



GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY  
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## THE GREAT NORTHERN EMPIRE BUILDER Part 4: 1955-1959

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*Out of the mountains and into the plains. GN's Empire Builder travels eastward on its way to the Twin Cities and Chicago after passing through the grandeur of the Cascade Range and Glacier National Park. GNRHS Archive photograph.*

A trend toward meeting ever increasing passenger expectations was seen in the service being offered by competitive railroads, and in 1953 the Great Northern announced an order of dome cars for the *Empire Builder*. These dome cars became the last new passenger cars purchased by the Great Northern. Even though the Great Northern could be regarded as the "Johnny-Come-Lately" to the dome competition, when it decided to do so, it did so in grand style. Each of the five *Empire Builders* in service received three dome coaches and one full-length dome lounge car, and they were the only Northwest domeliners to have two differently styled domes in their consists. With these four dome cars, the *Empire Builder* offered 150 dome seats to its passengers, more by quite a few than offered by any of the competing domeliners: the Canadian, the City Of Portland, the North Coast Limited, the Olympian Hiawatha, and the Super Continental.

The coach domes were inaugurated into the consists on May 29, 1955 and the full-length dome lounge cars were placed in service during the following October. The dome coaches and the full-length dome lounge cars were named "Great Domes" by the Great Northern, which described the

1955 *Empire Builder* in an information brochure, as follows:

*"Today's modern fleet of five Great Dome streamliners whisks across the top of the nation daily, offering the utmost in luxurious accommodations at standard fares. Rediscover the joys of train travel. Go Great . . . Go Great Northern's Incomparable Great Dome Empire Builder."*

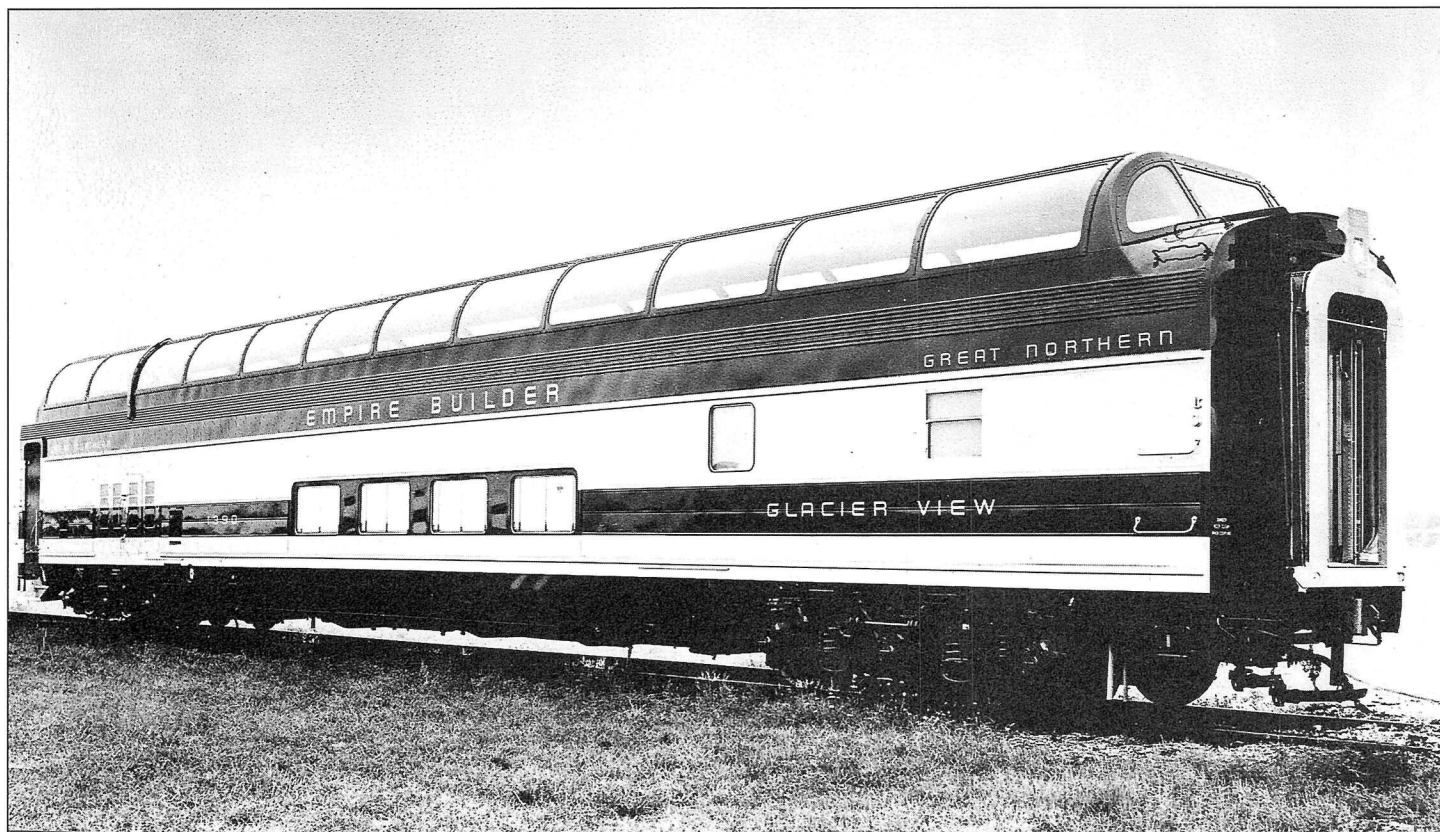
Some authors who have written about this 1955 edition of the *Empire Builder* have ascribed "Great Dome" to the full-length lounge cars only. This implication is incorrect as the Great Northern, from the day they entered service, had named these cars "Great Dome Coaches" and "Great Dome Lounge Cars", and always referred to this latest edition as the "Incomparable Great Dome Empire Builder".

With the inclusion of the full-length Great Dome Lounge Cars, each of the five consists of the *Empire Builder* was assigned the following locomotives and cars. Included are the line numbers assigned to those cars that provided reserved coach seats and sleeping car accommodations. Cars without line numbers (—) did not contain reserved spaces.



