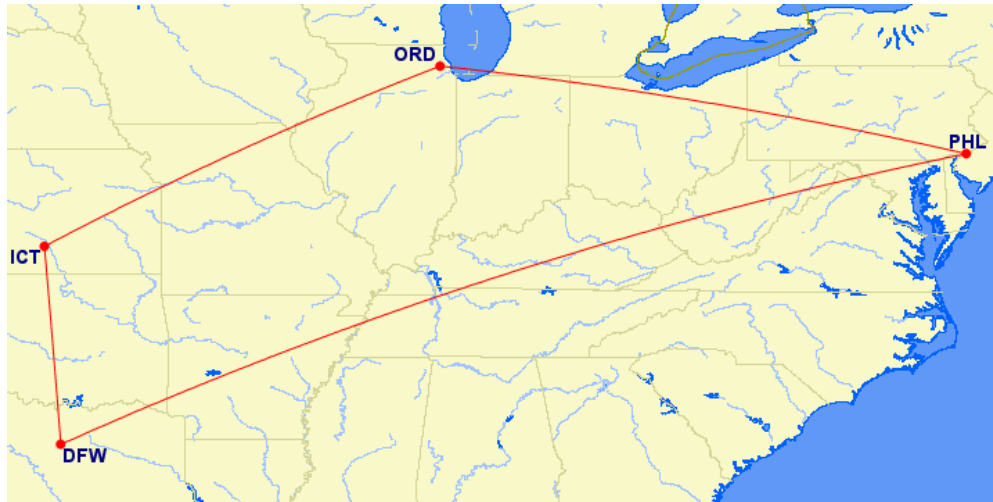


ARKANSAS CITY, KANSAS - APRIL 18 -20, 2025



I was home alone for Holy Week as Carol took Emmet to Florida for her spring break. On Wednesday 4/16, I looked at trainshow.net to see if there were any shows on Saturday 4/19, with Sunday being Easter. There was slim pickings, but a show in Arkansas City, KS was a possibility. I have never been there and didn't even know where it was. Turns out, it is located on the Arkansas River, just above the KS/OK border. But could I get there on Friday and back on Saturday for a reasonable # of airline miles? My first instinct was to fly to Tulsa, but that was over a two-hour drive to Ark City [its nickname] and the return flight schedule was not too good.

So then, I looked at flying to Wichita [ICT] that was about 60 miles north of Ark City and the flights were better and required fewer miles. I put an itinerary on hold and then checked on getting a hotel and a rental car with points as well. Both of those were available so I went backed and booked the flights for 18K miles and \$11.20 in fees. I had good seats on 3 of the 4 flights, the problem being in a middle seat, albeit in the exit row, on the return DFW-PHL segment. Amazingly, I was upgraded on the ICT-DFW return flight even before I actually purchased the ticket. The only downside to the trip was that I would arrive back at PHL at 11PM on Saturday night, possibly too late to take the train home. No problem, as I booked two-days at The Parking Spot South lot at PHL for 900 points. I checked in for the outbound flights on 4/17 and looked to see if there were any better seats for the DFW-PHL segment. I actually continued to look for better seats that evening and the next AM before I left for the airport. In doing that, I also saw I was upgraded for the ORD- ICT on Friday.

Friday – 4/18

I left for the airport about 1130AM and to my surprise, the south end of the BLUE ROUTE was totally backed up. So, it took me an hour to get to the parking lot. However, a shuttle picked me up quickly and I was in PHL by 1245PM. I didn't check my almost empty suitcase and there was only a short line for TSA PRECHK. I stopped in the food court to buy a drink and fries at

Chick-fil-a before heading to my gate. My flight to Chicago [ORD] was on a smaller A 320 and I was #3 for an upgrade so was content with my main cabin extra [MCE] window seat in row 10. The plane left eight minutes early and arrived 19 minutes early in ORD's K concourse. I had a fairly long walk to my connecting flight to ICT at gate G19 at 440PM. While I was awaiting to board, the time passed the [415PM] departure time for my return flight from ICT on Saturday. So, I immediately checked-in for my return flights. I also saw that a window seat in an exit row was now available for the DFW - PHL flight so I switched to that. While the seat map showed the plane was almost totally full, AA was NOT asking for volunteer to be bumped. For a reason that will be explained later, I actually hoped for a bump. The plane to ICT left the ORD gate a few minutes late.

