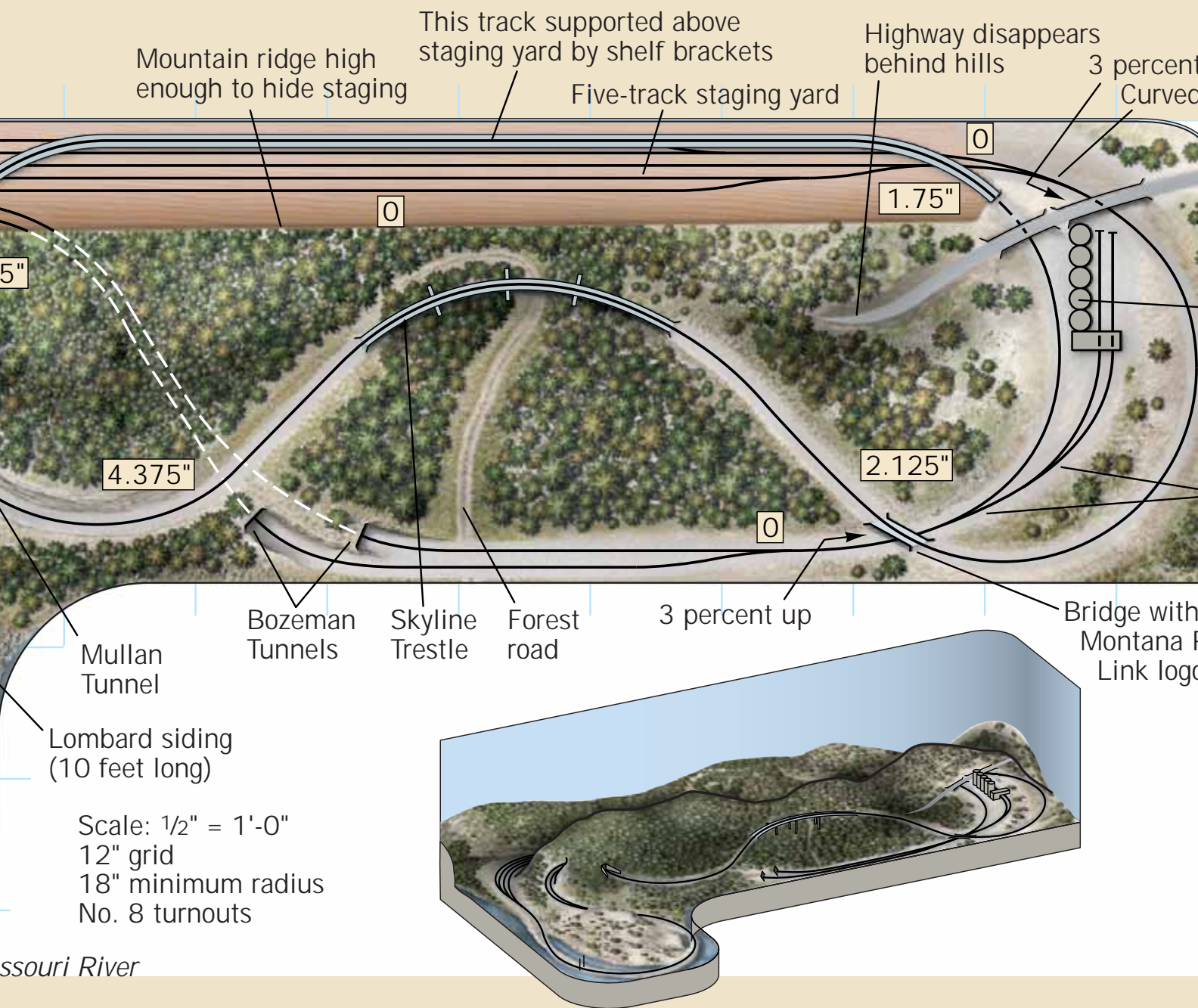


Room-size model railroads



ROOM-SIZED MODEL RAILROADS

Big

Three distinct Montana Rail Link vignettes highlight this N scale track plan

By Tom Danneman
Photos by the author

I wanted out of my apartment! For several years, I had collected N scale locomotives and rolling stock hoping that one day I could build my Montana Rail Link empire. But my apartment had absolutely no room for even a tiny layout. There clearly was only one thing to do – move! So I did.

Mind you, I still won't be able to build that dream mile-for-mile Mullan Pass empire, but I will soon be able to see all of my locomotives and rolling stock running on my very own N scale 6'-6" x 12'-9" layout.

The space and the plan

I've always wanted my layout to be in a comfortable setting. The space I have is a small basement that was largely finished when I moved in, but I made a few improvements before starting the layout. I installed new flooring and trim and did some other work to create a room that would be a nice space even without a model railroad.

The next step was to come up with a plan. I enlisted my brother Mike for help. A few years ago, he designed and built an apartment-sized layout based on the Denver & Rio Grande Western, and is now working on a much larger Rio Grande empire in his home.

I told Mike that I wanted my layout to be scenery-driven and include Mullan Pass west of Helena, and Lombard Canyon, which is between Bozeman

and Helena. I also provided the dimensions of the room (11'-0" x 14'-9"), along with the positions of the closets and doors and the clearance a person would need to move around the layout.

Mike soon designed the L-shaped track plan you see on page 96. This layout will provide plenty of mainline running, a siding where trains can meet, a short industry track, and a staging yard.

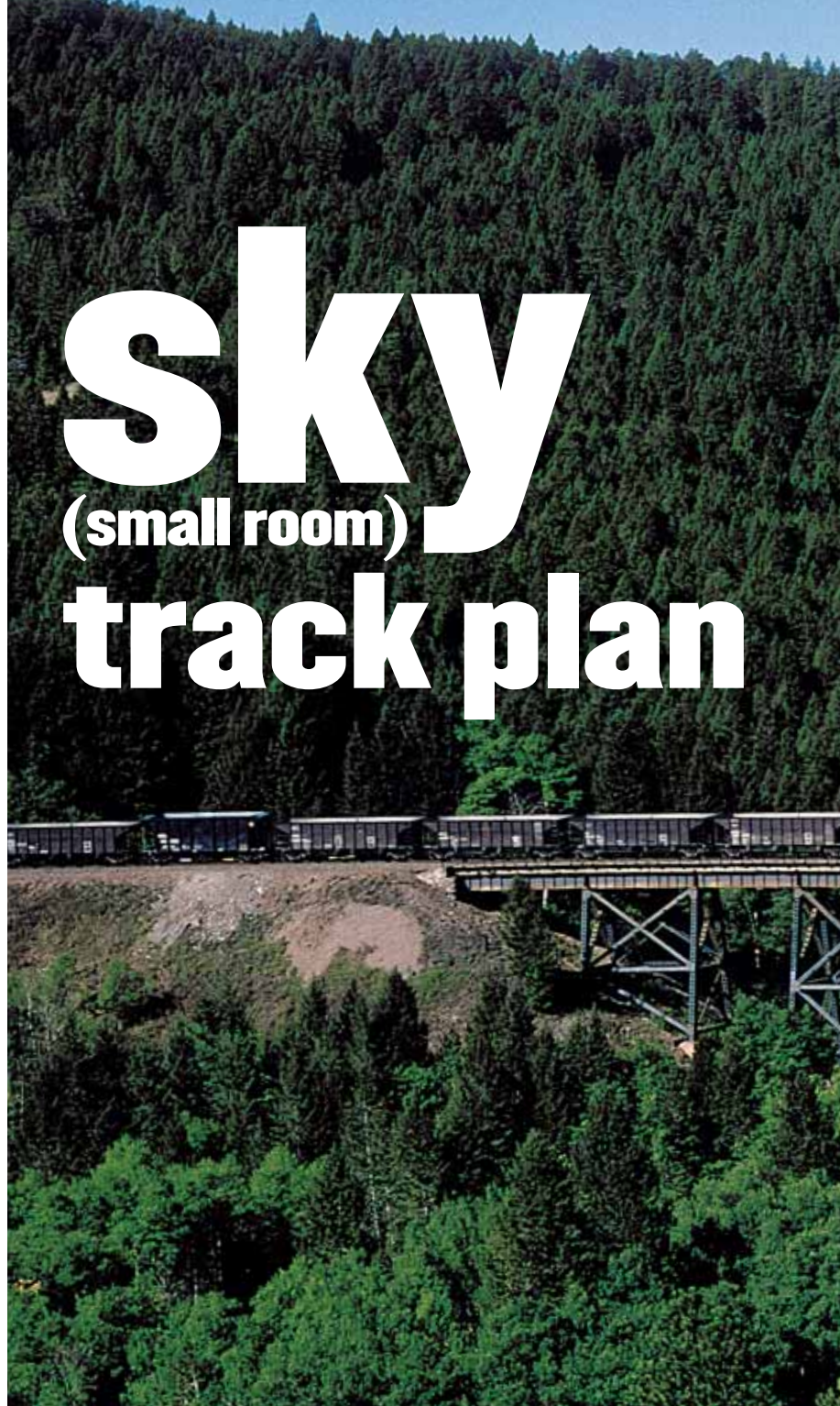
The staging yard was an important feature to me since all that rolling stock that was buried in boxes could be kept