A gleaming, brand new, GN Dome Coach, ready to give 46 coach seats and 24 dome seats to expectant passengers. The three domes usually in the consist replaced the 48 seat coaches of the earlier version of the train. The seats were available to coach class passengers. GNRHS Archives.

| EQUIPMENT                                                                                                                                                     | WEST | EAST | EQUIPMENT (cont'd)                                      | WEST | EAST |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|---------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| Four Passenger Fs and<br>Class W or Y Electric Motors, St.Paul<br>-Wenatchee-Skykomish-Seattle                                                                |      |      | Ranch Coffee Shop-Dinette-Lounge<br>Car-Chicago-Seattle | —    | —    |
| Baggage Car: Storage Mail<br>St.Paul to Spokane (Westbound)                                                                                                   | —    | —    | 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Car<br>Chicago-Portland via Spokane    | 11   | 21   |
| Railway Post Office-Storage Mail Car<br>St.Paul-Seattle                                                                                                       | —    | —    | 6-5-2 Sleeping Car<br>Chicago-Portland via Spokane      | 12   | 22   |
| Baggage Car: Storage Mail<br>Chicago to Seattle (Westbound)<br>Seattle to St.Paul (Eastbound)<br>Note: Car did not depart Seattle<br>on Saturdays or Sundays. | —    | —    | 16-4 Sleeping Car<br>Spokane to Seattle (Westbound)     | 33   | —    |
| Baggage-Dormitory Car<br>Chicago-Seattle                                                                                                                      | —    | —    | 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Car<br>Chicago-Seattle                 | 14   | 24   |
| Flat-top 60-Seat Coach<br>Chicago-Seattle                                                                                                                     | 100  | 200  | Dining Car<br>Chicago-Seattle                           | —    | —    |
| Great Dome 46-Seat Coach<br>Chicago-Seattle                                                                                                                   | 101  | 201  | Great Dome Lounge Car<br>Chicago-Seattle                | —    | —    |
| Great Dome 46-Seat Coach<br>Chicago-Seattle                                                                                                                   | 102  | 202  | 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Car<br>Chicago-Seattle                 | 15   | 25   |
| Great Dome 46-Seat Coach<br>Chicago-Portland via Spokane                                                                                                      | 103  | 203  | 6-5-2 Sleeping Car<br>Chicago-Seattle                   | 16   | 26   |
|                                                                                                                                                               |      |      | 6-4-1 Lounge-Observation Car<br>Chicago-Seattle         | 17   | 27   |



*The new full dome car was a massive piece of equipment, weighing in at over 90 tons and riding on six-wheel trucks. The car became the observation and lounge car for first class passengers. There were 32 seats in the lower level lounge, and more in a special upper deck lounge section, with a further group of sofa seats on the upper level, angled to get an easier view of the passing scene. GNRHS Archives photo.*

Because of the increased weight of each consist due to the four Great Domes plus the storage mail cars, four Passenger F locomotives were assigned in order to maintain the westbound schedule of 43 hr. and 50 min. and the eastbound 44 and 1/2 hr. schedules. The westbound *Empire Builder's* schedule was speeded up by one hour and ten minutes in 1955 in order to meet the requirements of the new US Post Office contracts. These had the 1955 *Empire Builder* carrying priority storage mail westbound in two streamlined baggage cars in addition to the working RPO-storage mail car. Within a year the Passenger Fs were assigned between St. Paul and Seattle when the Electrified District between Wenatchee and Skykomish was discontinued on July 31, 1956. The Passenger Fs operated westbound through to Seattle from St. Paul. On the eastbound trip they were changed out at Havre where each set received major servicing by the Havre Diesel Shops. During the eastbound Havre stop passengers and employees who were Passenger F-unit fans enjoyed the action as the incoming set was cut off and proceeded to the shops while the newly serviced set backed down and coupled up for its trip to St. Paul.

As indicated above, one storage mail car was inserted in the westbound consist of the *Empire Builder* in St. Paul for its trip to Spokane. This car came from Chicago via Milwaukee in the Milwaukee Road's Morning Hiawatha, train 5. It was always a Great Northern streamlined baggage car so that the *Empire Builder's* EB colors and appearance were maintained when it joined the westbound streamliner. The Seattle to St. Paul storage mail car was not in the eastbound consist of the *Empire Builder* leaving Seattle on Saturdays and Sundays, and the mail which was handled the other days did not have the priority status of that handled in the westbound Chicago to Seattle and St. Paul to Spokane storage mail cars.

Notice also that the RPO-storage mail car was assigned between St. Paul and Seattle in both directions. The Burlington Route operated its own stainless-steel RPO-storage mail car along with its own E Series diesel locomotives in both directions between Chicago and St. Paul. This was done in order to provide more time in St. Paul for the handling of mail by the RPO crew assigned between St. Paul and Minot. US Mail was, and had always been, important on the Great Northern, and the storage mail cars plus the RPO-storage mail car added considerable revenue that offset passenger operation losses the *Empire Builder*, despite the Great Dome cars, was beginning to experience.

The three Great Dome Coaches replaced the 48-seat flat-top coaches in each consist as of May 29, 1955. Each Great Dome Coach had 46 "Day-Nite Sleepy Hollow" reclining seats on the main level divided by the dome section into an 18-seat forward section and a 28-seat rear section. All 46 seats on the main level were reserved and individually assigned in advance. The upstairs dome area had 24 lounge-type seats that were not reserved, but were designed for exceptional sight-seeing by the coach passengers. This all-glass penthouse provided unexcelled viewing of the passing scenery in all directions. The men's and women's very large dressing rooms were located below this dome area.

