

# THE MICRO MODEL RAILWAY DISPATCH

*For the Micro Model Railway designer, builder and enthusiast*



*Tom Conboy's Herrin*

**Preview issue 0**  
**Summer 2021**

# THE DISPATCH

*For the Micro Model Railway layout designer, builder and enthusiast*

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## **Welcome Everyone!**

Thank you for taking an interest in the Micro Model Railway Dispatch, or **The Dispatch** as I like to call it.

For those new to this, a little explanation may be necessary.

The idea started off as an April Fools joke on my Model Railway Facebook page. It quickly turned out that quite a few people were disappointed that it wasn't a real thing, so I decided to try to put something together.

**The Dispatch** is for micro layout designers, builders and operators. A place to share ideas and discuss subjects of interest with like minded souls, in a familiar magazine setting.

Why a preview issue?

For you it's a preview of what to expect each issue, and for me, it's a preview of everything putting out the publication will entail.

You might feel you see similarities between this and Carls "Small Layout Scrapbook" of old.

Hopefully **The Dispatch** will develop a style of its own.

How much will all this micro layout goodness cost you?

**NOTHING AT ALL. IT'S FREE!**

All your feedback is appreciated and I look forward to hearing from you. You can contact me at with your opinions, articles, and layout details at [MMRDeditor@gmail.com](mailto:MMRDeditor@gmail.com)

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A big thank you to these friends and fellow micro layout enthusiasts who have provided me with material for this preview issue. As you see, we have modellers from all over the world creating micro's based on prototypes from all over the world. If that doesn't inspire you to get on and build something, then nothing will!

I look forward to hearing from you all.

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***"Micro layouts are small model railroads, usually less than three or four square feet in area that nonetheless have a clear purpose and excellent operating capability."***

**Carl Arendt**

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*The editor's favourite "Herrin" image. Who doesn't want to peer through that fence and take a closer look?*

Long before I started in the hobby of model railroading, I was a railfan.

Railfanning, or trainspotting, is a great hobby all by itself. When I am out photographing trains, the desire to recreate a model of a scene inspires me to get home and build a model railroad layout. A micro layout is an excellent way to recreate a real life scene without having to invest a lot of time and money to accomplish something worthwhile.

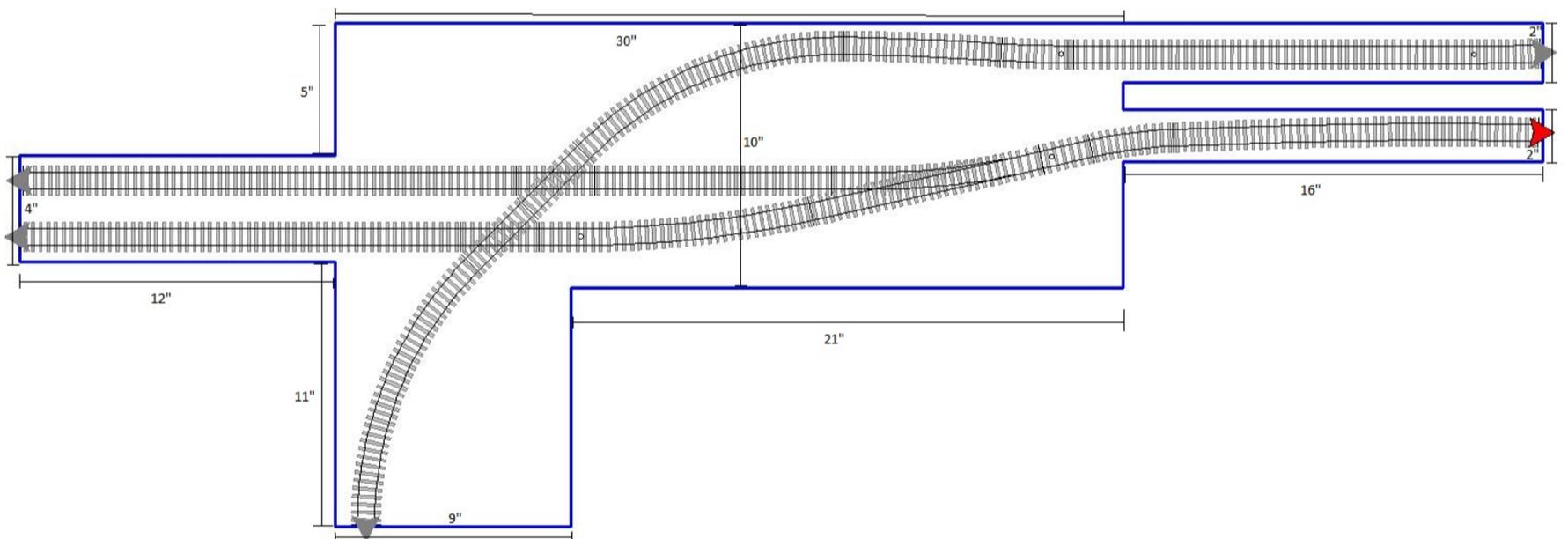
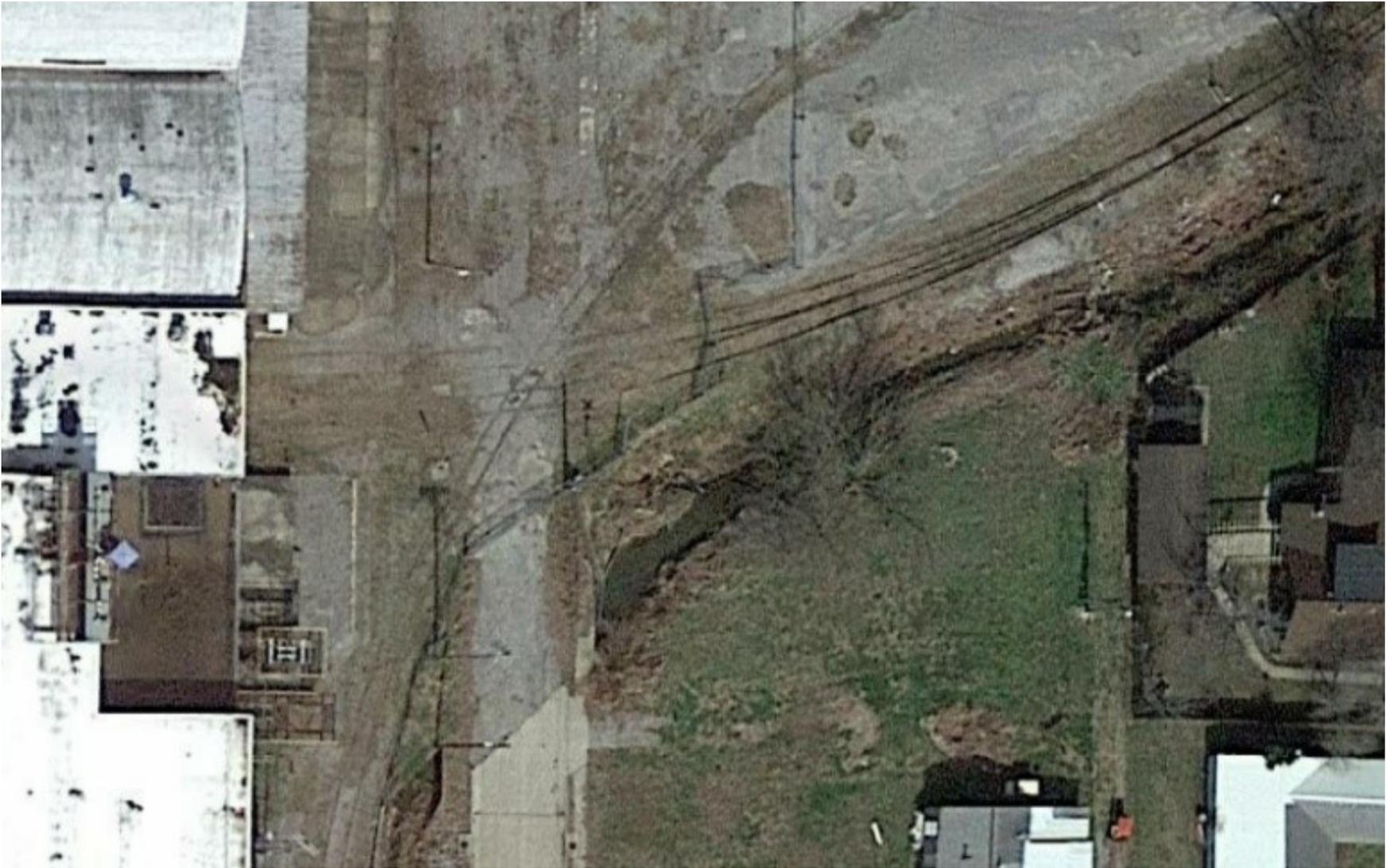
My HO scale Herrin Micro layout is based on a real life scene from the town of Herrin, Illinois. Herrin has a rich railroad history related closely to the coal mining industry that was prevalent in Southern Illinois.

