THE BRASS POUNDER

Newsletter of the Carolina Southern Division 12, Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Association

Volume 22 Number 5 May 2022

Division Coming Events
(See CSD Website for further details)

DIVISION MEETING

The Division's Monthly Meeting *(and clinic and lunch)* for May will be at the home of Joe Skorch on Saturday, May 21st at 10:00am
542 Eastway Ave. Kannapolis, NC 28083
To get on the attendance list, email Joe by May 15th

Superintendent's Corner

By Andrew Stitt

Webster's dictionary defines process as a series of actions leading to an end. When you think about it, much of what we do in our favorite hobby is a process. Whether it's going to a train show and having an item catch your eye, or starting to lay track on a long-anticipated layout build. While buying an item at a show might take a few seconds to decide to buy or not, starting to lay track can be a big deal (e.g. am I doing the right thing? Will I like the result? Can I find help if I need it?).

We are going to start a series of clinics in May that will represent, on a small level, the process of building a model railroad. Building a diorama should be fun for any that wish to participate. My plans for this start with building the basic structure. In my own layout construction, I have become a big fan of using foam as a base material. So, we will start by cutting and laminating (if necessary) some foam material. Shaping it with a rasp, hot wire cutter, or sand paper will be available. In June, we will move on to gluing the track to the diorama, and painting and ballasting (I'm sure many of us have learned this from attending Neal's clinic on that subject at RMU). We might also get into plaster casting a bit. July should continue with adding castings, and beginning ground coverings. Perhaps some of you might like to try applying static grass? We'll finish up in August with any final touches, including adding water if anyone is interested.

I leave you with this thought. Ever been curious about doing something in another scale, not the one that you are already invested in? Or modeling something different in your chosen scale? Here is an opportunity to be creative and see what that would be all about. The May get-together is graciously being hosted by Joe Skorch in Kannapolis. Joe has volunteered to cook out for those of us that are planning to attend. Please contact him (he is our webmaster & BOD member), so he can get a head count for the food. He can be contacted via email, or Facebook.

I hope to provide some foam panels which will be available for my cost. I will bring some of my tools, but feel free to bring your own as well. Certainly, you are encouraged to start your own diorama prior to the meeting if you would like.

I look forward to seeing many of you in May

THREE EASY STEPS to enjoy the Division meeting, hands-on clinic and lunch at the home of Joe Skorch on Saturday, May 21st starting at 10:00am. Joe's address is:

542 Eastway Avenue
Kannapolis, NC 28083

STEP 1: Send an email to jskorch@email.com to let Joe know that you'll be there so he can plan on how much food to prepare for lunch. Let him know **by the 15th**.

STEP 2: Use your car or smart phone to navigate to Joe's house (or, once you're on Dale Earnhardt Blvd, use one of the sets of directions shown below.

STEP 3: After you park, walk down the side driveway (toward the big garage) and enter through the basement entry in the back of the house.

From I-85: Take exit 60 onto westbound Dale Earnhardt Blvd. Turn RIGHT onto S Little Texas Rd and proceed .35 miles. Turn RIGHT onto Hyde St and proceed to the next intersection (.12 miles). Turn RIGHT onto Eastway Avenue and proceed .22 miles to 542 Eastway (Joe's house). It's the next to last house on the right.

From US-29: Turn onto eastbound Dale Earnhardt Blvd. Turn LEFT onto S Little Texas Rd and proceed .35 miles. Turn RIGHT onto Hyde St and proceed to the next intersection (.12 miles). Turn RIGHT onto Eastway Avenue and proceed .22 miles to 542 Eastway (Joe's house). It's the next to last house on the right.

If you can't make it to the Division meeting, clinic and lunch at Joe Skorch's house, there's an alternative choice for May activity on the same day at our neighboring Palmetto Division's Columbia area meeting for some 7 ½ " gauge railroading:

NMRA Palmetto Division
2022 Columbia Area Division Meeting

WHEN: May 21, 2022, 10:30 AM to 4:00 PM
WHERE: "Dreams Come True Railroad" (DCTRR)
2164 Beaver Dam Road in Cassatt, SC
REGISTRATION FEE: No Charge but a donation box will be available for contributions, all proceeds going to the DCTRR

AGENDA:

- 10:30 - Doors opening for registration and socializing
- 11:00 - Meeting Start - Call to Order and Welcome
- 11:05 - Recognition of non-Palmetto Division attendees
- 11:15 - Clinic by David Schleper "Description and Inspiration for the DCTR"
- 11:35 - Clinic by Wayne Forte "Block and Signal System on the DCTRR"
- 12:05 - 15 Minute Break

Business Meeting:

- 12:20 - Treasurer's Report
- 12:25 - 2021 Convention Summary
- 12:30 - SER & Division Activities - "What's on Your Layout" (online Sessions), MER Convention, Palmetto Division Fall Meeting, Cumberland Division Mini Convention.
- 12:40 - Division T-Trak HO Layout
- 12:45 - Nearby Division and Local Club Activities
- 12:50 - Meeting Close

Lunch and DCTRR Train Rides

The Palmetto Division will be grilling hot dogs (2 per attendee), providing condiments and providing soft drinks at the DCTRR pavilion. To ensure that there will be enough food for each attendee please let Kenneth Majchrzak (kemajchrzak@gmail.com) and Richard Lehman (rlehman777@yahoo.com) know that you will be attending. If you don't, it will be pot luck that there will be enough food for you. Attendees can ride the trains during and after lunch as it will take approximately 45 minutes for each train to traverse the layout.

For those attendees who will be heading back home toward Columbia and still have time in their day for a layout tour, John Kelchner will have his beautiful HO layout "Open for Visitors" from 1 PM to 4 PM. John is located at 209 High Pointe Drive in Blythewood, SC.

Please take the time to drop by and see his layout.

UPCOMING AREA TRAIN EVENTS

Historic Spencer Shops Train Show
May 14th – 15th
Saturday 9:00am – 5:00pm
Sunday 12:00 – 4:00pm
NC Transportation Museum
1 Samuel Spencer Dr.
Spencer, NC 28159

Editor's Notes

By Ed Gumphrey

Wow, it's May already! Looking back over April, I'd be surprised if I managed to accomplish 10% of the projects I was hoping to get done.

I got positive feedback from some of the members who made the trek northward last month to tour the facilities at Tichy Train Group. My thanks to Joe Skorch for providing some snapshots from the trip. That road trip also included a layout tour of Phil DeCheine's On30 St Croix Valley Railroad. There will be some pictures in next month's newsletter. And speaking of Joe Skorch, my thanks in advance for his hosting this month's meeting on the 21st. I'm looking forward to it.

Please notice how small the banner for upcoming train shows has gotten. This month's show at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer is the last nearby show until fall. Our Division will be represented at the show with the Metrolina display and some "in progress" demonstrations. A couple of members will be working on activities in the Back Shop during the show. Not full clinics, they're a way to simply show some model-building techniques and chatting with visitors. More volunteers would be welcome. Want to work on a kit? How about making some trees? Or maybe use powders to weather some of your rolling stock? You get the idea. If you want to demonstrate some of your skills, please let Andrew Stitt know by Friday May 6th so he can let the Museum folks know what to expect.

I think you'll enjoy Keith Iritsky's next section on his project recreating New Haven's three parallel lift bridges. I find his scratchbuilding to be inspirational and challenging at the same time. I can't wait for the next installment as he adds "water" to the river along with other scenery. It promises to be a remarkable scene on his railroad.

Reading Ed Smith's comments about the Panama Canal brought back old memories of my navy days and several trips through the canal. When I say old memories, I'm not exaggerating. I retired from 20 years of naval service in **1988**. I've always struggled to avoid telling too many "sea stories", but I'll limit myself to a few trivia points about the Panama Canal:

- The Pacific Ocean's end of the canal is actually **EAST** of the Gulf of Mexico's end.
- The Canal is over 100 years old and over 25,000 workers died during construction.
- Roughly 14,000 ships go through the canal each year, and over a million have passed since it opened in August of 1914.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

I target the 1st of each month for publication. Please submit articles for publication by the 27th of each month.
The preferred format is MS Word, but I can convert most other formats.
For questions and help, email me at editor@carolinasouthern.org

DIVISION AND REGIONAL NEWS

By Ed Gumphrey

Train Town Box Score

April 2022

Open Houses 5
Attendance 130
Hosts: Keith Iritsky (2), Gil Brauch, MMR (3), Ed Smith (2), Larry Paffrath, Fred Brooks, Alan Kerrick

To volunteer, go to:
http://carolinasouthern.org/ttvolunteerrequest.html
(#)=frequency (r)=first time host

Please, don't forget that volunteers are still needed for upcoming weekends. Follow the link to volunteer to help and get your name added to the list.

MEETING

There wasn't a format meeting held, but April's "meeting" was a road trip to tour facilities at Tichy Train Group. Four members from the Division signed up to make the trek to the Burlington area for the tour. From the feedback I received, everyone seemed to enjoy the tour and felt it was worth the drive. Our thanks to Jack Dziadul and the Carolina Piedmont Division for their invitation for us to join. Also, a vote of thanks to Joe Skorch for the snapshots from the trip on the next page.

After the tour of Tichy, the members had an opportunity for a layout tour arranged by Superintendent Andrew Stitt of the nearby On30 St Croix Valley Railroad layout of Phil DeCheine. Joe Skorch will have some comments and photos in next month's newsletter. If you'd like to see more of the machinery and process of making kits and detail parts, you can see the article from the last tour in our newsletter from May 2019.