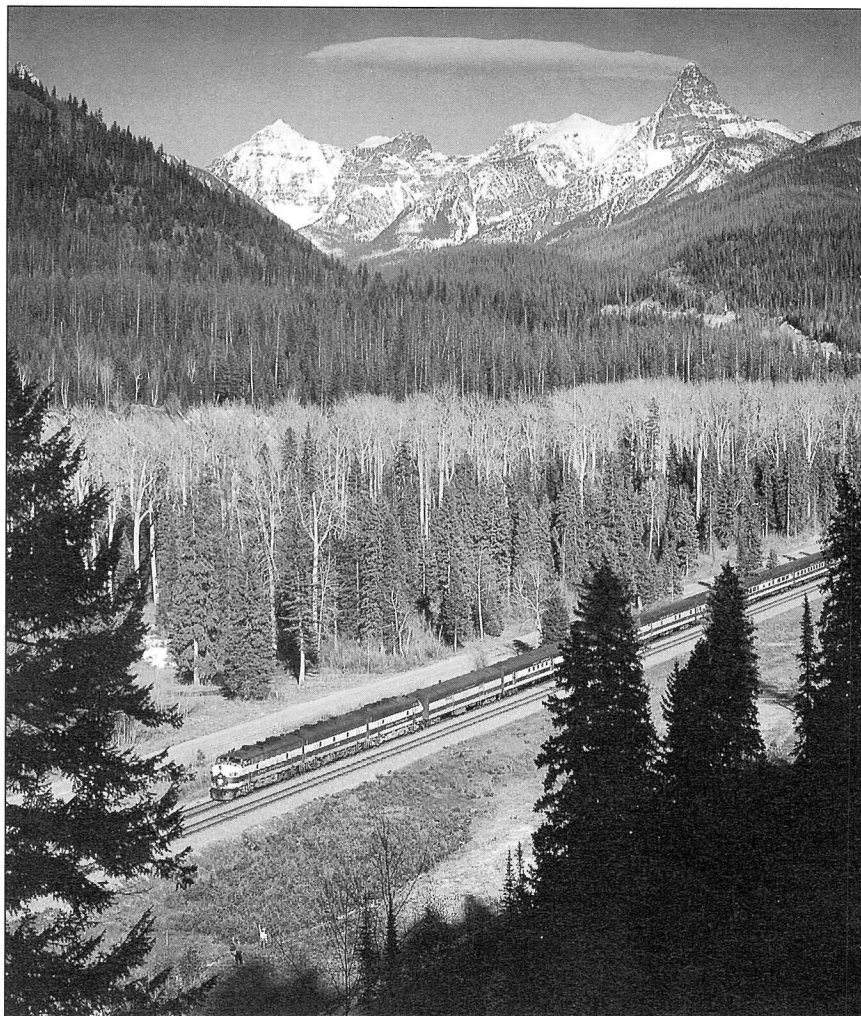
The interior decor of the Great Dome coaches was also beautiful and comfortable. Brilliant colors and designs had been adapted from the art of the Pacific northwest Native American nations. This art was presented as inlaid murals on the interior walls of each main floor section, and the drapes along side the Venetian-blind windows carried this art in its fabric. The coach seats themselves were very comfortable, and included leg-rests to create sleeping positions during night travel hours.

The Great Dome Lounge cars, named in the View Series, were very beautiful cars with an interior decor that was startling to a first-time viewer. The upstairs full-length dome area provided 57 sofa seats angled for better viewing and 21 lounge seats in the Top Deck Lounge that was located at the rear of the dome area. One very pleasant way to enjoy the passing scenery was to order a refreshment from the car's attendant and watch the view in the Top Deck Lounge. The table tops had indirect lighting that softly illuminated their inlaid designs. Even at night with the main lights out, this area was an enjoyable spot to watch the trip's miles pass by in the moonlight, with lots of stars visible overhead and the green signals changing to red as the *Empire Builder* rushed past.

The Lower Level Club-Lounge of the Great Dome Lounge Car provided an informal Western atmosphere with a beverage bar and 32 sofa and lounge seats at tables plus a writing desk and chair. The beautiful decor included multi-colored carvings and etched glass totem pole panels derived from Pacific northwest Native American art. This Club-Lounge was the place to be to enjoy a pre-dinner cocktail, and it was very popular with business travelers as well as vacationers. Other than wine with dinner, the dining car did not serve alcoholic beverages so that the dinner reservation system was not hampered by guests who lingered. With the Great Dome Lounge Car right behind the dining car, sleeping car passengers had their pre-dinner cocktails and after-dinner cordials in the Lower Level Club-Lounge or the Top Deck Lounge.

Without a doubt, the best place for viewing the sights was in one of the Great Domes as the *Empire Builder* hustled along the Mississippi River Palisades, cruised through the Rocky Mountains and Glacier National Park, and snaked its way along Puget Sound between Everett and Seattle. The Great Domes were also excellent places to observe Great Northern and Burlington Route train operations. Passengers were always fascinated with the signal lights changing and with the *Empire Builder* meeting or overlapping freight trains in the sidings as it raced along on single-tracked main line or passing, at speed, opposing passenger and freight trains on double track.

Other consist changes were made when the Great Domes came. The Mountain Series observation cars and one of the Chicago-Seattle Pass Series 6-5-2 sleeping cars were replaced by the Great Dome Lounge Cars and the Coulee Series six roomette-four double bedroom-one compartment-lounge-observation cars. The Coulee Series 6-4-1 lounge-observation cars were remod-

