



Five Years of The micro model railway Dispatch



The micro model railway *Dispatch*

The Quality Journal for the Micro Model Railway Layout Enthusiast



Power *Roder Swan*

Issue **22**
Summer 2026

The micro model railway *Dispatch*

Welcome to the New Look Micro Model Railway Dispatch!

I thought that the five year anniversary was a great time to go for a redesign of the layout. I am always striving to bring you a magazine that looks as good as the periodicals that you pay good money for.

The main difference you'll notice is that the Magazine is now in landscape format. The vast majority of images I receive are landscape in format, so it makes sense to use the images that way. When I can, I will use them as full page for maximum effect.

I hope you like the new layout. Let me know at MMRDeditor@gmail.com

Interspersed in the regular pages are some "blasts from the past" to show how far we've come, and remind you of some of the inspirational content we've seen.

Though **THE DISPATCH** is free, and always will be, it still takes time and expense to produce. The website hosting fees are ever present and I recently had to buy a new computer for producing **THE DISPATCH**. So if you'd like to help the upkeep of your favorite magazine then please feel free to donate through the [buymeacoffee](#) page (*link right*).

I hope you enjoy this celebration of five years of **The Micro Model Railway Dispatch**.

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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."

The Micro Model Railway Dispatch is designed, and edited by Ian Holmes for micro model railway enthusiasts.

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<https://buymeacoffee.com/iholmesgbj>

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THE MICRO MODEL RAILWAY DISPATCH

For the Micro Model Railway designer, builder and enthusiast

Issue No. 1 Spring 2021

Price: Free

Tom Conboy's Wetterau Food Services



I had been wanting to try an April Fools joke for several years prior to this. I just hadn't been quick enough in preparing it. Chris Nevard had done a couple of jokes in a similar vein and had been well received. I had no idea how well my little trick would do. There was just a cover and a contents page. But that was enough to set the Model railway internet on fire.

How it all started.
It was supposed to be a joke.

THE DISPATCH

For the Micro Model Railway layout designer, builder and enthusiast



From the editor:

Hello, and welcome to the first issue of The Micro Model Railway Layout Dispatch. Or "THE DISPATCH" as we call it. Why "THE DISPATCH"?

It turns out all the good synonyms for magazine, like Journal and Review were already taken so we were left with Dispatch. I thought about "Epistle" but I felt that had too many religious connotations, though you may all be devout followers of the church of the micro layout. "THE DISPATCH" it is then.

Periodically, "THE DISPATCH" will cover all aspects of Micro Model Railway design, construction, and operation. We have the best Micro Layout designers and builders on board to share their opinions. As well as you. We need your layouts too, send them in. We'll feature them.

First we need to "nail our colours to the mast" concerning the definition of a Micro Layout. Here in "THE DISPATCH" office we are firm adherents to the original four square feet rule, as originally suggested by Carl Arendt, who did so much to popularise the concept.

That's not to say we won't feature the larger scales not usually known for micro's. We have found a way to bend the rules, (see page 8). Now, I would ask you to turn the page and read on, as we all start this new endeavour in specialist model railway publishing.

Well, I would if we had a magazine. But this is an April Fools joke, to make you smile in these lockdown times.

Ian

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"Letters know" what you think about things.



Right: The Editors Parespring Watercress layout

The Works

Nils-Peter Morley Scale: 7/8":ft Size 1300mm x 450mm 50" x 18"

The Works came about from the wish to have a small micro layout to play around with and test stock.

The scale is 7/8ths of an inch to the foot, the track gauge, 32mm, represents an 18 inch gauge prototype. The track is PECO SM32 and the whole is 130cm x 45cm. Virtually everything above board can be removed for maintenance, and changing about etc.

Rolling stock is based on skips from **SLATERS**, **MODELEARTH** and **LGB** and is inspired by a wide range of equipment on industrial railways.



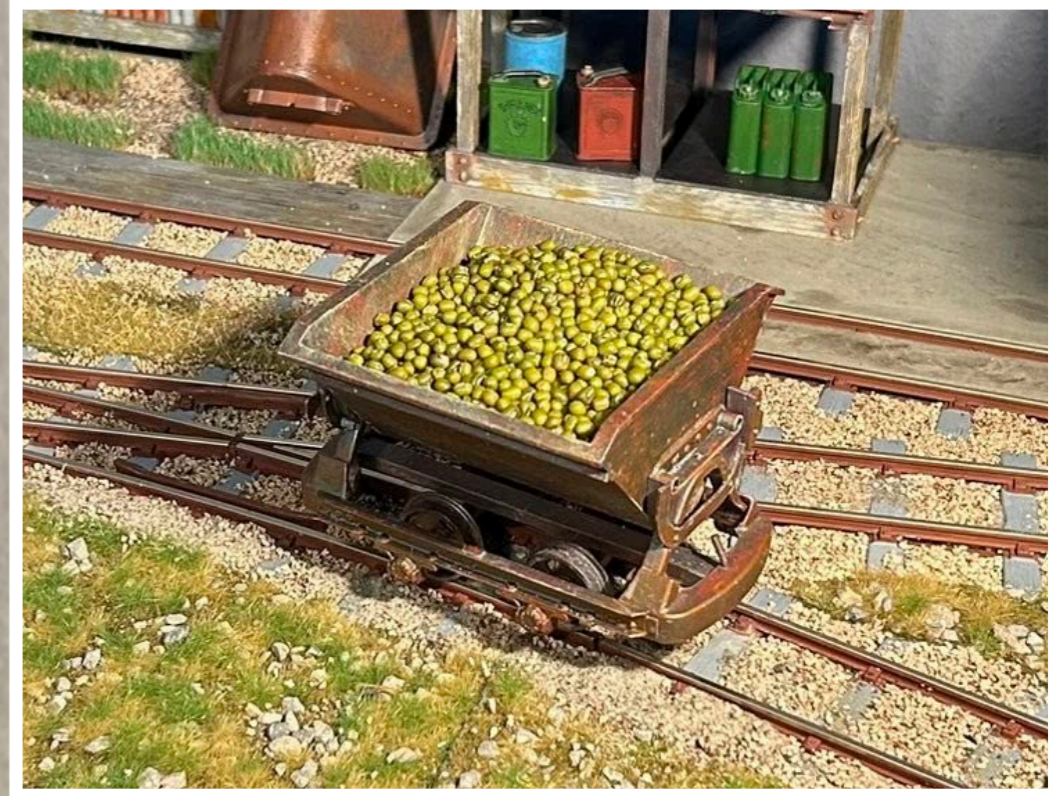
The two featured locos are a Ruston LB from **JAMES HILTON** and a scratch-built effort based on a Swedish Berg & co Peat loco using an **ESSEL** chassis, **MODELEARTH** parts and **EVERGREEN** and **PLASTRUCT** styrene sheet and sections. The axle boxes are from **MODELLBAU HEYN**

Scenery materials are from **MODELSCENE** and **HOBBYIST HAVEN** The ballast is a mix of **NOCH**, **WOODLAND SCENICS** and sand off the beach.





