

FEATURE ARTICLE

ROYAL HUDSON TO WHITE ROCK—AN OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE

- by **Don Evans**

It was an outing of Olympic proportions—both in preparation as well as in operation—as Royal Hudson #2860 operated a two day excursion trip to White Rock, BC on February 8 and 9, 2010. Having made a deadhead trip from Squamish on Saturday, January 16 with its passenger car consist, the train had been stored behind the Rocky Mountaineer station in Vancouver since that date while preparations were put in place for the White Rock trips.

The trips operated at the invitation of the City of White Rock for the train to participate in the opening of their Winter Festival and Bite of the Rock event, and under the sponsorship of BNSF Railway. Coincidentally, the 2010 Winter Olympics Torch Relay would pass through White Rock on the morning of February 9, and ceremonies would be held at the Peace Arch monument on the Canada—US border where the train would happen to be stored overnight.

Much additional preparation and scrutiny had to be undertaken as this train would operate inside the Olympic security window, so WCRA and the operating railways had to comply to all the extra precautions in place by Transport Canada for the station points. VIA Rail Canada graciously allowed the use of their Pacific Central Station where things were all set up and the City of White Rock helped us at that end. In the end, all went smoothly.

Sunday, February 7—this was the day to prep everything and get the train ready. The 2860 was steamed up by **Andy Faris** and the steam crew and BNSF brought over their shiny new ES44AC unit #6422 which was being added to the consist to “fly the flag” for BNSF as the trip sponsor. It certainly added a splash of colour! (Photo page 22, Dave Emmington) Meanwhile the tours group and our mechanical staff were busy preparing the train consist for passengers.

Monday, February 8 - Time to get to the station. With the consist assembled, the train pulled out of the RMR storage track and started its reverse move to Track 6 at Pacific Central Station. The train moved around the wye and backed into the station, positioning for the special



inspections and crew training necessary. This was all completed in the period from 1100 to 1300 hours. The train made a nice sight alongside the shiny stainless steel equipment of VIA's *Canadian*, however

platform access was restricted so not many got to see it. (Don Evans photo below)



Meanwhile in the station, **Bill and Sylvia Johnston** were checking in our passengers, who were then able to wait until boarding time in VIA Rail's special lounge area. At 1330 hours, the train was opened for boarding and the 175 passengers moved along the platform to their



assigned coaches. On board were also community representatives from White Rock and community ambassadors including Miss White Rock. (photo, Dave Emmington)

At precisely 1400 hours, the train departed to two blasts of the whistle, and moved out of the station and through the yard throat to prepare for the climb up the Grandview cut. After a brief pause for the signal, we were on our way and the 2860 stormed up the hill to marvelous stack talk, hauling the big orange GE diesel and her five cars behind. It was off to a grand start. Railfans and public were out on force on a beautiful afternoon to witness

and photograph the grand sight of a working mainline steam engine leading her charge towards New Westminster.

We had clear signals all the way, and the BNSF New Westminster employees were on the platform in force to wave as we passed the station there. We pulled to a stop on the mainline leading to the New Westminster rail bridge to await a tug and two barges of wood chips to pass through the open span, and then for the bridge to close for us.

Underway again, we steamed across the Fraser River on the bridge, and left CN Rails for BNSF's line south while a SRY train with a pair of SW900's waited its turn for the bridge and saluted us with its horns. The ride along the Fraser River was lovely, and then south through the Burn's Bog area to Colebrook where we had a clear board through the interchange with the Roberts Bank line. We were actually hoping for a meet there as we were running early, but no such luck—a westbound CN container train held in the clear for us.

Now clear of the other line, we slowed and crawled across the Mud Bay trestle (photo page 24, Greg Shevchenko) and continued south, trying to kill some time as we could not arrive early at White Rock. The entire community celebration was set around our on-time arrival of 1600 hours. There were many photographers out and a huge crowd through Crescent Beach and Ocean Park. I know they would have liked a little more speed, but we were just too early.



We rounded the point west of White Rock right on cue at 1550, and the train proceeded along the shore with whistles blaring for all to hear, and pulled into White Rock station just before 1600—a perfectly timed arrival. The train positioned at the allotted spot and passengers disembarked, greeted by a welcoming committee that included the Mayor of White Rock, Catherine Ferguson. Once everyone was off, the official welcoming ceremony commenced, with official words from the Semiamhoo First Nations **Chief Willard Cook**, Mayor **Catherine Ferguson**, MLA **Gordon Hogg** and WCRA President **Don Evans**. O Canada was sung with **Mark Donnelly** (of Vancouver Canucks performance fame). It was a fitting and celebratory welcome for the Royal visitor and her train!

