

UP's Leon Turn Freight Train - Final Report

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11/24/19 #22323

To all:

I'll see what I can pull together into a final report on the Leon Turn, using all the e-mail quotes I found a week ago. Grande/Hodge Turn later will help answer them, since both trains had similar jobs to do.

Train: UP's Leon Turn (called the "Oro Grande Turn" by the UP).

Direction: Eastbound and return Westbound in the same day.

Description: UP local to Victorville and Oro Grande and back, serving the cement plants at both towns, as well as the smaller industries inside Victorville.

Origin: San Bernardino.

Destination: Victorville, Leon (cement plant), Oro Grande (cement plant), and return to SB.

Railroads Represented: Mostly UP (possibly also CB&Q, Soo Line, D&RGW, and others).

Products: Bagged cement from the cement plants, bulk cement from the cement plants, cement clinkers (marble-size) to and from the cement plants, fuel oil for the cement plant kilns, general supplies for the cement plants, limestone from the Victorville Lime Rock plant (later Pfizer), fuel for the Standard Oil spur, lumber for Victorville, granite slabs for Texas Quarries (about once a month), limestone lumps for beet sugar refineries,

Car Types: Mostly 40' drop-bottom gons (UP GS gons) (all-steel and composite) (DRGW too), plus open hoppers, boxcars, 70-ton covered hoppers (UP CH-70-1), 3-dome tank cars of fuel oil, flat cars for lumber.

In the late 1940's neither UP or ATSF had very many 70-ton two bay covered hoppers, so while a few may be present, they did not predominate until more cars were acquired in the early 1950's and the cement companies switched to bulk from sack shipping in boxcars. But some boxcar shipping of sacked cement was still going on into the early 1960's.

Train Length and Weight:

It was about 10 to 20 cars long, shorter going eastbound and longer and much heavier going westbound. For example, 300 tons eastbound and 2300 tons westbound.

Typical Schedule:

May 4, 1945 sample: Leave SB B Yard at 9:20 am, return to A Yard at 7:10 pm

May 1-7, 1945 samples:

Departed San Bernardino -- Arrived Victorville -- Departed Victorville -- Arrived San Bernardino
1 Tue, May 1, 1945 UP X [2]/5520 West LN Turn Westward NA 2:25 PM 2:45 PM 6:45 PM

2 Wed, May 2, 1945 UP X 5522 East LN Turn Eastward 9:30 AM 1:15 PM 1:30 PM NA
3 Wed, May 2, 1945 UP X 5522 West LN Turn Westward NA 3:15 PM 3:25 PM 6:25 PM
4 Thu, May 3, 1945 UP X 5522 East LN Turn Eastward 9:30 AM 12:34 PM 12:56 PM NA
5 Thu, May 3, 1945 UP X 5522 West LN Turn Westward NA 2:51 PM 3:01 PM 7:25 PM
6 Fri, May 4, 1945 UP X 5522 East LN Turn Eastward 9:20 AM 12:27 PM 12:41 PM NA
7 Fri, May 4, 1945 UP X 5522 West LN Turn Westward NA 3:25 PM 3:37 PM 7:10 PM
8 Sat, May 5, 1945 UP X 5520 East LN Turn Eastward 9:49 AM 12:01 PM 12:07 PM NA
9 Sat, May 5, 1945 UP X 5520 West LN Turn Westward NA 2:07 PM 2:12 PM 5:20 PM
10 Mon, May 7, 1945 UP X 5004 East LN Turn Eastward 9:20 AM 11:29 AM NA NA
11 Mon, May 7, 1945 UP X 5004 West LN Turn Westward NA 2:21 PM 2:40 PM 6:05 PM
NA = Not Applicable (blank in table)

August 23, 1945 detailed sample:

Leave SB at 10:50am, with engine 2707 [2-8-2] and 3 cars (2 loads and one empty). It reaches Summit at 1:43pm and leaves Summit at 2:04pm. It arrives at Victorville at 1:43pm and leaves at 2:04pm for Leon, where it arrives at 2:55pm. Engine 3559 [2-8-8-0] has already run ahead light from Summit to Victorville an hour earlier.

The westbound UP Leon Turn train first appears on the train sheet at Leon at 3:55pm with UP engines 3559 and helper 2707 and two loaded cars. It enters Victorville at 4:10pm and leaves at 4:50pm with 25 cars, including 23 loads, and 2,300 tons.

It arrives at Summit at 5:53pm and leaves 5:58pm. 2707 doesn't leave Summit until 10:46pm to run light to San Bernardino and arrive at 12:22am. 3559 continues on to San Bernardino, passing through Cajon at 6:27 and leaving at 6:37pm and at Ono at 7:28pm, where it was joined by engine 5003(?) [2-10-2] leaving at 8:15pm and arriving at SB at 8:30pm.

