

Santa Fe's First District Supply Train - Final Report

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To all:

I'm a day late with a final report on the supply train, but better late than never. Here goes:

Train: ATSF's First District Supply Train.

Direction: Eastbound, then return Westbound the next day.

Description: Local supply train from SB to Barstow, making stops at every open depot on its side of the double track, and returning to SB the next day. Also stops to pick up broken couplers along the track, and to set out new rail on storage posts if one is missing.

Then, after about 1955, SFTT trucks delivered supplies to the open depots.

Origin: San Bernardino.

Destination: Barstow, then return to San Bernardino the next day.

Railroads Represented: All ATSF cars and an ATSF Burro crane.

Products: Miscellaneous railroad supplies, stationery, depot supplies, lantern and signal fuels, hardware, coal (bagged and loose), ice, distillate fuel, heating fuel, scrap metal, rails for section gang work, and other track materials.

Train Length and Weight: About 10 cars. Weight unknown.

Car Types: Two mineral brown coaches carrying miscellaneous RR supplies, maybe M-W boxcars, one Caswell gon with coal half in bags and half loose, one ice car, one tank car carrying distillate fuel with a red dome, one tank car carrying heating fuel (with a gray dome ?), one mill gon with scrap metal, one flat with a yellow burro crane on rails, one flat or mill gon with rails and other track materials, and a normal caboose.

The cars listed here are in no particular order, except that the 3 cars for the Burro crane were at the end, and the tank cars were in the middle, away from the crews.

Typical Schedule: Runs once every month or two, leaves in the early morning, takes all day to make its trip, returns the next day, working the other side of the double-track main.

Road Power: 1600 Class 2-10-2, or 3160/4000 Class 2-8-2, or (in 1951 and later) a GP7 or two of them

Helper Power: The train did not need a helper, as it was short.

Operations Details:

Stops at each open depot on the train's side of the double-track to unload supplies. This might imply that the train was turned in Barstow, so the cars around the Burro crane would still be on the end of the train going back.

Some crews hated them because you just puddle-jumped from station to station and sat there waiting for supplies to be unloaded. Other crews found them interesting to work.

Those supply trains operated infrequently as extras out of San Bernardino over all districts of the division, delivering supplies to all open stations.

The LA Div. Supply Trains were a joint effort by the division storekeeper and division engineer (i.e. roadmaster assigned to the district). The storehouse shipped material for any number of Santa Fe departments, bridge & building, water service, signal department, etc. M of W was more involved than the storehouse. Shipments of new 39 foot lengths of rail, switch frogs, switch points, guard rails, and track fastenings were primary.

The division superintendent got into the act. He made sure that the roadmaster located and had the Burro crane pick up all of the broken couplers littering the roadbed. This operation was particularly critical from Summit to Cajon on the westward track. Usually after a month, Drawbar Flat west of Gish looked like a junk yard, which included couplers with attached draft gears, and sometimes ends of center sills. The supt. did not want Santa Fe presidents F G Gurley or E S Marsh to see the junk.

The loads were boxcars and flat cars of material of every description that the various station agents had ordered in the preceding months. The empties were for loading discarded items.

Holmes Supply trucks from San Bernardino also visited the stations about once a week. Holmes Supply was a retail outfit dealing in clothing and hardware and other stuff. Their store was located on Mt. Vernon Ave. between 6th and 7th. They had an agreement with Santa Fe to supply section crews and extra gangs with personal items such as shoes, gloves, overalls, headgear, and you name it. In those days there was no such thing as hardhats. Holmes Supply had a box truck that workers could board and examine the products. The Holmes Supply store in San Bdn' was operated by the Valles family.

In general, there were supply trains assigned at every division point. The Santa Fe Magazine published at least two articles dealing with supply trains, and these two have been scanned to a PDF format. The articles: "Operation of the Supply Train on the Santa Fe" by Thomas J Brennan, Secretary to the General Storekeeper, 1919 and "What the Supply Car Has Done on the Coast Line" by A.T. Phillips, Supply Car Storekeeper, San Bernardino, 1957. They explain the operation of such trains and why they were economical to the Santa Fe.

There were a number of supply cars that the Store Department could call upon for any given San Bernardino supply train. This is true for any of the cars in the consist, especially the flats and gondolas used for scrap collection (generally from the ATSF fleet). The Caswell gondolas came from three classes, Ga-6, 8, or 49. There were several Burro cranes and their flats assigned to San Bernardino, and any one of them could be used for the supply train. The caboose (way car) would have depended on which crew was called for the supply train.

Beside many tool houses along the way was a railroad tie pad to accumulate scrap metal, such as broken knuckles, drawbars, angle bars, and anything else that could be picked up with a magnet when the supply train ran. Trackside buildings, such as tool houses, were used to store company materiel, coal, grease, and lubricants, which were all brought by the Santa Fe's supply train.

The supply train was probably parked in SB in the M/W yard west of the short way wye and east

of the UP
engine house.

More details about the train's consist and contents:

There were two red storehouse cars, which were old steel coaches painted in Santa Fe's special red-brown color that they used on some maintenance of way equipment. These storehouse cars carried stationary, scales, batteries, and other supplies to be unloaded.

