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Conventions

I'm sitting writing this just a week or so before the 2015 N-Trak UK Convention, hoping to get it finished and out to everyone before we gather at the Trouville in Bournemouth. On the subject of Conventions Neil has sent me a very good piece on the ins and outs of running a convention which is included after this. Also we have an article from Alan Cross about the work that has taken place to renovate the late Barry Peacock's "Mohawk Valley" layout to a standard where it can be exhibited again and a piece on module construction from Roger Beech. I'll also look at a few items in the market place which may have passed you by or have missed your attention.

I think, for once, that's enough wittering on by me, so on with…

Ralph

So you want to organise our Convention?
By Neil Lancaster

Our 2015 Convention is nearly upon us and I am looking forward to meeting you all again. For those who regularly attend, I thought I would draft this brief missive to let you know what goes in to the organisation and planning of our Convention. Whilst it's small scale compared to the events in the States (and a lot less hassle than the NMRA BR Convention over here), there are

still some anxious moments to overcome in the planning of the event.

Historically, we initially moved around the south of England, starting first on the banks of the Thames somewhere on the outskirts of London. I recall the layout room was a bit 'tight' but it worked. We then moved to Devon for a few years at the former Pontins camp (organised by Ray and Moira Hamilton), before moving to Bournemouth. The late Dave Ballam organised these events initially, first at the East Anglia Hotel (our spiritual home for a number of years!) and subsequently other hotels nearby before eventually finding the Trouville.

The big issue in finding a Hotel to accommodate our small event is the balance between cheap hotel rooms and a reasonable layout space. I assure you this is really difficult to find, even in Bournemouth. Most hotels want to charge several hundred pounds for the hire of the convention room - made worse as we don't have the 'pulling power' of the NMRA which has a couple of hundred delegates. They also require a substantial deposit up front.

The Trouville came to our rescue. Many of the senior staff came from the East Anglia hotel which has since been demolished, and understand our needs. The agreement is that they ask for a £300 deposit on booking and if

we don't reach 35 bookings for the hotel by early November, our booking is terminated and we forfeit our deposit. There is no further commitment on our (my!) part to pay cancelation fees. The deposit was kindly donated by Dave Ballam and we have used this year after year. I fear that if we ever lose this deposit, the game is over as it would be difficult to raise this amount among members.

You will now appreciate why I become very nervous as we approach the November deadline. We are only human, after all, and like me, I tend to pay for things at the last minute. However, I usually have no idea whether our Convention will take place until mid-October, as most of the cheques arrive that week. If members know they are coming they can send me post-dated cheques, months in advance, as they will not be cashed until November when I know we have reached the required minimum of bookings. If nothing else, it will reduce the strain on my pacemaker!

For members wishing to pay by credit / debit card to the Hotel direct, please send me the N-trak booking form in advance. I can then take into account the numbers and e-mail you directly once I know (taking into account your intended booking) that we have reached the magic number, and you are then safe to book direct with the hotel. As your cheques / CC / debit card payments are made out to the Hotel, your contract is with them. If the event is cancelled because we do not achieve minimum bookings, then you may have pay your own cancellation charge to the Hotel. Hence the reason why cheques should be sent to me first and other payments not made to the Hotel unless I have advised you beforehand. Once we know the event is taking place, any late bookings can

be made to the hotel quoting N-Trak to achieve our discount rate. Please inform me afterwards, however, so that I can keep tabs on the number of Conventioneers anticipated.

After, that it all seems to work like clockwork at the Trouville. They know our requirements and are only too pleased to help. We used to include the upstairs room with our booking (for other layouts and traders) but have since dropped it. Whilst it did offer more space, it did split the convention somewhat. However, we can always get it back if needed.

You will note that, in addition to collecting any annual subs at the Convention, I also ask for a registration fee which many pay in advance at the time of booking. At N-Trak we don't have any 'reserve funds' (other than £20 or so carried over in change from the raffle) so this money helps to pay for insurance and any incidentals required for the weekend. Any balance at the end of the weekend is usually handed out to the two groups (and other layout holders that may attend occasionally) as expenses.

I mentioned insurance. To cover myself, I take out exhibition insurance. Whilst our event is low key, we are not a 'corporate group'. As a volunteer organiser, I need to protect myself should something untoward happen. Magnet Insurance charge £53 for the weekend and we have taken this out each year.

