

Vancouver Island, Via Rail, RDC—A Recipe for Fun!

Victoria to Courtenay, BC 2008

By Kent Sullivan, 4D-PNR Member

In mid-August 2008 I took my sons Kyle and Sean with me on the RDC for the entire length of the line, Victoria to Courtenay and back.

We stayed overnight in Courtenay, otherwise the layover is only ½ hour, making for a lot of train riding for two kids (and one adult) in one day. The train takes a leisurely four hours and forty five minutes (usually five hours after delays) to cover the 225 kilometers (140 miles) each way. Top speed on the line is forty MPH and yes, they still measure it in miles per hour with this equipment. It's never been converted.

Roger Ferris has organized trips in the past, but anyone who hasn't had the chance should definitely take this trip! There are so few RDCs left in North America, and this one is relatively close. The people running the line are very friendly, and just mentioning that we were railfans was all it took to get us a cab ride on the way back over the Malahat. Awesome!

Info: www.viarail.ca/trains/en_tra_i_roch_vico.html

Schedule: www.viarail.ca/pdf/2008/timetable/VICT-NANAI-COURT-WESTERN-5MAI08.pdf

Booking: www.viarail.ca/tickets/en_index_tick.html

E&N: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esquimalt_and_Nanaimo_Railway

Victoria station is small but quaint and in good condition. It's located right downtown on the water so is very easy to reach by walking from any of the tourist hotels. Most of the hotels will also drop you there with their shuttle vans. This picture was taken just before departing on August 12 at 8:00 AM.



The consist both days was two RDC-1s: 6135 and 6133. 6135 is in the lead leaving Victoria station (facing the drawbridge).



Duncan has a very nice station. I wish we had had time to explore it. The stop was very brief. Must return some time by car to see it better.



At least one volunteer was hard at work on the restoration of this caboose next to the station in Duncan.



End of the line in Courtenay. Station is in pretty good condition and has lots of activity when the RDC arrives!



The station in Nanaimo was by far in the worst condition of the ones still standing. Looks like there might be a forthcoming restoration? Nanaimo is the largest city between Victoria and Courtenay, so it was sad to see it in such bad shape.



On the way back (August 13) at Cliffside, we were greeted by some local folks. The occasion was the 122nd anniversary of completion of the line, known locally as the E&N (Esquimalt and Nanaimo). The “rest of the story” is that there is getting to be quite a vocal group of people who want to ensure the survival of the line for use as commuter rail and this greeting was partially to launch a petition drive for supporters of the line.



You can see the rock cairn that commemorates the driving of the golden spike for the line. The greater Victoria area is growing and there are a lot of new housing developments north of the city along the line.



The cab ride was FANTASTIC since we got to experience the 1.8% grade up and down the Malahat. Can't get views like this of the trestles from the side windows!





Back in Victoria, we waved goodbye to the engineer, whose name has unfortunately slipped my mind. He works relief and has been with various BC railroads for many years. He really enjoys the RDC trip and is very proud of the RDCs. In his mind they were way ahead of their time and very durable. The units we rode were built in 1955, according to information that he was told.