I discovered this town while railfanning Herrin in 2015. When I got home, I did a little more research of the area using Google Maps and Streetview. I found a siding with some

interesting track work running into a manufacturing plant.

I soon discovered this was the former Maytag Appliance plant that closed several years ago. The track arrangement as it appears on Google maps would make a great micro layout.

I designed the layout using the Google Map Satellite image pictured on page 3 below. The challenge was how to compress the scene to fit a footprint of 4 square feet or less. I wanted the crossing and the plant entrance tracks to be the focal feature for this micro, so they were included in the track plan. A street entrance that leads into the parking lot would also fit, but a street located further to the right would be left out. A chain link fences also present on the prototype. A Walthers fencing kit would be a nice feature to include on the layout.



*How the prototype location translates into the track plan.*

The interior of the track entrances into the plant would be hidden behind a backdrop on the left, and the siding tracks leading to the plant would be hidden behind the backdrop on the right. I would use simple “hand fiddling” tail tracks sections that both measure 16 inches long. These will accommodate a four-axle loco and a 60 foot piece of rolling stock. Two rerailer

track sections were also included to ease wheel alignment on all fiddle tracks. The track plan also pictured above shows the dimensions used for the layout. The overall layout size, including staging tracks is 523 square inches, which is well under the 4 square feet (576 sq. inch) definition of a micro.

Operations on the layout are straightforward, with materials needed for the manufacturing of major appliances entering on the tracks that run inside the plant. Scrap metal and finished appliances will ship out from these tracks as well. Cars destined for the interior section of the plant can only enter by the tracks that run horizontally with the layout's length. A single right-handed #4 turnout is used to create two tracks on this section. The north track cuts across the horizontal tracks through two 30 degree crossings that are embedded in the pavement. Due to the sharp curve of this track south of the crossings (less than 15" radius), only

short covered hoppers will be used on this track. A covered hopper will be staged prior to an operating session to represent a car that is ready to be returned to the railroad. Inbound covered hoppers will be stored near the large storage tank at the center of the layout to represent a car to be shunted further south along this siding when it is needed. My research from the few prototype videos available of operations at the Maytag plant, shows covered hoppers were frequently held on this track. A plant entrance exists further to the south on this siding, but this is not included on the Herrin Micro.



*The start of an operating session as described by Tom.*



*The inbound car waits for space to be freed in the plant*



*Another Atmospheric view of Herrin*

Carl Arendt's definition of a micro states that a micro layout has a clear purpose for operating. You don't need a huge amount of space to capture that purpose, even when modeling a

prototype location. My Herrin Micro is proof of that.

*The editor says: "Tom's Herrin micro is one of the most realistic layouts I've seen in a long time. It just drips atmosphere. Close study of the prototype location and operations has reaped dividends here. An attitude we should all follow in creating believable micros"*

# Build your own box file.

Ian Holmes

The humble box file is quite the “in thing” in Micro Model Railway circles these days. But the use of this piece of office filing equipment for model railway layouts goes back quite a way. Some modellers have hazy recollections of a 009 scale layout being built in a couple of them back in the 1990’s, and the double O gauge society ran its first layout in a box file competition in the early 2000’s.

But it remained a bit of a niche until Neil Rushby and Colin Peake built their outstanding micros. The flood gates opened and many other box file micros have followed.

Then John Wiffen at Scalescenes produced his

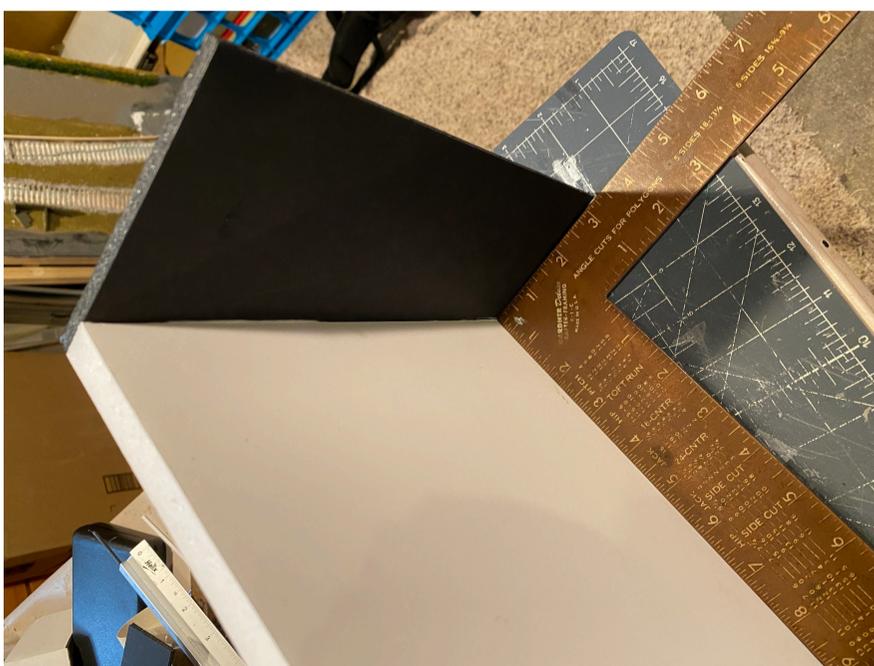
outstanding layout kits, with buildings specifically designed to fit around a simple track layout inside the container.

Though if you live and model in the USA, getting hold of a box file is next to impossible. I know. I tried.

I bought one from Amazon, but it was made of the wrong cardboard and had plastic inserts for the ends. If the ends had been removed, I would have been left with a flat sheet of card. So it was unsuitable for a layout. This led me to try to make one, and it wasn’t at all difficult. All it takes is a little care.

