

NTRAK Tethered Alignment Dowels

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Many NTRAK modelers start out with a simple POFF (Plain Old Four-Footer) module. As their skills develop and ideas blossom, they envision and eventually build a multi-module diorama to allow for grander scenes while still retaining the portability of the four-foot module. Frequently on multi-module dioramas, the track positions at interior interfaces are non-standard, thereby making track alignment more challenging. Also, the scenery often makes front-to-rear leveling somewhat difficult.

Unlike standalone modules, a multi-module diorama always goes together the same way, with the same modules always next to each other. Therefore, the alignment at interior connections of a multi-module unit can be greatly simplified by the installation of dowel pins that, when inserted in opposing holes of module fascia boards, can ensure proper alignment and leveling.

Similarly, many modelers building home layouts are now building modular bench work, making it much easier to salvage and re-build that home layout after a move. Dowel pins offer the same advantages in these instances as well, particularly when the modeler has incorporated a removable NTRAK module into his home layout.

To install the pins, properly position and clamp the diorama's modules together and then drill two 1/2" holes through the side fascia boards where the modules are clamped. The holes should be spaced as far apart as possible without interfering with the clamp area or the legs and they should be as high as possible while remaining horizontally level. Then insert 1 1/2" long x 1/2" diameter wooden dowel pins into the holes to insure proper alignment in the future. These dowel pins are prefabricated and are available in multi-packs at most large chain hardware stores. The 1/2" diameter pins are recommended because they have rounded ends for easy insertion, grooved sides for firm fit but easy extraction and will not shear like smaller diameter pins can.

I used to glue the dowel pins into one of the modules but found that it often caused problems when storing the modules. When looking for an alternative way to make sure the dowel pins wouldn't get lost, I decided to permanently attach them in a more flexible manner by tethering them to the underside of the module so that they can be pushed out of their holes, but won't disappear or get lost.

Go to the fishing section of Walmart or any sporting goods store and purchase a pack of 9" steel leaders. These leaders have a swivel on one end and a latching pin on the other end. Drill a hole in one end of each dowel, screw in a small eyelet and attach the latching pin of the leader to the eye. Push the threads of a small, flat head screw through the swivel on the other end of the leader and secure it to the under-frame of the module. See below.

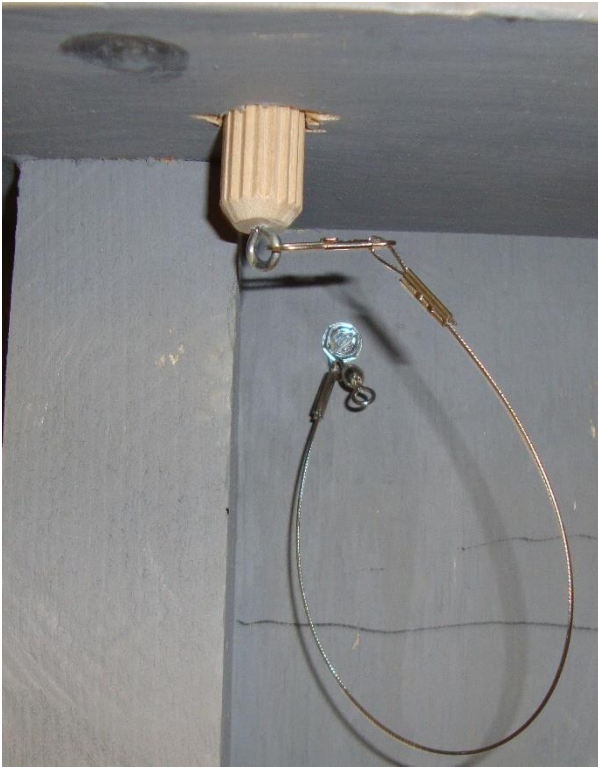


The next time you set up your multi-module diorama, the dowel pins will automatically align the modules so all

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you must do is level end to end. Track alignment and height will be assured, regardless of the location of the tracks on the modules. And when you tear down, you can relax, knowing that your dowel pins are attached to your modules and will be there for the next show. See below.



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