May I remind members that the Convention (and insurance) covers Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Any set-up in the Hotel prior to these days, (i.e. Thursday) is outside the Convention and at your own risk should there be any mishap.

We usually have a great time at the Trouville, so may I encourage those still undecided, to come and join us at the hotel. Day visitors are always welcome. The bar is open to the wee small hours and coffee served all day (at a charge). Currently we have over 40 bookings for the Hotel (with 5 from Holland and Neal from America) so I am looking forward to this one. Don't forget any modules, guys!!
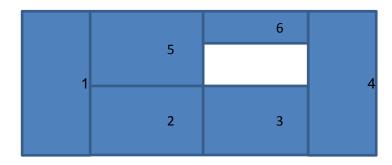
See you there

Neil

Model Railroad Modules
By Roger Beech

Over the years I have probably made half a dozen small model railroad layouts all of which were portable. Each one was slightly different from the previous effort and usually constructed with wood salvaged from the older edition. My first consideration when in the designing stage, was that the layouts should fit in my car, so that I could take them to model railway exhibitions. The only problem with that idea was that although the layouts could be easily assembled at an exhibition venue they were too large to assemble at home. And although the lounge was large enough to take a fully assembled layout, the request to do so was invariably denied.

For my last couple of efforts at building my railroad, I designed them from the very beginning to fit into my smallest bedroom - which I had bagged when my son left home. This ensured the layout would fit comfortably in both car and bedroom. It also gave me the opportunity to check out the layout before taking it off to an exhibition. A second factor in the design phase was the size and weight of the individual modules that made up the layout, bearing in mind the age of its owner.

The overall size of a layout that would fit into my bedroom was a convenient 3000mm by 1000mm. I decided therefore to construct the layout with five modules each of 1000mm long and 500mm wide with a 100mm valance. The sixth module, measuring 1000mm by 200mm by 50mm deep, is hinged onto module 5 and folds onto it when in transit. Module 1 slots onto module 2 as does 3 onto 4, again for transporting. The overall plan of the layout is as follows:

The layout's footprint when readied for transporting measures 1200mm long and 1000mm wide with all modules laying on their sides and looks like this:

Each module has its own attached legs with bracing and they fold into the overall envelope of the module. The bracing battens are in two halves, hinged and kept rigid by case latches. The outer modules 1 and 4 have two sets of legs at each end and modules 2, 3 and 5 have only one set at one

end, the other end being supported by the adjacent module with dowels and coach bolts. Pictured # 1 is module 4 which has two sets of legs.

#1

This next photograph # 2 shows modules 2, 3 and 4 and the way each module is connected smoothly to the other. Note also the 300mm sky board and the slot running along the lower half of the valance which receives the sky board of the other module when packed together for transit.

2

The picture # 3 below shows modules 1 and 2. Note the scenic area available

3

The next picture # 4 shows the fiddle yard area – modules 5 & 6 - behind the skyboard and the access space for those unexpected derailments and mishaps.

4

The last picture # 5 shows the modules ready for loading into my car which by the way is a small hatchback but with sufficient space to take the whole layout plus of course rolling stock, controls and other items.

5

The individual modules are easily carried by one person, being not too long or wide and their weight is about 10 kgs. Once the modules are slotted together for transit, I use canvas straps to secure them tightly for loading into the car. As can be seen by the last photo, I have started to lay the track which will be the usual oval shape with sidings and a fiddle yard. Then the difficult stage begins – for me anyway - when the scenery and structures are added and that will certainly keep me busy.

Although I can claim responsibility for the overall plan of the layout, my thanks must go to Ted Humber who constructed the fine modules for me. I just added the legs and fittings. Many thanks Ted.