In Convention news, more work goes on in the background:

- Alan Hardee, Layout Tour Chair, initiated a request to CSD members calling for more volunteers to host open houses for layout tours and/or operating sessions. Alan is collecting data. A full list of layouts will appear on the Convention Website in the near future and will include preview information and pictures of each layout.
- Joe Skorch, Webmaster, entered more updates to the Convention Website, most notably Hotel Information, including a link to make online reservations, which are now open. If

you don't live within a short distance from the Hotel, you might want to consider getting a room to be able to participate in more events without spending too much time commuting.

Thanks to Joe Skorch, here are some pictures from the tour:

The group gathers in the lobby awaiting the start of the facility tour. Is it my imagination, or is the average age of model railroaders increasing?

Don Tichy, in his yellow shirt, talks about processes to the tour group. Don is always smiling and loves to talk about his business.

A wide range of specialized machinery is used to produce Tichy's myriad injection-molded styrene parts for kits and scratchbuilding.

A scratchbuilder's dream. A large container catches sprues of parts as they are ejected from the high-pressure injection-molding machines.

It's like being in a dedicated model railroader's CANDY STORE. After the tour, the group was able to browse aisle after aisle, shopping for Tichy kits, detail parts, and decals at a discount!
Talk about fun!

BUILDING A DIORAMA

The Base

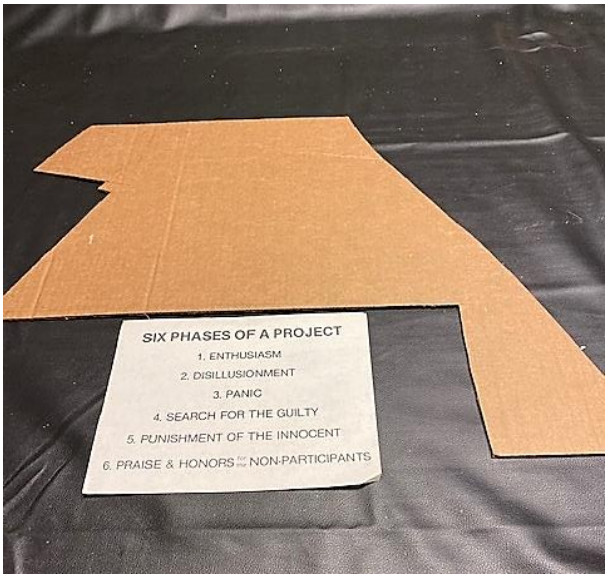
By Andrew Stitt

A diorama is a small representation of a larger scene. It can be inspired by a photo, a nearby location, or simply imagination. It allows us to be creative, albeit in a small way. Doubtless all of us have seen them. Many of you may have created or helped to make them in the form of modules. T-Trak is an example of a series of dioramas created to join together to form a free-flowing operating layout.

The project we are going to work on during this summer will be based on what you want to do. While it is my intention to use a base of foam, in reality it can be made using foam core, lauan plywood, or other materials. I chose foam because, although it is messy to create, the finished base is very easy to work with, and provides a good base for further scenic effects. It can provide a good base to "plant" trees, embed rocks, and create waterways. It takes paint very well as long as solvents aren't involved!

Getting started is always the hard part. What do I want to do? An urban scene? A rural scene? One track? Multiple tracks? A crossing? What about structures? What size will fit where I want to place it? Will it be added to an existing layout? Many things to think about for such a simple scene.

We'll get started by creating the base. As I said, this project will be using foam. Cutting it into pieces to fit the space on a layout can become involved. For such spaces, it is a good idea to make a pattern or template. Cutting and trial fitting takes a while. When you have a reasonably good fit, it is likely that you will be gluing pieces together. I found a really good glue for doing this at a recent Timonium show (Foam Fusion by the Hot Wire Foam Factory). Following their directions, after a day for curing, I am ready to carve away the flat and blunt surfaces. Few perfectly flat surfaces occur in nature. Minimizing them, I find that I still have a few gaps to fill. This I do will premade spackle. When it is dry, it sands really easily. The final step that I do in the preparation is to paint the foam with a brown latex-based paint. No pink or blue earth where I model!!



A cardboard template will guide cutting a foam base to size for fitting a diorama into an existing layout area.

Glue is applied to foam for stacking pieces together to form the basic scenery shape. I use Foam Fusion.

The stacked pieces of foam form the basic shape. Next step is to shape contours.

Spackle is applied to smooth our the contours. It sands easily.

