

1986-built QJ 2-10-2 6988 posed on the former-Rock Island turntable at Council Bluffs (ABOVE) on June 9, 2007. The 7081 crossed the Lilac Lane bridge (BELOW) just west of Hancock Junction.

Chasing QJ's in Iowa

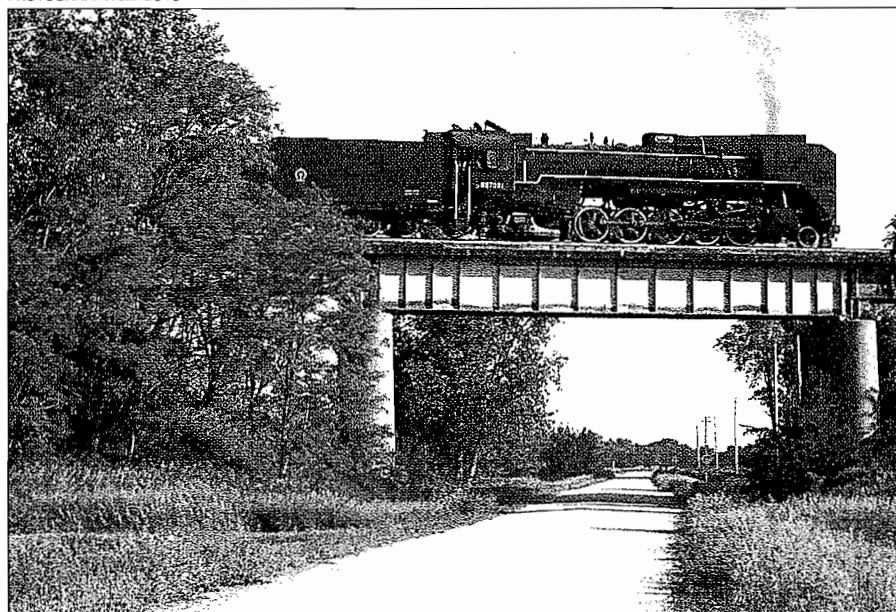
IT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY I couldn't pass up: doubleheaded 2-10-2s powering a revenue Iowa Interstate freight train 130 miles from Des Moines to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and back over the June 9-10 weekend. Historic Transport Preservation, Inc., had made arrangements for Henry Posner III's two Chinese QJ's to handle the freight and organized a car-chase photo special. Because the train was equipped with a FRED and no caboose or rear-end crew, the train couldn't back up, but it would slow down or stop between the predetermined photo locations to let the photographers set up for each runby. The whole affair was coordinated by radio, and it worked beautifully. The \$300 admission fee got you the photo runby locations and a detailed set of chasing maps.

Of course, it was just my luck to be stuck

in the middle of a weather-complicated air traffic control computer break-down that turned my six-hour, one-stop flight from Allentown, Pennsylvania., into Des Moines into a 22-hour ordeal. I almost cancelled the whole trip, but it looked like I could still make the Saturday trip, missing only the first three hours. I figured I could get to the 3:00 p.m. servicing stop at Anita and still get three-fourths of the weekend action. I pulled my rental car into Anita at 3:04 p.m. just in time to see them pulling the water hoses up onto the tenders of the QJ's.

What a chance to recreate the timeless images of doubleheaded Chinese 2-10-2s on a mixed freight and double-stack container train on the old Rock Island main line. Just like the 1950s, eh? What? Just like the 1950s? How do you photograph something

PHOTOGRAPHY: JIM BOYD



that is unique and doesn't "recreate" anything? Do you try to make it look like QJ's in China or capture the 2007 reality of steam on double-stacks? I actually did both.

By missing the early afternoon action east of Anita, I missed most of the "grain elevator town" settings, and the remaining 63 miles from Anita to Council Bluffs strongly resembled Iowa's longest "tree tunnel." There were few lineside structures, but there were numerous cuts and fills, however, as the railroad dealt with the rolling prairie hills.

My first instinct was to cut off the 21st Century consist and isolate the locomotives. The Inner Mongolia home of the QJ's featured fills and bridges, and Iowa presented some similar features. I started out the day with Provia 100 film in the Nikon, and the perfect weather yielded excellent results.

Before leaving home, however, my local camera shop was out of Provia 100 and could supply me only with Provia 400 (I know, I know; you digital doobies don't have to put up with such "heritage media" problems). It turned

out to be a lucky move, however, as Saturday afternoon's lengthening shadows made good use of the 400 speed film, and Sunday's weather deteriorated badly. I had just loaded the first 400 film when I overtook the train at the bottom of a sag. It started up the hill, and I made a bootleg unscheduled run-by at the ironically named "400 Road" overpass. The QJ's were down on their knees, both quarter-slipping and bursting into occasional full wheel slips as they muscled the 4300-ton train up a .8 per cent grade. The sound of the QJ's as they stomped under the bridge was the most impressive performance I've seen in many years. And to top it off, the whistle on lead engine 7081 was strongly reminiscent of a CB&Q O5b 4-8-4!

They had a night photo session with each engine on the Council Bluffs turntable, and it was novel for me to be "just a participant" instead of an organizer.

To get on the e-mail list for future HTP charters, contact www.steamspecials.com. The events are not "by invitation only." ☞

The smoke deflectors made broadside photography a bit less than satisfying, although the photographers in China had similar problems with the QJ's. A late Saturday afternoon runby (BELOW LEFT) made good use of down-the-track lighting. The sound was awesome (BOTTOM RIGHT) as the QJ's fought their way upgrade under the 400 Road bridge., where the 400-speed Provia proved its value. On dreary Sunday (BELOW RIGHT) the QJ's passed the grain elevators at Atlantic, Iowa..

