

# Pulling Strings for a Fan Trip

By Bruce Chapman

I was recently given a photo of an excursion to Labelle, QC, north of Montreal in the Laurentians (*photo 1*). The trip took place on Saturday February 28, 1976. The picture showed two Canadian Pacific GP9s, 8521 and 8520, in the old grey and maroon livery, along with six passenger cars (2272, 2257, dome 513, 2293, 2239 and Assiniboine Park). The two locomotives were special, being two of the last of three passenger GP9s (8520, 8521 and 8523) on CP's roster in the old colours. The photo brought memories flooding back of some strings I had to pull to get those locomotives on that train.

Not long before this trip, when I was working at the Operations Centre in Montreal, I was approached by someone from the St. Lawrence Valley Railway Society and asked if I could get two, old-colour scheme, passenger GP9s to Montreal for this trip. I had been keeping track of these CP Rail units. Two of them, 8520 and 8521, were running between Winnipeg and Emerson, MB in freight service for trains No. 950-941. The third, 8523, was in Revelstoke Yard in BC.

The question was: how to get the 8520-8521 to Montreal? I was working the 2400-0800 shift in the old Operations Centre in Montreal on the East Desk, nicknamed the "HO Gauge,"\* and on the Prairie Desk was my future boss, Joe Fifik.

About 0300 on Tuesday morning, February 24th, he got a call from the shop foreman at Broadview, SK that one steam generator on No. 2 (the *Canadian*) had quit, leaving only one steam generator to heat the train, and it was -40°C out there. So he called Winnipeg shop and asked them to cut one of the GP9s off train No. 950 and give it to him for the *Canadian*.

This was my time to act. It was my only chance. I asked him if he could make a wholesale swap on No. 2 and give that train the two passenger GP9s. The advantage for them was they wouldn't have to mess around with the power down at the depot, splitting them up, etc, etc. He hummed and hawed, and agreed, telling Winnipeg shop to get two other units for No. 950, and to use these

two units on No. 2. No doubt the shop was just as happy with this arrangement as they would not have had as many couplings and uncouplings of heat and MU connections in the cold, bitter weather.

So they arrived here in Montreal on Friday morning, in time for Saturday's train. The Glen Yard probably knew about this fan trip and power requirements. Friday afternoon, I got to work, for the 1600 to 2400 shift, and the big boss, Milt Morrow, (initials MDM – behind his back he was "Mad Dog Morrow") lights into me: "We needed those two GP9s for a transfer to Hochelaga this morning, and the Glen wouldn't give me them, saying they had to get them ready for this g.d. fan trip tomorrow morning!"

I said that I had nothing to do with them keeping them for this trip. So he says: "Next fan trip, you'll get whatever power is available!!" He was obviously happy that he'd laid one on me!

Despite this, the trip was a success and no doubt the railfans on the trip (as well as the organizers) were very happy. It was probably a once in a lifetime chance to see GP9s in the Laurentians (*Photo 2*).

Only one hiccup: on the return trip from Labelle, QC, the train hit a 4x4 truck with a snowplow on it at Val Morin, QC. The lead locomotive was none the worse for damages, just ending up with a slightly bent handrail. The delay was minimal, but the driver of the 4 x 4 (dressed in a business suit) was heard saying "Trains don't run here on Saturday!" ■



Photo 1 - CPR GP9s 8521 and 8520 at Ste Agathe, QC, 28 Feb, 1976.

Photo 2 - CPR GP9 8521 on the wye Labelle, QC, 28 Feb, 1976.



## Footnotes:

- The Operations Centre in Montreal had three "desks", each covering a region of the country. There was an "East Desk" (east of Cartier ON), a "Prairie Desk" and a "Pacific Desk." CP assigned the oldest locomotives to the East Desk and hence the unofficial moniker "HO Gauge" as a nickname.
- Thanks to Earl Roberts for the information about the accident.

Both photos by Earl Roberts.