

A Train Trip in Five Hundred Words

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We are about to embark, in five hundred words, on a virtual journey through the Northwestern United States. We are making this excursion in June to capitalize on the extra available daylight hours, and I will cast aside excess adjectives and adverbs for maximum word mileage. All aboard.

The time is eight a.m., and we are seated on Amtrak's California Zephyr leaving Denver, proceeding west through town, to begin our ascent of the Rockies through South Boulder Canyon. In the first fifty miles we will navigate thirty-one tunnels, the last being the six-mile Moffat Tunnel under the Continental Divide. We will exit the Moffat at ten into Winter Park. It was nice of Amtrak to schedule this Colorado part of the Zephyr's journey in the morning because there is much ahead to see.

Years ago, you would hear a rhythmic clickity-clack as the wheels traversed welded joints along the rails. Now tracks are seamless and quiet, but it has taken away part of the romance of trains.

We will glide through beautiful (*essential adjective*) Glenwood Canyon, through wild horse territory, the peach orchards of Palisade and into Grand Junction, where the Gunnison joins the Colorado River. In Ruby Canyon at five p.m. we will enter Utah and shortly get our last sight of the Colorado River. This is when we will begin to realize how breathtakingly (*essential adverb*) the monumental red, nature-carved landscapes (*essential adjectives*) of Utah contrast with colorful Colorado's own spectacular scenery (*more essential adjectives.*)

We will cruise several hundred more miles, reaching Salt Lake City at night. We will make Elko, Nevada by 3 a.m., then Winnemucca, and get into Reno in the morning sunshine. It will have been twenty-four hours since we left Denver, and we will be climbing for six more through Lake Tahoe, the Sierras, and California's Gold Rush region before we get off at Sacramento in the afternoon.

We have a layover in California's state capital, time enough to recover our land legs and eat, before we board Amtrak's Starlight Route at midnight. I'm hoping for moonlit views as we roll our way north through redwood country for much of the night, through Klamath Falls in Oregon, making it to Portland in the afternoon. In Washington, we will pass Olympia, maybe get a glimpse of Mt. Saint Helens, still steaming, and watch Mount Rainier emerge on the horizon. We will pass the Tacoma waterfront before we roll into Seattle, stopping at Kings Street Station just after eight p.m.

Let's get off and stay here for the night. I still have fifty words in my pocket, and if we catch the Amtrak Cascades train at 10:45 tomorrow morning, I will spend them to describe the stunning (*essential adjective*) beauty of the looming (*essential*) peaks, canyons, and rivers of the magnificent (*essential*) North Cascade Range in our four-hour journey to Vancouver, British Columbia. I will use "striking," "splendid," and (*word number four-hundred-ninety-eight*) "glorious."

The End.