

## From Australia To Louisville and Beyond

Detailed planning for attending the Louisville Convention began in mid 2007 when I discussed a preliminary itinerary with Vic Fitzpatrick, my fellow Australian N Scale Collector and traveling companion. Vic and I always wanted to visit the Pearl Harbor Museum in Hawaii, so enroute to Louisville, we decided to fly to the USA via Honolulu.

In the early evening of June 20<sup>th</sup>, our Qantas 747 Jumbo Jet lifted off from Australian soil and headed east to start our four week journey. After a 10 hour flight to Honolulu, we were soon able to soak up the 'spirit of aloha' atmosphere. After clearing customs and immigration, we organized our hire car and headed to the Pearl Harbor Museum located nearby Honolulu's International Airport.

With clear blue skies above and a temperature of 80 F, we began to relive the history of Pearl Harbor. Our first stop was the USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park. In the 10,000 square foot museum, with its impressive collection of submarine-related artifacts, we explored the intriguing world of submarines. Adjacent to the museum, a public memorial honors the 52 American submarines and the more than 3,500 submariners lost during WW11. Finally we took a tour through the historic WW11 preserved submarine, Bowfin. The Presidential Unit Citation and the Navy Unit Commendation were earned by the Bowfin for her wartime service.

Leaving the USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park, we then boarded a shuttle bus and traveled to Historic Ford Island located within Naval Station Pearl Harbor to tour the Battleship Missouri. The last US battleship to be launched and the last to be decommissioned, the Missouri place in history was secured on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945, when it was the site of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces thus ending WW11. It is said that the Mighty Mo's trademark feature are its nine 16 inch guns, each gun barrel approximately 67 feet long weighing 116 tons and able to fire a 2700-pound shell 23 miles in 50 seconds.

With early evening approaching, we boarded our bus to return to the USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park and our hire car. With plans made to visit the Arizona Memorial the next day, we headed towards Waikiki and our hotel for the night.

After a restful night's sleep we arose early and arrived at the Arizona Memorial at 6.30am to find even at this early hour, the ticket queue was nearly 150 feet long. As tour buses arrived, the queue soon extended to over 400 yards, proof positive of the claim that this destination remains the top destination in Hawaii with over 1,500,000 visitors annually. After viewing a documentary film about the Pearl Harbor attack, we boarded a boat and traveled out to the USS Arizona Memorial. Standing over a grave where 1177 men lost their lives, and with oil still seeping to the surface from the sunken ship, we found the visit to the memorial a very moving experience.

Returning to shore, we headed back to Waikiki for lunch. The afternoon was spent touring around Waikiki, and as evening approached, local entertainment including Hawaiian luaus, bars, nightclubs, theatres and sunset cruises came to life. For us though, we had to prepare for our departure from Honolulu for the next stage of our journey.

We bid goodbye to Hawaii as our evening plane climbed east towards Los Angeles. Arriving Los Angeles in the early morning hours, we changed planes and headed to Dallas Fort Worth, where another plane change saw us on our final leg to Louisville. Sharing the hotel shuttle bus from the airport with another convention attendee, made for an enjoyable start to the 2008 Convention.

After booking into our room, a quick unpack and freshen up, we headed to Louisville's Fourth Street for something to eat. Being a Sunday evening, the streets were quiet, but along the way we met up with another early arrival in Skip Hayes. Later that evening we caught up with other friends we had made from previous Conventions.

Monday morning provided an opportunity for a sleep in before checking out some early room sales. Then it was off to the first pre-convention activity – My Old Kentucky Dinner Train. A great time was had by all as we rolled through the green lush countryside while enjoying fine food in an elegant old dining car.

As Tuesday morning dawned, the sun rising over the Belle of Louisville riverboat and the long road bridge crossing the Ohio River made for a spectacular view from our hotel window. A quick breakfast followed and then we were on our way to the Kentucky Railway Museum & Steam Train in New Haven Kentucky. The relaxing 22 mile train ride behind a steam engine through the historic Rolling Fork River Valley was followed by lunch in a local park. Finally we explored Jim Beam, one of Kentucky's finest bourbon distilleries and tasted some of their fine products.

The home layout tour on Wednesday morning proved very popular, as we visited three of Louisville's premier N scale layouts. The operating hump yard on John Voller's layout was certainly a highlight. In the afternoon the Convention began in earnest as registration opened and we checked out the Convention Company Store for the Special Run and Convention Surprise Cars. Then it was time for the evening Welcome Reception sponsored by Micro-Trains Line Co. With the reception over, we headed off to check out more room sales before hitting the sack.

The Friday evening cruise on the Belle of Louisville riverboat was most relaxing as we joined the large group on board the Belle, now in her 92nd year. For three hours we travelled along the Ohio River enjoying the local sights, while the more adventurous passengers danced to the music of an on-board band.

The Model Contest displayed many quality models, while the traditional auctions, Swap-a-Rama and Banquet came and went in true NSC tradition. With its must sought after Special Micro Trains gift car, and the opportunity to catch up with old friends, we always find the Convention Banquet a popular and enjoyable Convention activity. As always the auctions turned up some good bargains for those in attendance.

