

BIG BOY

BACK IN STEAM

TRAINS MAGAZINE SPECIAL EDITION NO. 26-2019

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ON THE COVER: No. 4014 departs Evanston, Wyo., May 13, 2019. Leo de Groot
ABOVE: At East Granger, Wyo., on May 6, 2019. Mike Danneman

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How UP went after an isolated Big Boy in California, towed it almost 1,300 miles, and rebuilt it

Story and photos by Jim Wrinn



Spray-painted plywood signs speak of a sense of humor as well as a recognition of the challenges the UP steam team faced in 2013 when extracting Big Boy No. 4014 from its California home since 1962.

For years, conventional wisdom was that a Union Pacific Big Boy locomotive either could not, should not, or would not be restored to steam. It was too big. Too expensive. No need for it. There was no place to turn it.

It would crush the very roadbed upon which it trod. Its consumption of fuel and water would be animalistic, at best. The list was long and ranged from the probable to the absurd.

But then a strange thing happened. Someone in a position of responsibility took a fresh look at the idea. Instead of accepting conventional wisdom — from know-it-all fans to grizzled railroaders — that an operating Big Boy would be a bad thing, that person gave the prospect an opportunity. And what that person recognized and decided has super-charged UP's steam locomotive public relations with the return of Big Boy No. 4014.

More on that later, but first, we should start with the most basic question of all: How did this happen?

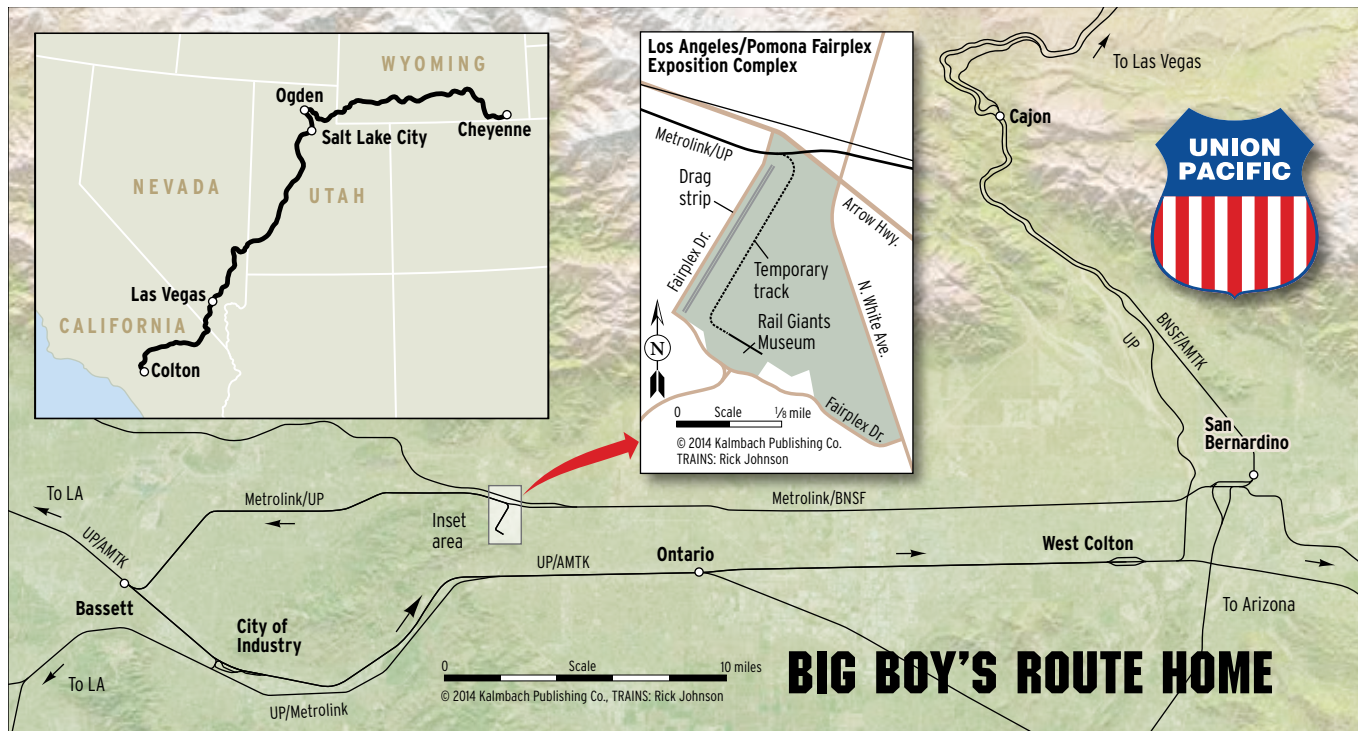
The answer is that about 2011, a West Coast businessman, with a knowledge of and a background in railroading, approached the UP about restoring one of eight surviving Big Boy locomotives. He even offered to pay for the restoration that would obviously run into the millions. Given who it came from, it wasn't a bluff, and the idea caught the interest of executives at UP's headquarters in Omaha, Neb. They put the question to Ed Dickens, who had just taken over command of the company's steam locomotives — its

Heritage Fleet, as UP calls its steam public-relations effort.