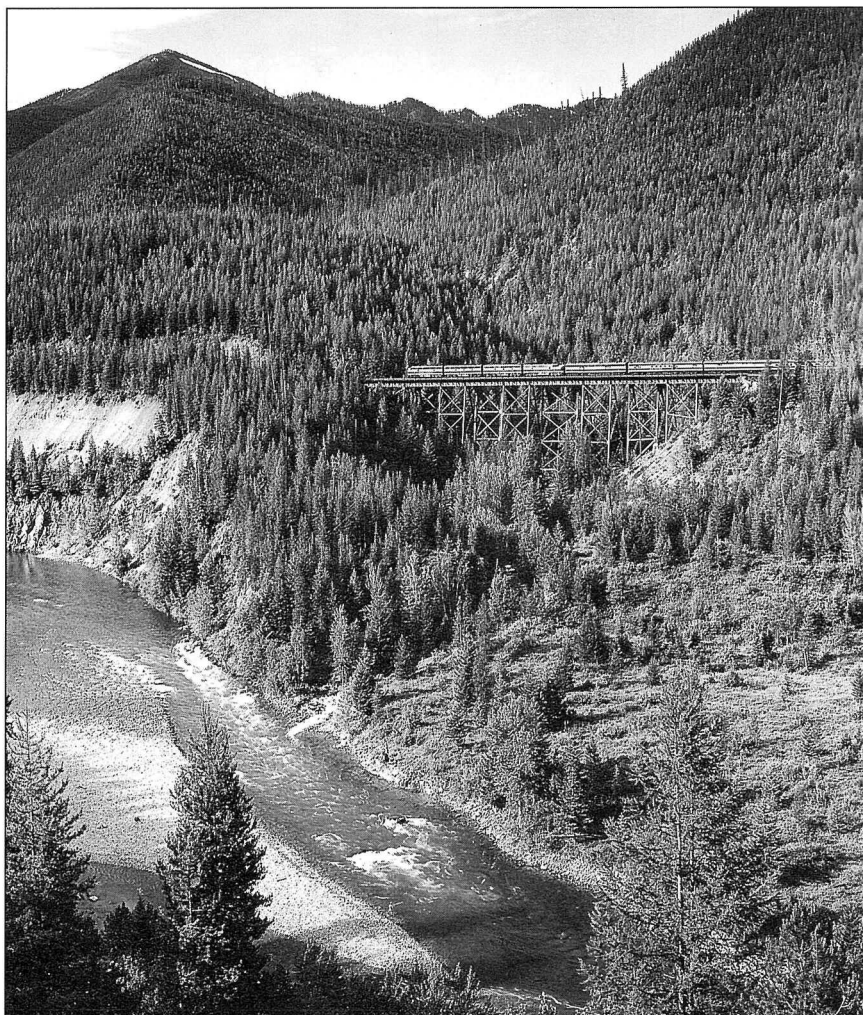


*This is the type of scenery which could be enjoyed in comfort from the new domes of the 1955 Empire Builder. The GN publicized this new travel amenity with relish.*

eled 1947-edition River Series two double bedroom-one drawing room-buffet-lounge-observation cars that retained their equipment car numbers. This remodeling took place during the 1955 summer months. The floor plan was somewhat unorthodox in that starting from the vestibule end of the car one found the existing porter's room, the rear brakeman (flagman) seat, and the two existing double bedrooms, followed by a new double bedroom, a new compartment, and a second new double bedroom. Then came the six new roomettes, three on each side of the car, and the hallway in between that opened up into the lounge. This small room had a lounge chair in each corner, a four-seat diagonal table arrangement in the center, and a three-person sofa that faced backward toward the observation windows and rear door. This door carried the lighted square *Empire Builder* tail sign on its outside lower panel.

Many appraised the 1955 *Empire Builder* with its 150 non-reserved dome seats, distinctive Ranch Car, exquisite dining car, unique Great Dome Lounge Car and Great Dome Coaches, and variety of sleeping car accommodations as "the most beautiful passenger train in the nation!" When "The Incomparable Great Dome Empire Builder" was compared to the competition, even though its arrival on the scene was tardy, it is easy to understand the Great Northern's contention that its *Empire Builder* was still number one and incomparable.

With the introduction of the Great Dome Coaches on the *Empire Builder* in 1955 the revenue reserved coach capacity was reduced to 192 passengers. The revenue sleeping car accommodations capacity with the inclusion of the Coulee Series 6-4-1 observation car in place of a Pass Series 6-5-2 sleeping car was also revised to 12 lower berths, 12 upper berths, 19 duplex roomettes, 18 roomettes, 23 double bedrooms, and eight compartments. This sleeping car accommodations capacity did not include the Spokane to Seattle 16 duplex roomettes and four double bedrooms. Duplex Roomettes #2 and #3 in Lines



Across the page, the *Empire Builder* is travelling through Marias Pass, and above it is shown travelling through the forests and superb views along the Flathead River. GNRHS photo.

15 and 25 were assigned to the Pullman Conductor and the Traveling Passenger Representative, and they were not sold as revenue space.

The five consists of the 1955 Incomparable Great Dome *Empire Builder* were drawn from the following pool of cars that also included the protection cars:

|                                           |                       |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Baggage Cars: Storage Mail                | 262-276               |
| Railway Post Office-Storage Mail Cars     | 37-42                 |
| Baggage-Dormitory Cars                    | 1200-1205             |
| Flat-top 60-Seat Coaches                  | 1209-1214             |
| Great Dome 46-Seat Coaches                | 1320-1335             |
| Ranch Coffee Shop-Dinette-<br>Lounge Cars | 1240-1245             |
| Dining Cars                               | 1250-1255             |
| Great Dome Lounge Cars                    | 1390-1395             |
| 1390 Glacier View                         | 1393 Lake View        |
| 1391 Ocean View                           | 1394 Prairie View     |
| 1392 Mountain View                        | 1395 River View       |
| 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Cars                     | 1260-1274<br>and 702  |
| 6-5-2 Sleeping Cars                       | 1370-1384<br>and 701  |
| 6-4-1 Lounge-Observation Cars             | 1190-1194<br>and 1197 |
| 1190 Choteau Coulee                       | 1193 Rocky Coulee     |
| 1191 Twelve Mile Coulee                   | 1194 Trail Coulee     |
| 1192 Corral Coulee                        | 1197 Grand Coulee     |

All of the new and rebuilt cars that were added to the 1955 *Empire Builder* carried EB colors and had the train name centered on each letterboard, located under each car's roof line and above the windows. "Great Northern", "CB&Q", or "SP&S Ry. Co." appeared in smaller letters at each end of the letterboard, depending upon which railway company owned the car.

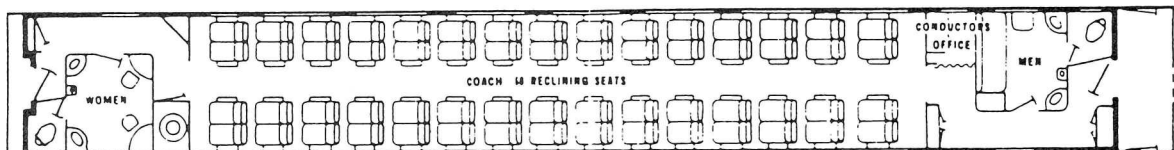
Of the new and rebuilt cars that were added to the consists of the 1955 *Empire Builder*, the Burlington Route owned Great Dome Coaches Nos. 1333-1335, Great Dome Lounge Car No. 1395, and Coulee Series 6-4-1 observation car No. 1194, and the SP&S owned Great Dome Coach No. 1332. Refer to Reference Sheet No. 209 for the cars that came from the 1951 *Empire Builder* for the railroad which owned them.

Each View Series and Coulee Series car had its name centered below the windows, and all of the new and rebuilt cars had their equipment car numbers at each end below the windows. The Spokane to Seattle 16-4 Glacier Series sleeping car came from the Western Star's assigned car pool, and these cars were rotated between transcontinental and Spokane-Seattle assignments on a defined maintenance schedule. Effective with the September 14, 1958 timetable, this car was not in the westbound *Empire Builder*'s consist leaving Spokane on Saturday nights.

