



# MRHS *Mainline*

Muskegon Railroad Historical Society

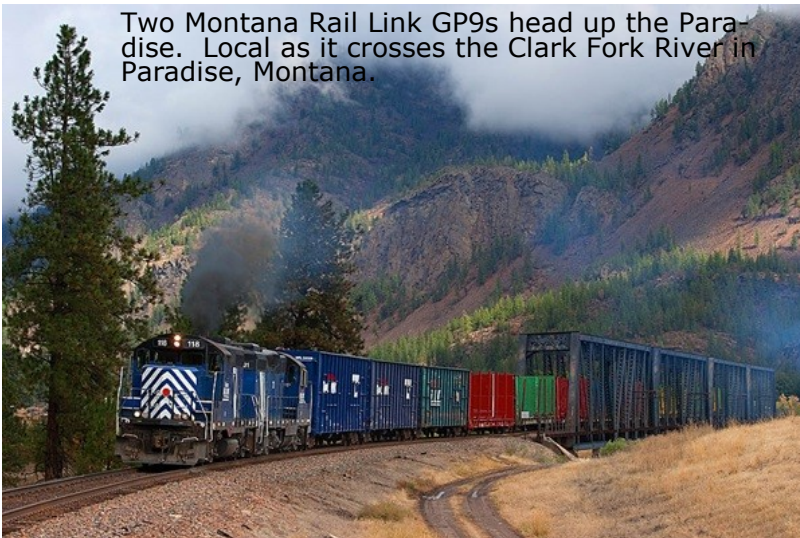
**Volume 33, Issue 7, July 2018**

## Tom Danneman's Top 10 retreats

It's more about quality of location than quantity of trains for Trains magazine's art director

By [Tom Danneman](#) | December 1, 2017

When I was asked to come up with 10 of my favorite spots to view and photograph railroading, I knew it wouldn't be difficult. The difficulty was picking just 10 spots, as other locations that didn't make the cut were not far behind in my rankings. I didn't choose these spots for the amount of trains that can be seen, but more so for the scenery and the ability to find a place to relax and let the trains come to me. Anyone who knows me knows I love Montana, so it might be surprising that all 10 of my favorites are not in Big Sky Country!



Two Montana Rail Link GP9s head up the Paradise. Local as it crosses the Clark Fork River in Paradise, Montana.

**MRL's 4th SUBDIVISION** Montana Rail Link's 4th Subdivision is the railroad's main route between Missoula, Mont., and Sandpoint, Idaho. The scenery along this subdivision is gorgeous virtually its entire distance, so it was difficult to pinpoint just one location on this 212-mile stretch. The railroad is alongside the Clark Fork River much of the distance and crosses it 10 times. While BNSF Railway trains constitute much of the traffic on the route, MRL

runs its Gas Local, which hauls gasoline, diesel fuel, and jet or aviation fuel between Missoula and Thompson Falls, and the Paradise Local, which works businesses between Thompson Falls and Cedars. The Paradise Local even sports a pair of GP9s!

**LOMBARD CANYON** Lombard, Mont., is a ghost town located on Montana Rail Link's 2nd Subdivision between Helena and Bozeman. The town, which once hosted a post office, two railroad stations, a hotel, and a general store, is now nothing more than a lonely spot where Milwaukee Road's Pacific Extension once crossed the Northern Pacific main line. Much of the old Milwaukee Road bridge still stands. It is one of the most scenic nine miles of railroad I've ever visited. The site of Lombard, and the railroad through the canyon can be seen from public, albeit rough, dirt roads off of the main highway in Toston.

**ROCKVILLE BRIDGE** Just outside of Harrisburg, Pa., stands the historic Rockville Bridge over the Susquehanna River. The stone-arch bridge is located on Norfolk Southern's busy Pittsburgh Line. Great photos can be taken right from Main Street on the west end. If you don't mind some hiking, you can get great views from the hillside above U.S. Route 22/322 on the east end. Do not forget the Bridgeview Bed & Breakfast ([www.bridgeviewbnb.com](http://www.bridgeviewbnb.com) or 717-957-2438), where, just feet from the bridge, you can relax on the deck and watch the parade.

**BNSF "RACE TRACK"** BNSF's famous "Race Track," otherwise known as the Chicago Subdivision, is a Windy City must-see. Park yourself at a station anywhere along the triple-track main line and you are bound to see a gaggle of trains. Many will be Metra commuter trains, but BNSF intermodals, freights, oil trains, and coal trains, along with Amtrak, also appear. A few searchlight signals even remain atop Burlington-era signal bridges.