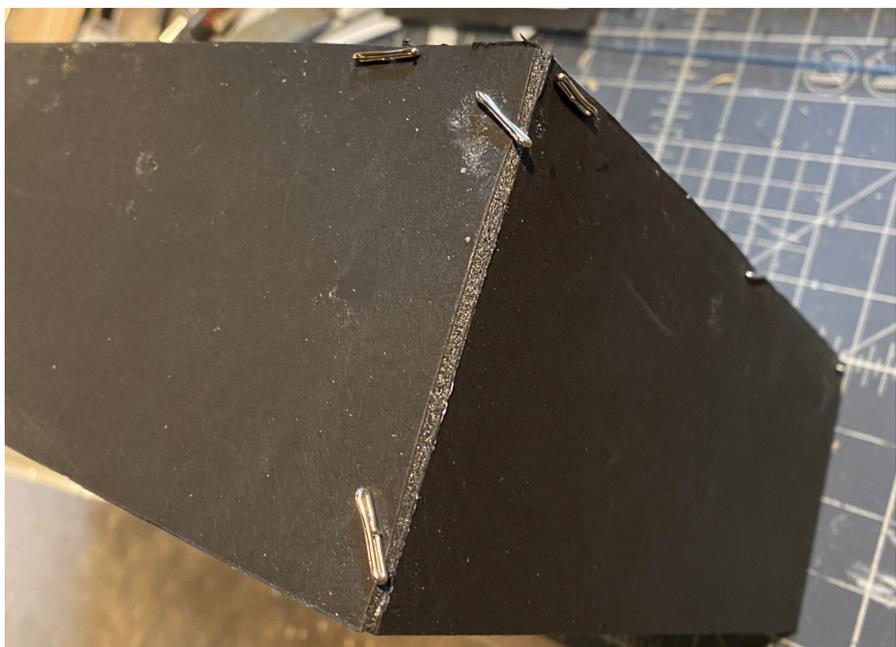


This is the box file I found on Amazon. Not suitable for a micro layout, so it is used for its intended purpose, storing paperwork for my Model T Ford.



To be honest, there’s not a lot to making the container.

I chose 10mm board for the base and 5mm board for the sides. Mainly because I happened to have a lot in stock. I made sure that the edges were square, and everything went together very easily. The biggest part of the thought process was deciding if the sides should sit on top of, or outside the base.



My chosen adhesive was Gorilla Glue woodworking glue. A very strong glue, so I made certain that everything went together square. The corners were pinned as the glue set.



A very easy job. Most of the time was spent waiting for the glue to set.

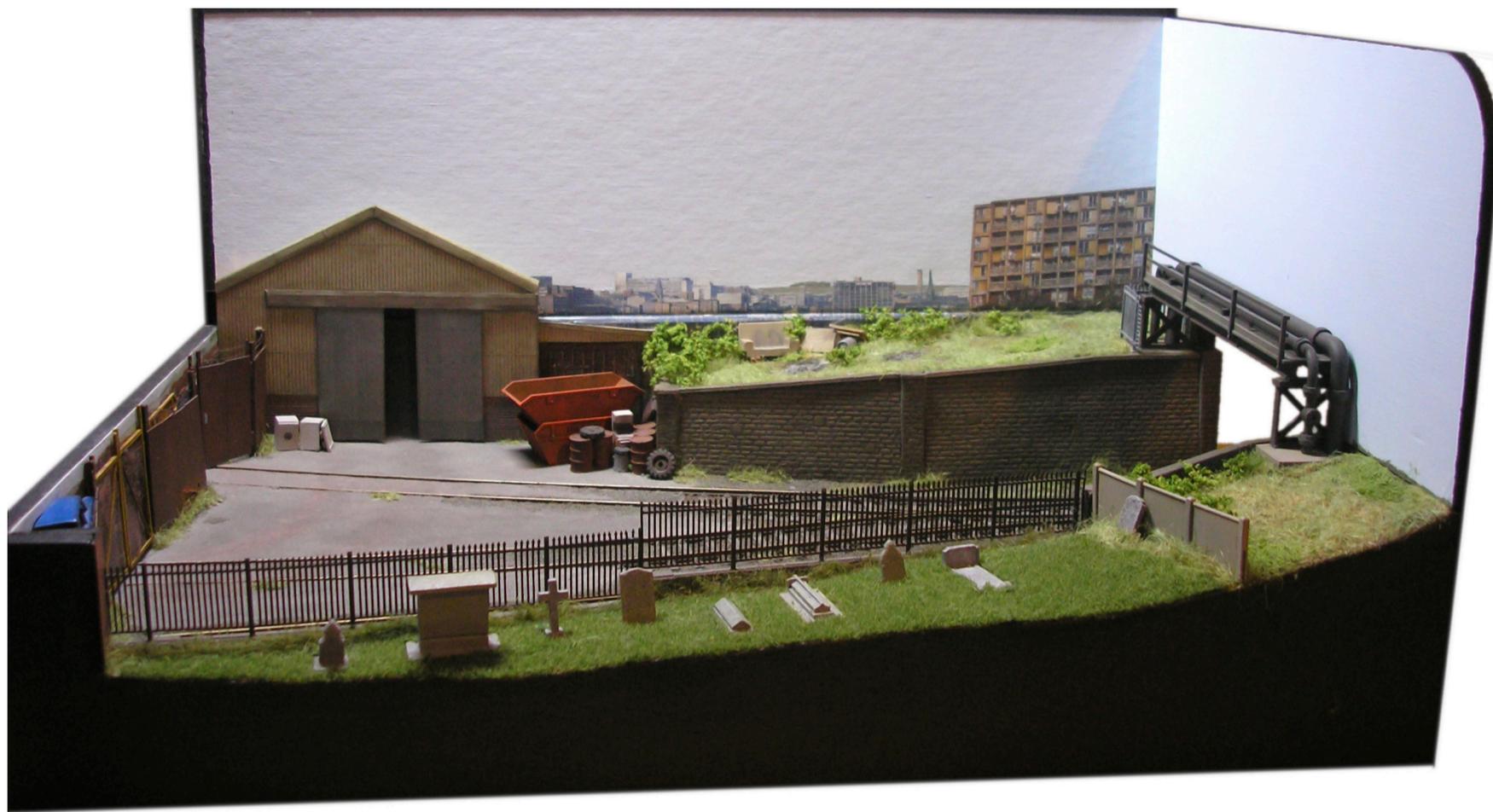


With the box finished it was time to position some buildings and track inside. To see if I could come up with an idea!

If there's a second issue of **The Dispatch**, then I'll give a progress report.

