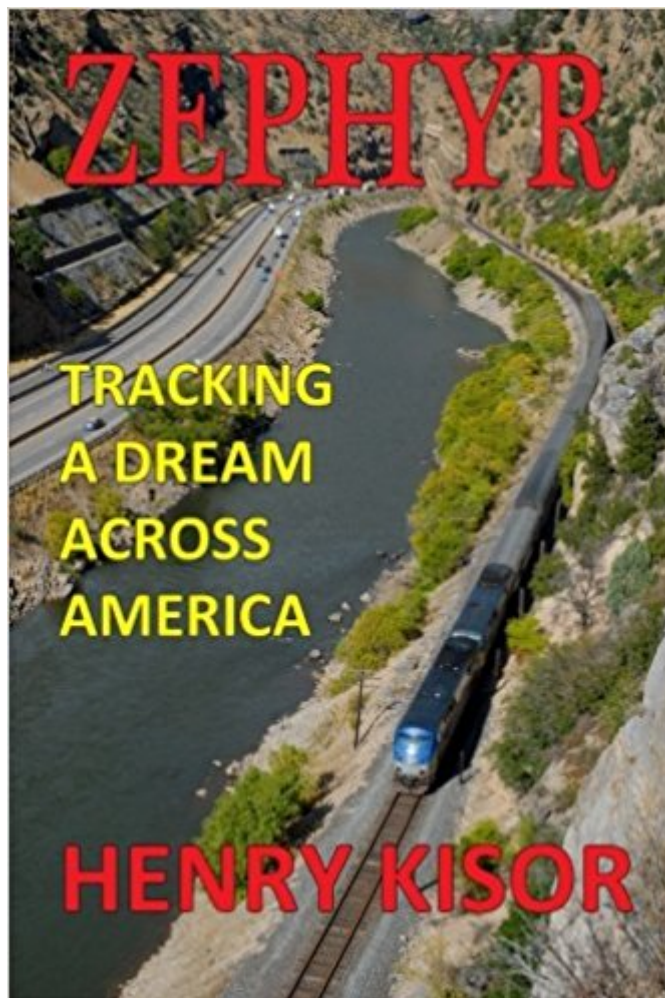


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# Zephyr



## Synopsis

Whether dashing through the Plains, creeping over the Rockies, hurtling across the Great Basin, or threading the Sierra Nevada, the California Zephyr is an earthbound cruise ship bearing as many as 300 passengers, each with a story to tell over the train's 51-hour run from Chicago to San Francisco Bay. Veteran journalist and novelist Henry Kisor climbs aboard and introduces us to the men and women who ride the rails—some out of restlessness, some as a hobby, some seeking love and friendship. There are also the resourceful train crew, who tell tales of "dog-robbing" supplies in the yards, of coping with medical emergencies en route, and of keeping their good humor. Fans of Henry Kisor's mystery novels and other nonfiction books will find him to be an affable traveling companion. As we head westward with him, Zephyr becomes a personal journey into the heart of America. This new 2015 edition brings up to date the original 1994 hardcover, and includes scores of new photographs. "An indispensable traveler's aid," the New York Times Book Review called it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Henry Kisor is the author of two other nonfiction books, "What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness" and "Flight of the Gin Fizz: Midlife at 4,500 Feet." He is also the author of five Steve Martinez mysteries set in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan: "Season's Revenge," "A Venture into Murder," "Cache of Corpses," "Hang Fire," and "Tracking the Beast." A sixth, "The Riddle of Billy Gibbs," is forthcoming. He and his wife Debby spend half the year in Evanston, Illinois, and the other half in a log cabin on the shore of Lake Superior in Upper Michigan. He retired in 2006 after

thirty-three years as an editor and critic for the old Chicago Daily News and the Chicago Sun-Times. In 1981 he was a nominated finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in criticism.

This book is a piece of living history like the Zephyr itself. This particular e-book edition has been updated with prologues and epilogues for 2015 which nicely bring a 1994 book into the present. I also like the newer photographs and that he dated all so you had an idea from which trip they came. My only issue reading this on the Kindle is that I know the photos must have otherwise been so much better. The author is an established writer and the book is very well written. In some chapters, his inner railfan begins to leak out and there's a little too much detail provided for a more mainstream train aficionado. I loved his description of the scenery-both what he saw with his own eyes and the pieces of history he shared as he passed the places and towns where they happened. Like many such books, the most fun parts were the people he met and, in some cases, shadowed. I liked the in depth profiles and found myself wishing I could meet Lela, Mike, Ray, Chris, etc. I love that the contemporary epilogue updated readers on these people. A solid read for people who enjoy train travel and a good look at the Amtrak of the late 20th century. Highball Number Five!