An eastbound BNSF vehicle train rolls through Trempealeau, Wis. A BNSF "Heritage I" C44-9W, and a CSX ES44DC lead the train past the old Melchior Hotel and Brewery.



**UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER** "Where nature smiles for 300 miles" was the famous slogan the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy used in literature for its famous Twin Cities Zephyr. The same can still be said for the scenery along the BNSF line from Savanna, Ill., to St. Paul, Minn., and Canadian Pacific's line across the river from Sabula, Iowa, to St. Paul. Quaint river towns and easy access are two great attributes of the area. My favorite spots along the river include the Mississippi Palisades State Park north of Savanna;

East Dubuque, Ill., where the Canadian National Dubuque Subdivision cuts through a curved tunnel before crossing the BNSF main and the river; and the stretch between Prairie du Chien and La Crosse, Wis., where State Route 35 closely follows the BNSF main for most of the distance.

**POWDER RIVER BASIN** Sometimes high traffic and great scenery overlap, such as in Wyoming's Powder River Basin. I love the wide-openness and the peaceful nature of the plains, but the number of coal trains on the BNSF/Union Pacific joint Orin Subdivision between Bridger Junction and Donkey Creek, Wyo., are what attracts most train-watchers to the area. Getting multiple trains struggling up Logan Hill or over the fills near Bill is common. Photographers have many opportunities for great sunrise and sunset photos due to the north-south orientation of the line.

**KANSAS CITY BOTTOMS** Variety is the spice in the historic “West Bottoms” of Kansas City, Mo. Trains from the Union Pacific, BNSF, Kansas City Terminal, and other railroads can be seen. Many are transfer moves, which use older power. The proximity of other noted train-watching locations, such as the Argentine Connection Flyover, Kansas City Union Station, and BNSF’s Argentine Yard, make the Bottoms a great place to spend a day.

**CRAWFORD HILL** For many visitors, access to this spectacular BNSF crossing of Pine Ridge in northwestern Nebraska is limited to public roads in the lower horseshoe area and the overpass at Belmont. However, check in to a cabin at the Ponderosa Ranch ([www.ponderosaranch.net](http://www.ponderosaranch.net) or 308-665-5973), and that changes. Included with the stay is access to the owner’s property, which surrounds the beautiful upper horseshoe area. With some hiking, great photos of the busy BNSF Butte Subdivision can be had easily throughout the day. The eastbound grade over the hill is steep enough for BNSF to maintain a helper base in Crawford. Enjoying a beverage on the deck while listening to loaded coal trains struggle up the grade is priceless.

**SANDPOINT, IDAHO** BNSF’s busy northern transcon, the Kootenai River Subdivision, and MRL’s 4th Subdivision from Missoula converge in Sandpoint. The greatest attraction in the area is the 1.5-mile, single-track bridge over Lake Pend Oreille. It can be photographed from public land at both ends. Sandpoint’s lesser-known operation is UP’s Spokane Subdivision, which runs between Spokane and the Canadian border at Eastport, Idaho.

**VALLEY CITY, N.D.** Valley City offers a reprieve from the otherwise flat topography of eastern North Dakota. BNSF’s Jamestown Subdivision, which sees mostly coal and crude oil trains, soars over town and the Sheyenne River valley on an impressive 3,860-foot bridge. While the former Northern Pacific main line has great photographic possibilities, I enjoy relaxing on a picnic table in Chautauqua Park along the river south of the viaduct.

Three photos in this article were taken by Tom Danneman



A Norfolk Southern stack train crosses the Susquehanna River on the historic Rockville Bridge, near Harrisburg, Pa.



# Quick Notes

## MRHS Calendar

Annual Picnic — Aug. 4 — 4:00pm

*At Mike Wood's House*

Bring a dish to pass. Optional

Aug. 7 — 7:00pm

MRHS General Meeting

Presentation - Montague and Fremont

Aug. 21, 7 :00pm

MRHS Board of Directors meeting

## MRHS Officers/Chairs

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Presentations: David Stroebe	616-422-6866
Publicity:	Open
Librarian: Jim Funnell	231-744-1979
Archivist: Andy Busard	231-755-6298

## Members Meeting Notes

**New building under renovations.**

**Need volunteers to help renovate our new building.**

**SAVE THE DATE**

April 27 2019 — Spring Show

## Presentation Opportunities

Please see Dave Stroebe if you want to do a presentation, or if you have a topic that you would like Dave to present.



616-422-6866



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## THE MRHS MAINLINE

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