"I was approached as to whether this was feasible, and from that conversation, we began our search for a candidate," says Dickens, senior manager of Heritage Operations. He was asked if the steam crew was interested in adding such an engine and if it would be feasible to operate the locomotive in the same service that UP operates its two other steam locomotives. "Knowing the infrastructure of the UP, I felt this was something that could be done," he added in a 2013 interview. "The opportunity is right."

The more he looked into the idea, the more he liked it. Having just changed managers, it would give the program a new and exciting direction. It also would take the company's use of its steam bravado to new heights.

The railroad had run 4-8-4 No. 844 since 1962 and 4-6-6-4 No. 3985 since 1981 as public relations and goodwill ambassadors for its far-flung system across the Western U.S. But the prospect of a legendary Big Boy as part of the program was now a possibility. With this much lead time, there was also the possibility of completing the restoration in time for the 150th anniversary of the first transcontinental railroad in May 2019. Now the questions began to shift. They were not if the railroad should do this but how. Of the eight survivors, scattered from Pennsylvania to Wisconsin and to Texas (see page 94), which one should the railroad go after? Which was mechanically in the best condition? Which politically and practically would be available? Would any organization possessing one of these last giants be willing to relinquish it?





Nov. 13, 2013, will always be known as the day when No. 4014 started down the road to restoration. A front-end loader tied to the tender coupler gently tugs the dead locomotive backward from its display site at the Los Angeles County Fairgrounds and the Rail Giants Museum.



The steam crew checks the position of the No. 1 driver wheel on temporary track as it inches out of its museum berth. Plywood under the ties was installed to keep level on undulating parking lot surface.



Building track in the parking lot of the Los Angeles County Fairgrounds, the UP steam crew fashions a curve for Big Boy No. 4014 to traverse as it makes its way out of the Rail Giants Museum in Pomona, Calif.

“EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE, EVEN THE IMPOSSIBLE” is a quote from the 2019 Disney remake of “Mary Poppins.” It is a line that was appropriate in Wyoming and Utah May 4-9 as Big Boy No. 4014 made its inaugural run from Cheyenne, Wyo., to Ogden, Utah, in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Golden Spike.

With work on Big Boy at a frenzied pace leading up to the trip, 4-8-4 No. 844 did not make a planned solo run to Ogden the week before and instead doubleheaded with the newcomer. Their duet made for an amazing sight as the Big Boy and the Living Legend thrilled spectators.

Thousands of onlookers from across the country and around the world crowded roads and populated every vacant spot along the UP main line following a christening ceremony headlined by UP Chairman, President, and CEO Lance Fritz; Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon; and Cheyenne Mayor Marian Orr. Fritz’s wife Julie smashed a bottle of champagne on the pilot of the locomotive before a crowd of several hundred who paid to see the event at the Cheyenne depot.

Then it was off to climb Sherman Hill via Track 3, the locomotive returning to Big Boy territory for the first time since July 1959. The train overnighted in three towns along the way — Rawlins, Rock Springs, and Evanston — before a triumphant return to Wasatch grade. The two left Rock Springs early on the morning of May 6 to get ahead of track work, and they continuously dodged freights on the UP’s busy Overland Route.

In Ogden, Nos. 4014 and 844 participated in a special ceremony in which they appeared nose-to-nose in the same fashion as the Central Pacific 4-4-0 *Jupiter* and Union Pacific 4-4-0 No. 119 in 1869. With a call on the radio from UP’s Fritz as part of a Thursday morning ceremony, Big Boy No. 4014 eased into the scene with No. 844 in front of a banner that read “#Done.” Fritz, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, U.S. Rep. Bob Bishop, and descendants of UP construction boss Grenville Dodge and Chinese laborers used hammers to tap an oversized golden spike, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869. Big Boy had fulfilled its aim of being the biggest gift to the transcontinental railroad’s 150th anniversary. 🍷



ACROSS SHERMAN HILL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 60 YEARS: MAY 4

1 Dignitaries crowd the platform at the Cheyenne depot on May 4 as Nos. 4014 and 844 hold the westbound main line. In a few minutes, No. 4014 will become the first Big Boy in steam on its original route in 60 years. Two photos, TRAINS: Jim Wrinn

2 UP President Lance Fritz and his wife Julie break a bottle of champagne to christen the engine on May 4, 2019. After the speeches were over, the two locomotives eased ahead to pick up passengers and head across Sherman Hill to Laramie and eventually Rawlins.

3 Engineer Ed Dickens talks to admirers from the gangway of Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014 at Rawlins, Wyo., on May 4, 2019. The script on the side of the cab has changed: The fractions are gone from the cylinder dimensions, as are two letters that once described the stoker type when the engine burned coal. In their place are “DB” for Dickens-Barker, the two steam shop crew members who installed the oil burner. See page 11 for the full breakdown. Mike Danneman





AFTER THE BIG PARTY in Ogden, it was time for Nos. 4014 and 844 to return home to Cheyenne, retracing their 500-mile route. The first challenge: the 65-mile-long Wasatch grade for which the Big Boy locomotive was designed. The grade starts in Ogden and ends at Wahsatch, Utah, just


east of Evanston, Wyo. While No. 4014's May 12 passenger special was nowhere near the tonnage it once pulled in the freight era, it was no less impressive in scenic Weber and Echo canyons.