## **Box Metals.**

*A very British box file by Colin Peake*



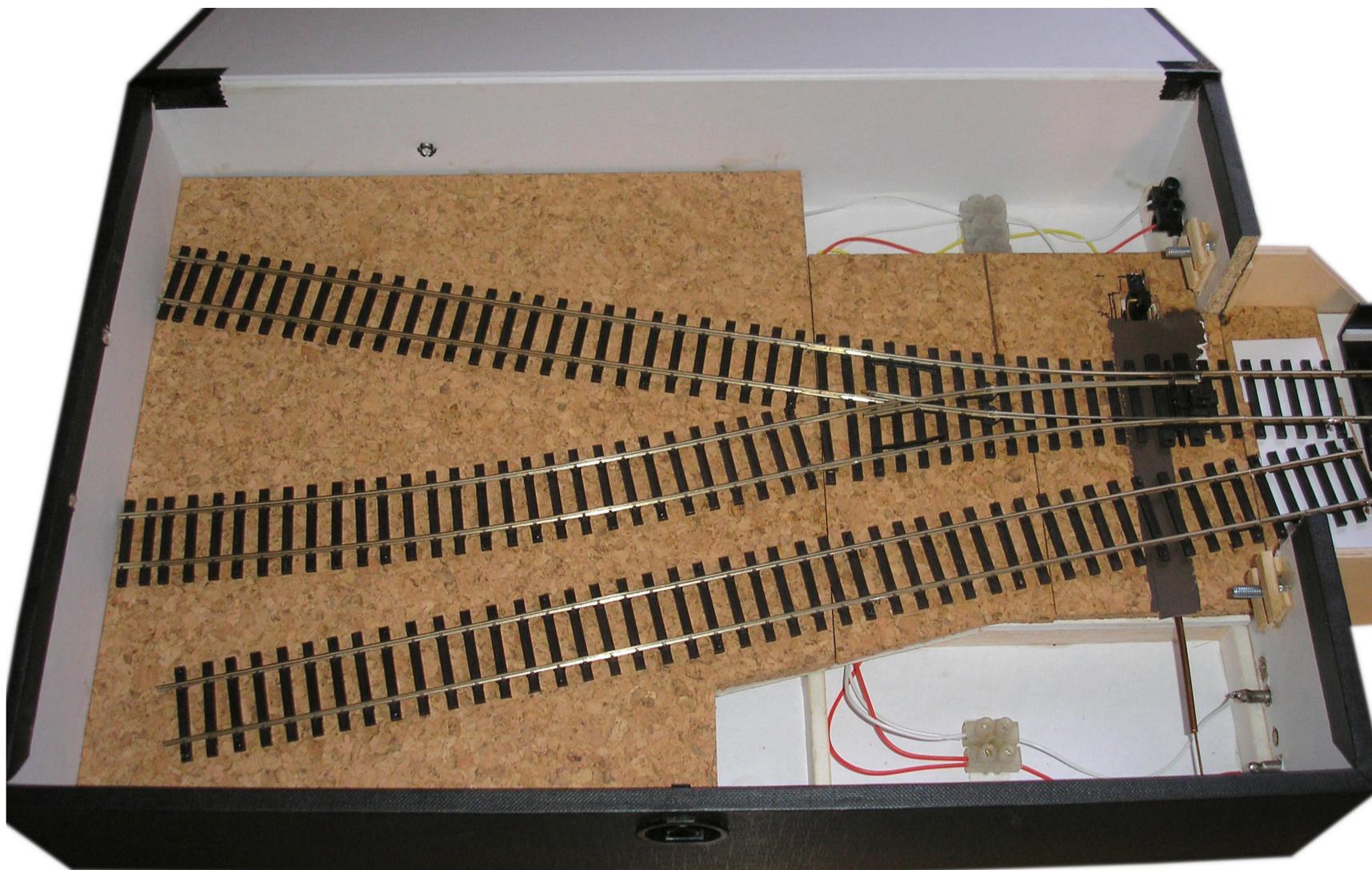
*The editors favourite view of the layout. It really is the perfect arrangement of a realistic scene*

It's funny how the internet reveals differences between countries that you never expected. For instance I had never realised that the Foolsap Boxfile was a particularly British piece of stationery until our Editor struggled to find one to purchase in the US.

In 2007, encouraged by examples I had seen online. I embarked on the challenge of fitting a micro layout into this 14 1/4 x 9 1/4 inch (360 x 235mm) internal space.

As with most builders of box file layouts, pretty much the first thing I did was break out of the confines of the box. This may feel a bit of a cheat, but unless you are going to squeeze an incredibly tight circuit of track in there, it is the key to a realistic operating scene.

Having the tracks running out from one side of the box allows for either an off-scene sector plate or simple 'fiddle stick' to be used to switch trains between tracks, adding to the operational potential. I chose to create a bolt-on extension piece with a lightweight sector plate holding a locomotive and two wagons. Where I have differed from many boxfile layout builders is by adding a trackbed raised from the base of the box rather than building straight onto it. I felt that this simple structure in square balsa wood section and foam core board added some strength to the otherwise cardboard base and would be less likely to warp once scenic treatment started.



*This shot from before the scenery was started shows the substructure to great effect*

Modelled in British 'OO' scale, 1:76 on 16.5mm gauge track, the scene I created depicts the outer area of a Yorkshire scrap yard in the early 1980s. This was a deliberate move in order to be able to use the once common 16 ton mineral wagon, the shortest vehicles on the network and ideal for the micro layout builder. By manipulating a short Peco 'Y' point to be a tiny bit shorter at the tiebar end two of these wagons would fit into the shorter sidings. Shunting was generally limited to a locomotive and three wagons, but a longer wagon could be introduced on the sector plate and shunted into the front siding as an obstacle of sorts to add to the operational interest.

Scenery was kept fairly low-key, the main

features of retaining walls and high metal fence helping to hide the edges of the boxfile, which I believe to be a key factor in making the scene look convincing. Due to the foldaway nature of the box some items had to be removable, including a building flat and a pipe bridge attached to a small backscene piece that slotted onto the right-hand end of the box to both support the open lid of the file and help hide the sector plate. These items could store in the boxfile when the layout was not in use. Subtle use of photographic scenes on the backscene and visible box edges helped to extend the view from the confined modelled scene.

*The editor says: "I remember one year I came back to England for a visit and met up with Colin at the Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway, and he brought Box Metals along. It was a delight to see. It is every bit as good as the photographs suggest. We sat outside in the summer sunshine studying the model and talking trains. A great day"*



