

STEAM RETURNS TO THE RIVER SUBDIVISION

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Steam Returns to the River Subdivision

October 7th and 8th, the Milwaukee Road 261 made its annual 'Fall Foliage Tour' on Canadian Pacific's River Subdivision.

Milwaukee Road 261 is a S3 class 4-8-4 Northern locomotive. Built in a group of 10 by American Locomotive Company in 1944, the 261 saw

regular service between Chicago and Minneapolis until retirement in 1955. When the 261 was built, it was "the last word in steam locomotive design", featuring roller bearings, precision firing equipment, 74" drivers, 26 x 32 cylinders, 250 psi operating boiler pressure, 460,000 lbs operating weight, and producing 62,040 pounds of tractive effort. It also has Milwaukee's solid cast pilot and all weather cabs. After three years in storage, the locomotive was donated to the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, WI. The 261 remained in Green Bay until 1992, when North Star Rail received a long term lease of the locomotive and moved it to their shops in Minneapolis, MN. After extensive reworking, the 261 was back in steam on September 14, 1993.



Milwaukee 261 waiting at Vermilion, MN.

Milwaukee 261 makes a number of appearances each year for a variety of events. This happens to the annual fall foliage run, which runs south out of the Twin Cities along Canadian Pacific's River Subdivision to La Crosse, WI. The River Sub runs along the Mississippi River from Hastings, MN to LaCrosse, WI, basically following MN Highway 61. Canadian Pacific acquired the River Sub through the purchase of Soo

Line, who picked it up in the shuffle when the Milwaukee Road became a fallen flag. The 261 ran this line in regular service years ago, pulling hot trains like the 'Hiawatha', and is back on her "old turf," for lack of better terms.

Looking at the weather forecast, Sunday was going to be the better day to chase steam down the river. Cool temperatures and clear skies would provide excellent photo opportunities. Again, we decided to start in Red Wing, MN as we would be clear of the Twin Cities and ready to roll down Highway 61 in hot pursuit of 261. Little did we know that 'Murphy's Law' of railroading would change the plan.

We arrived in Red Wing with time to spare, tuned in to channel 44 on the scanner and started to wait. Normally the 261 will run as an Amtrak extra, and follow the Eastbound Empire Builder out of Minneapolis. At 8:45 AM we were rewarded with a Dakota Minnesota Eastern westbound (map north) freight train. I use the term 'rewarded' loosely because with a DME freight running north at 5 minutes to Amtrak's scheduled arrival time means Amtrak is late, and late is never a good thing.



Dakota Minnesota & Eastern 6077 West passing through Red Wing, MN.

Shortly we hear:

"DME 6077 West approach. Jack, is that you guys?"

Sounds like the DME freight that just went through will be meeting a train north of town. I was skeptical that he was talking to Amtrak as the freight would have been held south of Red Wing to allow the superior train to maintain schedule.

"You bet 6077, how long are ya?"

"Thirty five hundred, got some air under 'em to get in the hole"

"Rodger that, we're released and ready when you clear"

A few more minutes pass and the radio comes back to life.

"Look good on the roll by 6077, maker is hung. ICE 6405 clear block."

6405 means it is not Amtrak that the DME freight is talk to, this is even worse because if there is a freight train allowed south, Amtrak is running even later.

"Rodger that 6405, looking good yourself, and FRED is there too. Make sure to smile for the cameras in Red Wing"



Iowa Chicago & Eastern 6405 East passing through the Red Wing, MN.

Minutes later Iowa Chicago Eastern 6405 East (map south) comes rolling into Red Wing. You have to remember that listening to the scanner gives you a leg up on what is coming around the bend at you – and we know it isn't Amtrak or the 261 with the Fall Foliage train. The gates start to go down before the train is visible, and people run to get to their spot only to be disappointed by another freight train.

People return to the warmth of their cars to wait once again when the scanner comes back to life.

"DME 6077 West to River Sub Dispatch." The engineer is no longer calm and smooth like when he was talking to the other freight train, and you hear the air brake valve roaring as air is dumping out of the train.

"River Sub Dispatch, go ahead DME 6077."

"6077 here, we just hit a semi south of Vermillion, we're in emergency right now."

A collective groan is heard as those of us with scanners realized the day was

turning sour. With that accident, the 261 will be even later.



Passing the accident scene, the sheriff is on site, and the 261 is just around the bend.

"River Sub Dispatch to 6077, confirming, you hit a semi, is that correct?"

"That's correct, Dispatch, we hit a semi on the first crossing north of the detectors. We just stopped."

"6077, are there any injuries?"

"6077 to Dispatch, we're OK on the train, conductor just got off to go check on the driver of the truck."

"Rodger that 6077, I'll call the sheriff and get him en route.... River Sub Dispatch to the Milwaukee 261."

Here is the call we have been waiting for.

"261, go ahead Dispatch"

"Ahhhh 261, I know you've heard what's going on there at the reservation. I'm knocking 'em down in front of you at Vermillion, try to stay behind the crossover at Vermillion if you can."



Milwaukee Road 261.

“261 to Dispatch, shouldn’t be a problem to stop short of crossover in Vermillion. Tool car, did you copy that? We’ll do our running inspection at Vermillion and blow down there.”

We know the 261 is out and running and now it will be sitting in Vermillion, which is a sign on a signal box between Red Wing and Hastings. Talking with some other railfans produced one person that knew where that ‘location’ is, and he was going there right now to see the steam train. As the caravan of rail fans rolled north out of Red Wing and through the reservation, we listened as the dispatcher stacked up trains behind the 261. The 261 is stopped one block short of the last section of double track main.

“River Sub Dispatch to 6077, any report on the driver yet?”

“6077 to Dispatch, driver is fine, no injuries.”

“Confirming 6077, no injuries to the driver?”

“That’s correct, no injuries to the driver.”



Amtrak 167 provides protection power with a blast from the past – Look for the ‘Hiawatha’ logo on the nose.



A closer look at the temporary Hiawatha logo on the protection power.

“Dispatch to 6077, that’s good news. The sheriff is on the way. 6077, is your train still on the track after the emergency application?”

“6077 to Dispatch, our train is in tact. We are all on the rail, repeat, everything is on the track.”

“Dispatch to 6077, good that you’re on the rails. Do you have any hazardous loads on the train?”

“6077, we have two hazardous at the rear, both on the track, did not make it to the crossing where we hit.”

“Rodger that, 6077. Your hazardous are still good. How about the truck? Can you tell what it was hauling, what kind of truck was it?”

"It was a corn trailer, and it was empty. We hit just the tail end of the trailer."

"Rodger that, 6077; empty corn trailer."

About this time, the railfan caravan rolled around a corner on a narrow two lane road coming out of the reservation. We pass the accident site. Not one of the cars in our caravan pulled off, we came to see steam.

One more bend of the narrow little road, run through the cut, and there sat the 261 just short of the crossover.

The 261 sitting still is an impressive sight. It felt odd to stand next to this great beast, as it is nearly silent except for the occasional pop or hiss, and the gentle whine of the steam turbo to keep the draft moving through the fire box.



The builder plate showing the heritage of Milwaukee Road 261.

All of the following pictures of Milwaukee Road 261 were taken while it was sitting at Vermillion. It was an excellent opportunity to see the locomotive close up, talk with the

crew, and get some nice photographs. The Fall Foliage Run was completed that day, although quite late. Even though we planned to run with 261 part way to LaCrosse, it was still great to see the locomotive and talk to the crew.



The Hiawatha observation car Cedar Rapids follows up the rear of the Fall Foliage run.



A rear view of observation car Cedar Rapids.