on the layout, ready to roll. It also allows me to store different types of trains staged to run, such as a grain train, a coal train, an intermodal train, as well as MRL's own manifest freight, which is referred to as the LM and ML (Laurel to Missoula and Missoula to Laurel). I can even throw in a local for good measure.

Inspired by Big Sky country

Even though the plan was based on Lombard Canyon and Mullan Pass, I

sky (small room) track plan





was able to sneak another location into the mix. I decided to model the twin tunnel portals located on the west side of the apex of Bozeman Pass. There really *are* two portals at West End. One is the existing tunnel Montana Rail Link uses today. The other is the original 1883 tunnel that Northern Pacific used until 1945, when a new 3,015-foot tunnel was completed. Built at a cost of \$1.25 million, the new tunnel accommodated the massive Z-5 class 2-8-8-4s that were used on this line.

Obviously, the MRL doesn't use the old tunnel, but I'm applying a little "modeler's license" here. That's what makes model railroading fun!

The layout's centerpiece is the portion that resembles Mullan Pass and, in particular, Skyline Trestle (above) – one of a pair of spectacular curved steel trestles that grace the east slope of Mullan Pass.

Mullan Pass has a stiff 2.2 percent grade, which crests at the continental divide, just outside the west portal.

Montana Rail Link's train ML (Missoula-Lauriel) glides down the 2.2 percent grade of the east slope of Mullan Pass and over Skyline Trestle. The trestle and its surroundings are the centerpiece of this compact track plan.

MONTANA RAIL LINK

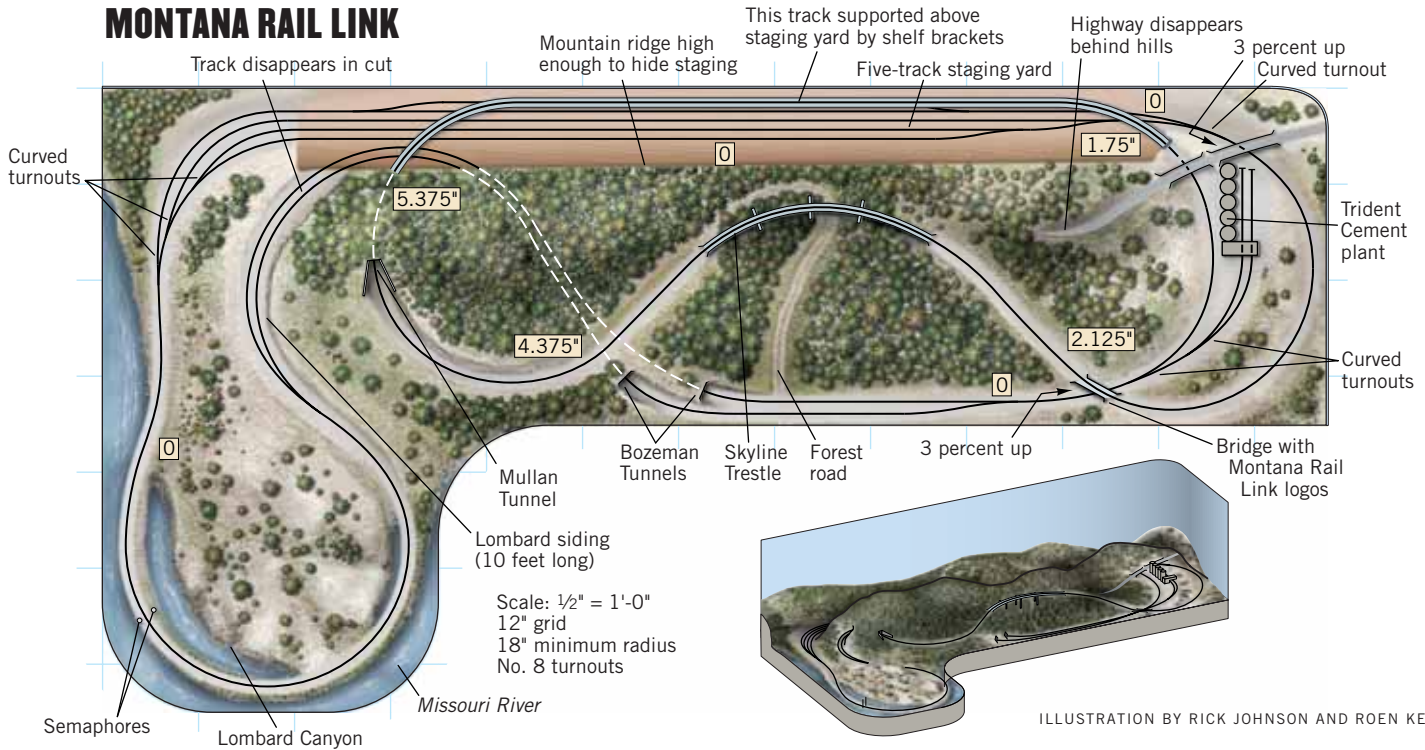


ILLUSTRATION BY RICK JOHNSON AND ROEN KELLY

Modeling a big-train regional

In 1990, when I first encountered the Montana Rail Link, I immediately knew that someday I would model this operation. Camera in hand, I've returned to Montana every year since. And every year the railroad changes just a little bit. New locomotives and freight cars are purchased, mergers are consummated, and even a deluxe private passenger train, the *Montana Rockies Daylight*, started running.

Every time I go back, I like what I see. In 1990, I photographed MRL locomotives still painted Burlington Northern green. In 1993, I was there to see BN's "whiteface" GP50s on that road's train 21. And in 1996, I loved seeing those smart-looking new orange-and-green Burlington Northern Santa Fe Dash 9s on a grain train.

The Montana Rail Link was in its third year of operation when I made my initial visit, having started on October 31, 1987. On that day, BN leased more than 580 miles of well-maintained former Northern Pacific Ry. main line to the fledgling regional. The trackage running from Jones Junction, Mont., (just east of Billings) to Sandpoint, Idaho, was leased – and not sold – because BN (now BNSF) still has NP bonds outstanding until the year 2047.

Though MRL doesn't own its main line, it was able to purchase from BN

230 miles of branches in Montana, and it received trackage rights over the BN from Sandpoint to Spokane, Wash.

Montana Rail Link maintains a fairly profitable network of branch lines, but its primary traffic is BNSF run-through trains. Burlington Northern Santa Fe maintains a guaranteed amount of tonnage over the line as a condition of the original contract between the two railroads. All this variety and traffic, along with the gorgeous Montana scenery that the MRL traverses, make the railroad a modeler's dream.

More than 10 years ago, I started collecting N scale locomotives and rolling stock with my dream layout in mind. I was drawn to N scale by the fantastic detail and exquisite running qualities of the rolling stock, as well as the ability to better emulate the scenery-to-trains size ratio – being able to more closely represent a Montana-sized mountain intrigued me.