The train overnights in Evanston and paused in Rock Springs for two days to rest

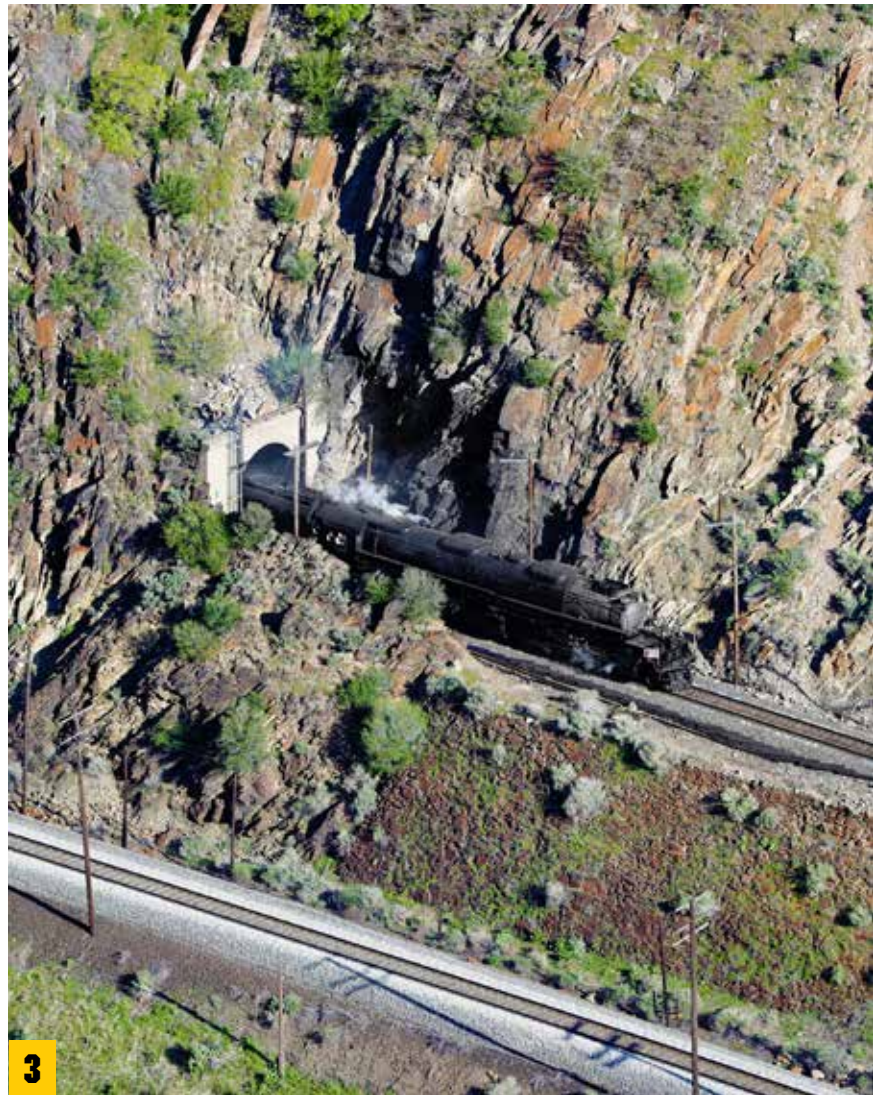
the crew and provide visitors the chance to inspect the engine more closely.

On May 16, the special ran to Rawlins on an uneventful trip until entering the yard, where axles 2 and 3 of No. 4014's second engine dropped between the gauge. Fortunately the train was running slowly and the crew was attentive and stopped the engine quickly. With the help of wood blocking and a local track crew, the engine was railed and on its way in 3 hours.

The following day, No. 4014 worked its way through heavy freight traffic and a tie gang near Walcott, Wyo., and ended up in Laramie for another day of rest.

The grand finale was the eastbound trip across legendary Sherman Hill. The engine pierced the Hermosa Tunnels and dropped downhill on tracks 1 and 2 for the first time. At Cheyenne, the two steam locomotives cut off from their train and headed to the shop for a well-deserved rest with more than 1,000 miles, a tremendous amount of hard work, and millions of smiles and memories, behind them. 





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CLIMBING THE LEGENDARY WASATCH GRADE: MAY 12

1 With a long motorcade hot in pursuit on parallel Interstate 84, Nos. 4014 and 844 thread a bridge over Weber Creek near Morgan, Utah. Sol Tucker

2 The two locomotives drew huge crowds as they made their way out of Ogden and through the confines of Weber Canyon. Justin Franz

Justin Franz

3 No. 4014 darts out of a tunnel in Weber Canyon. Sol Tucker

4 With the abandoned summit tunnel to the left, the doubleheader reaches the summit at Wasatch, Utah, on the 1916 line. The original 1869 grade is on the top of the embankment over the locomotives. The sound here: like that of a jet airliner taking off. TRAINS: Jim Wrinn



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