The twin silos are a tank from an LGB silowagen and one from a 1/32 scale kids globe farm silo. One silo is filled with Mung beans which can be loaded into skips and unloaded at the point in front of the main building.



Skip loaded with Mung beans

The tipping point



All the structures on the layout can be easily removed for storage. Once in place, a wonderful atmosphere is created.



The supply tanks are lifted from a **MIKE WILLIAMS** G scale WW1 kit and loosely based on a similar facility at Wilmslow Peat Works

The only building on the layout shows some great creativity. The texture on the walls is created by painting some Amara plastic sheet that is usually used for water to represent a pebble dash finish.

The bulk of the rest is **EVERGREEN** styrene, **PLASTRUCT** piping and the corrugated iron is from **SCHULCZ/EMA** Model supplies.



How it all started. Issue 0.

THE MICRO MODEL RAILWAY DISPATCH

For the Micro Model Railway designer, builder and enthusiast



Tom Conboy's Herrin

Preview issue 0
Summer 2021



The first issue of the magazine was called Preview and numbered 0 because I didn't know how successful the idea would be (*this numbering would cause some confusion later on*). I relied on contributions from my friends for material for the magazine.

A big thanks to all those people. Without them, there probably wouldn't have been any more issues of The Dispatch.



Fontaine Quarry

Ken Jones. Scale: Nn3 (N scale Z gauge track) Size 1300mm x 450mm 36" x 17"

Fontaine Quarry is not the first old layout I've saved and reused.

There was an 009-coffee table layout that I stripped completely and turned it into an N gauge layout called Mynoras Farm. It started as a present from my wife and sits in our lounge, as it's too heavy for me to take to exhibitions on my own.

Another N gauge layout was rescued from a skip in Swindon many years ago but was just too big for me to handle so it was donated to The West Midlands N Gauge Club who did a lot of work to it and added another board making it one of their exhibition layouts and renamed Tipton Hills.

Then there was a Z gauge layout formerly at Osborne Models, bought at Zedex in 2007 which I wanted to repurpose as a Nn3 layout but the gradients were too steep for trains to run although it has been out as a Z gauge layout.

So that leads nicely to Fontaine Quarry another Z gauge layout bought in early 2023 with the idea of making that my Nn3 narrow gauge layout. It's over 20 years old, and I don't know it's original name so the name I've given it reflects the fact that I acquired it from Paul Fontaine in Lincolnshire and it just looked like a deserted quarry with no buildings or people etc, almost a blank canvas.



Overall view shows the fiddle yard at the top, and the isolated passing loops, shown in red. So, a train can run around the yellow loop or take the blue line up to the quarry buildings. The various isolated sections allow me to run one train at a time from the very bottom to the top. If we ignore these fiddle yard sidings the layout is 36 in x 17 in.

It's always nice to build your own layout from scratch but if you can save and repurpose one then I also think that's also a nice idea. However, when you repurpose one, you'll find things you were not expecting.

Mynoras Farm had a smoked glass top and no glass in a front panel so I ended up cutting out a front panel and having that and the top fitted with clear safety glass.



For Fontaine Quarry the electrics looked daunting so I paid Steve Pelling, a professional layout builder in N and Z gauge to tidy up the electrics, and make the three sidings and two passing loops isolated via toggle switches so I can run everything from one controller. This was the most expensive part of the reuse of this layout, others may have decided to do this electrical work themselves.

Originally there must have been plans to make a water feature at the bottom. I've used that area to construct the fiddle yard and isolating switches. The layout measures 23 in x 37 in if we include the fiddle yard and now has a protective lid.

I've added all the detailing you can see with thanks to many people for building bespoke wagons, trees and the bridge. It's took about 6 months to get this far.

Next, I ran a mixture of trains as some are less stable than others and many have not run for years. Some of the couplings are **MÄRLKIN** and some are **MICROTRAINS**, so getting the right format has been a problem.

Unlike 009, known as a narrow-gauge system for 00-scale, Nn3 is not popular in UK and has virtually no off the shelf items. Although you can get **MICROTRAINS** American freight wagons in Nn3 and Japan now have some steam engines and carriages for Nn3 modellers, but they are expensive.



This picture shows the new moveable pool used to fill the gap over the upper tunnel and allows access should [or when] a train gets stuck there.

The model represents a 3ft narrow gauge in a N scale scene. In fact, this layout which has N scale buildings, people etc confused most visitors. One even shouted at me "I didn't pay all this money to see a Z gauge layout" actually only the track is Z gauge being 6.5 mm, everything else is to N scale. It has not been helped by the Nn3 group within the N gauge Society closing down and **PECO** when they made kits for bodies of saddle tanks labelled them as N6.5. My locomotives are all kits or 3D printed running on **MÄRKLIN** 0-6-0 chassis, again not cheap to build. The layout went to some local exhibitions in 2024 with the view of taking it to the International N Gauge Show in 2025.



At the top are various quarry artifacts that have been saved and grouped together, and various people are on site preparing for the public opening.





THE MICRO MODEL RAILWAY DISPATCH

For the Micro Model Railway designer, builder and enthusiast



How it all started. Issue 1.

Issue one featured the entrants of a micro layout competition run by a 7/8" to the foot scale group on Facebook. Proving that micro layouts are not exclusively for small scales. Something that I have tried to promote ever since. With two layouts in 7/8 inch to the foot scale in this issue I think I have succeeded in that.



Potterton

Roger Swan. Scale: 0:14 7mm:ft 14mm track gauge Size 600mm x 210mm 23.5" x 8.25"

I have recently completed a micro measuring 60cm by 21cm in O14 narrow gauge.