I decided I would model anything I could have seen from 1990 through 2000. While the trains change on my railroad, the setting does not. Anyone who's ever been to Montana will agree that the railroad is dwarfed by its surroundings. They don't call it Big Sky Country for nothing. My goal is to capture some of the flavor of that impressive scenery on my layout. – T. D.



Because the grade extends the length of the tunnel, westbound trains work hard all the way through and tend to belch tremendous amounts of choking black smoke. Almost all westbound trains require helpers, and in the case of heavy coal or grain trains, two helper sets might be used. Helper crews are required to wear gas masks.

I will also model the east portal of Mullan Tunnel, which had an unusual twin blower system that pushed exhaust gases ahead of the train to the west and



out of the tunnel. The blower system and its associated buildings were dormant for many years until MRL reactivated one of the blowers for emergency use – if a train stalls inside the tunnel and the crew has to evacuate, they can start this blower using their radio.

The serpentine line through Lombard Canyon is also represented. This dry, mountainous area along the Missouri River is, for the most part, devoid of trees and will contrast nicely with the pine-covered slopes of Mullan Pass.

This gives me at least three distinct vignettes of Montana railroading. While I could think of hundreds of scenes I'd love to model, three will do for now. Since I've already completed benchwork and laid track, maybe I won't have to travel 1,354 miles to see big Montana railroading action this summer. I can just walk a few steps downstairs. ♡

An avid N scaler, Tom Danneman is MODEL RAILROADER's art director. He lives in Pewaukee, Wis.

Semaphores (top left) are still in use between Spring Gulch and Quinns, Mont. In 1996, Burlington Northern train 125 (above) rolls along the Missouri River in Lombard Canyon. A freight (left) led by an MRL SD40-2XR crests the summit of Bozeman Pass. The modern tunnel is used today; the original tunnel was abandoned in 1945.

► **More on our Web site**

From GP9s to SD40-2XRs, Tom Danneman details Montana Rail Link's fascinating and varied motive power fleet. Read his report at www.modelrailroader.com



D. WALLACE JOHNSON

The Virginian in HO and N

Big-time railroading in small-time space

By Roger Marsh

Plying its trade among the hills and tipples of coal country with massive steam locomotives, growling Fairbanks-Morse Train Masters, and extensive electrification, the Virginian Ry. did things on a grand scale. The drama of tonnage grinding through the mountains is appealing, but how do you do justice to a sprawling prototype in a limited space? A 2-6-6-6 followed by five hoppers and a caboose looks a little odd, believe me!

Here are two plans, one in HO that fills a small room and another in N scale that fits on a pair of hollow-core doors, that show how it's possible to do something interesting with this railroad – even if you don't have a gymnasium to call your own.

HO in a bedroom

I named this layout Cunningham's Gap, partly because it sounds Appalachian, and partly because it's the name of a geographic feature near my home. The west end of the Virginian,

where Fairbanks-Morse H-24-66 Train Masters and 2-8-8-2 and 2-10-10-2 steam locomotives moved long strings of hoppers to waiting tipples, is the inspiration. If your nerves can handle rigging catenary, you can shift the layout farther east and take advantage of Bachmann's EL-C electric.

As drawn, the plan requires a 10 x 11-foot room. At a minimum, the layout can operate with a pair of Athearn Train Masters, though an additional pair would provide more flexibility. If you prefer steam, the Proto 2000 2-8-8-2, and an Athearn USRA 2-8-2, dressed up to look more like a Virginian MC-class Mikado, will fit the bill nicely. If you select the steam option, you will want to add some way to turn the engines in the fiddle yard. The Virginian was never a major passenger carrier, and for the purposes of the layout I've assumed that passenger service has ceased.

Rolling stock naturally includes a heavy dose of coal hoppers. Accurail's USRA 55-ton hopper and Athearn's 34-foot, two-bay, ribbed-side hopper both come decorated for the Virginian. These cars can be used to build up rolling stock quickly and more-detailed models can be added later on.

Structure kits for the various buildings on the layout are readily available

The Virginian Ry. shuttled hoppers between West Virginia's coalfields and the ocean port of Norfolk, Va. Roger Marsh shows how this 600-mile coal hauler can be modeled in a limited space in HO and N scales.

from the major manufacturers and can be weathered for greater realism.

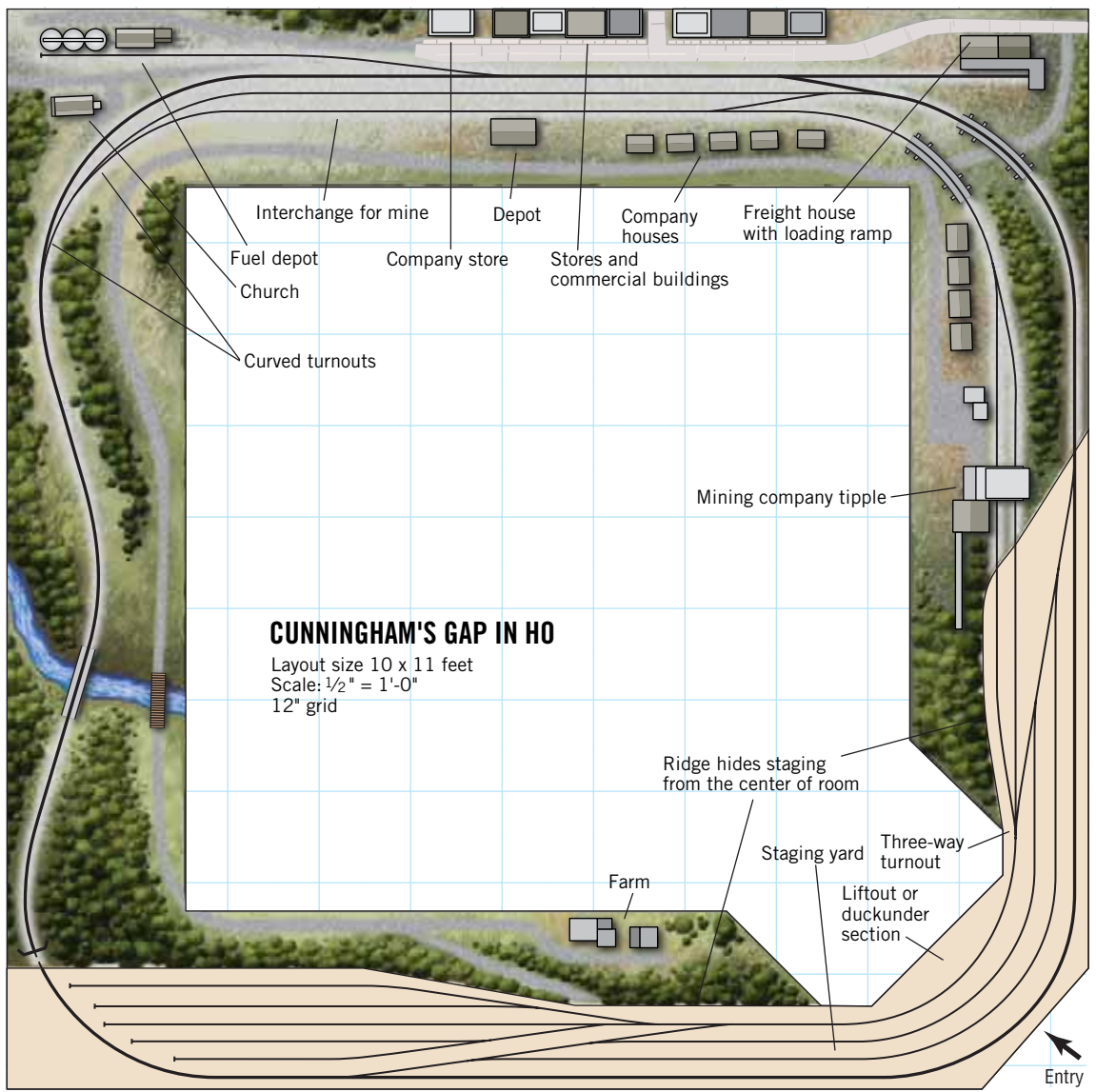
Operations

A fiddle yard gives this layout considerable operational flexibility, enabling a cycle of loads and empties through the mine. The yard has tracks for staging a pair of hopper consists, one of empties and the other of loads, each with about 15 cars and a caboose.

