



Prairie Ponderings

For the enjoyment and edification of model railroad operators

100th operating session features Wisconsin Dakota Railroad finale

A dozen stalwart crew members gathered August 11 for a final time to enjoy the 100th and final operating session on the Wisconsin Dakota Railroad in Harrisburg. Among those participating were four operators from the first South Dakota ops session held in Harrisburg May 20, 2006. Miles Rohan travelled two hours from Sibley, Iowa, to operate again on the WisDak. Nearby Harrisburg neighbor and WisDak chief engineer Terry Anderson contributed mightily in constructing the layout from December 2005 to April 2006. Both Mike Kaufman, who troubleshot early electrical problems and regular Chad Boese also participated in many ops sessions during the past six years.

That May 2006 session marked the first time since October 2005 that the railroad was back on track, following our return to South Dakota from the Twin Cities. Thanks to everyone who made the first 100 sessions fun and memorable.



In what's become the classic view of the 19' x 26' L shaped "train room", road engineers Eric Wollan (foreground) and Eric Carlson (center) work near Janesville yard while yard engineer Dan Horner (rear) performs switching duties. *Rich Dahl photo*



Bill McKean, Eric Wollan, Scott Nesbit, Terry Anderson, Chad Boese (first row kneeling) along with Dan Horner, host Alan Saatkamp, Mike Kaufman, Tim Smith, Miles Rohan, Jay Manning, and Richard Dahl posed at the onset of the final iteration of the WisDak held on August 11. *Rich Dahl photo*



Most of the crew was still on hand late that afternoon to enjoy another round of refreshments. The final debriefing in the crew lounge included a preview by co-conspirator Tim Smith of what to look forward to in 2013. See page four. *Rich Dahl photo*

Our family lived in Sioux Falls most of the 1990s. There I met NMRA activist and hobbyist Bill McKean, an across-the-park neighbor. He invited a few of us to his home layout on a Sunday afternoon. I recall being at the same time intrigued and overwhelmed by what Bill was trying to convey. Not much came of this toe-in-the-water experience.

Fast forward about five years. Now we lived in Eagan, Minnesota. I had a layout of sorts, but no operations. I enrolled in a community education class on model train operations. That proved to be one of the most helpful **and enjoyable experiences I've had in the hobby.**

My soon-to-be mentor, Gary Freseman, taught the class. Besides tips on how to go about setting up an operating scheme, Gary invited us, including look-alike (to some anyway) Paul Dieffenbach to visit his layout for an operating session. Gary also arranged for us to visit a couple home layouts, both established and under construction. He also invited me to operate on his layout several times a year.

With Gary's willingness to assist, I set up a system of operations for the WC Valley subdivision. John Thomas trained and brought me in to the world of DCC. On October 29, 2004, five friends christened the layout. John Thomas, Gary Freseman, Bruce Stafford, **John O'Brien, and Arlan Tietel all attended and hammered their way through session number one.** The next month, Paul Dieffenbach, my classmate from the comed class, joined the fun too. Eventually things smoothed out and began to flow in some order.



John Thomas, Paul Dieffenbach, Gary Freseman, **Bruce Stafford, John O'Brien, and Bill McKean** gathered in May 2010 during National Train Day weekend. Only Arlan Tietel is missing from this cadre of mentors who supported my initial operations efforts.

I truly enjoy hosting operating sessions. Those who attend are my friends—**locally and from afar.** It's also been great to have my son Matt involved along the **journey.** He's still active as **photographer for various layout projects.** His photos and the masthead for Prairie Ponderings have appeared in national model train magazines over the past several years (and might again some day!)

The best aspects of model train ops includes the people. They are folks I might never have had the chance to get to know, but for our hobby. They are a delight and have a wealth of knowledge which they share.



Our son Matt (left) met Model Railroader Magazine Associate Editor Cody Grivno at the Wis-Dak layout during Christmas break several years ago. The two share a common achievement as Thousand Lakes Region youth modelers of the year during their early teen years.



Brad Hinton of Canberra, Australia, an avid **DM & E fan (yes, that's correct!)** first operated the **layout two years ago.** He's been back since, and plans to make a third visit here in spring 2013.



Dozens of model train operators gathered at Tailgators in Brandon for supper, conversation, and later a Doug Harding presentation on the meat packing industry. The evening took place on day one of SiouxRail 2008. Too bad the fellows couldn't find anything to talk about!

Hosting monthly operating sessions the past eight years has been super. If you did the math, you'd probably be wondering how we got to 100 during the 94th month. It happened due to multiple ops sessions during weekends such as SiouxRail (as well as being part of ProRail and MinnRail while back in the Twin Cities).