*Ready for a short shunting session?*



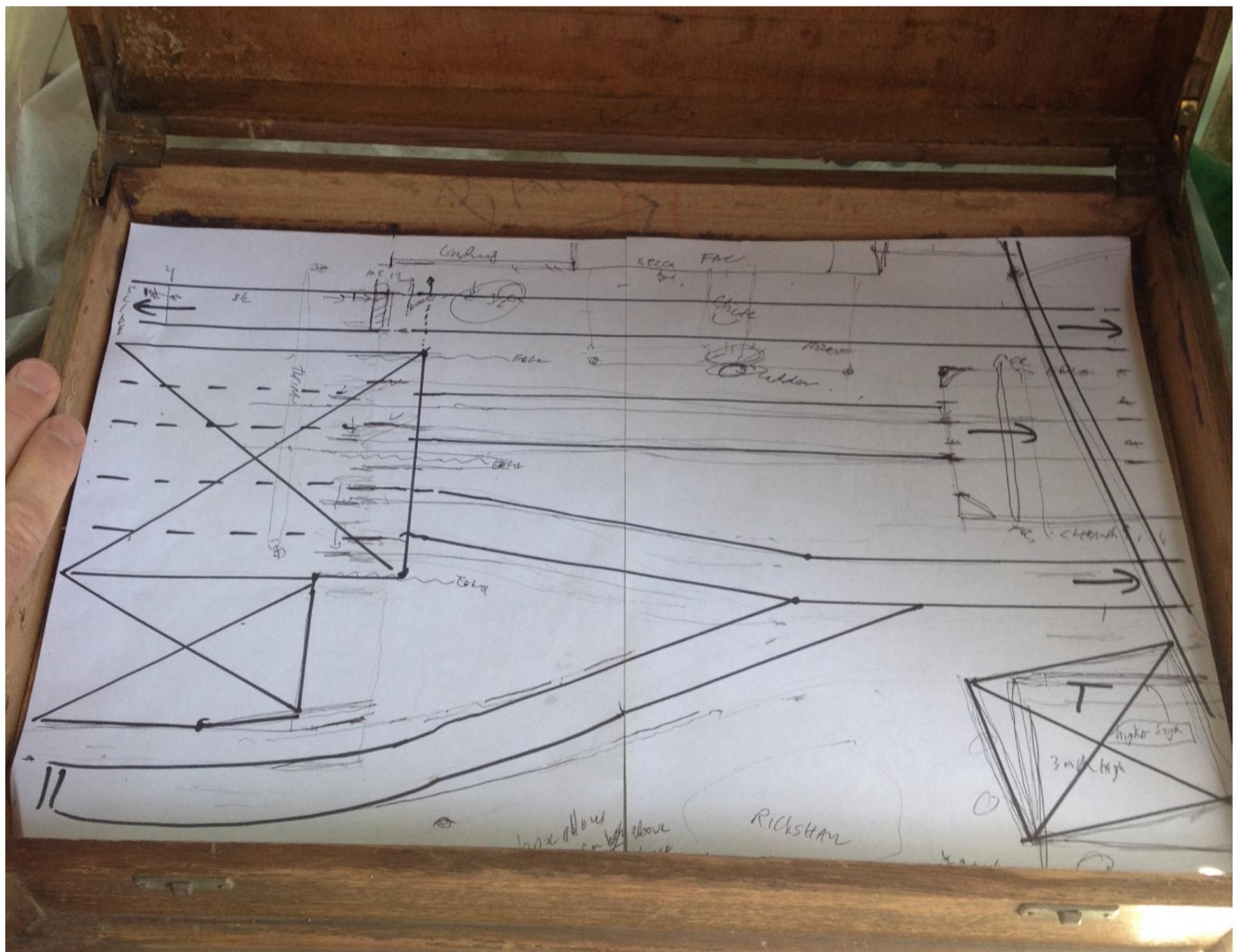
*Once operations are done, everything can be packed up inside the box.*

## **A taste of Jaipur** *India in a cutlery case by John D'Alton*

This micro started as a challenge to fit an On30 layout in an old silverware box 17 by 11 inches. I wanted to create the feel of a cramped industrial area including a loco and carriage repair works. The ground and ballast is orange-ish as in Jaipur, and eventually there will be a backscene with the Jaipur hillfort image at the back. In the front will be a chai-shop and auto-rickshaw and a few people chatting.

The layout consists of 3 main tracks which enter from the right, and there is a small traverser in the works shed which handles just 1 wagon or small loco. There is a cassette connected on the

left to the rear track, and a 4-track traverser connected (not shown) on the right. The through track at the rear goes in front of a loading dock and under a mineral loading chute before exiting to the right under a bridge which acts as a sight block. The middle track enters from the right and goes straight into the works shed on the left. The front track enters from the right and also enters the works, but has a branch to a small loading dock at the left front, and which services the works shed.



*Working with a full size plan is easy in the micro layout world*

An important part of my design process is trying out different options. This photo shows the stage where I have loosely placed some track roughly and put in some temporary buildings to get the feel of what goes where. Also you can see a 3D

printed autorickshaw only ¼ painted (next to a chai shop), and a 3D printed diesel (but not finished building yet and not painted.)



*“Blocking in” of structures to test the overall feel of your micro is an important stage in the design of the layout. John is really getting a feel for the overall effect here.*

This next photo shows more work done on ballasting and putting buildings in place. The two loading docks are made from scales scenes sheets, and the tall building will eventually have a covered minerals chute feeding into hoppers on the rear track. The buildings and track are

not yet weathered and weeds etc are still to be added. The roof of the works shed is still under construction because it has to be in parts which can be easily joined or dis-assembled, so I am using small lego pieces to attach them.



*Check the overall feel of your micro all the way though its construction, just as John is doing here*

I have 3D-printed some people who still need painting, and some 3D locos that also need much work (more later). Most of the scene is actually somewhat based on prototypes in India, but that is a future story. The layout place per se does not exist, and was recently named Thompsonganj as a fictitious area inside Jaipur in honour of a friend who died of COVID19. Once it is finished I plan to build a rural micro to attach to the other end of the large traverser to add operational variety.

For those interested the layout is analogue, and the track is a mix of code 100 set-track and flexitrack, which is barely visible just like the real thing. The idea of folding-down buildings and some of the design comes from the carendt.com site, which has been a major inspiration to me. After building a large HO gauge layout slowly over the last 25+ years it is a great feeling to have half completed this in just a few months.

*Editor says: "John has shared quite a bit of information about the progress on this micro and I'll be sharing some of his space saving storage dodges and other things in a later issue. It's exciting to see something other than British, American or European prototypes in a micro. I'm looking forward to more as this layout nears completion"*

## **Duluth Steel.**

*A micro layout subject by Ian Holmes*

As a rail fan, I am fascinated by coil cars. The covered cars used to deliver steel from the mills to distributors and fabricators.

My office in Minnesota overlooks an industrial park where coil cars are delivered to a major distributor. In watching the trains, I have taken many photos of different coil cars, with covers from many different railroads. Some of them are even fallen flags.

That variation in wagons makes the idea of a micro based around a steel distribution facility or fabricators a visually interesting proposition. The facility near my office is a large one that can see as many as a dozen coil cars and flat cars loaded with steel delivered to its facilities at a time. Obviously that amount of traffic would be too much for a micro layout.

But what if I could find a smaller fabricator, one with a smaller premises? One that only received a car or two at a time?

The answer was staring me in the face. My wife and I pass it every time we drive up to Duluth on the shore of Lake Superior.