I was listening to a Sherlock Holmes adventure, The Engineers Thumb, one night and the plot involved mention of "Fullers Earth" which I didn't know much about. So I did some searching and found there were deposits of this age old clay near Bath as well as in a few other parts of the UK (and

elsewhere in the world too, of course). A fascinating and precious material when you look into its many interesting uses over hundreds of years. So I thought it would make a good reason for a narrow gauge railway to exist.

The main purpose of the railway featured in the layout is to transport wagons containing bagged Fullers Earth to be weighed.

There is a sector plate hidden inside the building and it is moved via a piece of wire attached to an oil drum outside the structure. The sector plate only holds a loco and two wagons so this is a tuning fork shunting puzzle. The principal action of the layout is weighing one wagon at a time out of three.



An overall view showing the simple tuning fork style track plan. The sector plate is hidden in the main building.

The layout is made from foam board sandwiching a couple of pieces of sculpture-foam that is available here in hobby shops.

The Jubilee type sleepers are by **KB SCALE** (formerly Roy C Link Models) and the rail is **PECO** code 83 spiked onto each sleeper. To save space and avoid building a turnout I have used a sector plate hidden in a scratch built transfer shed. The shed is a foam board base with **SLATERS** sheet attached and has a removable wall at the rear for wagon/loco exchanges. I was fortunate to purchase some unbuilt **KB SCALE** wagons and many track components etc from a chap on the Narrow

Gauge Railway Modelling Online forum.
(Thanks John)

The Ransomes and Rapier loco body is a 3d print from **FLOYD KRAEMER** running on a **LOCONSTUFF** chassis.

The other loco is a **NONNEMINISTRE** kit, O&K from another excellent chap on the forum (Thanks Robin)

I now have 12 wagons and 2 locos so I can change over to weighing flat wagons and oil drums or skip wagons and their loads..

Why Potterton? Well, I thought, potters also use clay and I frequently watch an old TV

series that I remember from my youth called Potter featuring Arthur Lowe.

I have fitted **DG** couplings (thanks to James Hilton for his help) which work well over tiny magnets, one buried in each siding.

The shed was scratch built and I've included some interior details and a tiny LED light.

I enjoy shunting wagons and I will be taking Potterton to two shows this year.





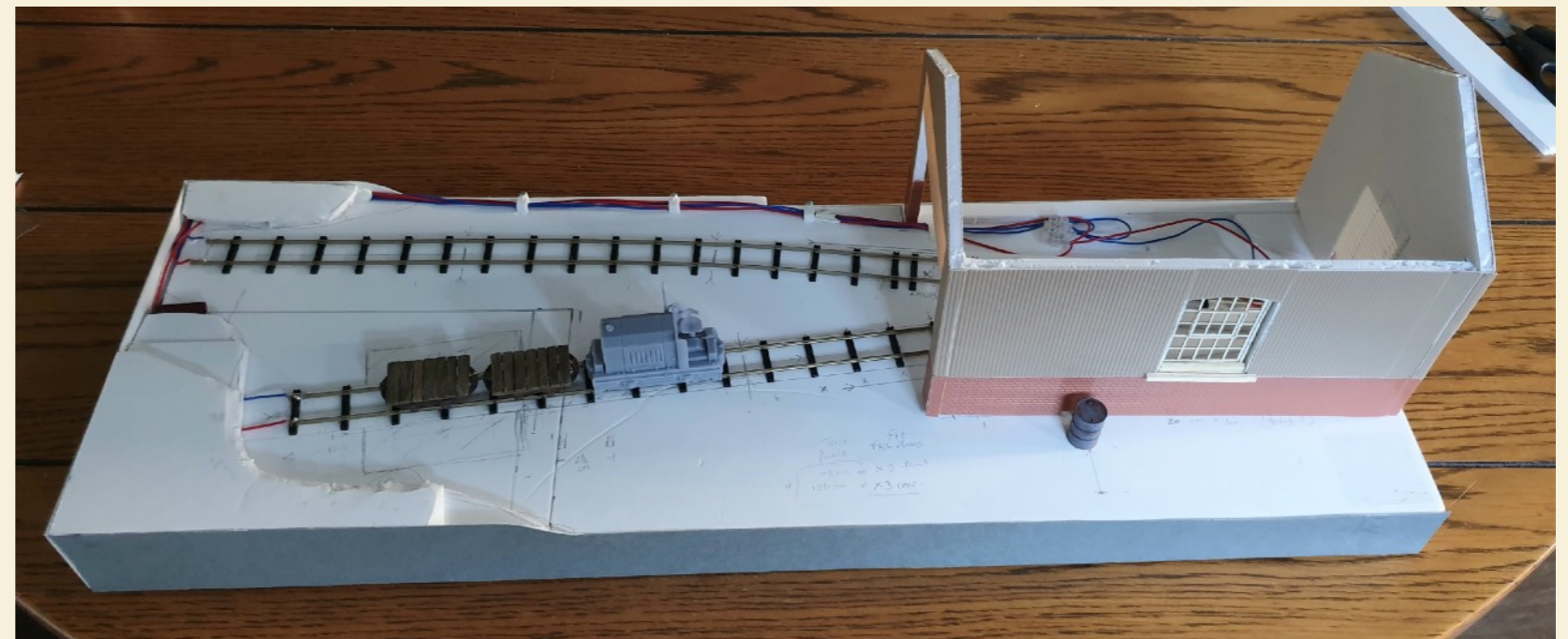
These pictures should give you a good idea of the construction used for the layout baseboard.