The mine tracks connect to the fiddle yard to allow interchange of loads and empties. The stub-end tracks are for storing general freight cars, which enables the "dispatcher" to vary the consists of local freights. This helps to avoid the funny feeling you have seen that boxcar before – quite recently in fact!

Digital Command Control (DCC) would be a distinct advantage for this layout. With the amount of activity I've contemplated in the staging yard, DCC would simplify wiring and control.

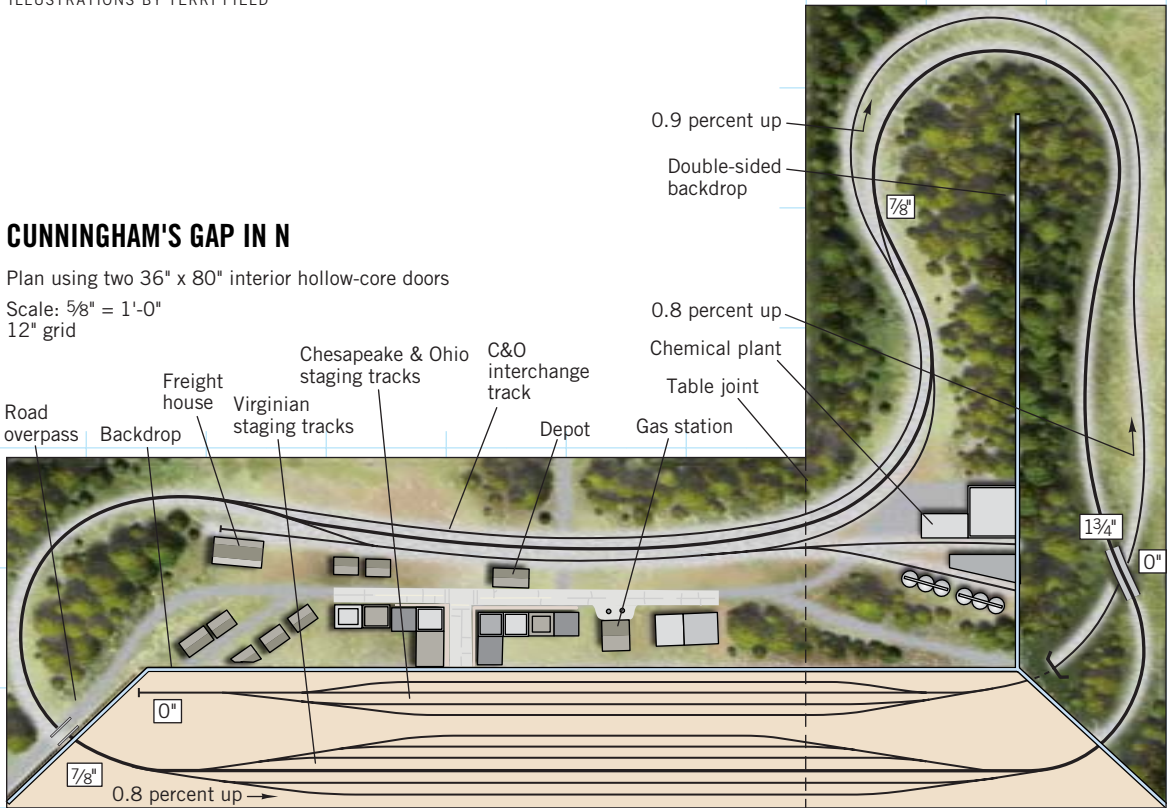
This layout is capable of supporting four or five operators, particularly if crews of engineer and conductor are



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TERRI FIELD

CUNNINGHAM'S GAP IN N

Plan using two 36" x 80" interior hollow-core doors
 Scale: 5/8" = 1'-0"
 12" grid





THE VIRGINIAN RY. CO.

used. For a full operating session, a fiddle yard operator/dispatcher is necessary to keep things rolling.

The staging tracks are mostly hidden from the view of operators on the inside, with the fiddle yard operator occupying a position where all the staging tracks can be seen. If DCC is not used, a yard control panel would be needed for the yard. For solo operations, it would be easy enough to take the trains for a walk without being too worried about losing sight of things.

The main traffic on this layout is going to be coal – empties westbound and loads eastbound. Not all of these are through trains, as there is the necessity to set out empties for the mine and for the next eastbound coal extra to pick up the loads from the interchange. A freight house and a fuel depot add local switching interest.

This layout mixes locals with long coal trains, but the Virginian also operated lengthy drag freights. Through freight trains can be accommodated by adding another long track to the staging yard.

Construction considerations

I would build this layout 54" high. That way a modeling workbench with shelves would fit comfortably under the layout, and access to electrical systems would be easier, quite apart from the visual benefits of a higher layout.

The use of open-frame benchwork is an advantage since the ground level is constantly changing, in keeping with

the hilly terrain so characteristic of the Virginian's west end.

The plan was designed with Peco code 75 track in mind, but you can use other brands as well. The minimum curve radius is 24", with wider curves used wherever possible. The entry to the room can either be a duckunder or a lift-out section. If the lift-out option is selected, care must be taken to ensure the staging yard tracks are not occupied before you heave away, otherwise very expensive noises could ensue!

N scale using two doors

This compact layout uses two interior hollow-core doors as its base. The layout depicts a West Virginia industrial town, with a freight depot, chemical plant, and an interchange between the Virginian and Chesapeake & Ohio.

Atlas opened up the field somewhat for the N scale Virginian fan by producing the H-24-66 in the smaller scale. The Atlas RSD-4/5 is an ideal C&O locomotive for this layout. As in HO, other rolling stock is available, though perhaps not with the same variety that is possible in the larger scale.

The N scale track plan is fairly self-explanatory. A grade separation allows the Virginian to cross over the C&O. A coal preparation plant is suggested, rather than visually present. Long coal trains are accommodated in the staging yard, so you can still see the drags come through town. Local industries and the C&O interchange in the modeled town provide the switching interest. I got the

The West Virginia coal district accounted for more than 86 percent of the Virginian's freight. This sprawling coal tipple dominates the little mining town of Slab Fork, W. Va.

idea for the chemical plant from an encyclopedia's description of the industries of West Virginia. There is more to coal country than coal!

Digital Command Control is the preferred mode of control, particularly since the Atlas Train Masters come with a decoder socket. The model is also available with a decoder installed.

Stacked and carved extruded polystyrene foam board is used to give relief from the rigid flatness of the doors. After all, West Virginia doesn't look much like Indiana!

The method of joining the doors holds no surprises; it involves gluing two equal lengths of 1 x 2 lumber to the underside of the doors where they intersect at the baseboard joint. Dowels and bolts provide the necessary alignment of the baseboards.

Both plans can be adapted to suit any of the Appalachian coal-hauling railroads. It's even possible to build a layout that covers a range of eras or prototypes (through interchangeable structures), increasing the value per square foot of the layout. ♣

Roger Marsh, a Presbyterian pastor, lives in Australia with his wife and two children. In addition to model railroading, his other interests include ship modeling, poetry, and kickboxing.

Naugatuck Valley in N

An apartment-sized New Haven layout with room to grow • By David Popp

As the last of the benchwork for my 11 x 30-foot HO scale Soo Line layout was unceremoniously shoved to the back of the storage unit, I figured it would be a while before I built another one. A recent move had caused my wife and I to temporarily downsize to a small apartment while we built a new house. Sensing my loss, however, Ingrid donated part of the living room for a small layout, and my plans for an N scale apartment-sized railroad were born.

A prototype with modelers in mind

Looking for something different from the Midwest, I sought out the New York, New Haven & Hartford for inspiration. After some research, I focused on the New Haven's Naugatuck Line, following the Naugatuck River Valley in Connecticut. This area was once rich with mills and factories and would provide some nice industries to switch. In addition, a devastating hurricane in 1955 caused the New Haven to rebuild most of the original double-track main line as a single-track one, making it ideal for a modeler with limited space.