New York New Haven And Hartford Scherzer Rolling Lift Bridges Project

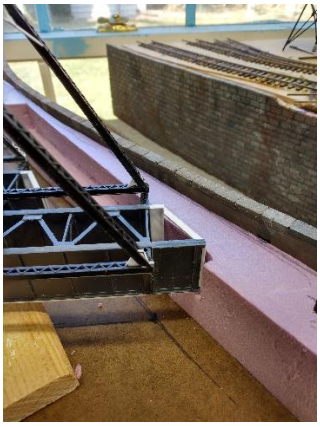
Part Three - Foam Carving Piers, Abutments, and Painting

By Keith Iritsky

Continuing the saga of the three Amig... I mean bridges over Fort Point Channel at South Station Boston. I'm at the point in the construction of the bridges where I have to place them on the layout. To get the piers at the right height to support the various bridge components, I am constructing the piers and abutments out of 2" XPS foam insulation, which is quickly becoming my favorite building material. I find it is very easy to cut to size, and carve stone blocks into. I was originally thinking of casting the piers in hydrocal, (time consuming and messy), or cutting down Chooch abutments, (expensive, hard to cut). I have a lot of 2" XPS foam, as well as 1.5", 1", and .5" left over from my Benchwork build, (2" foam glued with Great Stuff Pro to 1×3 joists. Thanks to Ken Patterson of What's Neat This Week in Model Railroading). I used my Homemade Hot wire cutter I constructed after watching Luke Towan of Australia's video on making an inexpensive table top foam cutter. It's like a table saw for cutting foam with a hot wire. I really recommend watching his videos, He's quite talented at modeling and making incredible dioramas.

I cut filler pieces for abutment walls to shape. The 2" foam wasn't quite high enough on the north side of the bridge (on the South Station side), so I had to add a piece of 1/4" foam on top of the abutment wall to bring it to proper height. Alex Plus caulk is a good adhesive to use to glue foam together. Solvent based adhesive will eat away at the foam, and white glue will never set without any air flow, being as it is trapped between the layers. The foam sections were held together with T-pins while the adhesive dried (Pic 1). I cut out the ledges to support the ends of the floor system at the opposite end of the bridge as well as the ledges for the operating section (Pic 2). These ledges were cut with an extendable box cutter type utility knife.

Pic 1: A 1/4" piece of foam was added to bring the height of the abutment filler piece to match the retaining wall height. T-pins hold it in position while the adhesive dries.



Pic 2: The filler piece to support the operation girder section.

I had to temporarily place the bridge components on wood blocks, and used popsicle sticks for fine adjustments (Pic 3). Measurements were taken and recorded. I set the 3 bridges several times to get the measurements. (It seemed like each time I set them up, I got a different measurement.) The piers were cut to the right height on the foam cutter and test fitted into place (Pics 4 and 5).

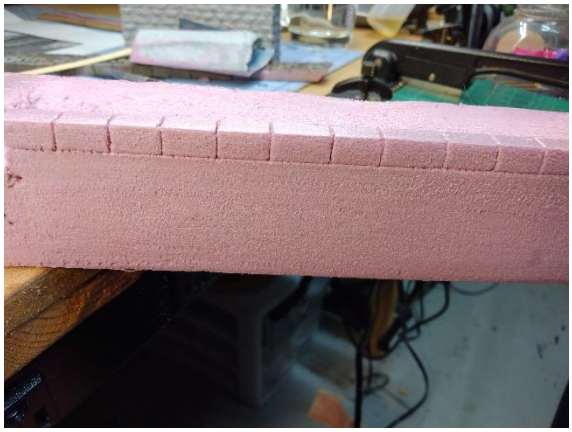
Pic 3: Bridge number one set up on wood spacers to take pier height measurements.

Pic 4: The three bridges sitting on the piers to test final height. Piers are not yet cut to length at this point

Pic 5: An end view of the three bridges being test fit on the piers.

Now for the fun part, carving thousands of 2'×4' HO scale blocks into the foam channel walls. They were started by laying out the cap stones as 2'×4'×2' deep. I made a paper “measuring tape” with tick marks made at the block height, and a separate line with the block length. This made marking the foam easier than trying to find the measurements along a ruler. I laid out the horizontal spacing with larger blocks at the bottom and thinner towards the top, and then the vertical marks to establish the length of the cap stones. I etched in the horizontal line with a new #11 blade, cutting in about 1/16 to 3/32”, followed by the vertical lines of the cap stones (Pic 6). Cap stones usually overhang the stones below by a few inches. To simulate this, I used the xacto knife to take a sliver of foam out underneath the cap stones on the top course of the “regular” blocks. A dremel tool was used with a drum sander attachment to remove more foam, tapering the top few courses underneath the cap stones to form a taper to the wall, allowing the cap stones to sit proud from the wall (Pic 7). After the taper was established, It was time to etch out the rest of the horizontal courses (Pic 8). To form the individual stones I used a xacto chisel blade to etch the alternating vertical lines as one would while making a block wall. The individual blocks were etched in, from the top to the bottom. You can

vary the block lengths by changing the vertical line spacing slightly. This adds visual interest so the wall doesn't look too sterile and even (Pic 9).