Mohawk Valley
By Alan Cross

Thought I'd let you know what happened to Barry's show layout after I got it back to Newbury. I actually put it up for (several) tests in our conservatory where it just fits. I found it had a basic design faults in that it was wired for an extra 4ft section that was never built, therefore the yard panel isolation switches were compromised. Luckily Barry had drawn up an analysis of the plug couplers which helped to a certain

amount, but I still had to open up a lot of wiring trees to put things right. The layout fiddle yard had been jury-wired and successfully operated for 15 years, but it is now put to rights so that all the existing yard section switches do what they should have done in the first place, because it will never now be extended. I also replaced, all 18 push-to-make yard section switches with conventional SPST switches which makes life much easier on the fingers! I now have a 8ft yard that can hold up to 18 small trains or combinations of. We tried the layout out at our local parish church's model railway club pre-Christmas bash and everything worked well.

For this mini exhibition I used Barry's notes/photos/diagrams to form a construction file for members to flick through and included his much modified obituary and a new history of the layout and what might be seen running through town. The one Barry provided for organisers/public was just a few lines. As the Western Pacific was new to me, I thought I'd try to set the layout into the history of the area it would run through. I think I succeeded in weaving the reality and fiction. My reference was David Meyrick's book "Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California – Vol. 1". What I found was that researching a history from this part of the world is a nightmare as little is recorded.

"Give your Pike a History"

I've written this one for an exhibition layout. I feel a bit awkward about this as its Barry's old layout, not mine but I do want it to live on whilst it's still reliable (it would be possible to dcc at a later date).

Mohawk Valley Layout Description.

Inspiration:

Although the layout was inspired by the Western Pacific Railroad's Feather River Canyon route, a feature of which is the Mohawk Valley, the layout is freelance and intended to convey the flavour of a railroad passing through a small town with a fairly prosperous past in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of the western USA.

The Town:

The imagined town of Mohawk has quite a colourful history. It's name has been taken from the much smaller township of New Mohawk that existed a few miles south, 100ft lower and at the end of a 39 mile, 3ft gauge railroad which ran through the Mohawk Valley called the Sierra Valleys Railway (bought and abandoned by the Western Pacific RR by 1918). Both real and imaginary towns are situated in Plumas County, which is in the north-eastern end of the State of California.

Our imaginary town is situated on the Western Pacific main line about 20 miles west of the important railroad town of Portola. The area had been a meeting place high in the Sierras for Native Americans and French trappers since the late 18th century, but first came to prominence during the 19th century with the 1839 gold rush, although the original New Mohawk was not founded on the gold rush. It's also worth remembering that early prospectors had to travel from the Californian coast to this remote area then called the "Gold Lake". It was the discovery of a "notch" in 1851 by hunter/trapper Jim Beckwourth which connected the State of Nevada to these northern Californian valleys and allowed the first settlers into the valleys via the aptly named Beckwourth Pass (elevation at 5218ft).

First in were prospectors followed by farmers from Switzerland. The Swiss found they were able to grown bumper harvests in the fertile valley (when the grasshoppers didn't get there first). The challenge was to get the produce to a market. This was solved not by the gold and iron deposits, but by an abundance of "green gold" in the form of pine trees. Lumbering eventually caused the Sierra Valleys Railroad to be built to haul the logs out of the valley all the way south to the saw mills of distant Reno, Nevada and the Central Pacific RR. Later on, it serviced the valley saw mills which started opening about 1885. When the Western Pacific was built, it eventually caused the closure of the narrow gauge line and what was left of the New Mohawk community was relocated to the site of the new main line railroad.

By then, and as a result of the Great War, the US Army built a small camp, used for undisclosed activity about 5 miles south from the centre of the "new" town of Mohawk. The signal tower was built at the same time, paid for by the army. It's not really needed now but the army doesn't know that it's

still paying for the maintenance! About 1925 there was a big fire and much of the town was raised by alleged locomotive sparks. It was gradually rebuilt in brick, much as you see it today. The main surviving industries served by the railroad are a small oil and gasoline supplier (originally a US Army installation), a fairly large wooden produce plant, a goods depot with stock pens which serves the town, the local ranches and farming communities. The Army activities and camp still remain although the railroad branch now exists only as a siding near the present goods depot, a more direct vehicle road, avoiding town, having been built during the Korean conflict. You might be able to see a special train stabled on the "Army Siding" from time to time during "undisclosed" troop movements. The town also derives a certain amount of income from civilian work and services to the army, although amazingly, after all this time, it is still uncertain what purpose the camp serves in such a remote spot.