The region also included some picturesque scenery as the New Haven wound its way north to Waterbury. Its dramatic, near-water-level route was surrounded by tree-covered rocky hills between towns and included some nice bridges to model.

And by the late 1950s, daily traffic on the line was ideal for a small layout. It included a north and south through freight, a local serving the towns, and four passenger runs each with Budd Rail Diesel Cars (RDCs).

The layout plan

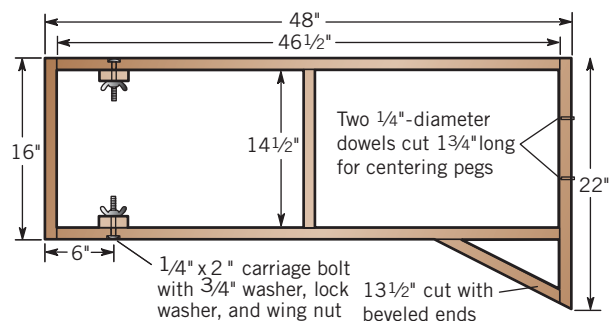
Because of my space limitations, I knew my layout could only be a representation of the New Haven. With that in mind, the towns of Seymour and Naugatuck exhibit the flavor of 1959 New Haven railroading in Connecticut but are not accurate reproductions.

MOVING FREIGHT ON THE NAUGATUCK LINE

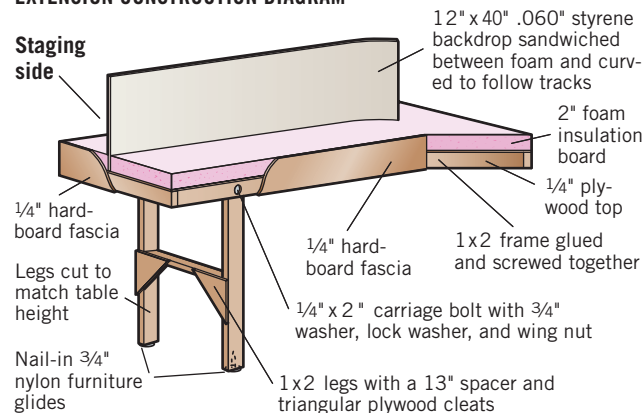
Late in the New Haven's history, the railroad would run a single freight north to Waterbury, Conn., each day. The train would have three locomotives, typically RS-3s. In Waterbury, the crew would break up their train into three locals, sending them off in different directions to switch the main back to Naugatuck and the Torrington and Forestville branches. In the evening, the three locals would return to Waterbury where the crew would reassemble the train, and then take the whole thing back south to Cedar Hill.

By using the staging tracks as a fiddle yard, you could easily simulate this operation on this version of the Naugatuck Line or adapt it for your own railroad. —D. P.

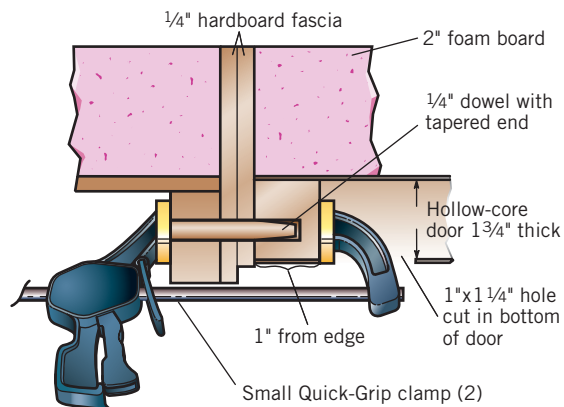
FRAME ASSEMBLY



EXTENSION CONSTRUCTION DIAGRAM



CLAMP ATTACHMENT



Track and roadbed

Peco code 55 track

- 387 no. 8 curved right-hand turnout (2)
- 388 no. 8 curved left-hand turnout (3)
- 393 20-degree crossing (1)
- 1791 no. 4 right-hand turnout (2)
- 1792 no. 4 left-hand turnout (6)
- 1795 no. 6 right-hand turnout (2)
- 1796 no. 6 left-hand turnout (2)
- 1797 no. 7 wye turnout (1)
- 5801 36" flextrack (25)

Midwest Products

- 3019 cork roadbed (25)

Structure key

Atlas

- A. 2548 plate girder bridge

Bar Mills

- B. 304 low boy trestle (coal dock)
- E. 912 Whistle Stop Junction depot

American Model Builders

- C. 617 barn (used as fuel dealer shed)

- D. 638 Springfield depot

Design Preservation Models

- F. 506 Gripp's Luggage (furniture factory)
- G. 660 Woods Furniture (kitbashed to fit backdrop and as a view block to staging)

Micro Engineering Co.

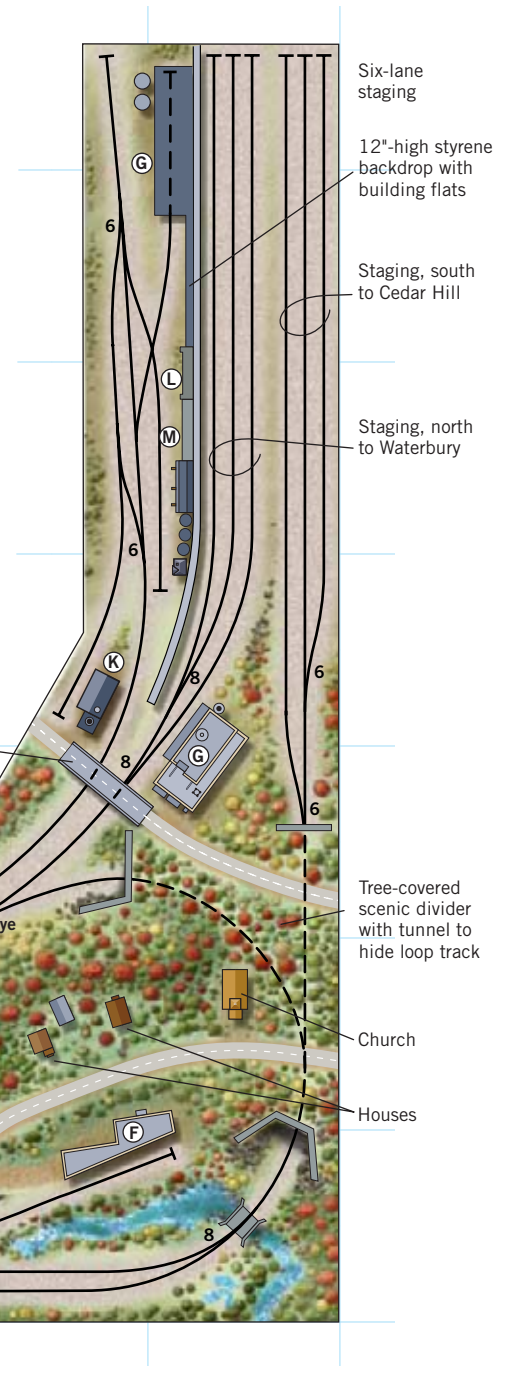
- H. 75153 40-foot ballasted-deck bridge (3 – cut to fit curve)

Model Power

- I. 1572 Jackson Meat (kitbashed into a textile mill)
- J. 1509 brewery (kitbashed into lumber mill)
- K. 1546 Holland Iron Works
- L. 1547 U. S. Customs (kitbashed into warehouses to fit backdrop)