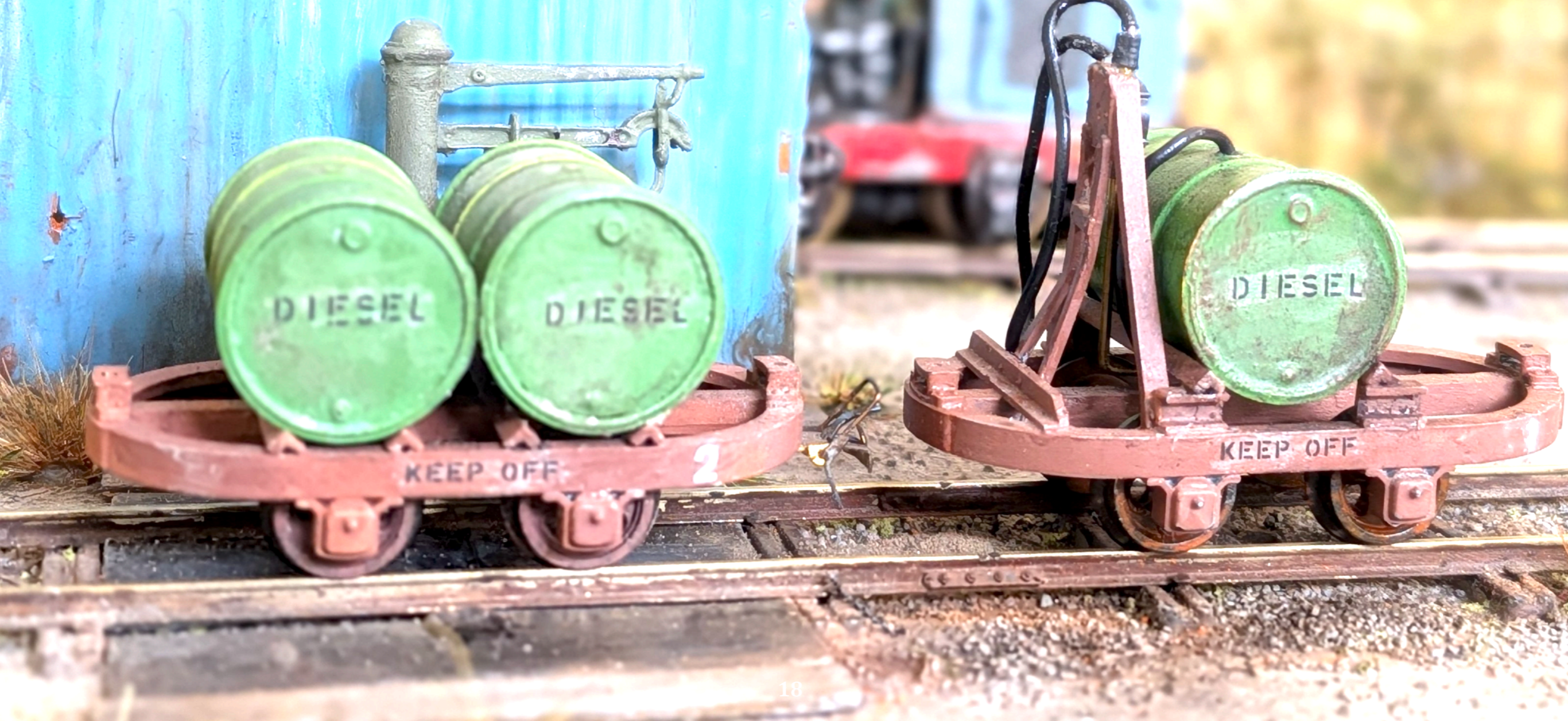
Blue sculpture foam blocks, often referred to as EPS or XPS foam is the same stuff ad you would buy in the big sheets in the DIY superstores for insulating your house.

In the picture at left you can see the blue foam sandwiched by pieces of 5mm foam core board.

The track and scenery is then built up on top of that. Micro Layout baseboards can be so simple.

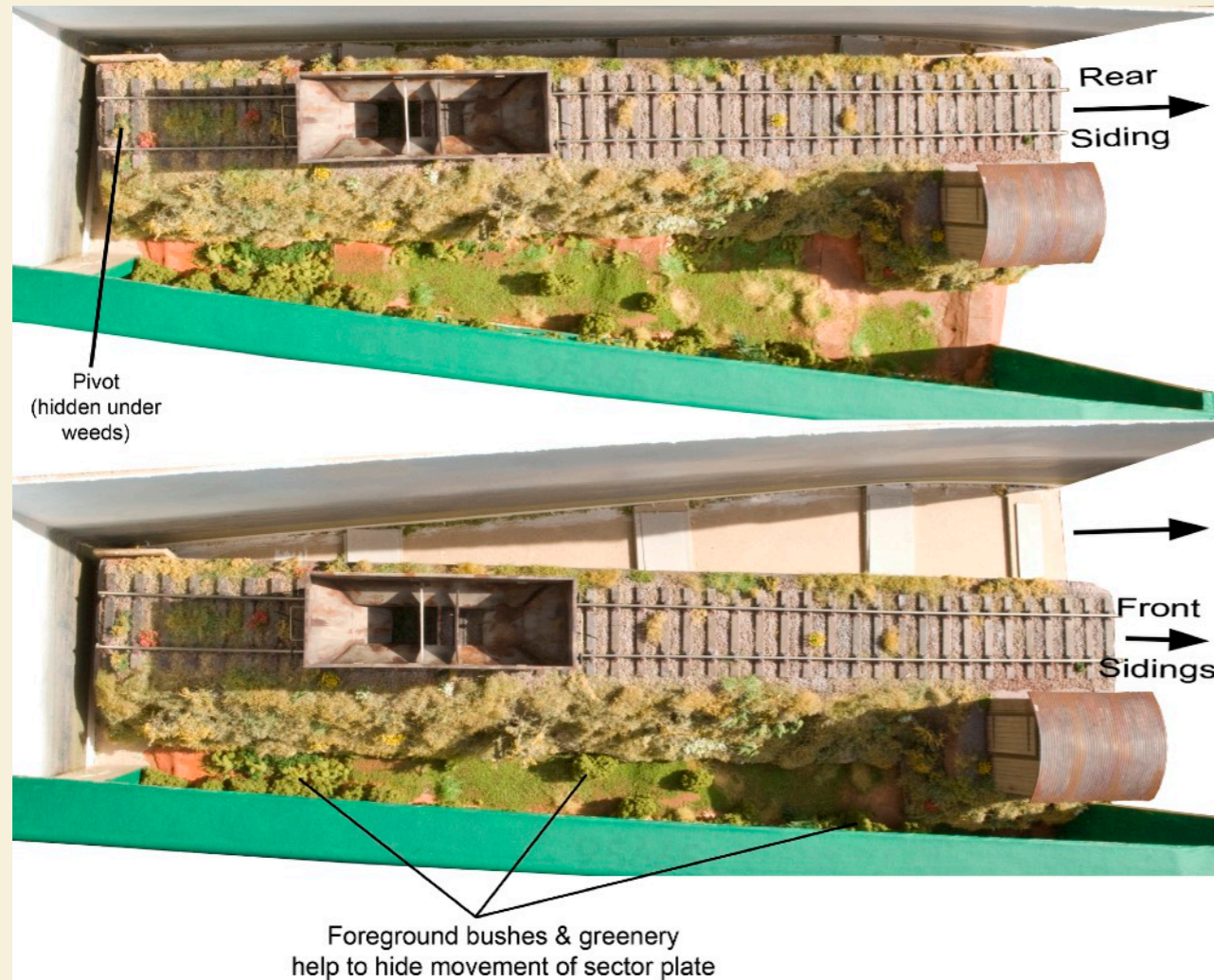
If you take a close look at the image bottom left. You can see that there is a rod protruding from the bottom of the oil drum, running into the building. This is the operating rod for the sector plate inside. All very will hidden.