Some railroad books serve as travelogues, describing the places and sights you'll see as you glide past. Some are memoirs with fascinating stories told by the railroad crews, about the interesting people they've met during their journeys. And some railroad books capture the "romance of the rails," helping you experience the lure of travel and the yearning for new horizons, so much you'll swear you can feel the cars rocking back and forth. In *Zephyr: Tracking a Dream Across America*, author Henry Kisor manages to do all three. The "California Zephyr" is one of the most famous passenger trains in America, ranking up there with the "20th Century Limited," the "Super Chief," and the "City of New Orleans" for capturing the public's attention and imagination. Kisor doesn't waste much time telling you about the train's famous history; instead, he starts at Chicago, with Amtrak, and tells you what you'll see and experience for the entire journey to the San Francisco Bay area. Along the way, he shares stories with you from the crew that make the trip fascinating and delightful. Kisor is a retired newspaper writer, and has also written several other books, both fiction and nonfiction. Originally written in 1994, the book was updated in 2012 and 2015. The author uses the geography of the trip to help him tell the story, starting with the Midwest, heading for the

Rockies, and finally the Pacific Coast. He brings a railfan's perspective as he tells you about the locomotives and equipment, but also a storyteller's gift as he relates the anecdotes the crew shares with him. You'll hear from everyone on the train — from the chef in the diner, to the conductor in the coach, the sleeping car attendant, and the engineer — with tips for cooking on a moving train, whispered gossip about secret romantic interludes, medical emergencies, stories from the cab, and more. What emerges is the story of a trip that you can't wait to make for yourself, and one you're sorry to see end. *Zephyr* is not what I'd call a "quick read"; it took me a few dozen pages to get used to Kisor's style of writing. But I'm glad I did, and I'd heartily recommend this book to anyone who enjoys trains, good stories, or meeting interesting people.

"*Zephyr*" is one of those special books that reaches across audiences. In this case, it speaks to travelers (actual and armchair), to those fascinated by the diversity that is America, those who marvel at America's natural wonders, history buffs, railfans, and railroaders themselves. Each audience addressed with inviting prose that provides enough detail and insight without becoming technical. I have ridden the route of the *Zephyr* many times, from when it was the California *Zephyr* of the Burlington, Rio Grande, and Western Pacific railroads to the AMTRAK era (including its many incarnations under AMTRAK). I have my trip westward from Boston to Emeryville already planned for April 2017. Both memory and expectation are served by Mr. Kisor's account of the journeys I have known and the ones yet to be. I grew up in a railroad family, spent some time decades ago in railroad service as an Engineer, and now simply ride the rails as a passenger. All parts of me rode along on the literary journey .... and like many long journeys, when it came to an end I wanted to travel more with "*Zephyr*" and Mr. Kisor. Bon voyage.

Mr. Kisor has written a very entertaining and informative book about one of favorite modes of transportation...the train. It was a page turner, and a delightful read. The only portion of the book I didn't care for was the section on his ideas for a plausible novel about a murder mystery set on a train. I quickly skipped over it after it started to bore me. When he sticks to his experience on the train, book is a winner. I plan on reading it again as I go from New York to New Orleans to Houston to L.A. To Seattle Wash to Chicago to Wash D.C. to New Jersey and home to Connecticut this summer. I've done many long distance train trips. Reading Mr. Kisor's book is the icing on the cake

for any Railfan! Loved the personal crew stories and how much pride they have in doing their jobs. The young ones could learn a lot from the veterans. Yes, you not only see herds of cattle just before you get to Denver...you smell them way before that! Loved every minute of being on the Zephyr on my trip and reliving it on the pages of Mr. Kisor's book.

Some interesting parts but mostly boring history. Kisor rather mean spirited as well. Dissed Paul Theroux, whom I consider a terrific travel writer.

If you are into train travel, this is a wonderful book. The writer, in several of the passages, clearly show that he is a bit of a snob towards those who are in coach. However, his vivid prose is second to none.

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