On the second flight, I was reading my monthly Knights of Columbus magazine and it had an article about two knights who responded to the plane crash at DCA airport on 1/29/2025. I had forgot that flight was from ICT and was a CRJ like what I was flying on. This is the view as we approached ICT. The land there was surveyed and divided into sections that each contain one square mile. Eventually, we arrived at 647PM CDT or 9 minutes late. I was quickly thru the terminal and over to get my Enterprise Rental Car. I was in ICT back in Feb. 23 with Carol for

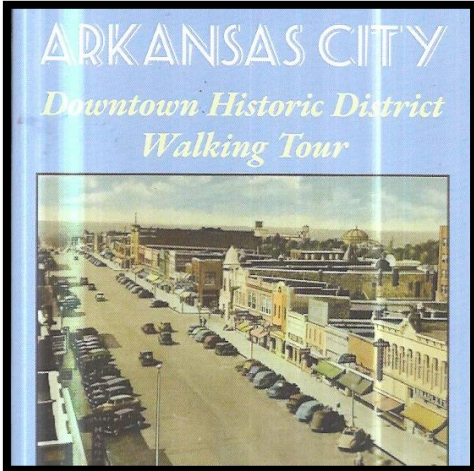


several reasons. Wichita was one of the cities on my 100 largest cities in the US; there was "The Best Train Show in Kansas" then and the Ike's Presidential Museum was close by in Abilene, KS. I stopped for dinner at a Cracker Barrel near the airport.

I had a 55-mile drive to my hotel in Arkansas City, to the south and a bit east of Wichita. I took the I-235 belt loop south of Wichita, then drove on local roads, and then US RT 77 for last part. Just a few miles south of Wichita, the area was totally agricultural. In fact, I even saw a farmer plowing a field at 820PM using a tractor that was equipped with multiple headlights. It started to rain as I drove. US RT 77 makes a loop to the east to avoid Arkansas City but I stayed straight and it became the road my hotel was on. I came to a red light and could see my hotel on the left side. However, the GPS said to make a right turn, then a left turn, go straight and then two left turns and finally a right turn. I ignored all of that and just made a left turn into the Quality Inn. To my surprise it was a very large property that was set-up like a HOLIDOME Hotel from the 1970s, meaning rooms surrounded an indoor pool complex. I was given room #120 but went all the way around the inside and could not find it. Back at the front desk, I was told I needed to go towards an outside rear door. My room was on a rear inside hallway. The place had certainly seen better days and there were only a handful of guests. By the time I was settled in it was almost 10PM CDT. I watched the TV for a bit before going to sleep.

Saturday 4/19

I was up and out of the room by 730AM. I was able to make waffles for breakfast. I was able to make iced tea but had to use my own tea bags as all they had were DECAF TEA. I was in the car heading to the downtown before 8AM to make maximum use of the time before the train show that



started at 9AM. Ark City takes its name from the Arkansas River that forms the city's south border. Its historic district has several streets of brick buildings, dating back to the early 1900s. Just south of there, RR tracks crossed South Summit Street to reach a grain elevator on the west side. I continued south and a short distance later, crossed the Arkansas River that is a major tributary of the Mississippi River. Its headwater is near Leadville, CO and it flows east for 1469 miles thru CO [Royal Gorge], KS, OK and AR



till it reaches the Mississippi River by Beulah MS. A series of lock and dams were built in the 1960s to allow commercial navigation [barges] from the Mississippi River to the Port of Tulsa. I



continued for a few miles on a 70MPH highway to the border with Oklahoma. To my surprise there was nothing at the border except this sign. Had I continued for a few miles, there was an Indian casino. Instead, I turned around and stopped by the river. It looked like you could almost walk across it.



