fire Department topped up the tender with water. There she was, standing in almost the very spot from where she had left so often on her daily runs up the Sound. How ironic that everything around her seemed derelict - the passenger station and freight shed boarded up and falling apart, the Steam Shop moved away – and here once again was 2860, now in her 69<sup>th</sup> year and looking so magnificent “.

Here there was a CN crew change and on to New Westminster. The trip continued as planned until the New Westminster bridge, where it had been the plan to wye the consist and back in to SRY. That was not to be, however, so the train continued to CN Thornton and travelled the loop track, ending up later in the afternoon at SRY but facing in the wrong direction. That had to be corrected later in the week when SRY ran the motive power consist to the bridge and wyeed the locos, now all was set.

Sunday May 2 dawned a nice morning, dry and just the right temperature. The train had been assembled and was being prepared; with the WCRA consist plus three loaned Rocky Mountaineer Red Leaf coaches (thanks RMV). The guests started arriving at the Fraser River Discovery Centre where Executive Director Catherine Ouellet-Martin and her staff had graciously opened early for our guests each day to let the centre serve as a check in point where our guests enjoyed muffins and coffee before boarding. At 0930 we moved outside to witness the grand arrival of the train. It was a sold out crowd of around 325 passengers plus many onlookers from the area. Among those aboard was New Westminister Mayor Wayne Wright, as the event was also a part of the New Westminister 150 celebrations—naturally he handed out pins to everyone as the trip progressed!

At 0940, right on schedule, #2860 appeared to the west, and put on a grand show as she steamed around the curve and into place along the Front Street Parkade for boarding. Many photos were shot here; the overpass afforded a great view. (Photo New Westminister, Deb Sankey)



Train Manager Dave Emmington and his on board crew had things well organized, and we were ready to go just before 1000. The “good to go” word was given and at 10:00, with steam swooshing, #2860 started to move her consist forward. Consist was Royal Hudson 2860, FP7A 4069, power car 9622, coaches WCXX 5652 and 5596, open observation car WCXX 598 in fresh paint, and Rocky Mountaineer coaches RMRX 5558, 5716 and 5707.

Across the Fraser River, and the show began, as we dropped to the Scott Road crossing, then began the assault on the Kennedy Hill—with its grade to 2.8%. There were throngs of onlookers at every vantage point, as the 2860 slipped a couple of times, then dug in to chug up the grade with stack talk that railfans said was louder than they ever heard her before. The skill of the steam crew (Mark Liggins, Jim Bogdan and Andy Faris) got us up the hill—and with quite a show!

(First photo, Ken Storey, 2<sup>nd</sup> photo Trevor Mills)





As it turned out, the F unit had some loading problems so was only partly helpful in assisting the grade, so the 2860 worked extra hard. Crowds were awed at the sound and sight of the steam engine as she crossed Scott Road (still on the grade) and then crested the top and picked up speed as she made her way through Surrey.

Up next was the steep downgrade of the Bear Creek Hill, 2.6%, towards Sullivan Station and then the flats on to Cloverdale. This was one of my favourite parts of the ride, as once clear of the grade we picked up speed and did some real nice mainline running at track speed. Now the sounds of the steam train moving at a nice clip on the well maintained jointed rail evoked classic sounds and memories. Across the Serpentine River, and then curving across Highway 10 was particularly special as the onlookers stopped to see—and then paced us along Highway 10. (Photo, Ken Storey)



Arriving at Cloverdale, we jockeyed a bit while the motive power was disconnected and then we were pushed into the stub ended track by SRY SW900 #905 to disembark. (photo, Deb Sankey)

The 2860 went a bit east of here on the track to be watered by the Surrey Fire Department. The passengers were met by former MLA Bill Reid and his crew, there were welcome bags for all, a vintage Model T Ford. While the passengers lunched and enjoyed the community, #905 pulled the passenger consist out and FP7A 4069 / 2860 were tacked on to head the return trip, and then pushed back into the siding. Now the Cloverdale onlookers could see 2860. (Photo Deb Sankey)



All aboard at 1300 and we shoved out of the siding to the mainline. Then we were off, this time a whistle symphony as the 4069's melodic chime interspersed with 2860's whistles - it was as if they were talking to each other. Our first stop came quite quickly as we pulled across 152nd Street for a visit to the Fraser Valley Heritage Railway car barn. Our guests appreciated the way across the street—SRY provided a signal maintainer and we crossed the street inside the railway crossing signals which were activated as we assembled large groups of about 100 at a time!

The FVRHS put on a really good show for everyone, we were able to see the fine restoration work on BC Electric Railway interurban #1225, as well as the very recently arrived BCER 1304 (see cover). The group's goal is to operate interurban service in the Fraser Valley once again, starting as early as next year. (Photo, Deb Sankey)





We reboarded the train and headed for New Westminster. Now we had to tackle the 2.6% grade, and here it was a bit of a struggle. The 2860 worked hard with some help from the F unit, but we had not considered that, operating in reverse, the sanders on the steam loco were only partly effective. However, once again she dug in and conquered the grade, her stack talk bouncing off surrounding buildings making an incredible sound for all to hear.

Now, it was time to ease down the 2.8% Kennedy Hill which was taken carefully, and then we were on our last leg into New Westminster across the bridge, and arriving at 1504—pretty much right on schedule. It had been a grand day and our guests disembarked with smiles and thanks to everyone involved.

**Sunday May 3** dawned a surprisingly lovely morning, as rain had been forecast and had blown through with a fury overnight. As a result of yesterday's run, and the prospect of wet rails, a decision to add an SRY unit to the consist was made and Chief Mechanical officer Singh Biln appropriately arranged for GP9 #124—the unit that was modeled in 7 1/2" gauge for our West Coast Mini Rail and built for us by Shane Carr (who was aboard on the Saturday trip).

The routine was the same as yesterday, and came off without a hitch. The train steamed in at 0940 on the New Westminster waterfront with 2860 / 4069 / 124 for power and the same passenger consist. A sold out crowd of 340 boarded and we were off. The difference was on the Kennedy Hill where great conditions and more power saw us march up the hill at 17 mph, again the show was incredible. (Photo, Ken Storey)



Arrival at Cloverdale was a bit early, and this time the 2860 backed the train right in without first disconnecting affording our passengers about 15 extra minutes for their community stop and lunch. The 2860 was watered again, and then returned to the boarding point solo on the west end of the train.

When we departed, 2860 backed us out to the mainline where SRY 124 / FP7A 4069 were added, and we were off.

Again, a good stop was enjoyed at the FVRHS at Sullivan, then we had a smooth ride up the Bear Creek hill, through Surrey and down the Kennedy hill to Scott Road (photo, Ken Storey). From here, the train crossed the bridge into New Westminster arriving right on schedule at 1500 hours. It couldn't have been better.



It was a wonderful two day outing for the Royal Hudson, and internet postings and video clips were already out. Comments were all good and the feedback from our guests aboard as well as those we worked with all positive. The Royal Hudson performed very well, and the braking interface problems were gone. As we go to press, the 2860 and consist are now being readied for the May 12 inaugural trip of this year's Whistler Mountaineer, which will see #2860 carry passengers on the North Vancouver to Squamish line for the first time since 1999!

West Coast Railway Association thanks all who helped us make these trips happen – Southern Railway of BC (SRY), CN, Rocky Mountaineer Vacations, New Westminster 150 Celebrations, Fraser River Discovery Centre, Fraser Valley Heritage Railway Society, our steam crew, the WCRA tours committee and – of course – all those who rode the trains.