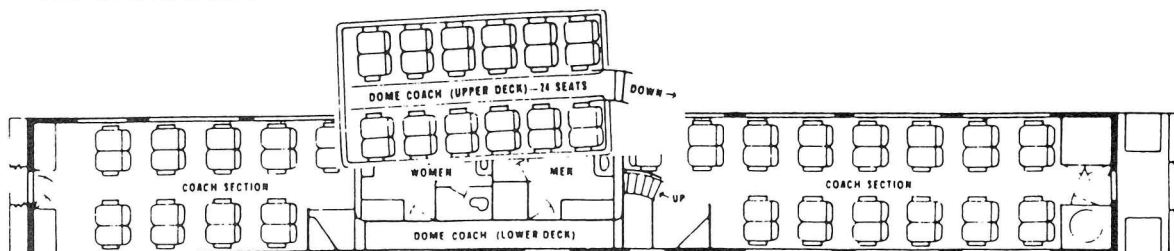
Because of lower traffic projections during the winter travel season, the Great Northern reduced each consist of the 1955 *Empire Builder* by one Great Dome Coach and one sleeping car during the 1955-1956 and the 1956-1957 winter months, and removed a second sleeping car during the 1957-1958 and the 1958-1959 winters. In addition to minimum vacation travel between October and May, except for the Christmas holiday period, the *Empire Builder* was beginning to feel the impact of transcontinental jet airplane business travel.

Of course, the use of the private automobile continued to grow as the federal highways were improved, developing eventually into the beginnings of the Interstate Highway System by the end of the decade.

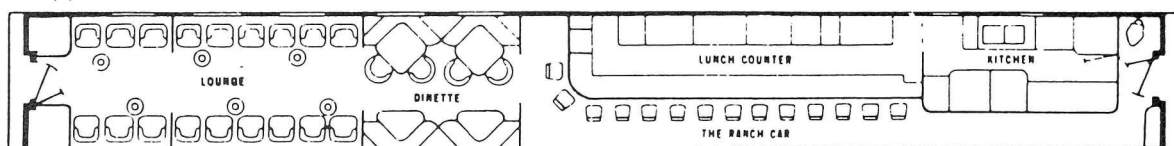
In order to facilitate Pullman on-train and other operations, the winter season consist of the *Empire Builder* was rearranged. The consist listed over the page was in operation for the 1958 and 1959 winter travel season.



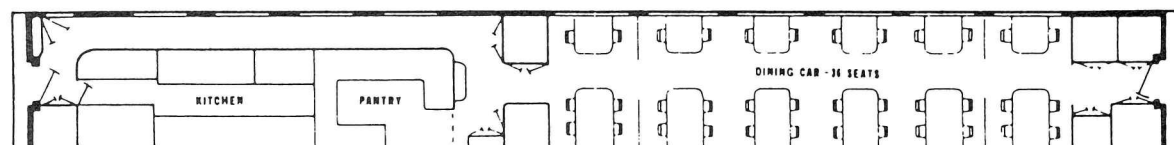
60-seat coach for passengers traveling between intermediate stations. Seats are reclining, have individual foot rests. All seats are reserved.



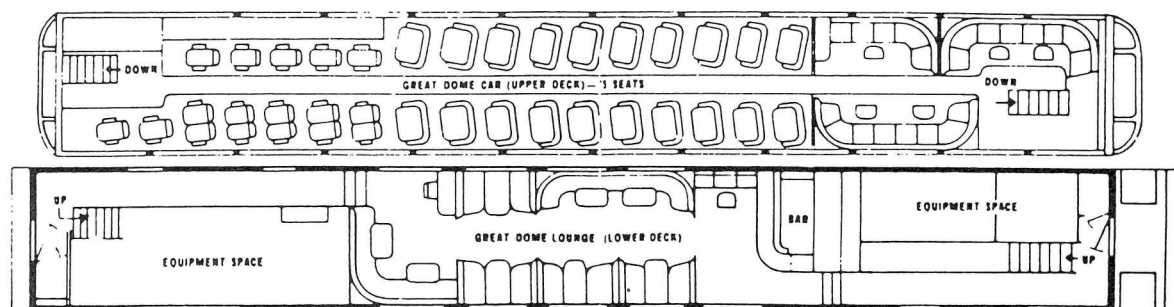
Great Dome coaches each have 46 reserved reclining leg-rest seats on the lower level and 24 unreserved upper level seats. They have commodious luggage racks as well as spacious dressing rooms.



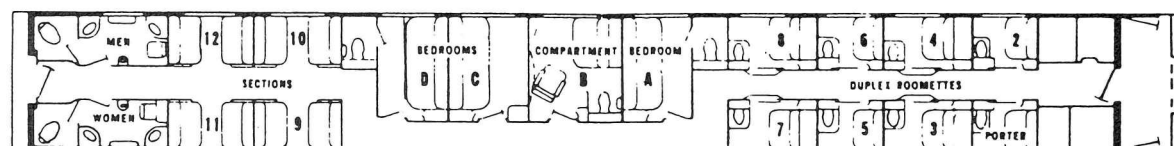
The **Ranch**, unique coffee shop-lounge car in Western decor, seats 14 at the counter, 12 in the dinette and 18 in the lounge section.



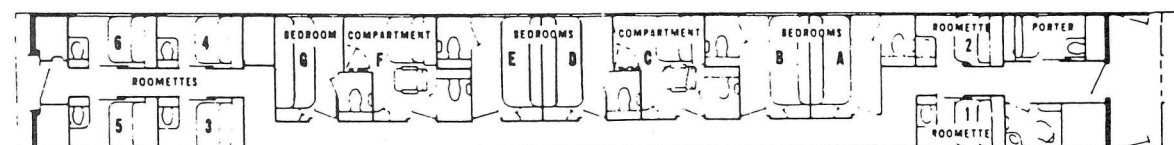
The Dining car accommodates 36 at each sitting. Glass partitions at either end of the dining area form a semi-private alcove. Evening dinner is by reservation.



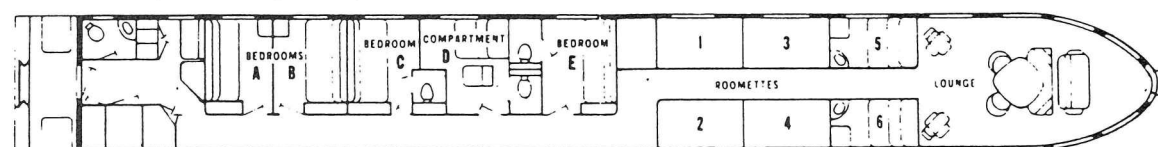
The full-length Great Dome-Lounge for Pullman passengers has 75 top-deck seats, angled for easy viewing. The superbly appointed lounge on the lower deck is a rendezvous for fun and refreshments.