The best ideas (1)

One of the best concepts from 5 years of The Dispatch



The MICRO MODEL RAILWAY DISPATCH isn't just about the layouts.

Sometimes it's about the space saving concepts and ideas that the modelers come up with.

One of the best came from Marc Smith on his **Clarbeston North** micro layout (*Issues 4 and 5*). This was the scenic sector plate.

As all micro layout modelers know, the sector plate is a very handy space saving idea. Using a pivotable length of track to line up with other tracks on the layout. Thus saving the need (*and space*) for turnouts.

Such a feature is usually hidden offstage away from the eyes of the viewing public. But Marc decided that as he was using his layout as a stage and backdrop for photographing his models that his sector plate should have scenery.

This caused quite a stir among readers of The Dispatch. One going so far as to say that this revelation caused his brain to explode as he excitedly wrote to me telling me how great he thought the idea was.



Bearhunt

Julian Cockshott *N scale. Size: 305mm x 305mm 12" x 12"*

Bearhunt is a circle of Kato track within a 12" pizza box.

I realise this format is very popular and wanted to have a go at building a layout myself in this style.

It is based on the popular children's book – 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury. I have read the book many times to my Grandchild and it is greeted excitedly by children of most ages at exhibition.

It tells the story of the family's journey from Grandma's house through the various terrains described in the book till eventually they reach the cave where they do find the star of the show. Then they quickly flee back home pursued by said star!

The house where the journey begins and ends is the **KESTREL** Bungalow kit – slightly modified. When it was first built I was still using grain of rice led bulbs and put one inside the building to light it up. However, I placed it a bit too close to the roof and it consequently burnt a hole in it! So a remodelling of the roof took place and the lighting was replaced by my more standard leds.

The grass terrain is static grass, the longest I've ever used at 12mm. It was a great size to help hide the figures walking through it.



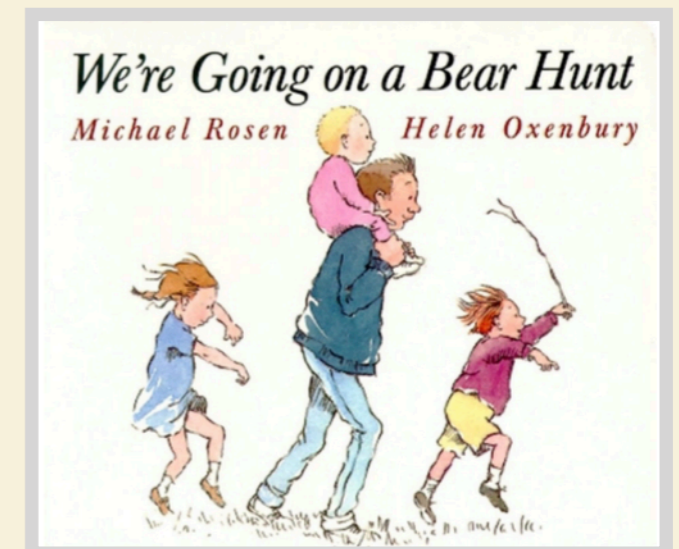
Overall view of this charming Pizza layout

The trees for the woods were cheap trees bought from China via eBay. I find the 'trick' with these types of trees to make them look better, is to cut them about a little and add extra scatter so they are not all uniform in appearance.

A 'messy' forest floor also helps. I tend to add all the offcuts/ branches. Resin was used for the river, and for once it actually behaved itself and hardly leaked out at all!

The road bridge was constructed from my favourite **DAS** clay, with the road surface

being wet and dry paper for that tarmac colour and texture.



The snow scene (*right*) was a little problematic. At first I tried static grass type snow. Not really effective and quite greying in colour, not a good look. I then was loaned some snow paste that sets rock hard. This was more successful and I simply painted/dabbed it on. A set of snowball playing children from Woodland Scenics helped to make the scene. But really it's completed by the hiding Polar Bear Mum and Cub. Always fun to try a lid of the pizza box to close. I'm pleased with how it turned out as it doesn't seem too unnatural within the landscape, even if it is a little contrived. The cave is lit by one of my signature lighting scenarios.

I took a nano LED and glued it to fall off the hand of one of the Noch Hunters and Foresters figures. I then glued the wires along the extended arm, down the body and wired it in under the layout. The glued wires were painted in on the body to match with his clothing. The effect perfectly illuminates the cave's inhabitant. The bear is a 3d printed model but it turned up with no claws. Can't be having that! So I glued individual paint brush strands to the paws and cut them to size. Typically fiddly for one of my layouts!

The cave itself was made from packing sponge and then covered in a little papier-mâché. I was restricted on the height and dimensions of the cave as I still wanted the lid of the pizza box to close. I'm pleased with how it turned out as it doesn't seem too unnatural within the landscape, even if it is a little contrived. The bear is a 3d printed model but it turned up with no claws. Can't be having that! So I glued individual paint brush strands to the paws and cut them to size. Typically fiddly for one of my layouts!

The layout, as mentioned, does feature lighting that is all individually controlled by a custom-built speed and lighting controller. The lighting effects can be switched on and off one at a time and this helps in recreating the story for visitors.

I have also posted several videos on my YouTube channel (**@smallworldlayouts**) on how I went about building this, and other, layouts. One of which is the complete story in voice over using my layout to set the scenes – do check it out!





