

N-Circle Railroad Update – December 23, 2020

First, the educational “clinic” part...

I updated the backdrop for the west end introduced in my N-Circle update from September 25, 2020 and created a new backdrop for the east end using real photographs. While still not ready to invest in commercial backdrops yet, these are an improvement over my rough PowerPoint design from September.

I used free Vermont scenery photos downloaded from the web. It is difficult to find two photos that will look continuous when placed side-by-side. Therefore, look for a generic scene without structures or other features that will make it obvious the scene is repeated. Then print two versions, mirrored left-right of each other, and butt them together to create what appears like a seamless continuous scene.

N-Circle_20-12-20_Backdrop_East



Note that for the four panels of the East backdrop above, I trimmed the photos at different points, so the broad foreground mountain on the left becomes a narrower, more pointed mountain on the right over the rear of the B unit. This makes it a bit less obvious that the scene is repeated, and by cutting the same distance in on both panels, all the topography still aligns.

N-Circle_20-12-20_Backdrop_West



For this West backdrop, I installed the new panels over the old, the upper layer of clouds is from the old panels. The colors were close enough that I said “good enough for now,” I will redo it before shooting for Model Railroader magazine!

I don’t “love” either backdrop – the mountains photo on the east side was clearly shot from a high altitude from another mountain, while the pasture on the west side is too “close-up” for the N-scale perspective, I should have trimmed off the bottom couple of inches. But both are better than the white wall and brown cardboard panel they cover, so they are an improvement for photo backdrops for now. Fortunately, my iPhone 5S takes sufficiently blurred photos to minimize their deficiencies...

Second, the educational “history” part...

Two of the most famous passenger train paint schemes in American railroad history were the Santa Fe Chiefs and the Southern Pacific Daylights. Here we find photos of the Southern Pacific Sunbeam Daylight meeting the Santa Fe Texas Chief in eastern Texas in the “1950s Louisiana” scenery scenario of the N-Circle Railroad, shot from the East, and then the West.

[N-Circle_20-12-20_Passenger_ATSF&SP_1](#)





Note the new backdrops can be seen in these two shots, a first small step towards better layout photos...

These are identical trainsets - the short 65-foot Arnold/Rapido cars produced in the 1980s or 1990s, and they are the same as the Amtrak set I gave to the NWV for our display layout. These short cars run much better on a small layout than prototypically correct 80+ -foot cars.

The locomotives are nearly identical F7A and F7B loco pairs as well: the Southern Pacific F7s are Bachmann Plus, while the Santa Fe F7s are Bachmann Spectrum. Unfortunately, these older units have not aged well. The armature brush pads on the Santa Fe F7B delayered after only light use, so I gutted the motor and tower gears and made it into a dummy, and the Southern Pacific F7B went up in smoke the other night, I haven't taken it apart yet. So, advice to N-scalers: don't invest in old Bachmann Plus or Spectrum locos!

I have nicer SP Sunset Limited 85' cars to run with Black Widow F-units, and Con-Cor ATSF 85' cars. Nice sets for "Special Runs," but too long for regular use in the N-Circle's yards. However, I found something very interesting on the web when researching the Santa Fe cars:

The red & yellow stripes along the bottom of Santa Fe cars appears to only have been on models. In a Google search I could find no photos of Santa Fe cars with the stripes, only on war bonnet locomotives. From on-line blogs: "Unpainted stainless steel was the order of the day on Santa Fe's fluted passenger cars." "Goes back to Lionel. In 1955 the passenger car die was changed to include channels so an adhesive tuscan stripes could be placed for their Congressional set. The Lionel Canadian Pacific set followed in 1957. The first Lionel red-stripe Santa Fe cars appeared in 1959. It was apparently felt the red stripe cars matched the Santa Fe F3's better and the cars look pretty sparse with all that removed fluting and no color in the channels." "Santa Fe stainless steel passenger cars only had black lettering in extended Railroad Roman. The trucks were silver and were freshly painted at all times. The cars were kept very clean and shiny with frequent washing. There was no added color in lettering or striping."

So, my 65-foot Arnold cars are apparently more prototypical than the long Con-Cor cars! Someday I will have to invest in a nice set of Kato Chief cars like Willie, to go with my other higher-quality Santa Fe F-units! 😊

The SP's classic stainless steel "Sunset Limited" passenger trains ran from New Orleans to San Francisco, through Los Angeles. Among the variations on the SP's orange & red "Daylight" trains, the "Sunbeam" was a named passenger train between Houston and Dallas on the Texas and New Orleans Railroad (T&NO), a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and ran into the 1950s.

So, I would rather have the Sunset Limited paint scheme to run into New Orleans, but it was never painted on the Arnold short cars – maybe a custom project for "someday"....

The Santa Fe came into Houston and Galveston, but did not go into New Orleans. So, the SP Sunbeam Daylight and ATSF Texas Chief may have met in eastern Texas around Houston, I have not determined yet exactly. But they do on the N-Circle Railroad!