The Trains:

Whilst we will run actual Western Pacific prototype trains, we also run a wide variety of other company's trains, mainly from the 1950s and 60s. For this reason, most of the head-end power is diesel, although you may be lucky and spot some steam power. Some of the trains running on the layout would not have ventured within a 1000 miles of these tracks, although, during adverse weather or in emergencies, competing companies did give some running rights to essential Mohawk Valley services.

It is also possible that you might see some much older trains trundling around which go back to the Civil War period. This is because Mohawk is an ideal scenic location for film companies requiring a High Sierra location with pine trees, tumble weed and in addition, deep snow in the very cold winters. We also try to run a very modern freight or passenger train to show how US railroading has moved on since the 1960s. Notable changes are no roof walks on freight cars or cabooses on the tail end and passenger trains are run by the US government subsidised Amtrak. The five regular named trains that may run through town are:-
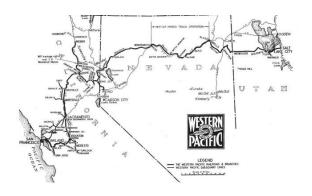
1. Illinois Central Railroad's "City of New Orleans" (Chicago-New Orleans).

2. Santa Fe Railway's hi-level all coach class "El Capitan" (Chicago-Los Angeles).

3. Chicago Burlington & Quincy/Denver & Rio Grande/Western Pacific Railroads jointly run "Californian Zephyr" (Chicago-Oakland Pier, for San Francisco).

4. Southern Pacific Railroad's "Shasta Daylight" (Portland-Oakland Pier, for San Francisco).

5. The Milwaukee Road's "Olympian Hiawatha" (Chicago-Twin Cities-Seattle/Tacoma).

Note that the real trains could be up to 20 coaches long during holiday periods but for obvious reasons only a small part of these can run on our model railroad.

The real Western Pacific Railroad:

You can liken this railroad to that of our own Great Central Railway's London extension from Sheffield to

London (Marylebone), which was opened towards the end of the 19th Century. The Western Pacific was a late-built line stretching 924 miles between Salt Lake City, Utah in the east to Oakland Pier, California (ferry for San Francisco), in the west. Using modern techniques and equipment of the day, it took less than 10 years to build. Although in parallel competition with the first transcontinental railroad, the Central Pacific/Union Pacific, it still managed to open up a vast area of land to commerce, the most notable and historic railroad town being Portola.

The line opened more or less all together due to two long live rock tunnels that were needed for the centre section to function. Notable is that it only needed 150 extra miles at a maximum gradient of 1% when compared with the earlier 179 mile at a maximum of 2.42% of Central Pacific's line across the Sierras. The map below shows the lines run by the Western Pacific, the green arrow giving the location of Mohawk town and train depot. If you're ever on holiday in this region there is a large operating museum, dedicated to the Western Pacific Railroad at Portola. Today the railroad is owned and run by its one time arch rival, the Southern Pacific Transportation Company.

New to You?

Just to finish here's a couple of useful new products that might have flown under your radar. Firstly there's a new range of scenic accessories from the good people at The Model Tree Shop (www.themodeltreeshop.co.uk). As well as their huge range of excellent trees and shrubs in all shapes and colours they have a range of very useful 'static' scatter materials. These can be used with a puffer bottle or an electrostatic spreader. I know there are a number of ranges around but some of the varieties that The Model Tree Shop have come up with are just great – try 'Dirty Snow', 'Patchy Dead Grass' or 'Autumn + Fallen Leaves'. These scatters come in a variety of fibre lengths and are packed in a useful shaker bottle at around £3.50 a go.

Also from The Model Tree Shop is a range of 'Tufts' and 'Strips'.

The tufts are small circular(ish) clumps of the static grasses, glued together and looking just like a small clump of long grass. There are also floral tufts suitable for gardens or wildflowers. A packet of grass tufts contains about 21 tufts for £2.00 and the floral clumps are £3.50 for a pack of 33. The 'Strips' are an answer to that proverbial problem – "How do I hide the base of a building?". These are thin strips of an acrylic base with scatter attached. Just glue to the baseboard along the junction between the building and the

ground. Job done at £3.50 for a pack of 12!

I think that's all – Thanks to all the contributors and see you in Bournemouth; Oh and don't forget those competition entries!

Till Next time… Ralph