Next, I drove to where US RT 77 looped to the east. I had consulted a 1994 KS State RR Map and saw there were tracks on the east side. In 1994, it was ATSF, but of course now it is BNSF. I saw a RR bridge over the river that had a train of autoracks. I got off at the first exit and headed to where the tracks were and came to this lash-up. BN3166 was built by EMD in 2/81 for ATSF as a GP50; it was derated to 2500 HP by BNSF that now classifies the locomotive as a GP25. BNSF 2788 was built by EMD for the ATSF in 3/79 as a GP39-2. Given that BN and





ATSF merged on 12/31/96, it is amazing to still see this locomotive still in a classic Santa Fe paint scheme. I crossed under the tracks and turned right eventually coming to a trackside building and a small yard. When home, I looked at a ATSF System Timetable for 10/29/89 and saw that Ark City was a division point between the Kansas and Oklahoma Divisions. Judging by the 40 or so cars parked there, it is still a crew change point under BNSF.

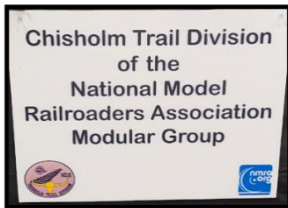
I watched trains there for about 15 minutes. Sitting there was a northbound ballast train that I had actually seen when I was driving on US RT 77. It was stopped probably for a crew change



and then left. The grey device on the side of the hopper just to the left of the pole is a solar panel that provides electricity to open the hatches on its bottom and drop ballast on command. At 8:45AM, I drove towards the show and was amazed that the city's streets were made of brick.



The show was on the west side of Ark City. To get there, I drove thru the campus of Crowley College, a regional community college in this part of KS. This was the 10th annual show and it was sponsored by the Wichita Toy Train Club & Museum that holds another show in Wichita each September. This show was located in the Agri-Business bldg. There were about 40 cars in the parking lot plus several trailers. I entered the building at 9AM not knowing what to expect. Admission was \$6.



Turns out, this was what I would consider a small show with about 50 tables of vendors, [three] museums, Operation Lifesaver and individuals with swap tables, Towards the rear of the building, there were several modular layouts; a hi-rail one from the sponsor, one from the local NMRA division, an S scale one and this very unusual display layout with four scales [O, S, HO, N].



I looked at the modular layouts first and then worked my way pass the various tables. At one of the museum tables, the man there said he liked my hat. I was wearing one from Gateway Rail Services in Madison IL. I asked if he was on the tour last fall [during joint convention of B&O, GM&O + C&O Historical Societies] when the President of Gateway fainted during his presentation to our group. The man said he was the one who caught him as he fell. I was standing about five feet in front of the president [and him] when this happened. What a small world! I looked at each table at least twice. I bought four HO freight cars [one for parts + one for resale], some 3D-printed HO scale loads, a large O scale station kit from Quality Craft Models [I can use the wood for other projects] and a \$3 RRiana grab bag that had at least \$25 worth of paper items in it. At the entrance, there were a free pile and I helped myself to 10 recent Lionel catalogs and a 1954 one from AC Gilbert. I sat down briefly to write down my purchases and then left the show just after 1030AM. I drove back to the yard to see more trains.

First up, was a northbound intermodal train; the first part was double stack, 53' domestic



containers from JB Hunt, BNSF's biggest customer. The rear of the train had containers from FEDEX and AMAZON. Surprisingly, the last ten car or so were TOFC [trailers on flatcar] that you don't see much anymore as the domestic intermodal market has largely switched to containers.

Next up was a southbound grain train. I was surprised that almost all of the covered hoppers



belonged to BNSF. With other RRs, the covered hoppers are usually owned by leasing companies and rented out to shippers.

I left at 1130AM and headed towards Wichita. From my RR map and the drive down, I knew there were several places where the RR tracks were right next to the highway. At noon alongside KS highway 15 I came to this train that was the intermodal one I saw in Ark City.



I passed thru Derby KS where I saw this sign.

Done with trains, it was time for planes! I headed for Spirit AeroSystems. This company is a major supplier of airplane parts to Boeing, Airbus and other companies. Originally, part of Boeing, it was spun off in 2005, but now Boeing is in the process of reacquiring the company. Its facilities are adjacent to

McCormick Air Force Base. Historically the facilities, currently used by Spirit to produce fuselage sections for the Boeing 737 and 787, were the same ones that used to produce the B-29 bomber at the end of WWII, and the B-47 and B-52 bombers during the Cold War. Amazingly, the last B-52H variants, produced in 1962, are still flying and are about to be re-engined so they can fly another 20 years or so. The entire 737 fuselage is produced here and then loaded on special flatcars to be ship by rail to Renton Washington for final assembly. The pieces of the tail



are shipped separately in special SKYBOX cars. It seems the plant was closed for the Easter Holiday and I was able to get this picture from an empty employee parking lot.