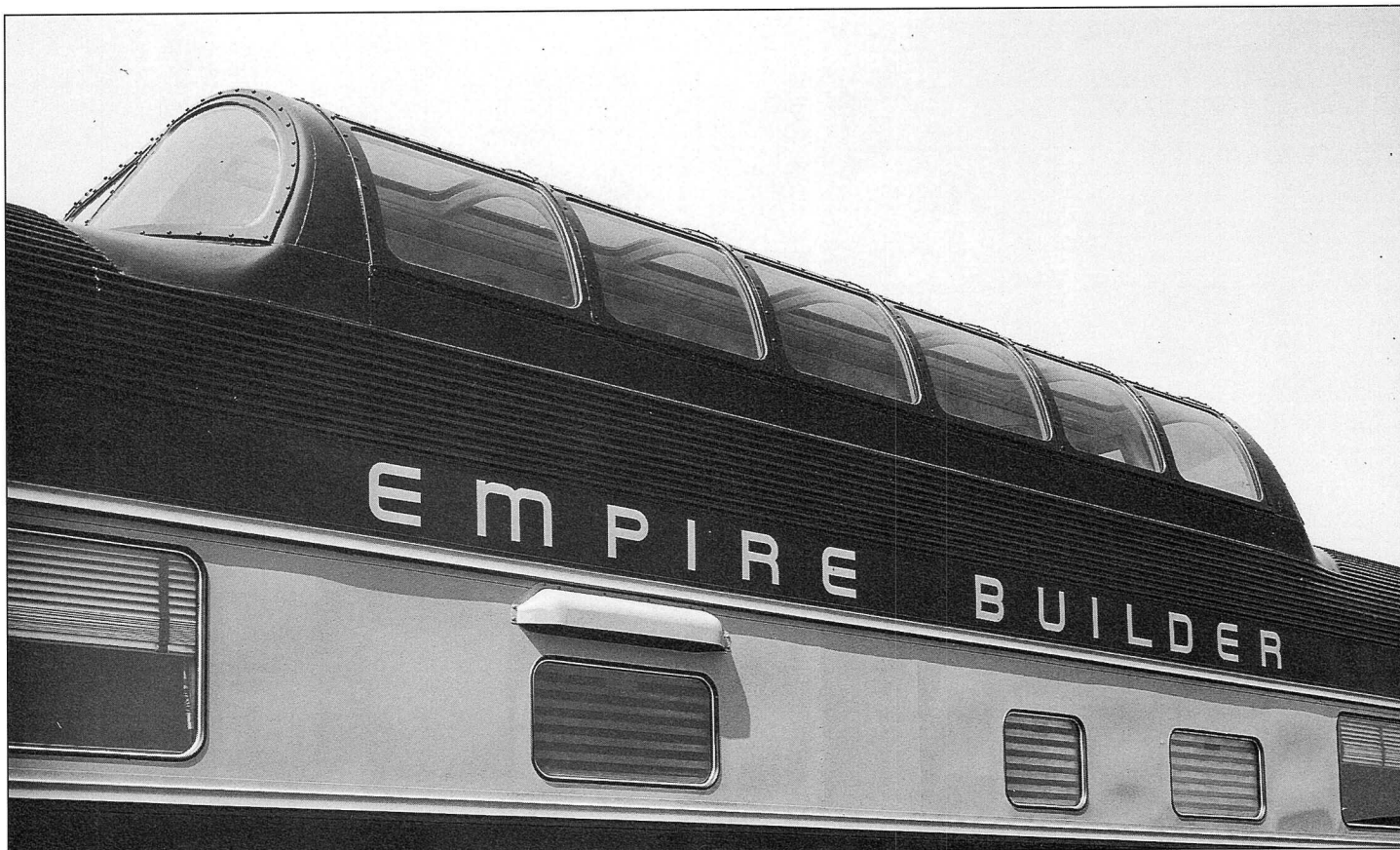
This Pullman car has 4 upper and lower berths, 7 duplex-roomettes, 3 double bedrooms and one compartment. The compartment and a bedroom may be combined into a suite.



Six roomettes, 5 double bedrooms and 2 compartments comprise each of these Pullman cars. Suites can be created by combining an adjoining compartment and bedroom.



The Pullman-Lounge-Observation car provides 6 roomettes, 4 double bedrooms and one compartment.



*A close up of the construction of the coach dome, with its curved windows. The glass was tinted, and the GN took special pains to inform its passengers of the correct method of compensating exposure and color correction for good photographic results. A special brochure with technical discussions and correct filters and type of color film to use was available for all passengers.*



*The usual configuration of three dome coaches coupled together created an impressive looking train, and indeed the GN promoted that its new edition of the Empire Builder carried more dome seats than any other train of that time. Photo from GNRHS Archives.*

| EQUIPMENT                                                 | WEST | EAST |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| Three Passenger Fs                                        |      |      |
| St.Paul to Seattle (Westbound)                            |      |      |
| Seattle to Havre and Havre to St.Paul (Eastbound)         |      |      |
| Baggage Car: Storage Mail                                 |      |      |
| St.Paul to Spokane (Westbound)                            | —    | —    |
| Railway Post Office-Storage Mail Car                      |      |      |
| St.Paul-Seattle                                           | —    | —    |
| Baggage Car: Storage Mail                                 |      |      |
| Chicago to Seattle (Westbound)                            |      |      |
| Seattle to St.Paul (Eastbound)                            | —    | —    |
| Note: Car did not depart Seattle on Saturdays or Sundays. |      |      |
| Baggage-Dormitory Car                                     |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | —    | —    |
| Flat-top 60-Seat Coach                                    |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | 100  | 200  |
| Great Dome 46-Seat Coach                                  |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | 102  | 202  |
| Great Dome 46-Seat Coach                                  |      |      |
| Chicago-Portland via Spokane                              | 103  | 203  |
| Ranch Coffee Shop-Dinette-Lounge Car                      |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | —    | —    |
| 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Car (See Note)                           |      |      |
| Chicago-Portland via Spokane                              | 311  | 321  |
| 16-4 Sleeping Car                                         |      |      |
| Spokane to Seattle (Westbound)                            | 33   | —    |
| Note: This car did not depart Spokane on Saturday nights. |      |      |
| 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Car                                      |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | 315  | 325  |
| Dining Car                                                |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | —    | —    |
| Great Dome Lounge Car                                     |      |      |
| Chicago Seattle                                           | —    | —    |
| 6-5-2 Sleeping Car                                        |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | 316  | 326  |
| 6-4-1 Lounge-Observation Car                              |      |      |
| Chicago-Seattle                                           | 317  | 327  |

NOTE: The Great Northern alternated Lines 311 and 321, a 4-7-3-1 sleeping car, with Lines 312 and 322, a 6-5-2 sleeping car, depending upon the winter travel season being considered between 1955-1956 and 1959-1960.

