



USA November 2011

Tour Report

31. October:

Early morning at Berlin Tegel. The entire airport sleeps – but no, a small group of dedicated men and women at the KLM desk checks in the 06:00 departure. The weather is rather dull, and after telling the guy at the security checkpoint that we go to Pennsylvania and the North-Eastern US, he looks pitiful and wishes „despite the snow storms“ a nice trip. At least I do not have to proceed to the special bomb check with my photo-gear (totally unusual for Tegel airport where I am always asked to undergo this check...)

Immigration at the JFK-airport in New York is fairly empty and quickly done, our rental car for the next days to come waits ready for departure at the car rental desk – and we just have to decide whether we prefer to listen to „Steffi“ or „Yannick“ who talk to us on the GPS.

Hurray, we are on our way to the Hudson valley! Finding our pre-booked accommodation for the next 2 nights is not so easy because we miss the small driveway to the Victorian style Milton River View mansion twice. What a beautiful view of the Hudson river one would have from the balcony – if it would be a little bit warmer!

Indian summer foliage is still strong at this place and time of the year and we hope for some good shots of the regular diesel train operations along the Hudson river.

A CSX freight train rolls along Highland's River Road, seen from the Poughkeepsie-Highland bridge



1. November:

A wonderful morning with clear skies and a raising sun greets us today. After a short drive we arrive at the famous Poughkeepsie bridge on the Highland site. Originally built as railway bridge by the Central New England Railway (CNE), and being for a long time the only rail-crossing over the Hudson river, it survived the following railroad companies too: first the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad (NH) and finally the Penn Central (PC). In the 1970s the railway line over the bridge was closed and the future didn't look good for this extraordinary piece of engineering until a non-profit-group acquired the bridge and managed to collect enough support to refurbish the bridge. Since 2009 it is re-opened as pedestrian walkway, and offers a fantastic view-point of the Hudson river and the CSX sub-division's tracks below the bridge.

The malefactor who finally disturbed us on this site of the Hudson river. Luckily Amtrak and MetroNorth saved our day...



Due to snowstorms and flooding in the days before our arrival, a lot of trains had been stopped at stations and sidings on the way and were cleared now, giving us a steady flow of freight trains this morning. Later today we decided to change locations and drove southward to the Bear Mountain bridge. There were still a lot of freight trains around and we were kept busy here, too. But then we saw a local train, loaded with all sorts of stones. This didn't look good – it was the perfect ballast train for some PW-activities! We feared the worse but there were two more trains coming after CSX 5414 had passed our position, thus we hoped for more trains in the afternoon. But our radio fell silent around 2pm... no radio, no trains. We assumed that the PW-train had hit the road again and train-traffic was stopped. Well, that's not a disaster at this location because we just moved to the other site of the river, where Amtrak and MetroNorth run their passenger trains along the Hudson. Perfect afternoon light gave us some beautiful shots. As you can imagine, CSX resumed freight train operations just in the moment the sun hit the peaks of the hills...

2. November:

The early morning rush hour from 5 to 9 was busy as expected. We had hoped for the perfect morning fog shot from the Bear Mountain bridge but as soon as the sun climbed above the hills around us, the fog disappeared magically. Our radio produced more and more trains – keeping us happy today! Around lunch time we decided to check out Iona Island and found some nice spots for an afternoon session of freight trains. We felt a little bit under pressure because we didn't want to miss Amtrak's „Lake Shore Limited“ running northbound on the former NYC's Water Level Route. We had photographed this train already yesterday and were surprised to see some “heritage” coaches within the train consist. As these coaches will be replaced by Amtrak's new fleet of modern equipment, we were keen to get yet another picture of the heritage cars, but Amtrak didn't follow our wishful thinking and presented a complete set of modern coaches today.

Even more exciting was the presence of the modern dining car, being the prototype 8400 for the View Liner series. Built in 1988 as blueprint for about 100 new dining cars to come, it remained the one-and-only piece of its kind due to Amtrak's crises during all those years. Having been out of service until summer 2011, it was good to see it back in service now!

After sunset we said "good-bye" to the Hudson valley and moved on to Scranton where we wanted to chase some of the ACLO/MLW hauled trains of the "Delaware & Lackawana" (DL).

Prayers for a giant cruise ship sailing up the Hudson at the same time the train arrives were not answered...



3. November:

Some tracks at the Scranton yard were lifted, reducing the number of available tracks by 20% for the time of the construction work, giving the guy at the signal tower lots of thoughts how to accommodate DL's traffic and the shunting operations of the adjacent railway museum. We didn't complain about "too much" action and were busy taking photographs of all train movements around us. DL took some time to get on working temperature but when it was ready, it shunted around like crazy. We had difficulties to decide which train to chase first! We were keen on all kinds of ALCO and MLW diesels, something the DL has plenty of. Normally the DL runs a freight train out of Scranton every day, but we didn't know which one they would operate today. Based on our experiences from previous visits we thought that today would be "Stroudsburg" day, running on the Delaware Water Gap Route. Nope, DL decided to do a lot of local shunting but promised us to go on the Stroudsburg line the next day. Sounded great!

