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Date: 09/22/06 16:50

1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: srlrxst

Santa Fe Classification Yard Enters Testing Period

By Jerry Post

Desert Dispatch, Barstow, Ca

Tuesday, February 2, 1976

Barstow - After 25 months of construction and some \$50 million in expenditures, the Santa Fe Classification Yard entered a full testing period today, with company employees taking their positions throughout the 600 acre yard to receive and service trains entering the new facility from all corners of the country.

Santa Fe Regional Manager William B. Cox defined the occasion saying "We are going into a complete testing period of the various component parts of the yard. Our construction is 98 percent complete and we are ready now to try the system out in preparation for our April grand opening".

A crew of 550 workers manned the yard today, and for the first time scheduled trains were fed through the system's computerized hump yard, the heart of the new operation. There both eastbound and westbound freight cars were sorted and assembled into blocks destined to various stations along the line.

As each car passes the Hump Tower, it is identified and weighed by computer, then slipped down a 6 percent grade into the 48 track classification yard. A retarder automatically slows the car to the appropriate speed and leaves it with just enough momentum to descend through computer-switched tracks and out onto its correct siding where it meets the next car at about 4 mph.

Four computers in the Hump Tower not only identify and route each car, but then keeps inventory of the number, weight and length of cars on each track. Following humping, inventory data is transferred back to the main brain for the entire system to an IBM 370 computer stationed in the Terminal building.

This computer, as explained by Asst. Regional Manager Gene Flohrschutz, receives inbound advance listings on all approaching trains and then verifies these listings through scanners along the three inbound routes as trains arrive. It feeds this make-up information to the Hump Tower computers at the appropriate time to initiate the classification and sorting procedure.

Gordon H. Dotson is the new Terminal Superintendent responsible for overseeing the entire operation. He has jurisdiction over all Santa Fe activities that transpire between Hinkley, Lenwood and Daggett, and since January of 1975, he has been the man on special duty to assure Santa Fe's head office

that the yard has been progressing.

Dotson's assumption of his new responsibilities marks his return Santa Fe-Barstow operations. Between 1960 and 1964 he served as the city's Trainmaster. "This has been a year out of my life that has just flown past", says Dotson. "Now I feel that we have about the most modern facility for repairing and classifying cars in the United States. We have visited other operations throughout the country and picked out all their good points, leaving the bad ones where we found them".

Car repair and maintenance is an important part of the entire Santa Fe system in Barstow. At the west end of the yard there is a bright orange grid structure which fuels the diesel engines and stocks the trains with sand. Close by is a washer where each eastbound cleaned prior to departure.

Cars can be serviced or repaired at one of several points in the yard, depending upon scheduling factors. The one spot repair track near the 62 foot high Supervisor's Tower will service 90 cars a day, Dotson estimates. Cars can also be shuttled through a rapid progression network which features three tracks for servicing purposes.

As trains are made up they are pulled out into a nine track departure yard. Each line is over 8,000 feet long and capable of handling up to 185 cars. From there, trains are able to leave the yard in either an easterly, westerly or northwesterly direction. The counterpart to the departure yard is a ten track receiving yard, where arriving trains are broken down and channeled into the appropriate servicing, fueling or classification divisions of the yard.

Crewman from the arriving trains clock in at the 25,000 square foot Terminal Office and can then relax in special cleanup facilities provided there. Included in this building are a cafeteria, a large locker and shower area, conference rooms and a multitude of offices for such personnel as the trainmaster, roadmaster, agent, and so on.

No rundown of the new Santa Fe operation would be complete without a word about the Supervisor's High Tower which bears the Santa Fe emblem. From the mighty blue structure's upper level, one is provided a breathtaking view of the entire yard. Here the planner and general car foreman monitor all that transpires upon the tracks below. In addition to the obvious advantage of long range visual perception, they are provided with an electronic map which records, through a varied series of lights, all train movement that occurs between Lenwood and Daggett. At their disposal, too, are Model 40 CRT computer linked teletype screens which provide them access to almost any information on trains inside or outside of the yard that they could require.