During the 1955-1956 winter season the Great Northern decided to replace the Ranch Car in each consist with the remodeled Western Star's coffee shop-dinette-dormitory cars, Nos. 1140-1144 and 1148. This was done in order to provide coach and sleeping car passengers with lounge as

well as meal service between Williston and Seattle on the consolidated Western Star-Fast Mail during the winter season. The Western Star's dining car and Mountain Series buffet-lounge-observation car were in the consist between St.Paul and Williston only in order to facilitate the consolidation west of Williston. However, *Empire Builder* coach passengers sent a barrage of letters to the Great Northern complaining about the loss of the Ranch Car. Suffice it to say that, following the 1955-1956 winter season, the Ranch Car was returned to the *Empire Builder's* consists, and it was not removed again during the winter season until the Big Sky Blue Era that began in 1967.

Effective with the April 29, 1956 timetable, the *Empire Builder's* train numbers were changed to trains 31 and 32 for its Chicago-Seattle runs on the Great Northern and the Burlington Route. All of the through sleeping car line numbers had the digit "3" added as shown in the table above in the 1958-1959 winter season consist.

During the 1959-1960 winter season the assigned consist reflected the decreasing passenger traffic pressures upon the *Empire Builder*. For the first time since its 1929 inauguration, the *Empire Builder* did not have an observation car. Lines 317 and 327 were withdrawn on February 14, 1960, and the consist was reduced to three coaches and three sleeping cars. Along with the observation car, the famous lighted square *Empire Builder* tail sign also disappeared. Only a portable red oscillating Mars light appeared on the tail gate of the Chicago-Seattle 6-5-2 sleeping car, Lines 316 and 326. The Coulee Series observation cars continued to be in the *Empire Builder's* consists during the summer travel season until 1967, however.

As the *Empire Builder* completed service during the decade of the 1950's, there were regressive trends emerging in the seasonal traffic statistics that trains 31 and 32 were accumulating. Operating costs were also increasing at a precipitous rate despite winter season on-train crew reductions along with car removals from the five consists. It was also difficult to project a positive future for the *Empire Builder* during the 1960's. (The *Empire Builder's* service during the decade of the 1960's leading up to the Burlington Northern Lines merger will be covered in a future Reference Sheet.)

Great Northern modelers have expressed frustration over the years with their attempts to model the "Incomparable Great Dome Empire Builder." Modeling it accurately as a transcontinental streamliner results in an extremely long train that overwhelms most modelers' layouts. However, if the modeler is willing to fantasize a bit, it is possible to construct a shorter *Empire Builder* that is historically accurate.

Assume that the layout centers in Spokane during the 1955-1959 period, and it is modeling the winter travel season. The Great Northern *Empire Builder's* westbound 12-car winter season consist was as follows between Spokane and Seattle during that period:

Three Passenger Fs  
St.Paul-Seattle Railway Post Office-Storage Mail  
Chicago to Seattle Storage Mail Car  
Chicago-Seattle Baggage-Dormitory Car  
Chicago-Seattle Flat-top 60-seat Coach  
Chicago-Seattle Great Dome Coach  
Chicago-Seattle Ranch Car  
Spokane to Seattle 16-4 Sleeping Car  
Chicago-Seattle 4-7-3-1 Sleeping Car  
Chicago-Seattle Dining Car



While there are many photographs of the exterior of passenger cars, very few have been published showing the Entry Vestibule of a car. This is what the passenger saw entraining a GN streamliner. A very clean and update design is shown in this GN Archives photograph.

Chicago-Seattle Great Dome Lounge Car  
 Chicago-Seattle 6-5-2 Sleeping Car  
 Chicago-Seattle 6-4-1 Lounge-Observation Car

This westbound consist contained every type of car assigned to the 1955 *Empire Builder* and is historically accurate as the winter season consist from Spokane to Seattle. The eastbound consist was 10 cars long between Seattle and Spokane when operated on a Saturday or Sunday. Then the consist did not have the Seattle to St.Paul storage mail car or the 16-4 sleeping car.

In order to further historical accuracy, a modeler can

create the SP&S Streamliner, and operate it on this fantasy Spokane layout as a companion to the *Empire Builder*. The Streamliner's winter season seven-car Spokane-Portland consist during the 1955-1959 period included the following cars:

SP&S E7 and F Series Diesel Locomotives  
 SP&S Spokane-Portland RPO-Storage Mail Car (Note 1)  
 SP&S Spokane-Portland Baggage-Dormitory Car  
 SP&S Spokane-Portland Coach  
*Empire Builder* Chicago to Portland Great Dome Coach  
 SP&S Spokane-Portland Dining Car  
*Empire Builder* Chicago-Portland Sleeping Car (Note 2)  
 SP&S Spokane-Portland 6-3 Buffet-Lounge (Note 3)

Note 1: A considerable amount of mail was transloaded from and to the *Empire Builder*, and to and from the Streamliner, during the Spokane station dwell time while the switching activities were taking place.

Note 2: The Great Northern assigned either a 4-7-3-1 or a 6-5-2 sleeping car to Chicago-Portland service depending upon which winter season between 1955-1956 and 1959-1960 is selected.

Note 3: The SP&S owned two 6-3 buffet-lounge cars, one which was available for westbound passengers to board in Spokane at 9:30PM and the other on the arriving eastbound consist, which laid over until the next night.

Note 4: By 1955 all SP&S passenger locomotives and cars were painted in SP&S corporate colors.