Pic 6: The etched cap stones.

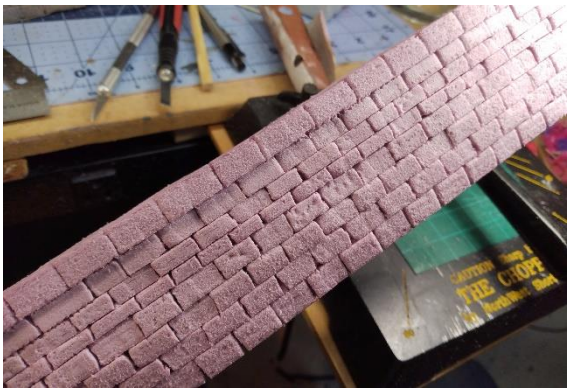
Pic 7: Creating the cap stone overhang.

Pic 8: The horizontal stone courses etched in.

Pic 9: the stones laid out. Not much detail at this point.

I use several techniques to detail some of the individual blocks. First I use the chisel blade inserted into the vertical lines, and wiggle it back and forth to open up the space between the stones. To widen the space horizontally, I use one of the boxcutter blades removed from the handle inserted into the horizontal cuts and wiggle back and forth. The blade is about 3-1/2" so just move it along the groove and widen the cuts. I then use a brand new blade (foam dulls them quickly) to cut thin beveled slivers of foam around the blocks to make a "Cut Stone" effect. To further customize the stones I use the rectangular end of a chopstick (never throw anything away.) to push some random stones in a little to vary the depth of some of the blocks. This really details the wall. By angling the chopstick you can bevel the face of the stone. Anything to make it feel more "Organic".

Sometimes I'll use a brass bristle brush to tap on the stones to create some pock marks and texture so the stones aren't too smooth (Pic 10). This sounds like a lot of work, but to get large retaining walls for pennies, you have to put in some work. It really does go fast and is quite relaxing – I actually fell asleep while carving a wall one time. Luckily, when I dropped the xacto knife I was wearing shoes. After painting and weathering, the detail will really pop.



Pic 10 The detailed and varied stones.

PAINTING AND WEATHERING THE WALLS AND PIERS

To simulate the mortar jointing, I made up some wet spackle by adding some water and mixing. It should be about the consistency of pancake batter. Spoon it onto the stonework, and spread it with your finger, or if you are squeamish, with a putty knife. Squish it in well (Pic 11). I work in small sections so that the spackle doesn't dry (Pic 12). While it's still wet, remove as much as you can from the surface with a piece of damp paper towel leaving it in the “Mortar” lines and removing it from the face of the stones. Be careful to remove any spackle from recessed stones, so that they are not covered up. Leave it a few hours or overnight to dry.

Pic 11: Spoon the spackle onto the stones.

Pic 12: The spackle smoothed into the cut lines.

The next step is to paint a base coat of a medium shade of gray. All of the paints I used for this are cheap Wal-Mart acrylic craft paints (Pic 13). I then painted random stones with a lighter gray and random stones with a darker gray. You could add more shades if you want, just don't make it look like a checker board. You are after all, the Charles De Gaulle of your carved foam wall (Pic 14).

Pic 13: Gray base coat on the stone work.

Pic 14: The stones painted varied shades of gray.

After these colors thoroughly dried I brushed on an alcohol and India ink wash, followed by dry brushing with light gray. When this is dry it's time to break out the dark brown weathering powders. In the recessed area that the bridge ends will rest in, I heavily weathered the stones with grimy black, streaking it down where the girder will sit, followed by rust brown, rusty red, and dirty brown. I left it heavier on the flat shelf where water, rust, dirt and cinders will accumulate (Pic 15). Along the bottom of the wall I used grimy black for about a scale foot in height. This shows the discoloration of the stones by the sea water. This scene will portray water line one foot below high tide. Then I used white highlight powder just above the high tide mark and just below the capstones as shown in the reference photo from the Library of Congress that I used for guidance (and practice) (Pic 16). I followed this with a thin amount of grungy green powder to suggest some type of seaweed just below the waterline. In various areas I used weathering powders to break up the monotony of the rest of the wall. I used grimy black to color recessed blocks, and highlight white to emphasize the block edges that protrude.

Pic 15: The heavier weathering under the girders.