Gynthrolith Mine blew me away when I first saw it. I was made speechless by the simplicity of the trackplan and the fact that so many rewarding vignettes could be created in such a small area. The clever positioning of view blocks made the layout seem much bigger than it actually was.

Gynthrolith Mine

Günther Kiltz' layout is perhaps my favorite micro from the past 5 years of *The Dispatch*



This view of the layout shows how the central “mountain” isolates each scene from the other. Very effective for making the layout seem much bigger than it is.



The best ideas (2)

Another of the best concepts from 5 years of The Dispatch

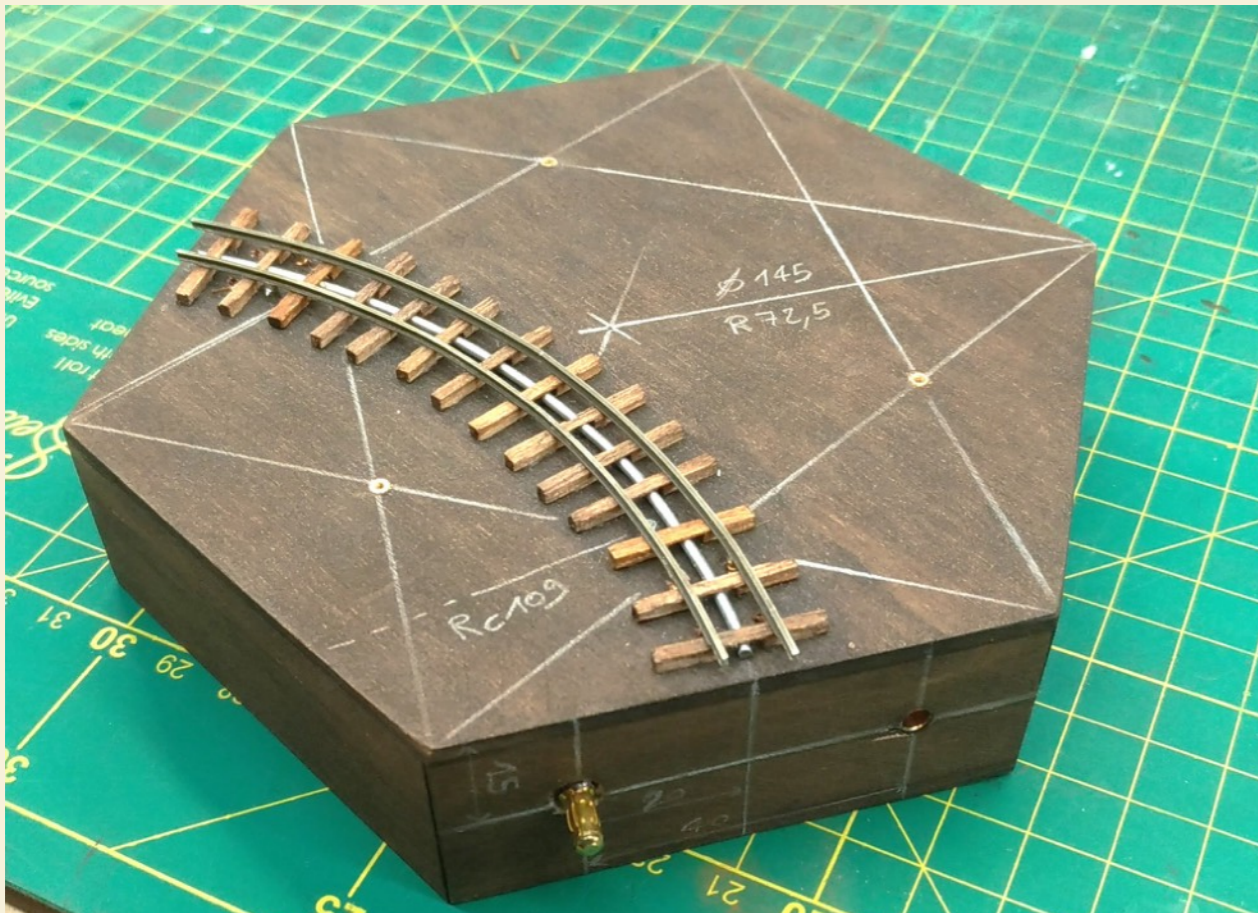
Hex-Trak is a relative newcomer to the micro layout scene. The boom started a couple of years ago when a YouTuber called Table Top Modeler, (Justin Gonyea) created a modular baseboard/track system built around hexagons, similar to those used by wargamers. The hexagons had track elements laid on them, and you could theoretically lay these elements in any order to create a unique layout. Hex-Trak has taken off in a big way with many modelers trying this out.

When I saw Justin's work, I was immediately reminded of a concept called **Pazuro** from an Italian modeler, Flavio Valenti. (*Issue 16*).

Where Justin had designed and created his own bespoke units. Flavio had bought some cheap wooden boxes off Amazon for his baseboard units.

It's amazing to me how like minded modelers on opposite sides of the globe can come up with similar ideas.

I think these mini-modular systems are great and I'd love to see more of them in **The Dispatch**.



Big Bend Scenic Railway

Tom Bowdler Scale 7/8":ft Size 610mm x 610mm 24" x 24"

My first micro railway, Shadow Mountain Mining, was built in 7/8 inch to the foot scale on 45mm, Gauge 1 track, to the traditional micro model railway size limit of four-square feet. Bending the code 332 rail to less than 12" radius was difficult, akin to bending an I beam.

Since I have been a gauge 1 live steam enthusiast for many years, I was challenged to build a micro layout on which a live steamer could be run. The result was the Big Bend Scenic railway.

Another circle of track was fabricated (easier this time) and a supply of extruded insulation foam (my favorite layout building material) was procured.

My wife and I had recently made a trip west in our RV to visit Big Bend National Park in TX and had photos of the area for inspiration. Except for a long-gone tram used to extract minerals from the area, there is no railway there. That was not a problem for the whimsical modeler in me so I invented one that took tourists on a scenic ride through the park.

The first challenge was to see which of my live steamers would traverse the tight radius circle. In 2007 I had built a tram for a fictitious wild animal park using a **REGNER** Konrad locomotive modified into a cab forward with scratch built brass bodywork.