Having left the passengers, the train departed and moved south of the main part of the city, then paused to unload the on board attendants and all stock items in preparation to move across the border for turning and overnight. The **White Rock Fire Department** attended to top up the water in the tender for tomorrow's trip back to Vancouver.

The train then moved across the border with only the operating crew, and steamed south on the mainline to Custer, WA where the train was turned on the wye. This was an exciting move for us and for US railfans' who paced the train on its US segment the entire way. For WCRA, it was a great move as well—the installation of a second water glass in late 2009 brought the engine to the US Federal Railway Administration standards thus allowing the move on US tracks (in 2007 we were unable to do this and the steam engine had to return to Vancouver in reverse). This was the first time the 2860 had been in the US since the 1970's.

After turning, the train returned to Blaine and settled down for an overnight in the siding there.

Tuesday, February 9.

The morning dawned a little foggy, but otherwise nice and it would turn into a beautiful sunny day. This was the morning of the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay in the area, and large crowds were out in White Rock at 0645 to see it pass through town. The torch proceeded south to the US-Canada border, where a special ceremony was held at the Peace Arch



monument. The steaming train was clearly visible to those at this celebration. This was the closest the 2860 would get to any sort of 2010 Winter Olympics involvement.

(photo, Gordon Hall)

Up in White Rock the crowds gathered in the lovely warm sunshine as the morning progressed—the train was due to arrive around 1030. Unfortunately, some



administrative details delayed the departure from the border, but finally around 1130 she steamed proudly past the Peace Arch to re enter Canada. (photo p. 26, The Northern Light)

The sun was absolutely perfect as the train steamed majestically past the namesake white rock (photo back cover, Bob Hunter) and positioned just south of the crossing to the pier. Here two of the torch bearers' who had earlier carried the Olympic flame posed for photos in front of the train. (photo front cover, Deb Sankey).

At around 1235, the all clear was given and 2860 eased her train up to the platform to board passengers. We departed at 1300 hours—about one hour late, and were on our way. This trip would be quite different to yesterday's—we had no reason to delay our progress and so #2860 marched off to Vancouver in grand style, with stack talk and whistles no one there will forget.

As we stormed through Crescent Beach there were once again huge crowds to see our passage, but this time we weren't just coasting. Slowing for the drawbridge we eased across at the 15 mph posted speed, then accelerated this time across the Mud Bay trestle with steam being



blown eastward by a stiff west wind. (photo, Bob Hunter). There was nothing in our way through Colebrook, and soon we were parading at good speed on the smooth track alongside Highway 91. The sounds of a steam locomotive at full stride were unforgettable to us aboard, and an amazing sight to the many onlookers.

Crossing the bridge at New Westminster it was clear we had made up some time, and we

proceeded unimpeded into New Westminster, through Burnaby and down the cut into Pacific Central Station. The steam engine chugging gently into Track 6 and pulling to a stop at 1420 created a sight that was commented on favourably by all who witnessed it. We disembarked our passengers and supplies, and the train then backed out of the station. The great trip was over, and we had good comments from all the 250+ passengers aboard and those involved.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who participated—to the sponsor **BNSF Railway**, to the **City of White Rock** and White Rock organizer **Rene Duson**, to **Dave Emmington** and his on board crew of volunteers, to our steam crew led by **Andy Faris** (fireman) and engineer **Mark Liggins**, to **VIA Rail Canada** for the use of the station in Vancouver, to **Rocky Mountaineer** for the storage space for the train, to **CN** for the move from Squamish, to **Transport Canada** for their help, and to all those who rode the train making it financially feasible to pull off the trip. Also thanks to both the **Vancouver Fire Department** and the **White Rock Fire Department** for watering the train and to our staff for their help. It was a true team effort.

The train set was now back at Rocky Mountaineer storage, but subsequently headed to Vancouver Island for a tour train demo trip on March 27th. The 2860 is at VIA Rail Canada's Vancouver Maintenance Centre where arrangements are being made to drop the centre driving axle and rebuild the axle boxes to tighten up the centre axle lateral. You can read more about both these projects in this issue on pages 9 and 18.