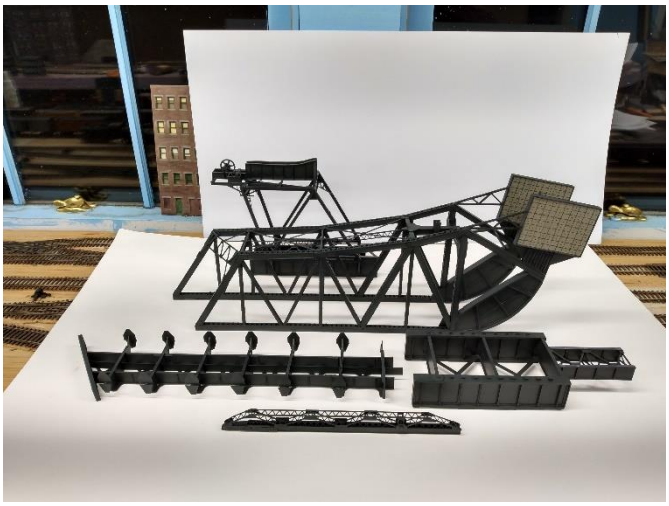
Pic 16: A prototype photo from the Library of Congress guided weathering, shown with my practice section.

After the retaining walls were done I had to construct the piers that the various bridge components will sit on. Again, I cut these to shape using the foam cutter table and etched the block detail (Pic 17). Repeating the retaining wall technique, I painted and weathered the piers. I then test fit the bridges on top of the piers (about fifteen times) to determine their precise locations. I used Alex Plus Adhesive Caulk to glue them into place on the masonite river bottom (Pic 18).

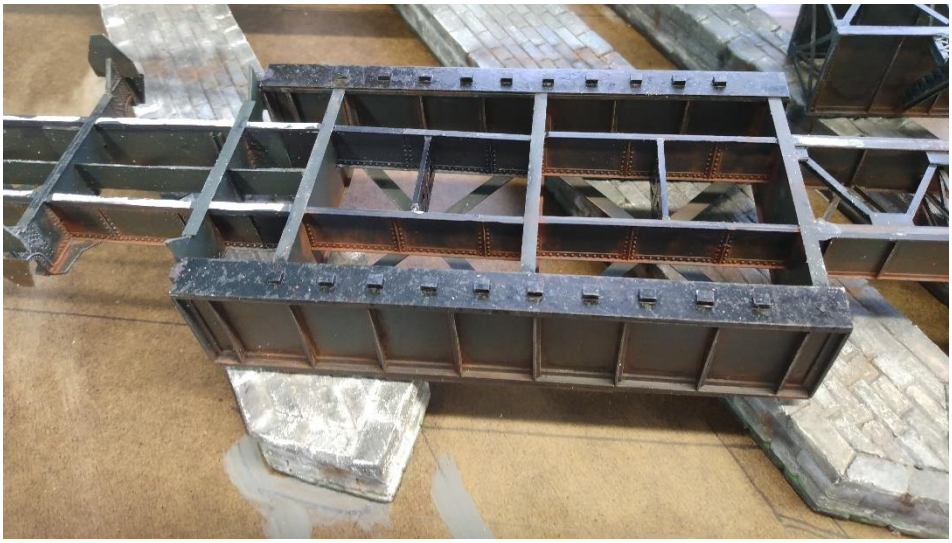
Pic 17: Piers cut to size and etched with block detail.

Pic 18: The piers glued in position.

Now to paint the bridges. To ensure a good bond when glued, I masked any parts of the bridges where track will be glued, as well as the mating surfaces of the four components with blue painters tape. I then painted all fifteen parts of the bridges with Microlux grimy black for airbrush (Pic 19). This took 3 ½ hours. I let the parts dry overnight and applied an alcohol/ink wash. Actually, I painted the gears and drive shafts of the bridge operating motors with gunmetal first. The wash was allowed to dry completely. After the dark wash dried, which accentuated the shadows and crevices of the bridge components, a rusty wash was applied while holding the surfaces to be rusted vertically, to allow the rust to run down and collect in the lower crevices (Pic 20).



Pic 19: all the components from one of the three bridges painted.

