

## KATHY'S BIRTHDAY TRIP BY PRIVATE RAIL CAR – 2013

After a somewhat uncomfortable trip to Portland on another rail car in June, Kathy and I were discussing going on the Silver Lariat private railcar once again. We had taken a Thanksgiving trip with them and really enjoyed it.

I went to the California Zephyr website, and discovered there was going to be a trip from Seattle to Los Angeles on Kathy's birthday in December. This will be a big birthday, but I will not say which one!



Lounge looking toward back of Silver Solarium car



Lounge looking forward with stairs to the dome

The railcars have been updated are very comfortable and have great food, unlike the car we rode on in June.

The trip will be limited to 8 guests, all of whom will have bedroom accommodations. Breakfast, lunch and dinner on both the 22nd and 23rd, plus full bar are included in the price. The name of the car is the Silver Solarium and it is a combination sleeper and lounge car.

The pictures below are of the daytime and nighttime configurations.



Kathy suggested that we fly to Seattle a day earlier and do a little sightseeing. I thought it was a great idea, so I got online and made the hotel and air arrangements.

We planned to fly out of Burbank Airport to Seattle to board the train. We also planned to get off the train in Van Nuys in the San Fernando Valley on the run from Seattle to Los Angeles. That station is manned and is closer to home than going all the way into Los Angeles.

After a somewhat balmy (70 degrees) December here in Southern California, we found that Seattle was going to be in the low 40's! This would be quite a shock, but fortunately, we had enough cold weather clothes to handle one day there.

We were picked up by our car service and checked in for our flight. As we approached Seattle, the clouds got thicker, but I got a shot of Mount Baker sticking up through the clouds. We saw Mount Rainer, but the clouds moved in before I could get a picture. We started our approach to Seattle, and kept descending through the clouds. We finally broke out of the clouds almost over the airport! As we were getting off the plane, I went into the cockpit to ask the pilot what the ceiling and visibility were, and he told me the ceiling was 500 feet and the visibility was a mile and a half.

We called for our car service and were taken to our hotel in Seattle. The check in person offered us a room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, or one on the 12<sup>th</sup>. We took the room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor because we knew we could not see anything out our window on the higher floor.

By the time we got checked in, it was almost time to go to the restaurant, and with the clouds, there was no incentive to do any sightseeing.



Mount Baker



View from the 5<sup>th</sup> floor

The hotel website had listed a number of nearby restaurants, and Kathy went on the Trip Advisor website to check them out. She found a restaurant called, of all things, Brooklyn Steakhouse and Oyster Bar that had a happy hour starting at 3 PM on Saturday, and featured 99 cent oysters! Well it turned out the review was not quite accurate. The place did not open until 4 PM, so we waited outside in the cold for an hour. When we got inside, however, our patience was rewarded with some really great food.



We started off with a dozen Hood Canal Oysters, and a glass of a local Chardonnay. We were sitting at the oyster bar and had a front row seat of the oysters being shucked. The man working with the oysters was also very helpful with our orders. Since it was Kathy's birthday, he slipped us some extra oysters.

As we are sitting there, we noticed another patron being served a plate with 4 beer samplers and matching oysters. I commented that it was a shame they did not have a white wine sampler, and we were told that they did! Needless to say, the wines were great and the oysters they were paired with were also wonderful.



Wine Sampler



Calamari

The restaurant also had a great list of happy hour appetizers, and we worked our way down the list. When we left at the end of happy hour at 6 PM, we were indeed happy! Aside from the oysters and wine, we had calamari, oyster poor boy sliders, crab stuffed mushrooms, and beef and blue cheese bites! When we got the bill, it was less than if we had gone to a steak house for a full meal. We retired for the evening, and the next morning took a taxi to the Seattle train station. The train was delayed by Amtrak for about an hour due to some technical problems, but we were met by Burt, one of the owners, who remembered us from a previous trip and escorted to the rail car. We were welcomed aboard by William, one of the staff, who we remembered from our previous trip. After getting settled in, we heard William's chimes announcing breakfast! We were seated in the other rail car, the Silver Lariat, up in the dome for breakfast. What a great way to start a trip! We spent most of the day up in the Silver Solarium's dome with our e-readers and music, watching the scenery pass by. Kathy as usual set up her "day camp" there. We stayed up there as the sun was setting, and just enjoyed the atmosphere with the twinkling Xmas lights in both domes. Unfortunately, we did not see Mount Shasta, as it was dark, but below is a picture I had taken previously.



Kathy's day camp



Mount Shasta

We retired for the night, and I had my first experience with an upper train bunk! The ladder was only a foot wide, and I had to climb up and crawl into my bed. That was not a problem, but getting down in the morning was an experience.

The next morning I got up while we were stopped in Sacramento, and the sun was just rising. I took a few pictures including one with the sun rising above one of the ships of the reserve fleet in San Francisco Bay.



On previous rail trips I had been curious about the rusting boilers just off shore south of Martinez. Burt told me it was the wreck of a ferry named the Garden City. Its keel was laid in 1879, and the South Pacific Coast Railway employed the Garden City on the "Creek Run", from San Francisco across the Bay to Oakland (at what's now Jack London Square) and Alameda. In 1983, the boat was burnt down to the waterline by a series of brush fires on the adjoining hillside. The picture on the left is what the ferry used to look like, and the one on the right shows all that is left of the ferry, just the boilers.



Today we also spent time in the dome, just coming down for breakfast and lunch. In the afternoon, I wanted to get some pictures going around the double horseshoe curves north of San Luis Obispo. The curves were built to allow trains to climb up the Cuesta grade from San Luis Obispo while maintaining a 2% grade (meaning rising 2 feet for every 100 feet of track).



We then crossed the Stenner Creek Trestle, just outside San Luis Obispo



After leaving San Luis Obispo, we headed west to the Pacific Coast, the most spectacular section of the trip. The line runs right along the ocean, all the way to south of Santa Barbara. On the way, we actually pass through Vandenberg Air Force Base, riding between the launch towers.



This portion of the coast is off limits to development, and retains its unspoiled beauty. By the time we reached Santa Barbara, it was dark, and for the last time we heard William's chimes inviting us to dinner. It was an excellent dinner, finished off with a generous slice of carrot cake. We arrive at our destination, Van Nuys, strangely enough, on time after being on board for 36 hours! We got off the train, and there was our driver waiting to take us back home. An hour after we got off the train, we were home. In conclusion, it was another fantastic trip, with some very nice people, and Kathy said it was one of her most memorable birthdays ever.

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