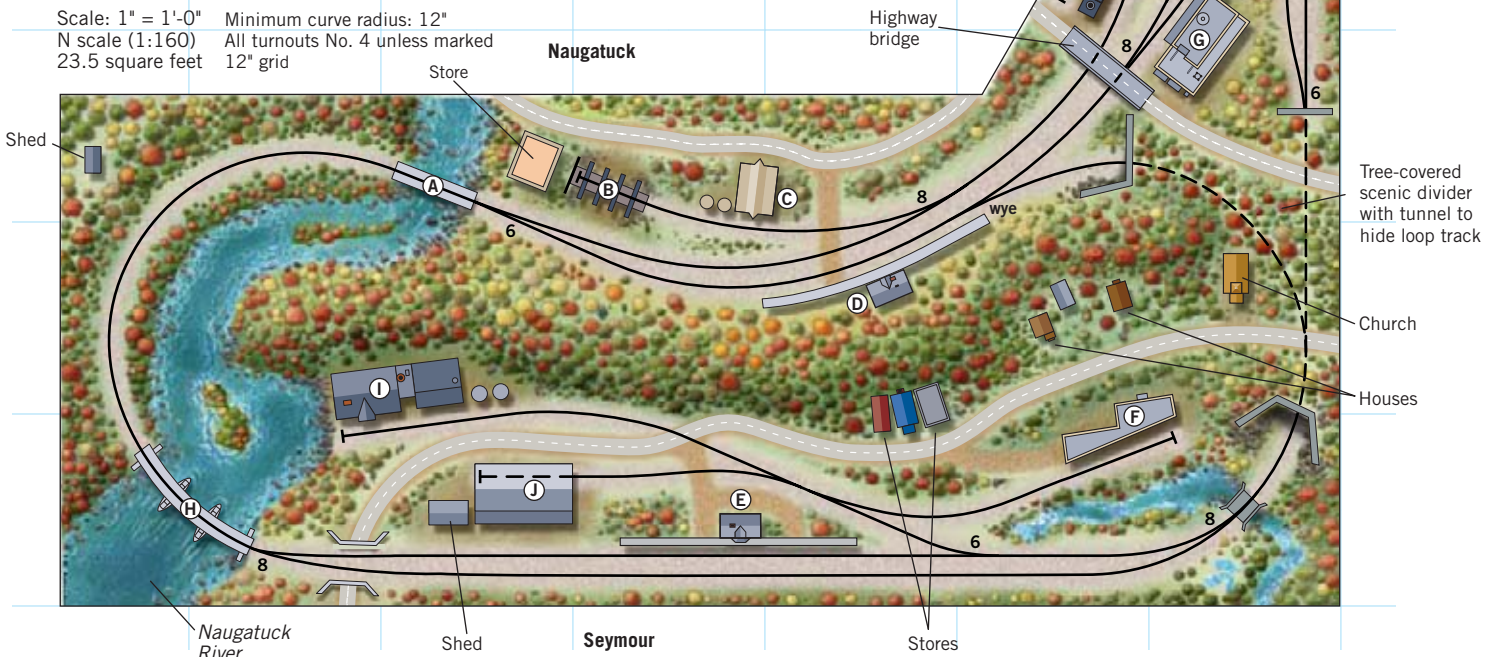
Walthers

- M. 3246 Gold Flame coal dealer (modified to fit backdrop)



Scale: 1" = 1'-0"
 N scale (1:160)
 23.5 square feet

Minimum curve radius: 12"
 All turnouts No. 4 unless marked
 12" grid



I designed the layout in two pieces. The benchwork for the main part is a 32" hollow-core interior door covered with 2" foam insulation board and has a completely independent loop for display running. For support, I set the layout on an inexpensive folding table.

To gain a little more space and add some operating interest, I built a 16" x 48" removable extension. This piece allowed me to include a six-track staging yard (three tracks for each end of the railroad) and a 6"-wide industrial park for the town of Naugatuck.

When in use, the extension clamps to the layout with two Quick-Grip clamps and is supported by a removable leg. To build the extension, see the series of construction diagrams.

Fun for two

I designed the layout with two operators in mind, and it would be a good candidate for an entry-level Digital Command Control (DCC) system with walkaround control.

For an operating session, using a simple timetable, one operator would run the local and switch the industries at Seymour and Naugatuck. The other would handle the through freights and the typical late-1950s New Haven RDC passenger trains making station stops at both towns.

As you get more experienced, you could add waybills, extra trains, and even a fast clock! Despite my Naugatuck Valley's small, apartment-living size, its possibilities for railroading fun seem endless. 🚂

Short line with an interurban heritage

The Valley City Street & Interurban Ry. as an HO switching layout

By Cyril Durrenberger

Short lines are sometimes obscure, but they can be excellent prototypes for model railroaders. Often most, if not all, of the short line's facilities and operations can be modeled if some "selective compression" is used. The April 1981 issue of *The Soo* (magazine of the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society, www.sooline.org) had a comprehensive article on the Valley City Street & Interurban Ry. (VCS&I) of Valley City, N. D. The line had several features that would make for an interesting model railroad.

Valley City is in the valley of the Sheyenne River, and both the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie (Soo Line) and Northern Pacific served the area. In 1891 the Soo Line laid track through the valley, but couldn't locate its line to go through Valley City. The Soo's station was built 1.75 miles north of town.

The NP came directly through the city, but in 1908 built a bypass that spanned the valley on a long, tall viaduct. Local trains of the NP still came to Valley City to switch industries and to pick up or drop off passengers.

The VCS&I electric line was built in 1905 to connect the Soo Line with Valley City and the NP. It ran local passenger service on tracks in the city streets and out to the Soo depot, but by 1945 passenger service was dropped. The line continued to haul freight until its purchase by the Soo in 1953. In later years the VCS&I mainly handled cars being interchanged between the Soo and the NP. It also switched industries in Valley City and carried LCL (less-than-carload-lot) freight from the Soo.

The VCS&I had a total of three pieces of motive power. Interurban

combine no. 1 was purchased second-hand in 1905 and used until 1915. Combine no. 2 was purchased new in 1915 and used until 1947. In 1947 a used electric "locomotive" (really a former line-maintenance car) was purchased and served until 1953. Plans for all three appear in the April '81 issue of *The Soo*. When the Soo Line purchased the VCS&I, electric operations were terminated and the overhead removed.

The track plan

I've designed a track plan to capture the neatest features of the VCS&I in the years after passenger service was discontinued. The layout would occupy about 40 square feet exclusive of the aisleway and only 59 square feet with it.

The two staging tracks represent Valley City's connections with the trunk-line railroads and allow Soo and NP locals to appear at their respective stations, interchange cars with the short line, switch a couple of industries each, and disappear offstage.

The Soo at North Valley City is much like the prototype but condensed to fit. The station was a standard Soo Line second-class depot. There's a list of structure kits that could be used on this layout online at

www.modelrailroader.com, including two that could be modified to represent this station. For scratchbuilders, however, there are plans in *Soo Line Standards, Vol. 3*, published by the SLH&TS.

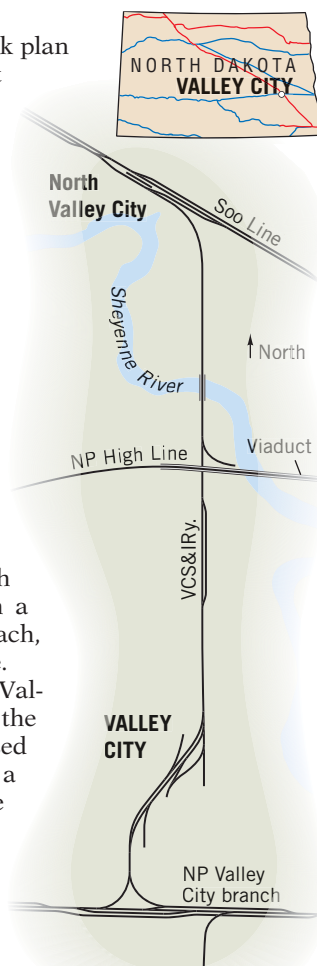
Freight cars are interchanged on the station's house track. There's a grain elevator and a coal and fuel-oil dealer. The Soo main line proceeds through a wooded cut into the staging track behind a low backdrop. This should be just high enough to hide the train, and the higher the layout's base height the lower this "train hider" can be.

The VCS&I leaves the Soo station and crosses under the NP "High Line" bridge. It passes a siding for the Soo's stockyard and the Miller Fibre Co. A few blocks into town it reaches the NP interchange track. The VCS&I serves Curtis Olson Oil Co., Smith Lumber and Coal Co., and a freight platform owned by the Soo. The NP track terminates here, and there's a spur to an NP gravel pit.

The NP track goes to that road's station where there's a runaround track and a spur to Russell-Miller Milling Co. The NP "Low Line" out of town to the north terminates at the edge of the layout, while the line to the south passes behind flats of commercial buildings to its own behind-the-backdrop staging track.