4. November:

We returned to the station at 8 a.m., and were not disappointed. DL had to haul a heavy grain train to Pocono Summit – ok, that's only 80% of the line to Stroudsburg but still an exciting outlook! Four of DL's biggest locos were rostered for that duty: among them #3000, former GE experimental locomotive – being the highlight for us! We were looking forward to some excellent photographs, and didn't want to miss the full sound of those ALCO/MLW engines. But it wasn't time for full excitement yet because the train hadn't left Taylor yard, plenty of time remaining for us to photograph the other workings at Scranton.

Finally, around 11 a.m., the train arrived at Scranton, made a brief stop at the signal tower on the Eastern end of the station and started its journey on the tough uphill slope out of Scranton. Hmmmmmm. Nice sound! We started chasing the train, leaving Scranton towards the highway where we wanted to make our first picture. We had to stop on the highway, though. Of course not legal, but at least we used high-vis-vests...



We didn't want to think about the possibility that the police arrived earlier than the train. But the train wasn't in sight yet – suddenly a car stopped beside us and a pretty official looking guy approached us. He didn't wear a uniform so we were relieved a little bit. He turned out to be a railfan himself, chasing the train like we did. But opposite to us he wasn't dressed winter-proved, we had a sunny day with a very strong cold wind... As soon as he went back to his car, the train moved around the corner and we did our shots, said "bye-bye" to the totally surprised railfan and continued chasing the DL train!

The train ran pretty slowly on some sections because of the bad condition of the track and the

partly steep gradients on the way and we got ample opportunities to catch up with the train again and again. It was nice to see and hear the 4 ALCO/MLWs working hard.

We arrived at Pocono Summit shortly after the train and managed to drive to the wrong site of the track initially (despite a GPS...). Well, we were just 20 meters, some nasty spiny shrubs and a small creek away from the objects of desire. The local railfans awaited the train on a well paved parking lot on the other side of the tracks already....

Canadian lady passes Canadian boys (ok, we didn't check the sex carefully enough to be sure)



The shunting activities brought more good photo opportunities and we were already happy with the results so far. But we wanted more and waited for the return service at Gouldsboro. But the train didn't show up as predicted, so we started chitchatting and went on and on ... Suddenly a scream: "train is coming" - hey, have you ever seen photographers (who believe they are so damn professional) running about like headless chickens? This would have been a good opportunity! Despite this little incident we had a very good time and happily called it a day, moving on to the home of the black monsters at Harrisburg.

5. November:

The day started brilliantly. While driving through town we saw a Norfolk & Southern train waiting on one of the numerous bridges crossing the Susquehanna. There was just a high fence between us and best photo location which we overcame with some extra physical activities.

Do you go crazy about numbers? 8385, 8362, and 9916... Scout's honour!



NS is the dominating railroad company in the area, and most likely none of the larger class I railroads is as unpopular among railfans as the Norfolk & Southern: not only because of the nearly all-black-livery or the fairly boring roster, it is also their policy of zero-tolerance towards railfans. Already our first photo-location beside the track kicked off the usual response: first the driver started the lights and the bell, then he called the NS security department "photographers near the track at MP 74". Thanks to our radio we could hear that message live and knew that it was time to change positions.

NS 7524 rushes towards Harrisburg



We decided to stay in the Duncannon area, just north of Harrisburg, with a lot of action, and a variety of nice locations. Amtrak was on schedule, too, giving us a hard time now, because a freight train approached us on the closer track from the opposite direction and didn't want to end. Wow, that was close – just 500 meters were in between the freight train's last hopper and the fast running Amtrak train – but we made it!

Amtrak from Harrisburg.



We then motored to Phillipsburg, where Susquehanna #142 was prepared for a series of night photographs. This steam locomotive was built at Tangshan (China) in 1988 according to US standards. It survived the passage of the stormy Pacific and is now serving passengers on the former Bel Del! Purists may argue whether a Chinese steam locomotive is typical for the US but at least the Chinese SY has US origins because the Chinese did what they can do best: copy. We had the impression that most participants didn't bother about the origins.

Steam, steel and smoke during the night photo session!



6. November:

we returned to the Bel Del for some fine day photography with the same trainset before heading back to New York to end our US part of the tour.

Reading helps. Sometimes.



#142 sneaks around the curve.



Poughkeepsie-Highland bridge and one of the rare CSX coal trains on this route.



Special thanks to Christoph Grimm and Tom Nemeth for sharing their excellent knowledge about nearly every railroad related issue in this area!