Most of the other cars in the train were the gray maintenance of way color, before silver became the standard color.

There was one carload of coal in a Caswell gondola. Half the coal was in burlap sacks and the rest was loose in the car. The sacks could be thrown out at each station, or some loose coal could be dumped from the bottom of the car to the side of the rails.

There was an ice car for delivering ice blocks to the ice houses at section houses. The local section crew would help unload them, as they were 300 lbs. per ice block, and each station got several tons of ice.

Somewhere in the middle of the train would be two company tank cars. One had a red dome and carried a pre-mixed type of gasoline (distillate?) for the motor cars. This was unloaded through a hose into an underground tank by the tool house (motor car house).

The 2nd tank car carried heater fuel (we think) and didn't have a red dome. We don't know where this was unloaded to.

In front of the caboose was a set of three cars: a mill gondola, then a flat car with a Burro crane on it, then a flat car or gondola.

The mill gondola carried scrap metal (broken pieces of rail, etc.) picked up by a magnet on the Burro crane. The scrap metal was stored at each station on a wood platform made of ties near the tool house, and the crane would pick it up from there.

The yellow Burro crane rode on rails on top of its own flat car. There were two rails for the powered crane to move along, and two more rails outside those for outrigger wheels (double flanged) to balance the crane. The crane could use either a magnet and/or rail tongs to pick things up.

On the other end of the Burro crane car was a flat car or gondola that carried new lengths of rail, frogs, and whatever other track materials were needed. The Burro crane would unload these track materials where needed. Every mile or so along the tracks the railroad would keep one spare rail sitting up on three wooden pillars (to support each end and the middle), and this rail could be used to replace a broken rail as needed. If this spare rail was gone, the crane replaced it with a new rail.

Then there was a caboose at the end of the train. The cars listed here are in no particular order, except that the 3 cars for the Burro crane were at the end, and the tank cars were in the middle, away from the crews.

More info on Burro cranes:

In the SHRHMS book "Work Equipment Cars" there is a picture of a burro crane and that's on page 25, where the crane is on rails and on a flat car. There is another such photo in that book, on page 147, showing a Burro crane on a flat car.

The Orange Empire Railway Museum lists as part of their collection ATSF work flat car #206204 as "Mother car for Burro Crane. Cast frame." This one was built (or converted) in 1955.

The LA Div. had one or two captive Burros, one assigned to the store house in San Bdnno' which was kept in the rail yard, and lone was assigned to the tie plant in National City. Whenever a supply train was operated, the rail yard Burro was loaded on its assigned flat car and cut in between an empty gon and a gon containing frogs and new 39 foot rail. The Coast Lines steel gang had an assigned Burro on a flat car.

Some Burros had their own ramp placed on the flat car deck under the boom. The ramp had a hanger installed between the rails at the balance point. The load line fitted with rail tongs was raised over the balance point and connected to the hanger. The ramp was raised off the deck, moved forward, and lowered to the track structure over the flat car coupler. The Burro boomed around and the boom lowered, after which the load line rail tongs grabbed two lengths of three quarter inch cable that were wrapped around the center sill and produced up through the car deck. The Burro was then backed onto the ramp and with the Burro wheel brakes, and more importantly the load line brake, the Burro slowly moved down the ramp.

There could be as many as 6 or 8 couplers scattered around the curve at Drawbar Flat. Usually the supply train returning from Barstow with the Burro crane would pick the junk up with the magnet, or a work train with a Burro would clean up.

Santa Fe had several classes of gondolas with "coal doors," small doors in the sides through which coal could be delivered by hand to station agents, section gangs, etc. The Ga-6 and Ga-8 class composite gondolas built in 1921/1923 had four small doors in each side when delivered. They lost those in 1940-1944 when rebuilt with steel side sheathing replaced the original wood sheathing, but in 1940 the Ga-49 class steel gondolas were delivered with two small doors in each side just above the trucks. There is photo somewhere showing a Ga-49 partly loaded with coal in the Los Angeles Division supply train that roamed the division delivering supplies to agents, etc.

Arcadia, Anaheim, and Fullerton over various years had supply trains every six months for their various needs. This included all the various forms that they utilized for that particular station.

"This is MY Railroad" filmed by SP shows supply train operations as might have been used .

Modeling the Train:

Use two mineral brown coaches carrying miscellaneous RR supplies, one Caswell gon with coal half in bags and half loose, one ice car, one tank car carrying distillate fuel with a red dome, one tank car carrying heating fuel with a gray dome (?), one mill gon with scrap metal, one flat with a burro crane, one flat or mill gon with rails and other track materials, and a caboose.

Some think that at least one of these was a Caswell still in mineral brown or another type of side dump ballast car for dumping coal at the supply stops.

B&W pictures of the heavyweight supply car appear in both the work cars and head end cars books.

There's a nice photo of an Ft-I in MW service taken at Summit with a speeder on board in the late 60s on page 27 of the Santa Fe Open Top Cars by Hendrickson.

Intermountain released their HO Caswell gondola in ATSF maintenance of way paint and lettering.

There are HO Burro crane kits by Custom Finishing Models, which also makes an unloading ramp for flat cars, item #7016

If you have corrections and additions, please send them along.

Thanks,
John Thompson