SiouxRail is every few years, as the spirit moves three or four of us to offer a weekend of operations. We draw anywhere from 20 to 30 folks from four or five states. Four years ago, we included a restaurant dinner in Brandon, SD, following the afternoon session and a special treat. Midwest Railcar Repair (MRR) owner Greg Carmon gave up his Saturday afternoon (see below) to tour our gang. Greg's been a strong supporter of model railroading. In May 2012 TLR members toured MRR during the Sioux Falls based convention.



My operating layout also sharpened many modeling skills. Highly detailed, good-looking structures add to the operating layout experience, both as a host as well as for interested operators. Prototype tours and interviews improved my appreciation for details and enabled me to cross-kit or kitbash many neat structures.



An Alco switcher shoves a covered hopper that's been tagged into the MRR paint shop. The edge of the inspection and repair shop is to the left.



Eric Carlson's custom locomotive paint jobs, including DME 6363 heading east while crossing the Rock River at Byron, add to realism.

My father in law, Don Nelson is a patient and helpful resource in my quest to learn how railroads operate. Here he's shown holding two time books from his 41 year career on the GN and BN. Thanks, Don.



Besides hosting and serving as superintendent of **the WisDak, I've also greatly enjoyed helping** members of the division gain understanding of how they might (or might not) choose to develop **their own operating scheme. I taught one such** class several years ago through Sioux Falls community education class covering operations, but attendance was small and one fellow thought it was a class about introduction to model railroading, which slowed us down quite a bit.

However, during the past two years about half of our DSED members have taken advantage opportunities to survey the layout, make scale drawings of the track plan and industries, write engineer orders, develop a sequence for the 19 different trains, create a timetable, and even graph the timetable showing stations and times, including a couple train meets.

Especially satisfying is the progress of three of our members. They have already met the paperwork requirements (and have the requisite 50 hours in various operating duties) to apply for the NMRA Achievement Program chief dispatcher certificate (once they fill out and send in the statement of qualifications and record and validation form.) Their progress and enjoyment of the various responsibilities including dispatcher, road engineer, and yard master is a delight to observe.

When we decided to return to South Dakota seven **years ago, it wasn't a tough decision. In addition to Jan's family still living here, I knew I had a** dozen or more friends through our mutual hobby **of model trains. Here's to the next 100 sessions!**



Don Miller, Dave Bauman, Larry Feay, and Richard Dahl worked on timetables for the WisDak, a further benefit of the operating layout experience for those interested. *Richard Dahl photo*

DSED Division Doings

Upcoming events and activities involving the Dakota Southeastern Division

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, August 24-26
Prairie Village Jamboree in Madison, South Dakota
DSED modular club layout will again be entertaining guests in the Roundhouse. Steam rides and roundhouse tour too. Check their website for details including admission and times.

Saturday September 15 10:00 to 2:00 at the Ronning Library, 49th and Southeastern in Sioux Falls
Fourth annual clinics open to the public. Free. Hands on scenery making for the kids, DSED modular layout in action as well as **Gary Johnson's highly detailed N gauge layout. Kids can again "drive the train" on a portable industrial switching layout too.** DSED September business meeting begins at 2:30 following cleanup.

Agenda will include sign-up to co-host layouts for the October 6 home layout tour.

Saturday September 29 Thousand Lakes Region mid-year board of directors' meeting at 10:00 a.m. **at Cooper's Pub, 1607 Park Place Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN.** All are invited.

Saturday October 6 from noon till 5:00 p.m. Seventh annual DSED open house home layout tour. Self-guided driving tour features a total of eight layouts from N gauge to S gauge. There are five layouts in Harrisburg, plus two home layouts and the Sioux Valley Model Engineers Society club layout in **Sioux Falls on this year's tour. Individual railpasses** cost \$5, family pass \$10. Passes available at HobbyTown on west 41st street beginning September 15. Check our division website, dakotasoutheasterndivision.org for more details this summer.

Saturday November 17 and Sunday November 18
Trains at Christmas sponsored by the Sioux Valley Model Engineers Society at the Lyons Fairgrounds. **DSED modular layout plus members' portable** home layouts featured along with numerous vendors and displays. See SVMES.net for more details.

And yet to come... an opportunity (or two) to preview the next iteration of model railroading in Harrisburg on the Twin Cities and Western, successor layout to the Wisconsin Dakota Railroad. The October 6 open house will feature much of the layout as it will be, without all the landscaping and detail.