Spirit also produces the front section of the 787. These are shipped by air in one of the four Dreamlifters operated by Atlas Air for Boeing. These aircraft are heavily modified 747-400s,



whose internal volume is 3x that of a 747-400 freighter. The rear of the aircraft splits open allowing the fuselage sections to be directly loaded inside. I had seen one of these before in the late 2010s when I toured the Boeing factory in Everett Washington.

At this point, it was starting rain heavily so I went to have lunch. There are BNSF tracks just



west of the Spirit complex and what did I see - the last few cars of the same intermodal train that I had already seen twice that day.

Lunch was here. Freddy's is a burger and shake place where the food is made to order. It is



much like what Steak 'n Shake used to be before its nutjob CEO ruined the company. I didn't know the chain is based in Wichita. The nearest ones to me are in Exton PA and in Burlington Twp. NJ. My plane wasn't until 415PM but it was raining so I decided to skip going to see other railfan spots in Wichita and just head to the airport. I stopped to fill up the rental car at a JUMP STAR that was actually selling 93 octane super premium for \$2.53 @ gallon or 45¢ cheaper per gallon than regular. I returned the rental at 149PM. The rental cost was free with points so I just paid the \$4 Customer Facility Charge and 54¢ in various taxes. I drove 128 miles.

Once in the terminal, I printed out my boarding passes. I had checked-in on line and saw that AA was still not asking for bump volunteers on the DFW- PHL flight. I would have like to check my bag but decided not to. On the upper level of the departure area is a historic display devoted to the Wichita, the **Air Capital of the World**.



Over 300,000 aircraft have been produced here, more than any place in the world. Several aircraft companies such as Cessna, Beechcraft, Learjet, Steerman and Moody were started here and the first three mentioned are still based here. I already mentioned Boeing's Wichita Division that produced 000s of bombers and together with Spirit over 10,000 B-737 fuselages. One display panel said that in 1937 Amelia Earhart talked with Bill Lear, a local *entrepreneur*, who was an early pioneer with radios, about installing an improved radio transmitter in her plane. However, she left on her RTW flight having never installed it. Who knows, maybe if it had been installed, she might have found Howland Island and there never would be the mystery of what happened to her. FYI – several groups are actively searching for her plane using sonar and side scan devices in the area she was presumedly last heard from.

By the historical displays were a large group of family and friends awaiting the return of



members of the Kansas Air National Guard from an overseas deployment.

Eventually, I went thru TSA. There was no one in any of the lines and walked to Gate 6 to await my plane. I used the time to charge my phone and read one of the RR magazines I had with me. While waiting, an Alaska Airlines plane from Seattle landed. I can certainly understand why there might be folks flying between SEA and ICT.

My flight arrived a few minutes late; it is a turnaround flight from DFW. Eventually, we were allowed to board. I was in Group 1. However, when we got to the end of the jetway, they were wheeling out an incoming passenger on oxygen. Someone said he had been in the very back of the CRJ and they missed him. As mentioned previously, I had been upgraded for this flight even before I finalized the reservation. This has NEVER happened to me before. We left a few minutes late and the pilot said because of turbulence there would be no enroute service.

Bummer, I passed on a drink before we took off. However, things settled down about 35 minutes into the flight and I was able to have my Tito 'n tonic. Once again the drink was served prepared in the glass – no little bottles. As we got close to DFW, I could see our location on Google maps as the GPS signal is received on my phone even at altitude. We landed to the south and then held for a while before the CRJ was able to cross the parallel runway.

DFW is yuge and AA is the major carrier operating exclusively from Terminals A, B & C. It also uses Terminal D for arriving int'l and some departing domestic flights. Meanwhile, AA's RJs use Terminal E and its satellite. Unfortunately, my flight arrived at a satellite gate and my flight to PHL was at Gate C8. I had checked the DFW terminal app and it said this was a 20-25 minute connection. However, the flight from ICT arrived at the gate at 551 PM while the flight to Philly was scheduled to start boarding at 615PM. From the satellite, I had to go down two levels and then had a long walk under the tarmac to the regular Terminal E. I am dragging my suitcase but at least the handle works on the one I took for this trip. From there, I had to go up to the SKYLINK TRAIN that connects the five terminals. The train made one stop in E and another in C before I got off. Luckily, C8 was right by where I got off. By the time I got to that gate, they were already boarding group 3. I had no time for a potty stop let alone a stop for some food. I dropped my stuff in seat 16A and ran to the back of the plane to use the bathroom and got back just as folks were boarding near my row.