Aug. 2, 1947 - 10:15am Extra 2713 (2-8-2) (no helper) UP 0-12-300 (no loads, 12 empties, 300 tons)

As of March 1, 1947, per the UP schedule:

San Berndo-Oro Grande - Daily ex. Sun. - leave 10:00 am, arrive 1:00 pm, leave on return 3:00 pm, arrive 6:00 pm - Does switching Ono.

We have no local schedules after 1947.

Thursday Feb 12th, 1948 sample:

UP Leon Turn Extra 2710 (2-8-2) leave 9:00 am

Road Power:

The Leon Turn used an engine from the helper pool of the time:

- 2-10-2s, 2-8-2s, 4-8-2s, 4-10-2s into 1948, and in 1950-51
- 2-8-8-0s into 1947 only
- FM H20-44s in 1947-1950
- Steam helpers return 1950-51 (2-10-2s, 2-8-2s, 4-8-2s, 4-10-2s)
- TR5s (SW9 cow-calves) 1951-54
- GP7s and GP9s, 1954 and later

During 1948 to early 1950 it used an H20-44, or sometimes an H15-44 (1949) or an NW2 or an RSC-2 (1949).

Then during the mid-1950 to late-1951 steam revival, it would be back to a 2-8-2, 2-10-2, or 4-10-

2 (or sometimes a 4-8-2), from the steam helper pool.

Then later in 1951 it was back to diesels, now using a TR5 cow and calf (from the helper pool). But the TR5s left in early 1954, and then it would be a GP7 or GP9 or two.

The Leon Turn could have the same engine several days in a row, depending on UP's power needs.

Helper Power:

Often a helper was used westbound from Victorville to Summit, due to the heavy cement loads. This helper loco would be from the same helper pool that the road power came from. Eastbound out of SB they handled mostly empties, so they did not require a helper eastbound.

Operations Details:

The Leon Turn originated in San Bernardino, with the power based at the UP engine house next to the wye near the short way at San Bernardino. We do not know where the cars came from, but they departed from a track west of the SB depot, near the wye to the Short Way.

It hauled mostly UP empties to Victorville (and Oro Grande) and hauled back westbound UP traffic. Eastbound out of SB they did not require helpers. Westbound locals often needed helpers out of Victorville because of handling mostly loads.

The train ran six days a week (not on Sundays). The Leon Turn crews were basically being paid by the hour.

Some UP workers on the Leon Turn in the late 1940's were conductor Bill Seeley, brakemen Andy Anderson, Burt Waugh, and Eddie Draper, and later conductor Eddie Draper. They had three brakemen due to the Full Crew Law. The engineers and firemen varied too much to recall any names. The workers on the SF and UP local trains knew each other because they met at the same stops.

The locals would bring mostly empties for cement loading and take mostly loaded cars away. Each railroad picked up the cars that were destined for customers on its own railroad. The UP's Leon Turn went out earlier in the day, and the SF's Oro Grande Turn didn't leave San Bernardino until about 2 in the afternoon.

When the Leon Turn first arrived at Victorville going eastbound, the crew would get the switchlist at the depot. Next it went into the eastbound siding (east of the 6th Street grade crossing) and then the engine would cut off, back around the train (using the eastbound main), cross over, and park just behind its caboose while the UP engine and caboose crews went together to lunch in Victorville.

It would then set out and pick up cars in Victorville and/or at Leon, depending on the switchlist. About half of the Lime Rock plant traffic went to the UP, and the same was true for the other, smaller industries there.

When the train had a steam loco, they got water and probably turned on the wye at Victorville first and then backed up light to Oro Grande to pick up loads there and then at Leon.

If the Victorville local switcher had westbound traffic for the UP's Leon Turn, it put it on the UP engine track by the wye (in the later years after helpers were gone from that track). In earlier years, the Leon Turn probably picked up and set out cement cars directly on the Leon tracks rather than in Victorville.

When the cement cars were loaded at the cement plants, the Victorville local switcher would pull the loads out and leave them on the two side tracks next to the eastbound main, east of the cement plant (in the case of Leon). The westbound Leon Turn would pick up the westbound UP cars.. The road engine would uncouple from its train on the westbound main, back in to the (double-ended) storage tracks, pull the cars out, and couple them onto the front of its train, going through two crossovers between the westbound main and the storage tracks.

Most UP cement traffic from Leon and Oro Grande was eastbound, as UP had the Crestmore cement plant near Riverside to generate westbound cement. The UP's eastbound low priority freights ("walking dogs") would stop at Leon and Oro Grande to pick up the eastbound loaded cement cars. Those cars were not brought into Victorville by the switcher, as that would be moving them in the wrong direction.