Traffic and equipment

Soo traffic at North Valley City includes box-



cars for the grain elevator, hopper and tank cars for the fuel dealer, and cars for the VCS&I. The VCS&I delivers stockcars to the cattle pens, tank cars to the bulk oil plant, and boxcars to the remaining industries, plus cars to be interchanged with the NP. The NP sends a few gondolas to the gravel pit, boxcars to the milling company, and cars for interchange to the Soo.

The VCS&I could be operated with either a combine or the line-car "locomotive." Combine no. 2 could be modeled by using LaBelle Woodworking kit H064 and adding baggage doors. The line car would have to be scratchbuilt. The diesel era would be easiest to model because suitable engines are available for the Soo and NP. If the period is post 1953, a Soo diesel would be assigned to the former VCS&I.

Operations

This layout might keep two operators busy if one ran the NP and Soo trains and the other the VCS&I. But this is a low-key, easy-going sort of railroad, well suited to solo operation.

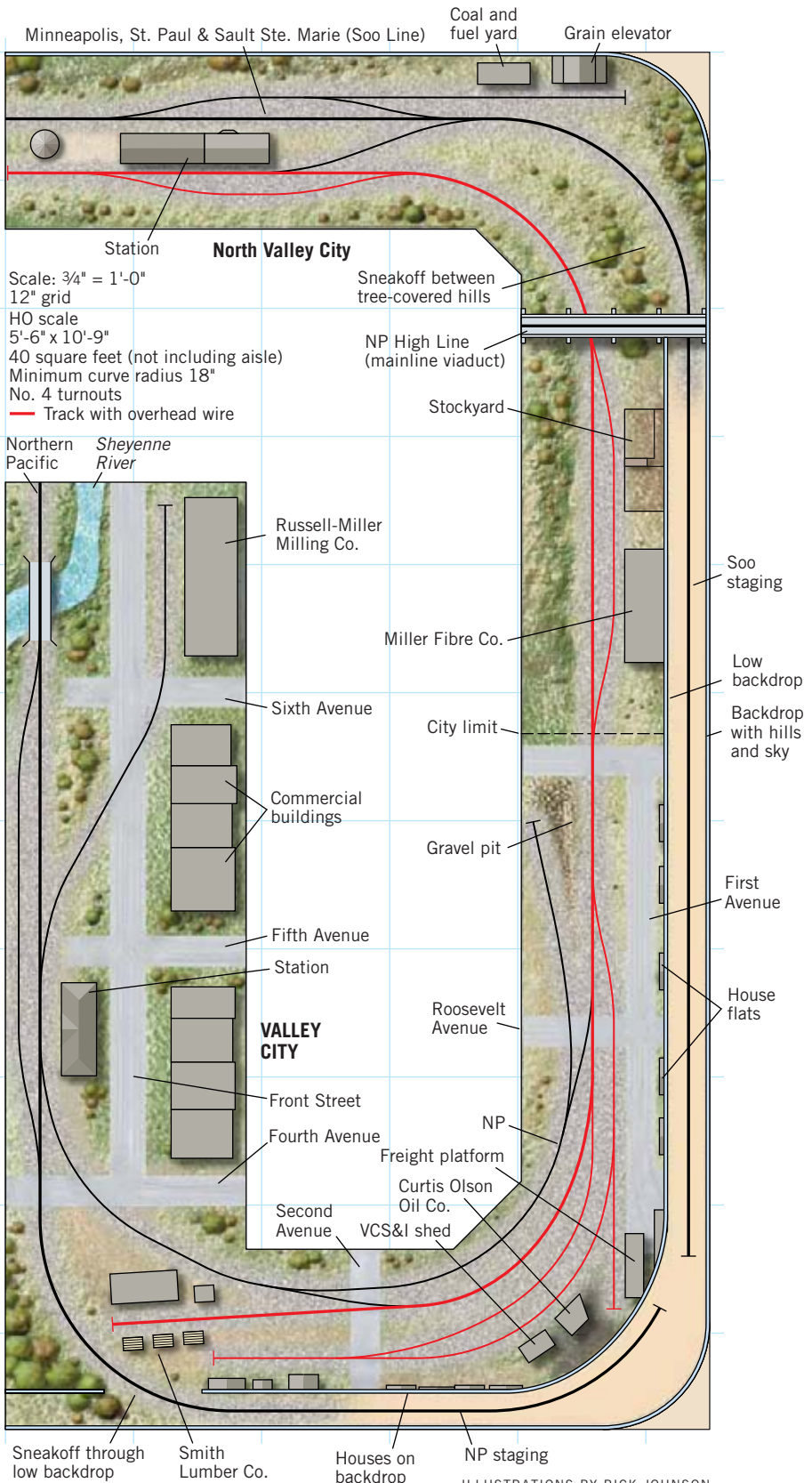
The NP local would run from staging to Valley City. There it would switch the gravel pit, interchange track, and milling plant, drop off LCL boxcars, and return to its staging track. The engine and caboose could be "restaged" – exchanged – between operating sessions.

Then the VCS&I switches the local industries and NP interchange track, and goes to the Soo station at North Valley City. There it drops off cars and picks up cars for Valley City and returns south, doing any switching required along the way. Because of the electrics' limited hauling capacity, it may be necessary to make two trips each day.

The capacity for cars on the layout and in staging tracks is limited, but nothing says all the cars have to be on the track at the same time. Cars can be rotated to and from storage when the connecting trains are restaged, so a greater variety of rolling stock than you might expect could be seen passing through this prairie metropolis. 🚂

Cyril Durrenberger is an air quality official for the state of Texas. His own HO layout models the "Rabbit," the old Houston East & West Texas RR, which was a predecessor of the Texas & New Orleans and Southern Pacific lines in East Texas.

VALLEY CITY STREET & INTERURBAN RY.



ROOM-SIZED MODEL RAILROADS

A division point yard in N scale

A simple yard with staging tracks provides plenty of railroad action for one or two operators

By Andy Sperandio

When I was still in my teens I happened upon a couple of publications that still affect how I think about model railroading. These influences show up in the track plan I drew for the first in this new series of articles on layouts designed to be built in less than 100 square feet.

To design it I asked myself what kind of a layout I'd want if I had to live with that limitation. A railroad featuring yard operation was an easy choice for me, and a division point where trains passing through change crews, engines, and cabooses seemed to offer the greatest play value, although you can say "operating interest" if you have to be more serious about it.

The basic shape of the layout is a loop or oval with the yard in a small city out front and staging tracks concealed at the back. The staging tracks are vital, because the foreground yard is a place somewhere in between really important destinations. Trains have to appear to come from someplace else and go on to someplace different, and that's what staging allows.

Although meant to re-create prototypical railroad action, this is a free-lance design not based on any real place. If you like this plan and want to build it for yourself, I hope you'll feel free to call it whatever you want. I'm calling it the division point at Oldburg, on the Ozark Lines.

Influences

The first of those influences I mentioned is a book called *Frank Ellison on Model Railroading*. One of our hobby's great pioneers, Ellison established the idea that operation, re-creating the drama and excitement of railroading in miniature, was what a model railroad was for. After many years in the hobby I can appreciate that this is the key to long-term enjoyment and the answer to the question of what to do with a layout after you've built it.

Ellison made the division point yard at Colbert on his O scale Delta Lines sound exciting, and while I never got to run it, I've had the chance to enjoy similar situations on a number of layouts. I've always enjoyed the challenge of keeping up with the flow of a busy main line while sorting cars for through freights, locals, and town switchers, and even a layout the size of this one can deliver that kind of fun.

The other influence came from the stories of Harry Bedwell and E. S. Dellinger in the old pulp *Railroad* magazines of the 1930s and '40s. I'm too young to have found those on the newsstand, but I accepted some with curiosity from older friends clearing their shelves, then eagerly bought more on auction at model railroad conventions.