With Convention activity moving to the Kentucky International Convention Center, we spent time attending a selection of clinics. While a wide range of Clinics were available, it was pleasing to see the interest generated by those with subjects relating to prototypical operation in N Scale. We checked out the World Greatest Hobby on Tour and the wide range of layouts from TTrak to the huge NTrak layout on display.

All too soon the Convention was over and it was time to continue our journey. Sunday afternoon found us in Cleveland, where we picked up our hire car and drove west to Fostoria, Ohio. Here we rail fanned the many trains traversing the location known as the 'Iron Triangle'.

After an overnight stay in Tiffin Ohio, we continued our journey west through Ohio and Indiana to Grand Rapids Michigan. We visited Bruce Chubb and operated on his famous Sunset Valley Oregon System HO scale layout. The next day was spent visiting a number of fine HO layouts in the Grand Rapids area. Leaving Michigan, we headed south to Dolton Illinois, a suburb south of Chicago to visit Terry and Marge Papp. I first met Terry in 1997 during my first ever visit to the USA and he kindly introduced me to railfanning. Then it was back on the road for an overnight stop at Rockford Illinois. While there, we visited Bill Kirshmeyer's large HO scale model railroad.

The next day found us in the twin cities of Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota where time was spent time rail fanning around the city's historic railroad areas. We also took the opportunity to visit a number of model railroads, the largest being Jeff Otto's huge 3,700 square foot HO scale Missabe Northern Railway layout. It was now Saturday July 5<sup>th</sup>, and time to return our hire car in preparation for the next segment of our trip west.

At 11.15pm, Amtrak's Empire Builder train # 7 glided into the St. Paul depot on schedule. Upon boarding, we quickly found our roomette and settled down for our journey to Essex, Montana. Breakfast found us near Devils Lake, North Dakota, and by early evening we had reached East Glacier Park, Montana. Travelling along the southern edge of the beautiful Glacier National Park, we soon arrived at Essex.

At Essex we stayed three days at the historic Izaak Walton Inn. The inn, originally a change point for crews of the Great Northern Railway, is located adjacent to the BNSF mainline between Chicago and Seattle. Situated midway between East and West Glacier, Essex provided a convenient base for our drive on the spectacular 'Going to the Sun Road'. Along Highway 2, we visited East Glacier and Whitefish, while also rail fanning across Marias Pass.

All too soon our time in Essex ended and it was time to again board the Empire Builder. Just before 9.00pm the train rolled into Essex, and by mid morning the next day, we had arrived at Everett, Washington where we were met by Dean Daughenbaugh and Bruce Kane.

The following day found us rail fanning Stevens Pass with Dean and Ken Yohe. The scenery was spectacular and the air crisp as we passed over the pass at an elevation of just over 4000 ft. Stopping at both the western and eastern portals we saw the huge fans at the western portal that purge the tunnel after the passage of a train. After travelling to Wenatchee and Appleyard, we visited Rocky Reach Dam. During the day were observed a number of east and westbound trains, including the eastbound Empire Builder just west of Everett.

Another day was spent checking out some local hobby shops. While driving through Seattle, we observed a BNSF train with its unusual load of wind turbine blades and generators for a project in Canada.

On another occasion we travelled to Sedro Wooley north of Everett to visit a HO scale Kansas City Southern Lines home layout. The area at the foot of the basement stairs was constructed to resemble the East Midway train concourse of Kansas City Union Station. After walking through a 10 feet x 30 feet mock-up of a Pullman Lounge car, we then entered the layout room. Here was a highly detailed 20 feet x 40 feet loop to loop layout. Set in the 1940 to 1952 time period, the layout was designed primarily for passenger operations but with provision for local and mainline freight operation.

Adjacent to the Pullman car sat the Cab of Kansas City Southern F-7 No. 20. The 3 ton cab is all that remains of Great Northern F-7A No. 42D. It has been completely restored and repainted inside and out, and has its own sound system. The five chime Nathan air horn and brass bell are both operational.

The next day we left Everett for Seattle to pick up another hire car for our journey to Portland, Oregon. A 60-mile drive south of Seattle found us at Jim Younkin's house in Olympia and an opportunity see the extensions Jim has completed on his beautiful N Scale Mud Bay & Southern N scale layout. After enjoying drinks and a chat while sitting on Jim's outdoor deck, it was time to head off to Portland. An overnight stop at Portland was followed by a short drive to Tillamook and Cape Meares. Then we headed north alongside the Pacific Ocean on the scenic route of highway 101 to Astoria, and an overnight stop at Seaside. The drive over the 4 mile long bridge at Astoria across the Columbia River was quite an experience.

Returning to Portland the next day, we spent the afternoon rail fanning at Vancouver Junction. Our timing was good, as we witnessed a number, UP, BNSF and Amtrak trains passing through this busy junction. Then all too soon our journey was ending as we headed back to SeaTac Airport in Washington to catch our flight to Los Angeles, and then our non-stop 15 hour Qantas flight home to Melbourne.

Thanks to all in the N Scale Collectors, KSONS and our other USA friends, for helping to make this journey to Louisville and beyond so memorable.