The direction of the cement traffic depended partly on where the big construction projects (like freeways) were at the moment.

The UP also hauled open hoppers of clinkers (the baked balls of cement before they are ground up into powder) from the Oro Grande cement plant to the cement plant at Crestmore. Apparently sometimes they also hauled clinkers to the cement plants, probably from the Crestmore plant. There was a lot of open hopper traffic at the cement plants (besides the covered hoppers for cement). Clinkers were water-proof (and wind-proof) and could be carried in open cars, unlike cement powder.

The cement plant at Leon (Southwestern Portland Cement) didn't ship out any clinkers. They shipped the cement as powder in covered hoppers and bagged in boxcars.

The Oro Grande cement plant was shipping limestone in drop-bottom gondolas and cross-hoppers to Kaiser Steel (in Fontana). In the plant, the last track on the lead was called the "high line," and that's where they picked up cars of limestone for Kaiser. In San Bernardino, the cars of limestone were transferred to the Santa Fe's local train to the Kaiser steel mill. The plant at Leon did not ship out any limestone.

The Leon "interchange track" got machinery on flat cars, such as rings for the ball mill.

Both cement plants were burning oil as their fuel, so we would expect the local freights to carry loaded tank cars east to the cement plants and empty tank cars back west to the LA area.

Regarding the operations at the Victorville Lime Rock plant (later Pfizer), trucks brought in the limestone. The railroad spotted boxcars of empty bags there. The traffic out was ground-up limestone (also clay and talc), and it went out in bulk in covered hoppers and also in bags in boxcars. They loaded 3 to 6 cars per day there.

At the far (RR west) end of the spur there was one overhead spout for loading covered hoppers, plus they could spot extra empty covered hoppers west of the spout for later loading. The plant also had 3 or 4 doors for loading boxcars of bagged limestone. The local switcher took the loads to Leon and combined the cars with the cars from Leon, and they separated the Santa Fe-bound cars from the UP-bound cars and put them on separate tracks there for separate trains to pick up.

Just west of the depot (between the depot and the lumber spur) was a section of the House Track that served as a team track. There was an open paved area there where trucks could park next to the track. The switcher spotted loaded LCL (less than car load) boxcars there and occasional flat cars of tractors or other farm machinery.

Just east of there, the House Track ran alongside the depot, which had a raised unloading

platform along the freight house end of the depot (RR west end). This was another place for the switcher to spot LCL boxcars. The frequency varied.

Storage tracks 1 and 2 (across the mains from the Victorville depot) were only used for set-outs from local trains (like the Leon Turn) going eastbound. They would drop both loads and empties there. Neither track was assigned to a particular railroad.

Coming off Storage 2 was the Texas Quarries Spur. They got one flat car of stone slabs every few months and shipped nothing out by rail.

The Leon Turn did nothing but set out and pick up UP traffic. It took empties (mostly covered hoppers in later years) to Leon and Oro Grande, and picked up loads there.

At Oro Grande, the locomotive moved the caboose to the east end of the train, and the locomotive moved to the west end for the return to SB.

We don't know where the loaded cement hoppers and other cars were taken once they brought them back to one of the tracks near the Short Way wye in SB.

The Santa Fe's Oro Grande Turn only ran about six month out of the year, depending on the cement traffic, but the UP's Leon Turn ran all year round. It hauled clinkers and limestone out of the Oro Grande cement plant (probably to Crestmore) in open hoppers. Perhaps it was a matter of balancing the capacity of the various plants.

They only dropped cars off in Victorville, but they picked up cars at both cement plants. The reason is that the drop-offs were mostly empties, which were easy for the local switcher to take to the cement plants, but the pick-ups were mostly loads, too heavy for the switcher, so the local trains picked those up right at the cement plants (after the switcher had placed them on a convenient track). And through drag freights could pick up these cars too.

At each location where the switcher set out cars for pick-up by local or through freights (Victorville, Leon, or Oro Grande), they tried to arrange the cars so that the trains didn't have to do any extra switching to pick up their cars. The switcher separated cars into four categories: eastbound Santa Fe, westbound Santa Fe, eastbound UP, and westbound UP. They tried to put the four blocks onto separate tracks, so that a passing train could directly reach the cars going its way.

The UP's Leon Turn hauled westbound UP traffic into the late 1950s, but in later years it was the UP's Blue Diamond that picked them up.

Modeling the Train: Choose a UP loco appropriate for the year. Use mostly 40' drop-bottom gons (UP GS gons) (all-steel and composite) (and DRGW too), plus open hoppers, boxcars, 70-ton covered hoppers (UP CH-70-1), a 3-dome tank car of fuel oil, and a flat car of lumber.

This needs more work sometime later. Please review it and send in corrections and questions.

Thanks,
John Thompson