Dellinger described the exploits of a group of railroad men on the fictional Ozark Lines, which I always imagined

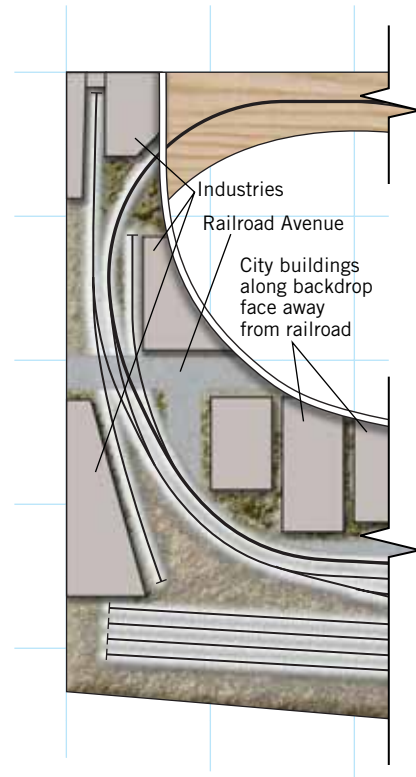
he based on one of my hometown lines, the Missouri Pacific. Steeped in steam and crackling with the crisp language of timetable-and-train-order railroading, Dellinger's tales vividly demonstrated how people made the railroad work.

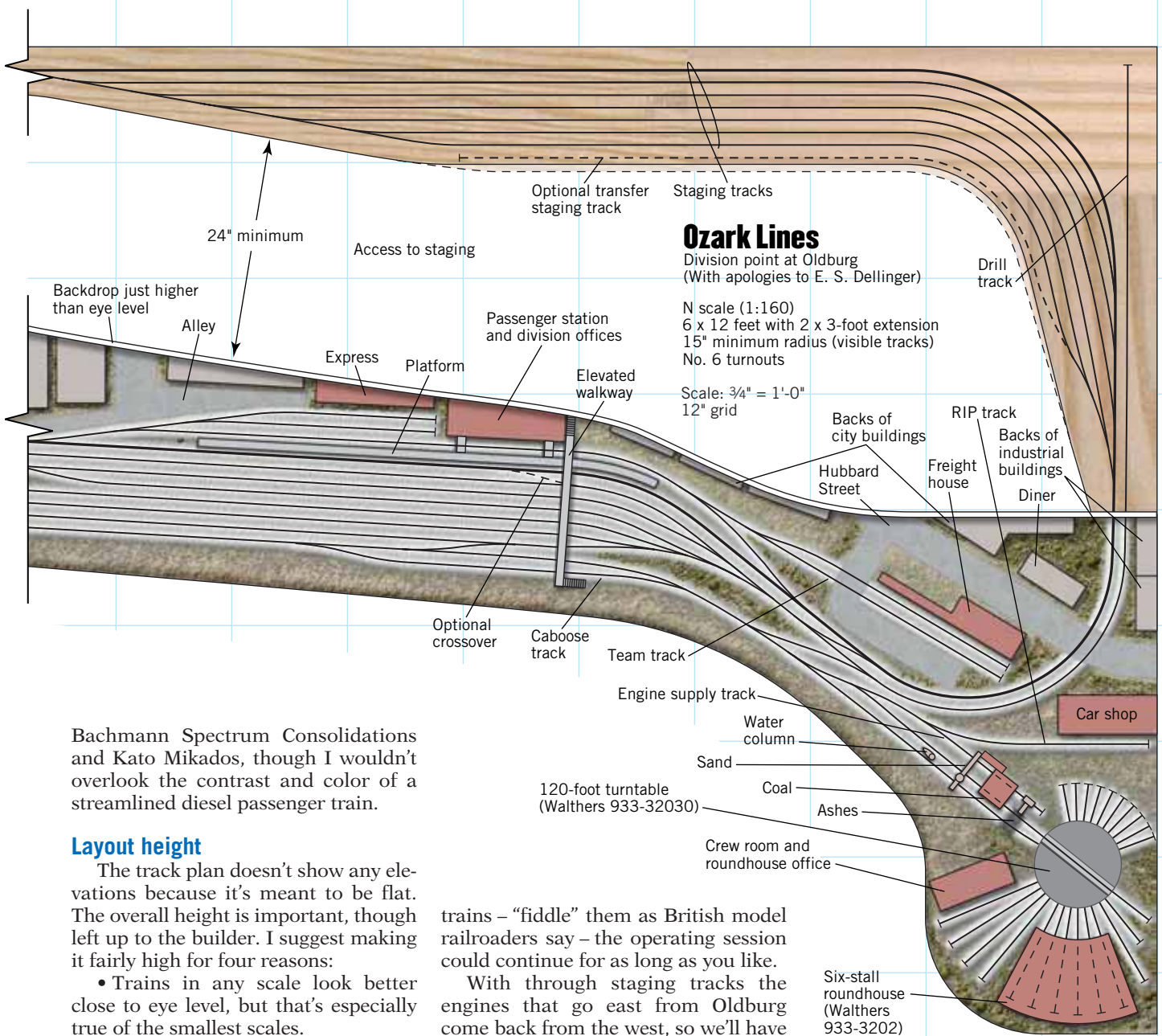
It seemed to me then that the fun in model railroading would be to take the roles of Dellinger's characters moving freight and passengers. As a model railroad engineer, conductor, dispatcher, or yardmaster I've always found that to be true and have never forgotten those stories. Most events on the Ozark Lines revolved around the yard and crew terminal at Oldburg, so that's the name of this division point layout.

Practicality and imagination

Oldburg is actually just about 75 square feet, less if you don't count the open access area. It would fit in a corner of a basement or garage. I chose N scale to allow for a reasonably extensive yard that can handle trains of more than just a few cars.

Setting the railroad in the steam era helps too, with shorter, less massive cars and shorter but more frequent trains. A steam engine terminal is both visually and operationally more complex than its diesel counterpart, and N scale allows a fairly complete layout of roundhouse, turntable, and servicing tracks in a remarkably compact area. I imagine this railroad to be powered by





Bachmann Spectrum Consolidations and Kato Mikados, though I wouldn't overlook the contrast and color of a streamlined diesel passenger train.

Layout height

The track plan doesn't show any elevations because it's meant to be flat. The overall height is important, though left up to the builder. I suggest making it fairly high for four reasons:

- Trains in any scale look better close to eye level, but that's especially true of the smallest scales.
- To back Oldburg's narrow scenes I show flat or partial buildings, which look best when you can't see their truncated (or complete lack of) roofs.
- A horizon at or near eye level requires little actual backdrop painting to be effective – it can be mostly sky.
- Ducking under is necessary to reach the staging access, but the higher the layout the less you'll have to duck.

Oldburg in operation

Although it could be enjoyed by just one operator, I think Oldburg is big enough to allow for two. One person could concentrate on classification yard switching, while the other could run trains in and out of staging, hostile engines for servicing, and switch the industries and freight house. If one or the other ducked back to the staging yard from time to time to rearrange the

trains – “fiddle” them as British model railroaders say – the operating session could continue for as long as you like.

With through staging tracks the engines that go east from Oldburg come back from the west, so we'll have to imagine a line that doesn't have steep hills in one direction and river grades in the other. Steam still gives us plenty of excuse to relay engines so trains can keep moving. Meanwhile arriving locomotives have their fires and ashpans cleaned; coal, water, and sand topped up; and lubrication renewed. Then they're ready to replace the inbound power on the next train through town.

If a little more space is available at the left end of the plan, the industrial switching district could be extended along a narrow shelf.

In no additional space we can invent a route map splitting both east and west of Oldburg to reach different major cities or connecting railroads. That would set up more switching complexity for the classification yard. Despite its name, I think it would be a while before operating this layout grew old. 🍷

ILLUSTRATION BY KELLIE JAEGER

Track plan highlights

- Name:** Oldburg, division point yard on the Ozark Lines
- Scale:** N (1:160)
- Size:** 6 x 12 feet with extension
- Prototype:** free-lance
- Period:** steam era
- Layout style:** table with access “pit”
- Turnout minimum:** no. 6
- Minimum radius:** 15" (visible track)
- Maximum grade:** 0
- Options:** optional crossover lets switcher on drill track work trains on the main; optional stub staging track holds transfer run from another railroad for interchange