The three-car train hauled its own water and fuel supply with a narrator in the first car and passengers in the next two including a gorilla in the last seat eating an ice cream cone. I told you I was a whimsical modeler. With their short wheelbases they negotiated the curve in fine fashion.

Second, I had to choose which scenes would represent Big Bend National Park. The majority of the park is made up of Chihuahuan desert, so I chose a hike we took to the Burro Mesa Pouroff and proceeded to carve and paint the foam to replicate that area. Rain is rare in the desert, but when it falls, it flows rapidly causing erosion in its

wake. The Pouroff is an area where the rock face was eroded by flooding water over the millennia revealing layers of differently colored underlying rock. The other major scene is Santa Elena Canyon where the Rio Grande River separating Mexico and the US has carved a 1500-foot deep passage through the limestone. Carving and painting the foam, guided by our photos required a number of coats of paint and “do overs” until I was satisfied that it looked like the areas modeled.

In the center of the layout is the locomotive service area. High above is the water tank constructed from an empty

butane can with scratch-built spout and counter weight. A crane built from an Ozark Miniatures kit lifts a bucket with coal fuel from its pile to the locomotive.

On the other side of the tracks are barrels of fuel oil on a homebuilt stand ready for oil burning locomotives such as our tour tram.

On the right front corner are two figures (*image below*) waiting for the tram to pass to continue their hike. I purchased them from Midwest Rails on Etsy and painted them to resemble the clothing worn by my wife and me on the day we hiked to the Pouroff.



Waiting on the refueling.



The two people here look suspiciously like Tom and his wife!

When I display the layout, a photo of us, along with photos of the terrain I modeled, are displayed.

The figures in the tram cars were sculpted by our son Greg from **SCULPEY** clay.

Even though live steam running is the purpose of the layout most venues where it is displayed are not live steam friendly. I incorporated wiring to power the track and built an electric version of the live steam tram using pieces of 2x4, pvc pipe and brass tube with a **PLAYMOBIL** motor block for power.

Big Bend Scenic has been well received at a number of shows. I built it as a challenge to prove that a true four-square foot operational railway can be built in large scale and powered by live steam at that!



Live steam action on the Big Bend Scenic Railway.



The refueling workers wait patiently under the water tank

Boxfile Bonanza

A look at some of the outstanding box file layouts of the past five years of The Dispatch



Colin Peake's Box Street Metals featured in the first issue of the Dispatch and is one of the seminal boxfile layouts. Boxfiles have since become big business. You can even buy kits

from Scalescenes to download and build all the structures to fit in a standard UK sized Box file.

Even though the box file is an almost exclusively a UK thing, I receive many emails

from modellers around the world asking about them.



Boxfile modellers seem to be extra creative. Whether they physically build the layout inside the container. Or fit everything for the layout inside the box itself.

Alpe Adrei Microlayout

Jur Snijder Scale N 1:160 Size 400mm x 300mm 16" x 12"

This is my micro layout 'Alpe Adrei'. It is based on the Alp Adria region on the borders of Austria, Italy and Slovenia.

A land of tall mountains, deep valleys, swift streams, green meadows and small villages. Railways here need many tunnels and bridges!

The challenge was how to invoke this within the space of no more than an A3 size filing box, about 30 x 40 cm wide and 8 cm. high. The layout had to be self-contained within the box.

Trackwork is a simple oval using the smallest radius of **KATO UNITRACK**.

This was laid out on a base of XPS foam blocks at a height that allowed both a bridge as well as a tunnel. The foam was carved into a rough outline of the terrain and then finished with lightweight spackle before painting.

Final decoration was with various types of fine scatter and vegetation. A hole was cut out of the side of the box where on the inside a control box was fashioned from thin plywood so that no knobs or switches stick out. The layout can run either on a 12V power supply or on a 9V battery. The background is a photo from the actual area, printed and fixed to the inside of the box lid.



The track test fitted in the box



Foam blocks used for the basics of the scenery



Magnificent mountain scenery in a box file

The front of the box was cut to make a flap and improve visibility of the layout (see *image top right*). The limited height of the box meant that there was no headroom at all to build up the mountainside above the tunnel, so I used a flat foam sheet painted green to indicate that this is actually part of the box rather than of the landscape. This also provided space for an information panel about the layout.

The train is a **KATO POCKET LINE** set with the loco wheels painted black (*image below right*). Though the Pocket Line range is 1:150 scale instead of 1:160 it fits in perfectly well. The station and other buildings are made from a laser-cut Faller kit, the bridge is a combination of Kato and Peco parts and the tunnel entrances are cut-down Metcalfe elements.

Various figures complete the ambiance. If you look closely you can spot a famous Slovenian road cycling champion on his training round! Building a tiny portable layout like this is very satisfying and I completed it in under a month.



The controller hidden away in the side of the box



The scenery starts to take shape on Alpe Adrei. You can see how the blue foam forms the basic shape of the landscape by being added to and cut away as required.



The famous Slovenian racing cyclist rides alone on the roads of Alpe Adrei.



The entire layout. A stunning mountain vista, all contained within a box file.
The inset picture shows it all boxed up with the lid closed

A Plethora of Pizzas

A look at some of the Pizza layouts of the past five years of **THE DISPATCH**



Mark Fielder's Nn3 Pizza may well have been the layout that coined the name for this style of circular layout



I have enjoyed featuring many different styles of pizza layouts with you all over the past five years. All kinds of prototypes and all kinds of styles. The Pizza layout world is as bright and creative as it has always been.



Berth Svennson's "Salinas de Berth is another of my favorite layouts over the past five years. That curved sector plate sets it apart from other layouts.

Fryden Brickworks

Colin Kennington, Scale 009 1:72. Size 350mm x 300mm 14" x 12"

In 1974 when I was still at school we headed out into Derbyshire for a family walk. We stopped in a layby at Friden for a brew. I looked over the dry stone wall and to my amazement saw a narrow gauge train going through a field, so I went off to investigate. It was the narrow gauge railway serving Friden Brickworks. The staff were friendly and helpful and I took several photos, including these.



Prototype Friden scenes that inspired this Micro.