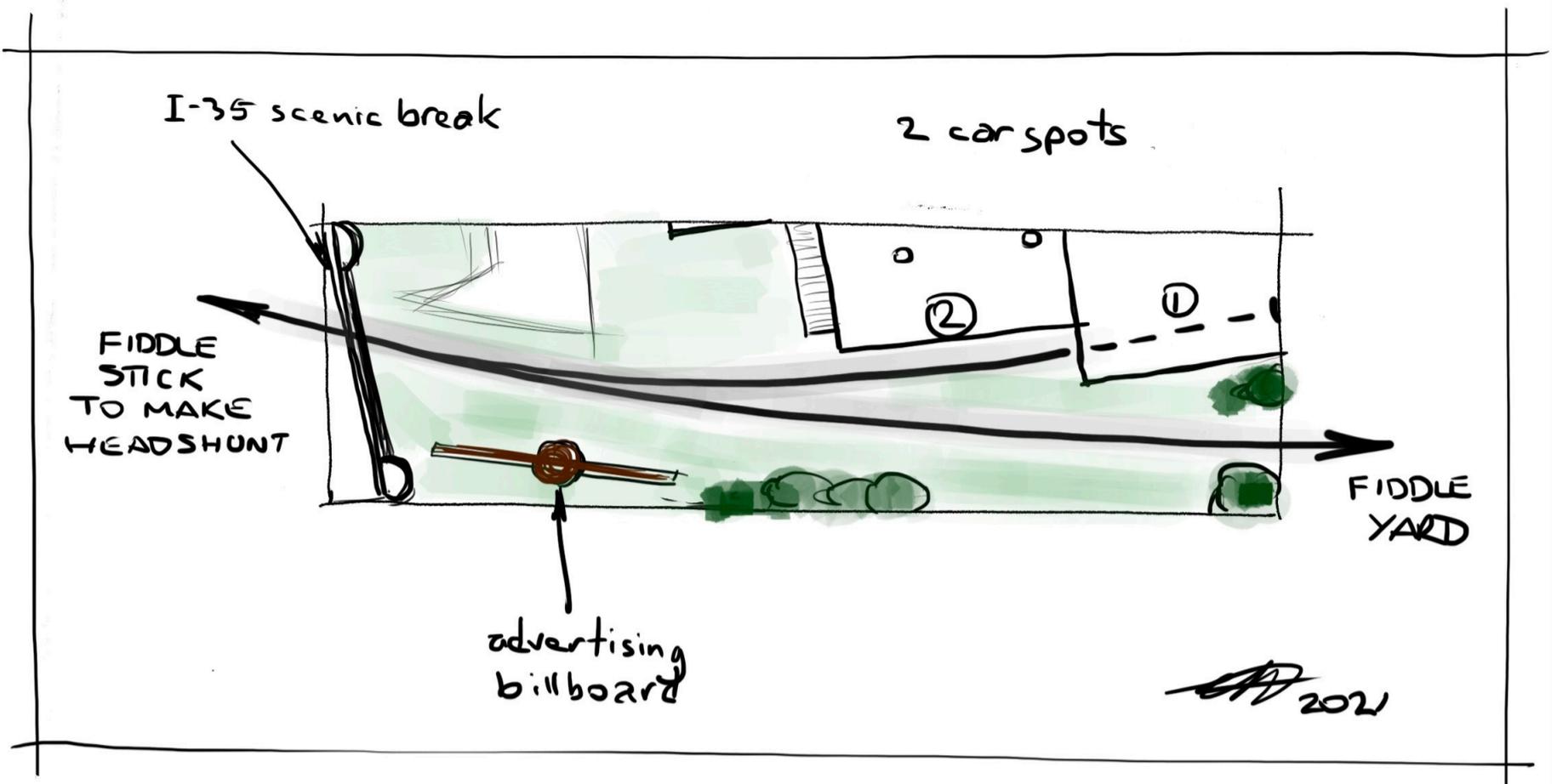
Duluth Steel Fabricators sits in the shadow of Interstate 35. It no longer receives steel by rail but the railroad line and siding is still there.

The line conveniently appears from behind trees and exits under the Interstate flyover for real world offstage exits, and for an interesting scenic twist, the siding into the premises actually slopes down to the buildings.

I think this location has a lot going for it. So much so, that I'll be starting work on my version sometime in the near future.

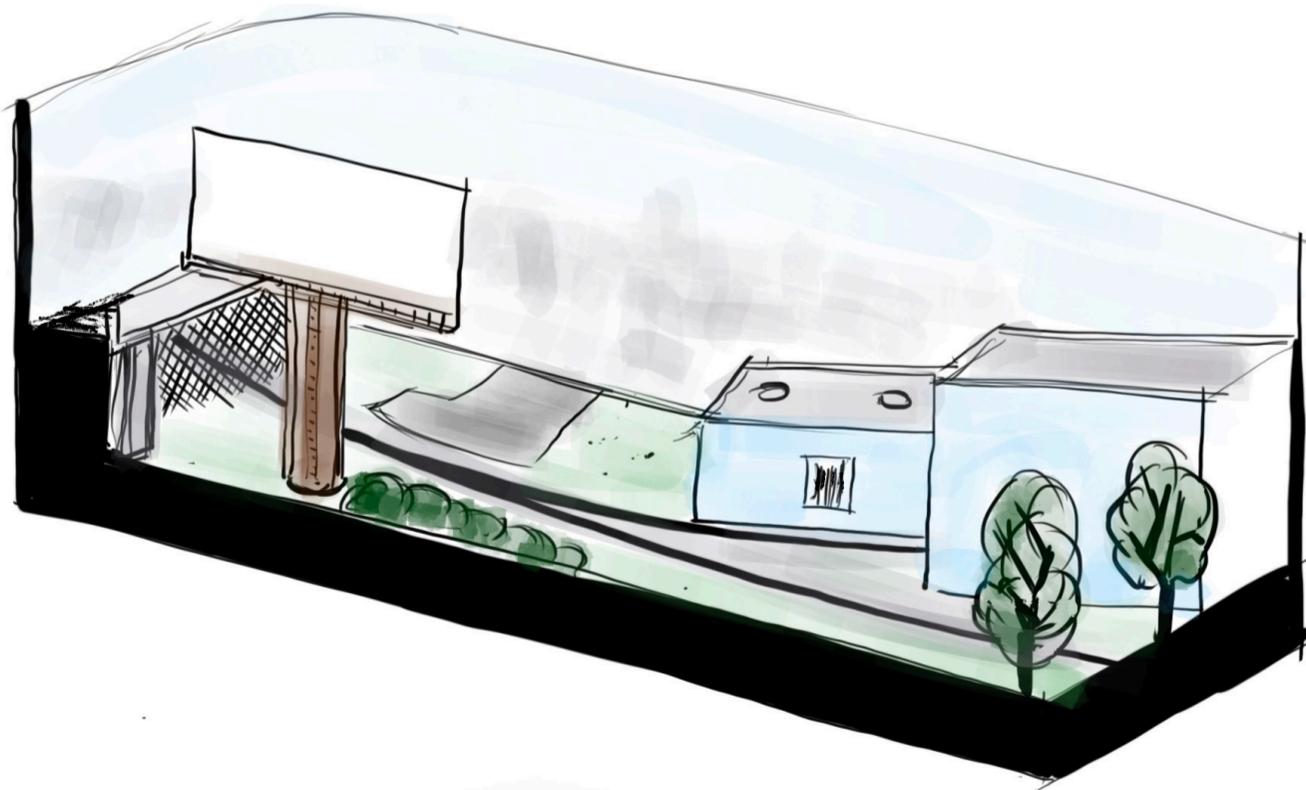


*A Google Earth view of Duluth Steel Fabricators*



This is how I see Duluth Steel being built if I were to start construction tomorrow. It's a simple tuning fork design with a kickback siding to serve the facility. The siding has two spots. Flat cars and coil cars would be dealt with inside. Box cars would be dealt with outside, at spot 2. Operationally, a loco would appear from the trees hiding the fiddle yard exit with a car for the industry. When the factory siding is empty it will be a simple matter of shoving the car to its allocated spot. If the siding is occupied then there is the added problem of moving the cars around.

An interesting twist to operations could be to have the industry siding worked by a trackmobile, due to weight restrictions on the works siding. In that instance, the main line loco would leave the car for the works in the head shunt and a trackmobile would appear from inside the building to pick up the car and haul it inside to be dealt with. One thing I'd really like to fit into the scheme is that advertising billboard, I think a loco would look good in the shadow of that. There really is one at the location, you can see from I-35 and a good local advertisement on there would really tie the location down.



