

Santa Fe's GWS Freight Train - Final Report

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To all:

I'll try to do a final report now on the GWS train by adding in relevant info from our old email notes:

Train: ATSF's GWS.

Direction: Westbound only. (The eastbound version was the SWG train.) (The GWS was timetable EB from the Pacific Northwest to Barstow, then WB from Barstow to SB.)

Description: GWS = Great Northern-Western Pacific-Santa Fe. Inside Gateway Special from the Pacific Northwest via the GN and WP, via WP's Bieber Extension, Stockton, and Barstow to Los Angeles.

In 1944 it was the GNX (Stockton to LA) "Great Northern Express." After WWII, the train was combined with the WPX and re-symbolled to GWS. Competed with the SP for traffic to and from the Northwest.

Origin: Pacific Northwest via WP's Bieber Extension, Stockton, and Barstow.

Destination: San Bernardino.

Railroads Represented: ATSF, SFRD, GN, NP, WP, SP&S, MILW, CN, CP, WFEX, FGEX.

Perishables were primarily shipped in SFRD reefers, but when short of these, WFEX & FGEX reefers were used.

Products: Lumber products, Northwest produce including apples, canned fruit, potatoes, onions, strawberries, poinsettias, and beer, livestock, "shook" wood shipments.

Forest products in box cars and on flat cars, apples, canned fruit, and beer in NP and WFEX reefers, raisins and nuts, general merchandise, livestock in GN, NP, and MILW stock cars. The good lumber was shipped in boxcars and the rough stuff on flat cars and gons with ends up. Flat car loads of untreated utility poles, sometimes with as many as two idlers.

Train Length and Weight: Typical trains c.1950 had around 80 cars and weighed around 3000 tons.

Car Types: Boxcars, reefers, flats and gons (for lumber), stock cars.

Typical Schedule: 1947: Arrive in SB around 3:00 pm (varies a lot: Noon to 5 pm, sometimes 7 pm and later). 1955-56: Arrive in SB around 5:00 pm (varies a lot).

Road Power: 2-10-2s, 4-unit freight FT sets, until 4-unit freight F3/F7 sets arrived in 1948-53.

Helper Power: 2-10-2s, 4-8-2s, 2-8-2s, also FT sets (full or partial), until GP7s arrived in 1950-53, and GP9s in 1956-57. Number of helpers west from Victorville depended on train weight, normally at most one helper.

Operations Details:

A hot train, it could arrive at and depart from Barstow at widely diverging times due to the many miles of its run.

Trains arriving at Barstow from the Northwest were switched from one end to the other to dig out east traffic and any Victorville shorts. All cabooses and power were changed, and if the train was light, a cut of Kaiser coal was added to the rear to fill the train to max tonnage. If the train was heavy and exceeded tons per operative brake, a cut of empty reefers was added for braking power down the big mountain.

The only problem with reversing trains at Barstow was concerning cars restricted to head end or rear end only. They would have to be specially handled from one end of the yard to the other.

At San Bernardino, all trains off the mountain headed into the A Yard. Most of the westward trains in the A Yard got heavy duty switching unless it was a case of lifting off a cut of coal and just changing cabooses. Extensive switching was necessary in order to dig out all Third Dist. shorts, San Diego traffic, 2nd Dist. traffic, cars for the Loop and San Jacinto. Shook shipments came in NP boxcars into SB, then were distributed to the various packing houses for assembly.

The GWS freights were completely disassembled and reclassified into various local freights. When a GWS train got to SB, switchers attacked both ends of the train, taking out the cars needed for local trains and adding in some cars bound for LA. Then the trains went on to Los Angeles (as different local trains). The cars that were taken out were switched into various local freights, such as 2nd District locals or turns, 3rd District locals or turns, the San Jac Turn, and the Redlands Loop local. Cars bound for industries along the 2nd or 3rd District were called "shorts."

Regarding arriving westbound freights in general, most trains had a cut of coal taken off, usually from the rear. Empty SFRD reefers (for extra braking power) were taken out, usually from the front. Hog cars and other stock cars for SB were taken out, but cattle bound for Buena Park stayed in the trains (these were dairy cows for the dairy farms near Lamanda Park).

Modeling the Train: As usual, 1/4 to 1/3 of the train should be ATSF and/or SFRD cars. The rest should be GN, NP, WP, SP&S, MILW, CN, CP, WFEX, and FGEX cars, to give it a Pacific Northwest flavor. There should be plenty of boxcars (many with lumber inside), along with some reefers, and flat cars and gons of rough lumber, and a few stock cars. There could be a cut of coal in drop-bottom gons on the rear.