Of course, the Streamliner also had the winter season North Coast Limited's two Chicago-Portland cars in its consist between Pasco and Portland. However, the modeler can designate that the layout encompasses the Spokane area only.

To add accuracy to the Spokane terminal facilities, the modeler could have the *Empire Builder*'s St.Paul to Spokane storage mail car already set out and unloading at Spokane GN Station's mail terminal building that was adjacent to the passenger station. Then the modeler can account for all of the 14 cars that the westbound winter season *Empire Builder* had in its consist arriving Spokane and the 12 cars that it had

leaving Spokane eastbound Saturday and Sunday nights during winter season operations. The eastbound consist contained 13 cars including the Seattle to St. Paul storage mail car on the other nights.

The inclusion of the consolidated Western Star-Fast Mail winter season consists into this Spokane layout presents problems of train length also. However, the modeler might consider the operating diorama approach. The layout could model that short night time frame of about one and a half-hours when the winter season eastbound and westbound *Empire Builder* and the Streamliner arrived in Spokane, and then departed from Spokane after considerable transloading of mail and complex switching activities by the two Spokane GN Passenger Station switch engines. They should also be included, working the head-end and the rear of each train, in this operating diorama.

The ideas expressed above formulate a schematic that a modeler might use as the beginning for modeling the Great Dome *Empire Builder*. It provides the basis for the modeler's ingenuity and creativity as the diorama (layout) emerges into its winter season operational phases with shorter, but still accurate train consists in and around a fantasy terminal area named Spokane.

In summary we have seen how the Great Northern management sought to respond, not only to the pressures of competition, but also to the wishes and demands of their customers - the living, paying passengers - by improving service on the great *Empire Builder* trains. Budget costs were always a big consideration, but the Great Northern was, to the end, committed to serving the passenger in as grand a style as possible.

After all, the Great Northern slogan was always "If you want to GO GREAT, then you GO GREAT NORTHERN".

## It's the Streamlined **EMPIRE BUILDER'S** birthday ...but how many candles for the cake - 2, 6 or 10?

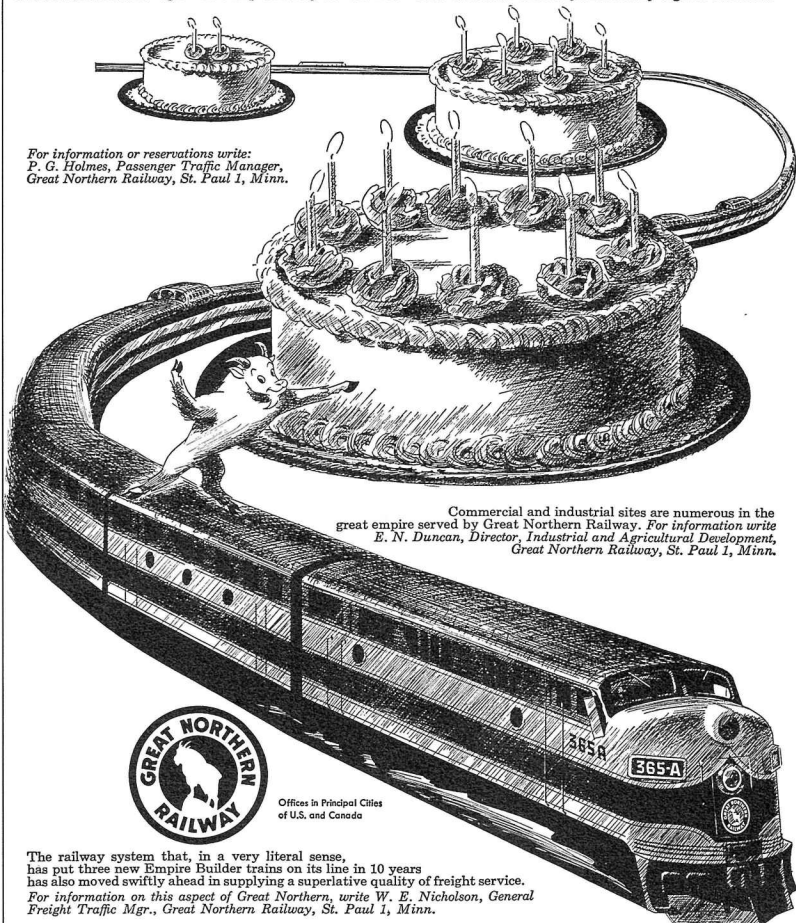
Great Northern's *Empire Builder*—the incomparable streamliner that speeds each day, each way between Chicago and Seattle-Portland—will be 10 years old on February 23.

But, new as it was in 1947 the *Empire Builder* was fully re-equipped from baggage car to observation lounge in 1951 and in 1955 again was improved by addition of

Great Dome cars for coach and Pullman passengers—the third modernization of this world famous train in 8 years.

That has been the tempo of Great Northern Railway's progress in providing the ultimate in fast, comfortable, passenger service across the scenic top of the nation.

Happy Birthday, *Empire Builder*—happy second, sixth and tenth birthday! It is truly a great occasion!



Any excuse to get the GN image in front of the public. A prolific GN Public Relations Department at work again, certainly catching the attention of readers.



The attractive lower lounge of the dome coach



The spacious viewing and seating area of the dome coach.



*The lower lounge area of the dome coach featured reclining seats with adjustable leg rests. The decorating was subdued and modern, and Indian Art was prominently displayed.*



*The lower lounge level of the Great Dome held the bar and entertainment facilities. There was a small lounge on the upper deck as well as sofa seating. Again Indian Art was prominent.*



*Looking the other direction from the bar area in the lower lounge of the Great Dome.*



*The Ranch Car from the earlier version of the Empire Builder was continued in the 1955 version, and was always a popular attraction. Besides serving inexpensive meals, the car provided a lounge section decorated in Western ranch style.*



*Company artists provided much advertising material extolling the virtues of the new full dome equipment carried on the Empire Builder for Pullman passengers. This drawing is a sample of part of one of the full-color "on train" brochures.*



*The Public Relations Department of the Great Northern continued the company policy of providing superb photographic advertising for its passenger trains, and this photograph of the 1955 Empire Builder is a good example of the art. It shows the new Great Dome Empire Builder running along the southern boundary of Glacier National Park. Great views such as this were available from the four dome coaches, and were obvious attractions which the GN used to attract passenger patronage. Photograph from the Great Northern/Burlington Northern Archives.*