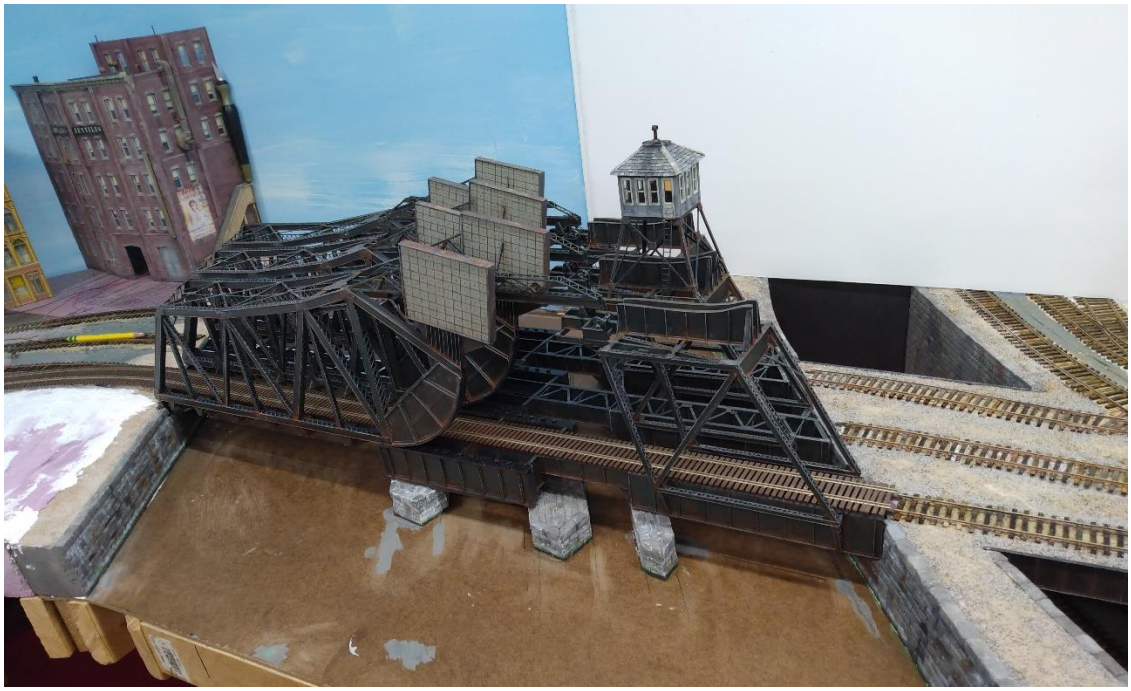


Pic 20: Bridge girder section after rusty wash has been applied.

After the washes, I dry-brushed a very light gray onto the edges and raised areas. I find a pure white wash often seems stark and harsh, so I usually use the lightest hue of the color the objects are painted with. So what is light black? Gray! Dry brushing really brings out the detail on girder angles and the webbing of the main truss girders, whereas without the dry brushing, the girders just look like black square tubes. You can see the details pop with edges and rivet detail more visible (hopefully, I'm using a phone camera with ambient lighting.) (Pic 21). The webbing on the girders and vertical stiffeners show up when highlighted with a brush with most of the paint wiped off. After dry brushing, dry pigment powders were used (Doc O'Brian's) to add more weathering. A grimy black to add some soot underneath upper supports from stack exhaust and a grungy gray was used to fade the upper services from sun exposure. Dirty brown makes for a nice dark rust. I used this first followed by rusty brown in the center of the dirty brown area. Brighter (newer) rust can

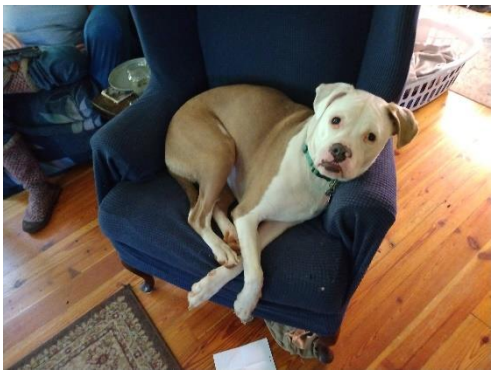
be achieved by using Doc O'Brian's rusty red sparingly. Don't make the mistake of using powders first and than dry brushing. The paint brush will get all gummed up with the powders and discolor the highlights. I didn't seal all the weathering powders because, unlike rolling stock, once the bridge is in place it won't be touched. This concludes the painting portion of this build along with the piers (Pic 20).

Pic 19: Washes and dry brushing help highlight details.



Pic 20: Test fitting the painted and weathered bridges on the piers. Track is just loosely placed to judge the appearance.

I hope you enjoyed this, and got some ideas from it. The next installment will cover the painting of the canal and assembly of the bridge components. Oh, and here is Hamilton doing what he does best, judging YOU while being a comfy man (Pic 21).



Pic 21: Lord Hamilton Barkbottom the Third

A FEW UPDATES

By Ed Smith

Well, it's been a crazy month. Hopefully, things will return to some semblance of normalcy. I can't believe Summer is just around the corner. This month's article will touch on several areas of interest to me.

