

Santa Fe Rail

Contributed by Bob Burton

The Santa Fe laid its first steel rails in 1876. They were probably #56 or #60. By 1900 the railroad was laying #75, then #85 in time to be used on the Belen Cutoff, and #90 was used by 1910. By the mid Twenties, #112 then #115 was in use until #131 became standard.

Santa Fe practice was to buy only the heaviest rail standard and lay it on the main line somewhere. If new rail replaced old rail, the old rail was lifted and relaid on a secondary line. The old rail from the secondary line would be reused for yards and sidings. A particular rail might have been used in a half dozen places. That is why a section of 1876 rail was recently discovered in service in a siding of a line built in 1910.

Another practice: When a line was relaid with heavier rail, the rail in old passing tracks would be removed and the old track would be moved over a few feet to become the new siding.

Other railroads used "A" rail, but not the Santa Fe. "A" rail was rolled from the tops of steel ingots, where bubbles collected in the molten metal. This type of rail was inferior and was used for yard tracks. But the Santa Fe had plenty of hand-me-down rail for yards, so that steel was instead rolled into tie plates.

Tie plates began being used about 1900 only on grades and curves. Within a decade they were being installed on all ties.