

Chinese steam locomotives may pull Midwest excursions in September

ROCK ISLAND, Ill. - While negotiations on details among several parties have yet to be finalized, two Chinese steam locomotives recently brought to the United States may pull a series of excursions out the Quad Cities this September, if they are approved for use here.

The two locomotives, class QJ 2-10-2s No. 6988 and 7081, were built in 1985 and 1986, respectively, by China's Datong Locomotive Works. Pittsburgh-based Railroad Development Corp., the owner of the 500-mile regional Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS), purchased the engines earlier this year.

The locomotives arrived in Rock Island in June. Prior to any use, on freight or excursion, the locomotives will have to be certified by the Federal Railroad Administration. To get them certified, Iowa Interstate plans to run them in freight service between Iowa City and the Quad Cities in early August, IAIS President Dennis Miller told the Des Moines Register. The Quad Cities consist of Rock Island and Moline, Ill., and Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa.

If negotiations are successful, the 2-10-2s will be used on the weekend of Sept. 15-17 to pull excursions out of the Quad Cities. The trips are planned in conjunction with Riverway 2006, a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Rock Island Railroad bridge across the Mississippi River, the first railroad bridge over that waterway.

Plans call for trips on three routes covering two railroads:

On Friday, Sept. 15, a round trip on Iowa Interstate, from Rock Island westward to Iowa City and on beyond to the wye at Homestead, Iowa, and return.

On Saturday, Sept. 16, also on IAIS, a round trip from Rock Island and Silvis, Ill., eastward to Bureau Jct., Ill., with intermediate stops at Geneseo and Atkinson, Ill..

On Sunday, Sept. 17, a one-way "brunch" train from Rock Island, Ill., across the river and eastward to Muscatine, Iowa, on the Iowa, Chicago & Eastern Railroad. Passengers would have brunch on the train to Muscatine and return to Rock Island on a Mississippi River boat.

The excursion trains would be operated by "Friends of the 261," the Minneapolis-based operator of Milwaukee Road 4-8-4 No. 261. The "Friends" would supply crews and passenger cars. Ticket prices and specific schedules have yet to be worked out.



Iowa Interstate 711 heads west into Silvis, IL with the Chinese QJ steam locomotives on June 27, 2006. The ties in the foreground are for a new siding being built by the IAIS with cooperation from the BNSF to move interchange of unit trains away from the overcrowded IAIS Rock Island yard. (Erik Rasmussen)



Iowa Interstate Chinese QJ steam locomotive no. 7081 is being unloaded from its flatcar on June 29, 2006. The Iowa Interstate 717 is present to assist in removing the flatcars from under the equipment. (Erik Rasmussen)

NOTE: USED BY PERMISSION OF KALMBACH PUBLISHING CO.