The plane was scheduled to depart at 645PM but that came and went. A bit later the captain came on the PA and said I guess you're wondering why we still here? They were missing about 20 passengers arriving on other flights and since ours was the last flight to Philly that evening [and no one would be making any connections there], AA decided to hold the plane. Folks dribbled on and eventually we left about 7PM. I had some Easter bread with me to eat but the flight attendant recognized my status and offered me some free food. I took the cheese plate that I have had before. Sitting next to me was a football player from Malvern Prep who was making college visits. He is a kicker and can kick a 50+ yard field goal in high school. He expects to play at the D1 level and hopes to make it to the NFL.

The plane arrived in PHL just before 11PM, just two minutes late but at the far end of terminal B. Once off, I was walking slowly and made my way out of B and across to baggage claim to get a shuttle to The Parking Spot South. A shuttle for its North location was there and a South one came a few minutes later. We made additional stops by D & E, and about 1130PM the shuttle pulled into the parking lot. As we did so, there was a sign saying PREMIUM PARKING LOT DAILY RATE \$35. I was surprised by the amount. I was dropped off right by my car. I put my bags in the back seat and headed to the exit.

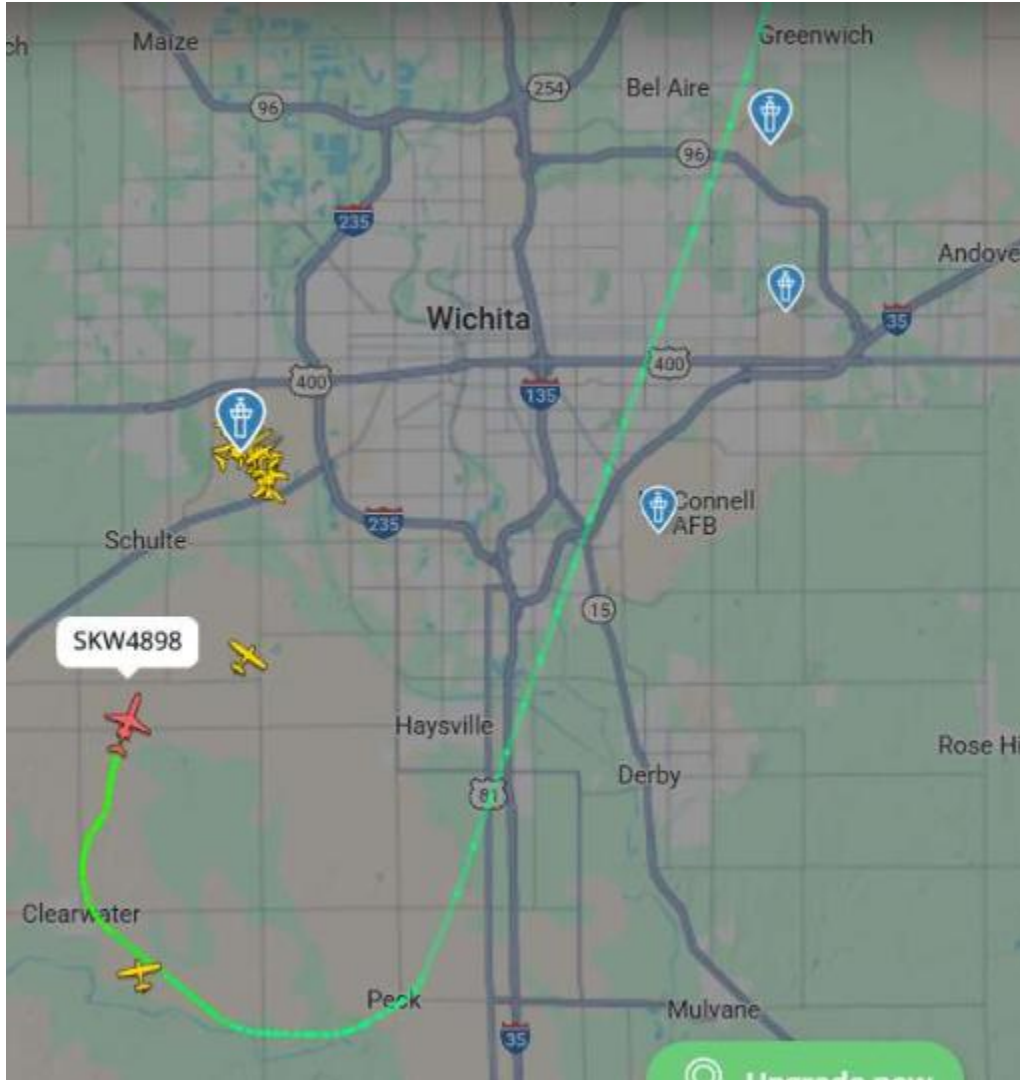
I scanned the QR code on my reservation and the machine said I was in the wrong lot and my discounts did NOT apply so I owed \$79.58. I tried a 2nd time and got the same thing. I called their phone number and they said someone would come let me out. The same shuttle driver who dropped me off eventually came but he couldn't do anything for me. He said I needed to pay the \$79. I said that wasn't going to happen and no one was getting out of the lot until I did. About 20 minutes later, another man showed up who said I was in the wrong lot. I should have been in the A lot across the street. I said there are NO signs saying that or directing me. He asked how did I get in this lot? I said I scanned the QR code. He said it shouldn't have let me in. Exactly I said! He was on the phone talking with someone but they could not figure out how to open the gate for me. He said I needed to pay the \$79 and then contact their customer service. I said that is NOT going to happen. Finally, he had a sensible idea. He told me to back away from the exit. He pulled his car up to the exit and tapped a card that opened the gate. He drove out and told me to quickly follow him. I was out but all of this wasted over an hour. The only good thing about this is that there is NO traffic on the BLUE Route at 1230AM, so I was home in about 40 minutes.