First, Wade's Train Town: The re-location to the Newton Depot has been nothing but successful. The new venue has opened so many doors for our display that attendance is great since opening in September 2021. We have averaged over 100 visitors a month. This compares to maybe 100 visitors a year at the Brookford location. We are grateful for the Museum's participation and acceptance of our display. That said, we are still searching for members to volunteer on this project. Gil Brauch, Keith Iritsky, and I share equally in hosting our weekly open houses. But at times we are stretched thin. With Summer upon us, we all have other interests that consume time. We are looking for someone to be our fourth host, so we can have a full monthly rotation. If you're interested in this opportunity, or just volunteering on an occasional Saturday, contact us at this link:

http://carolinasouthern.org/ttvolunteerrequest.html

Next, work on my layout has basically taken the month off. My wife and I spent 3 weeks on a Panama Canal Cruise, and unexpectedly I have developed Rheumatoid Arthritis in my joints and hands. Layout work has taken a big hit, but I'm not far behind on my schedule for our October Convention. With new drugs, my hands no longer feel like numb clubs, and I'm able to work on the layout again. I have about 10 feet of double track to finish and the Mainline will be totally installed. That may not sound eventful, but in reality it is double track Mainlines, each about 700 feet in length, 105 turnouts built using Fast Tracks, and electrical drops on every 3-foot length of track and all switches. The goal now is to finish wiring all 34 district drops to the DCC Bus, and testing and troubleshooting each district in the next 2 months. This will leave me a couple of months for some mock-up buildings, scenery, and details. That's the plan.

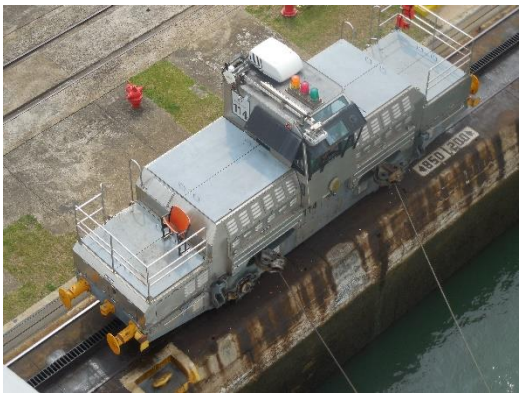
By the way, I've added a new twist to this project. The layout has been a dream, or maybe obsession, of mine for many years. So, after working on some facet of it every day for about 10 years, I've decided a Golden Spike Ceremony would be cool. With the mainline nearing completion, I've decided where the spike should be driven. It will be at the WBD tower, representing the western end of the Binghamton, NY trackage, located on my upper level. My biggest concern is finding a jeweler who can fabricate HO scale gold spikes. Hopefully, this ceremony will be sometime in the Summer when the main is fully operable. Stay tuned.

Finally, I just want to touch on the cruise my wife and I were just on. I don't want to bore you with 3 weeks of cruising the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific, but what stands out is the Panama Canal (pic 1). The canal offers a modeler a plethora of things to model. You can build a diorama of the parallel lock system or a layout with all 3 sets of locks and the Panama railway.

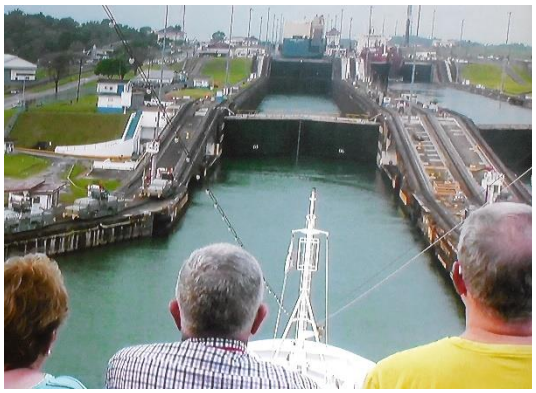
Pic 1: The Panama Canal is a true engineering marvel that offers a plethora of model-building options.

Using a series of 3 parallel locks, the water level is raised around 80 feet from the Caribbean side to the Pacific side. Each lock is serviced by a series of mules, or electric boxcabs (pic 2). On each side of the ship these mules use cables to center the ship between the walls of the locks. Usually, 2 or 3 on each side are used. These don't supply power, they just keep the ship centered. The track work is a basic straight line with an incline on each side to adjust to the rise in the system. Although fairly basic, the trackwork has parallel tracks, switchbacks, and turnouts to service facilities. Also, the mules are electric, so you have a 3-rail system buried in the concrete (pic 3, 4, 5, 6). Along with many unique service buildings and the Panama Railway which offers passenger, container, and canal freight services, you have many aspects to model. If you are looking for something unusual to model, big or small, this may be it. That's it for now.

ED



Pic 2: Electric "Mules" keep ships centered in the locks.



Pic 3: The view as the ship enters a lock.

Pic 4: Ready to enter the last lock raising us to the level of Lake Milaflores near the Pacific end of the canal.

Pic 5: Looking back at a ship entering a parallel set of locks going in the opposite direction.

CLOSING PAGE BONUS

They say April showers bring May flowers.
They certainly brighten up this view of CSX 8181.

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