# Inspiration Album

Some ideas for this micro



*The entrance to the factory would make an interesting model. (Google Streetview)*



*Even more interesting, if you can fit it on the layout, is this building that houses the offices (Google Streetview)*



*As new a Coil car as you will ever see. This one was just a few weeks out of the paint shop when I saw it in Plymouth, MN. A manufacturer needs to add this model to their range. I'd buy one for sure.*



*At the opposite end of the spectrum. Just look at this tired old Reading Cover. The Reading Railroad ceased to exist in 1976. That means this cover is a minimum of 45 years old.*

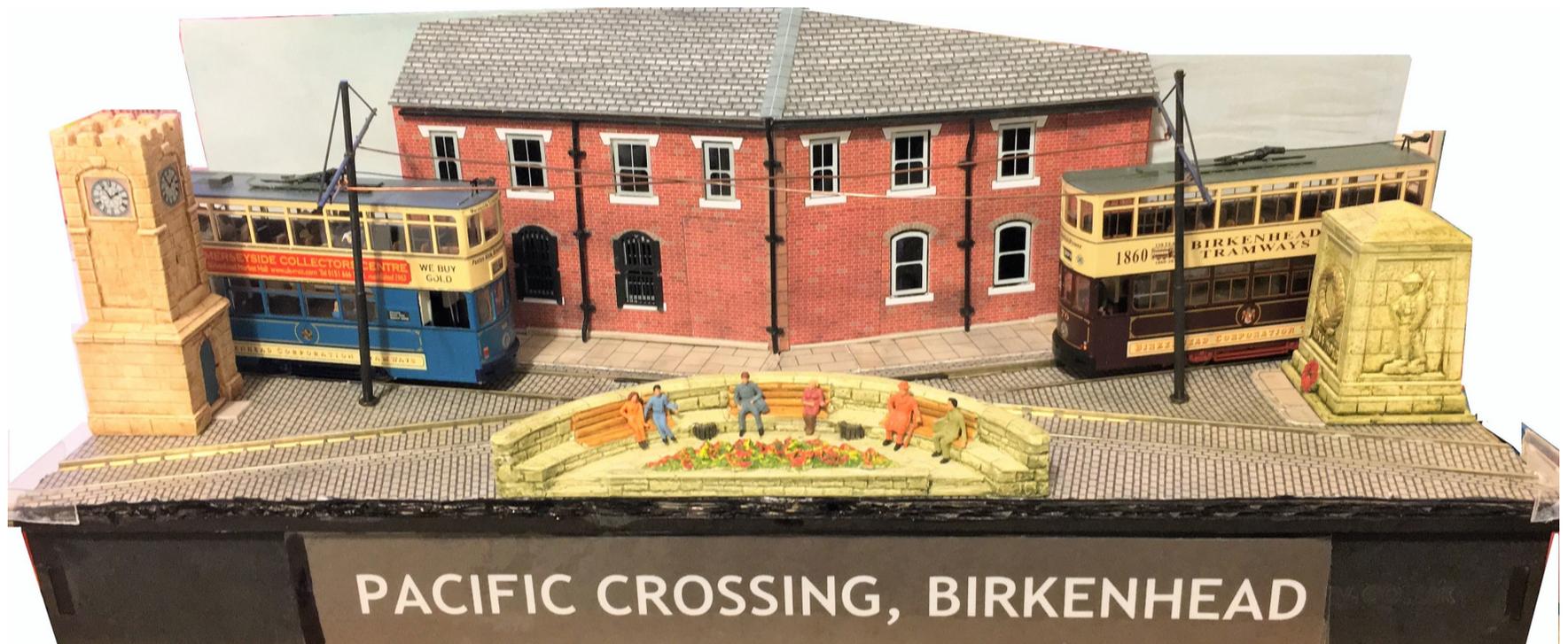
# Project Gallery

Your chance to show us your work

## Dave Carson

Dave is well known to micro layout modellers. His Walmington on Sea Pier Tramway layout has long been a classic of the genre. His new layout, "Pacific Crossing, Birkenhead", is inspired by a real location in a suburb of Liverpool, England. At 16" x 6" it's a tiny thing,

and you may well look at it thinking it is too simple. But I imagine that it takes superhuman levels of concentration not to crash the cars into each other



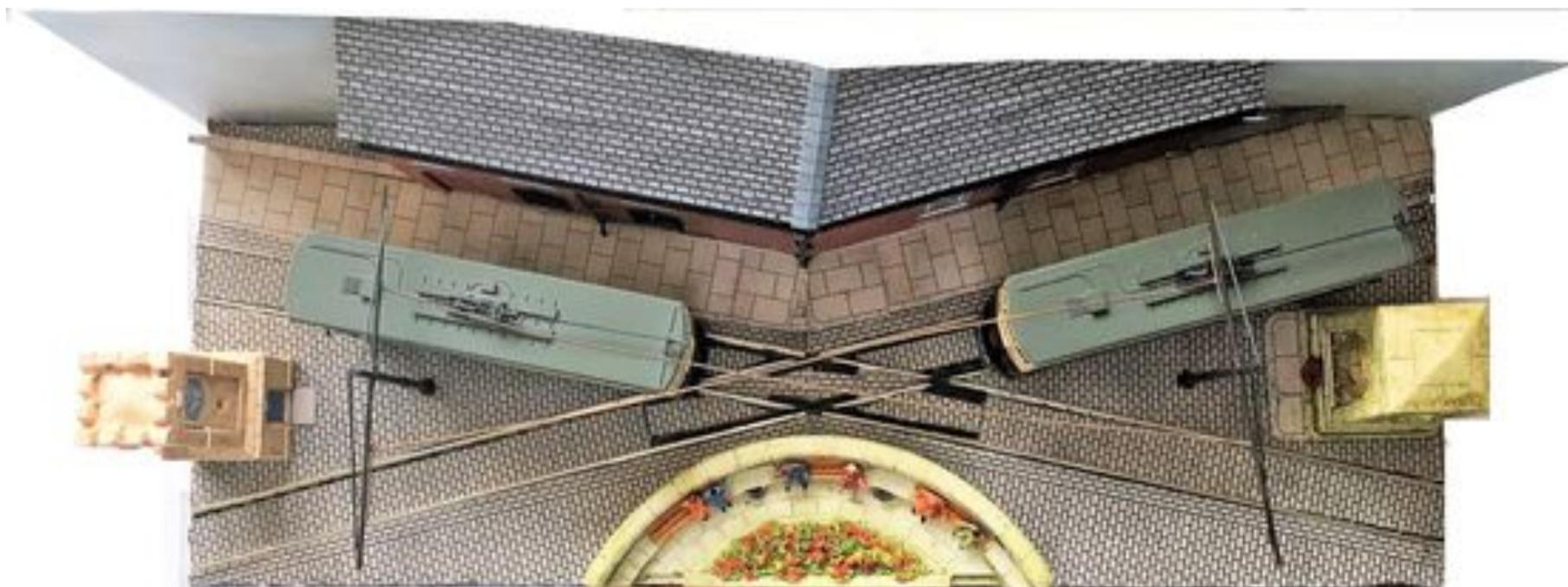
*An overall view of this micro (or is that macro) marvel*



*The left hand side*



*The right hand side*



*The track plan. Just look at the tight clearances*

## Bob Hughes

We could fill an entire copy of *The Dispatch* with the layouts of Bob Hughes. His micro layout output knows no bounds. Here's just a few of his creations that he has built over the

years. All are still in his possession and make great household decorations.