I mentioned several times I was hoping for a bump on the DFW-PHL flight. Why? Well, I was supposed to pick up Carol & Emmet at PHL on Easter Sunday afternoon. I figured that if I got the bump, I would find a cheap hotel near DFW and spend the night there. I had an extra day of clothes with me. I would fly back to PHL arriving there about the same time as them. I even figured out that I could attend Mass on Easter morning in the DFW Chapel. But this didn't happen. Instead, I dealt with the parking lot issue and drove home. I slept on Sunday till 1025AM and went to 1130AM Mass at my own parish. At 2PM, I drove to PHL to pick them up. They arrived a bit late but turns out their luggage arrived on an earlier flight and was in a different terminal so walking there was a big inconvenience. Traffic was pretty bad on I-95 and the bottom of the BLUE ROUTE and we weren't home till about 445PM. We had Easter dinner at the Popeye's, a block from my house. Carol & Emmet left at 607PM and with bad traffic in NJ and on the Merritt Parkway they finally arrived in Franklin CT about 1130PM.

Recapping the trip

As mentioned at the start, the flights were booked with miles so the only cost was AA's \$11.20 fee. The Quality Inn was totally free [but dumpy]. The rental car cost about \$20 for gas and the fees. Yes, I spent money on food, but I probably would have spent about the same if home.

Including admission, I spent \$45 at the train show some of which will certainly be recovered by sales on eBay. I got to add two states to my list for 2025. So far this year, I have flown 19 times for a total of 17,040 miles. However, since these were all with points, nothing counts to status. I have been upgraded on eight of the flights YTD and that is VG considering I am flying for free.



Friend Paul Hobbs is also into trains and planes. I told him of my trip in advance, and using the **flightradar 24 app**, he was about to follow my PHL – ORD – ICT flights. This is just one of the screens he sent me; this shows the actual route of my CRJ as it was about to land in Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport.

I am home till 4/29 when Carol & I are flying to Milwaukee, albeit via CLT, to board a Viking ship for a week-long cruise on the Great Lakes. The cruise ends in Toronto on 5/6. Our daughter Erin has just moved back to Wisconsin from Oregon and will actually pick us up at the MKE airport.