There are a total of four planners, each working a separate shift. It is their responsibility to see that there are no delays in the smooth yard operation. Alongside the planner, sits the general car foreman who is responsible for insuring that all cars are repaired as needed.

As of today, almost all aspects of this complicated system are being tested and coordinated. Assuming that program designers see their new operation progressing properly, the yard will be officially opened during the latter part of April. Santa Fe spokesmen are not yet revealing their plans for the opening celebration, but it is certain that all of Barstow will be invited to share in welcoming this multi-million dollar facility to the community.

Supervisory Personnel Appointed to the "Hump Yard":

W.M White

J.E. Gill

Lawrence E. Dale, (current mayor of Barstow, and staff member of the Santa Fe/WARM museum in the old restored Barstow depot)

C.F. Lilley

G.H. Dotson

G.V. Sanders

P.J. Dewolf

H.A. Burris

I.D. Burt

R.W. Jones

D.J. McDougal (seen in various Santa Fe PR photos, such as in "North American Railroads", depicting modern computerized hump yards)

N.C. Orfall

M.J. Wood

L.J. Nettles

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Date: 09/22/06 16:50

Re: 1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: srlrxst

The open house event was held on Saturday, May 15th including bus tours of the yard and other festivities, much in the same fashion as the grand opening of the SP West Colton yard. One of the 5700-class Bicentennial locomotives was on display as well. Were any TO members there that day or take any photos?

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Date: 09/22/06 16:58

Re: 1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: srlrxst

"Now I feel that we have about the most modern facility for repairing and classifying cars in the Unites States. We have visited other operations throughout the country and picked out all their good points, leaving the bad ones where we found them".

Interesting. I wonder if Mr. Dotson could have been referring to SP's West Colton yard and if so, overall, what did they improve? I have also read that Santa Fe's Barstow yard was the "world's most technically advanced classification yard, but wasn't SP's WC Yard the first? (minus some flaws in the early days before they were ironed out)

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Date: 09/22/06 18:22

Re: 1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: srlrxst

If I remember correctly, it was actually the Missouri Pacific Railroad in 1960 to first use computer-electronic equipment in their classification yards, or perhaps it was CTC or some other electronic-controlled signal operations. Please correct me if I wrong, as I know very little on this subject!

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Date: 09/22/06 20:01

Re: 1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: [mwbridgwater](#)

Interesting documentation of history there, Lance. I know you and I would both like to find something that detailed on the West Colton opening.

Mark

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Date: 09/22/06 21:01

Re: 1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: BarstowRick

Lance and all tuned in,

Nice reporting and for a minute you had me thinking this was happening all over again...as in today. Great historical reporting.

Since we are comparing the Santa Fe Barstow Yard to the Southern Pacific Colton Yard. Allow me to throw in an observation of my own.

SP had a computer program that was ahead of it's time and it was known to be tied into the overall rail system...of the day.

Barstow, was a homegrown operation with the home boys researching, developing, building a prototype and finally installation of the advanced computer system. A system that extended system wide connecting specifically to the Argentine Yard in Kansas City.

The systems compared: (I am using caution here because I have no intention of offending anyone on either side of the fence). Basically they rivaled each other...equals in many ways.

On the Santa Fe side: Overheard by these ears, a Santa Fe Supervisor answering a question about the SP computer system said, "We didn't need the SP computer system as ours was better" in many ways. And he went on to describe the pluses. Today, under the management of BNSF, Barstow is still number one in leadership and ability to handle and classify freight.

On the Southern Pacific side, now under the management of Union Pacific the Colton Yard is their number one Southern California operation. I had the opportunity to talk to the former SP Colton Yard - Yardmaster. He was around when the yard was built and could tell of stories one after the other. He indicated that SP started out with a teletype sorting computer and later

changed to the computer system for which SP is famous and was the envy of many railroads, including Santa Fe.

I do believe I've treated this fairly. It will be interesting to hear from others on the subject.

RickH - remembering a family of Santa Fe rails.

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Date: 09/24/06 01:23

Re: 1976 Santa Fe Barstow yard local newspaper article

Author: 72368

Barstow Yard was also the first location in the West to make use of the data produced by ACI labels on the sides of freight cars - but other roads (notably SP) finally killed the ACI label project.

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