*Lyddlow Mill. O scale.*



*San Vince de Ray. N Gauge in a tea tray*



*Farrall Sidings On18 in a large plastic bottle*



*Book End. Bob's latest. A book end layout. Powered by fishing line*

# Ken Hutnik

Ken Hutnik from Amherstburg Canada shares his two micros. The first is a HO<sub>n</sub>30 roundy-roundy at only 8"x10". The farm theme features a country store in a barn, horse pen and fishing pond. It is built on a wood artist panel. LEDs light the interior and exterior. The rail truck is an HO scale Ford truck that has been mounted on an N scale Kato 109

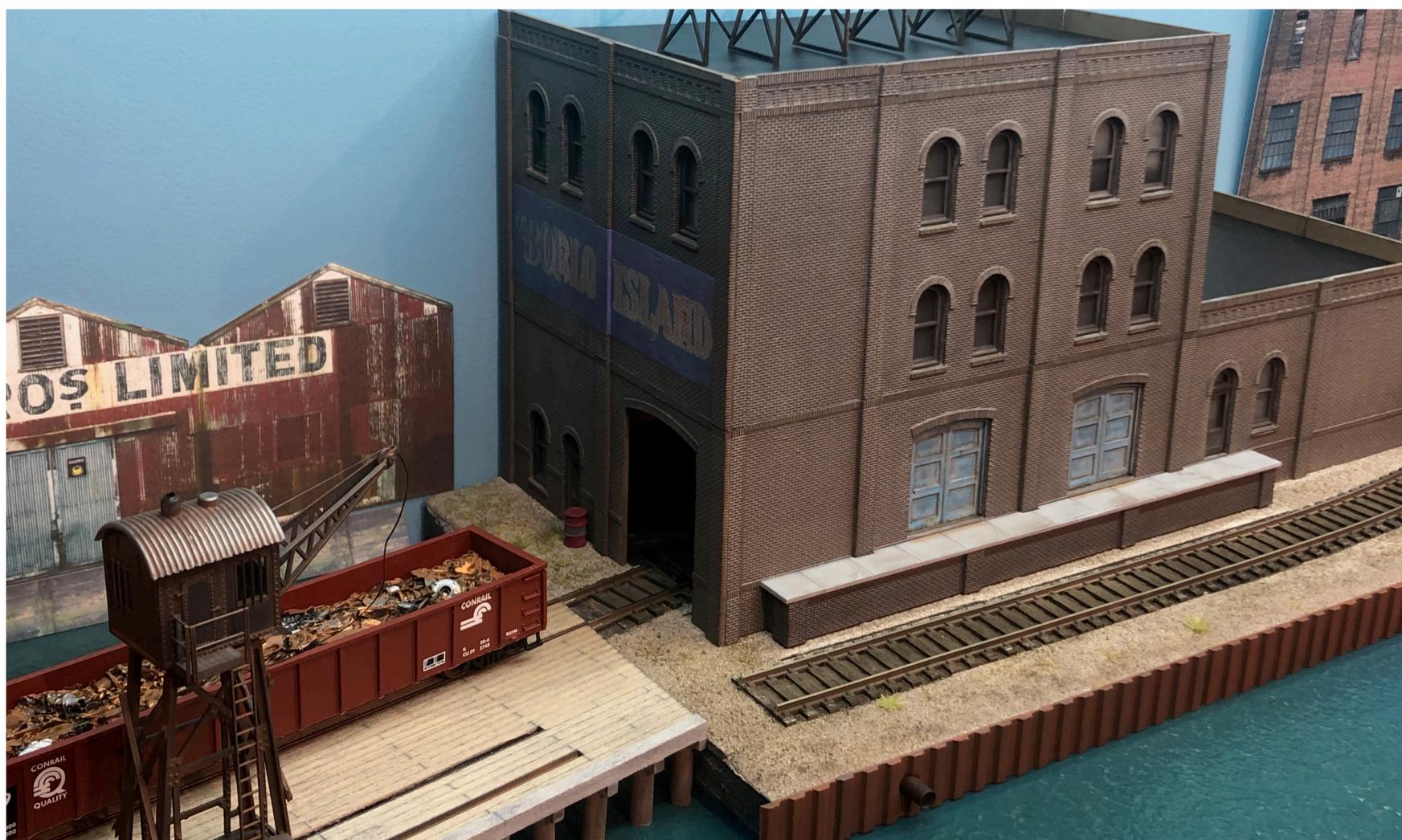
drive. LEDs, resistor, diode and capacitor were all crammed into the cab with a driver. The throttle is a small PWM controller powered by batteries in the barn. Track is N scale flex track with a radius of 2". Scenery is Sculptamold with various textures layered on top. The micro is finished and was presented as a gift for a family member.



Ken's second micro currently under construction is called Queens Quay. It was inspired by Rayner's Quay in the April 2006 Layout Scrapbook update on Carl's site. Instead of having the transfer table inside one of the buildings, Ken designed the rail barge to move between two tracks. The barge also

doubles as a cassette to move cars off and on the layout. The layout is HO standard gauge, 1'x4', built with Gatorboard and foamboard. The buildings are kitbashed plastic kits, the wharf and car floats are scratchbuilt with some kit parts.

## Queens Quay



# The Fiddle Yard

The editor sorts his train of thought

What a crazy idea! To put together a niche model railway publication, (I hesitate to use the word magazine).

I'm passionate about the micro layout concept, and it has really pained me in the years since Carl Arendt passed away to see the true meaning of the micro layout definition get twisted and changed in the way it has.

Recently I have really wanted to do something about it and claim back the micro layout territory to be what it was.

Oh, the letters and emails I was going to send to magazine editors! It would have been an endless task correcting them about every layout mis-labelled as a micro.

A different tack was called for. The first part of the plan was helped in a way by the Covid crisis. With all these people, railway modellers included, locked down in their homes, the time would be right for model making projects to keep people occupied and their spirits up. A micro layout would be the perfect thing!

I approached Tom Conboy about starting up the Micro Model Railroad Cartel podcast again. Luckily he thought it was a good idea, so after a hiatus of several years we are back sharing micro layout goodness over the internet again.

The idea of a "magazine" was always at the

back of my mind, but as an April Fools joke.

The problem was I always thought about it too late in the day to get something finished for April 1st.

Not this year though. I had the idea sorted out months in advance, giving me plenty of time to fine-tune the design and make it look like a traditional magazine.

Then when it was "released to the world," it turned out that many people wanted the real thing, and so, here we are.

I am, by training, a graphic designer, and it has been a challenge to flex my design muscles, and learn to use all this new software to put everything together.

For the technically minded, I used Apps called Graphic and Procreate on my iPad and Pages on my Mac.

I'm grateful to these like minded souls sharing their work with you in this first issue. There's a lot of interesting material here. I really hope you enjoy it.

I can only do more issues if you provide material. If you have something to share, be it layout projects, plans, or if you just want to share your enthusiasm for micro layouts. Please get in touch. You can contact me at **MMRDeditor@gmail.com**



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and recommendations.

Don't forget to listen to the Micro Model Railroad Cartel podcast for lots more micro layout inspiration! The podcast is currently running a one square foot station halt/flagstop micro layout challenge.