The brickworks railway always stayed in my mind and I thought it would make an interesting model one day. Roll on 50 years to 2024 and the Romiley Model Railway Club (of which I'm a member) introduced a 'Chairman's Challenge'. The idea was to encourage non-modelling members to make a small diorama and the entries would be judged at the Club's exhibition. Personally I'm not a fan of dioramas, I would rather make things that move. Hence I came up with the idea of a micro layout based on Friden, obviously not a true representation, but inspired by it, hence changing the name to Fryden.



The foam board and balsa wood base

The layout is just 35cm x 30cm, made to fit in a **REALLY USEFUL BOX** for storage and transport. To add to the interest there is a backscene splitting the layout into two sections, the smaller section has a countryside scene while the wider section is the actual brickworks. To get more interest in a small space there are two levels. The high level is just an oval of track, while the low level is the brickworks with a short tuning fork arrangement. Operationally this means two trains can be running simultaneously on the tiny layout.

The baseboard is just an upturned box made from foamboard and balsa wood. The high level track base is supported by balsa supports, cut from a 'plank' so they are all the same height. Superglue was used to stick everything together with track pins reinforcing the joints.

Track is **KATO N** gauge sectional track using the smallest radius that they make - this determined the width of the layout. Again it is stuck down with superglue. Each track has its own power feed, as does the electrically switched point. The power is supplied by little two pin connectors built underneath the ballast, I soon learnt that it is best to glue these in place as one came disconnected when the wire was snagged later in the project. As I couldn't get the track up to refit it, I had to solder new wires direct to the rails, a tricky job.



The layout sits comfortably on the kitchen table



The view down into the yard gives an interesting perspective on the scene.

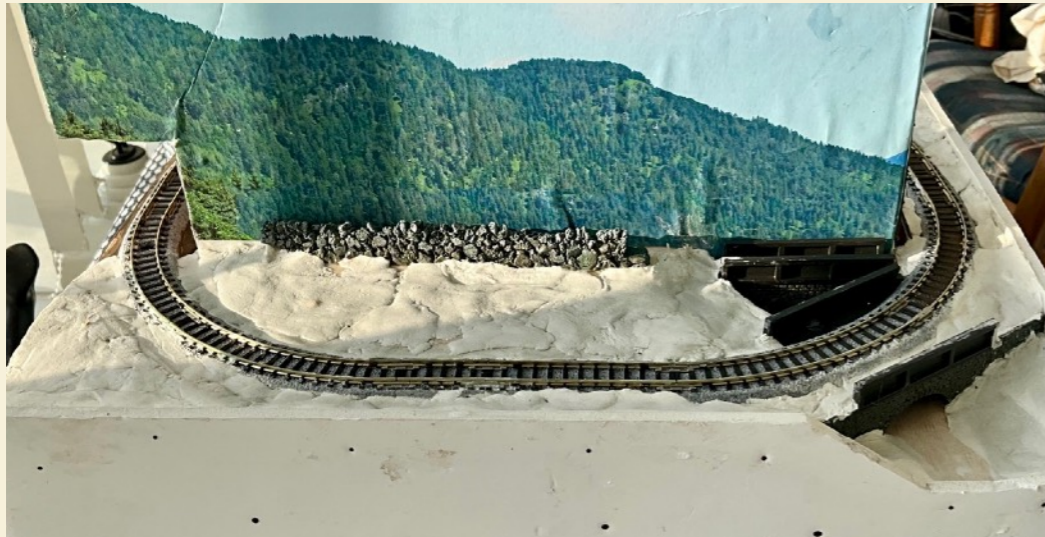
The buildings are a mix, the corrugated 'works' had to be made in several interlocking sections so they could be slotted in place with the high level track running through. They are mainly made from plastic sheet with square section framing. Once in position on the layout they were covered in embossed plastic sheet and painted; lots of dry brushing to make them look old and rusty.

The big brick building took three attempts before I was happy with it. First I tried scratch building it, but the proportions were all wrong and it ended up in the bin. The

second attempt was a **SCALE MODEL SCENERY** kit, this was the perfect size. It used laser cut parts covered in pre printed paper which I made a complete mess of while sticking them together, so that followed attempt one into the bin. The third attempt used a hybrid approach. It uses a second Scale Model scenery kit, but covered with embossed plastic sheet. I also took the opportunity to make the centre section stand out (a bit of 5mm balsa sheet) to add more relief. The kit windows and doors are used. I brush painted it and added the name from individual letters!

The wood effect building next to it was made to fill the space. It is simply a piece of embossed plastic sheet cut to the required size with doors and a window added. The notch on the right side is for the high level trackbed. I had read somewhere that to get a good likeness to old wood you should start by painting it black then dry brush colour onto it. I was very sceptical about this approach, but I am very happy with the result. My attempt at making the tall chimney was a complete failure, but I found one in a shop which I painted to match the brick building.





With the buildings in place the ground was added using wall filler, a messy job that had to be done very carefully. It was then painted and detailing added. You can see how tight the clearances are where the high level track runs through the buildings.

A similar approach was used for the countryside scene using filler, static grass and ground cover. The stone wall is a 3D printed item from Edwins and the bridge sides from **PECO**. For the back scene I used an offcut of a commercial item left over from my G Scale layout.

The trees are cheap proprietary items with branches and foliage cut off one side so they fit flat against the back scene. Photographers, cows and Snow White & six dwarfs (one has vanished) complete the scene below



I'm very happy with the result. The yard lights are powered by a 3 volt battery and you can look into the scene through the apertures where the low level track and road are.

Most of the locomotives are 3D printed bodies from several suppliers on **KATO** chassis, plus a couple of RTR ones. The idea was to have a train of several skip wagons circulating on the high level line. Getting the wagons to run reliably has been difficult as the combination of sharp curves and standard couplings causes derailments, instead wire link couplings are now used. The choice of loco is critical to avoid catching on the trees or buildings. For the low level a loco and single wagon is enough. Keeping the track and wheels clean is vital for good running. An early problem was tiny drops of almost invisible glue from applying the static grass on the side of the railhead.

Operating such a simple layout, especially at an exhibition would be fairly boring, so I automated it, which trebled the cost of the project. The high level circuit uses a Heathcote Electronics simple station stop module. While most of the oval has permanent power to the rails, there is a short isolated section (one piece of KATO curved track) inside the 'works buildings' and a infra-red sensor between the rails. When the train passes over the sensor it cuts the power to the isolated track for a short while so the train stops. At the end of the pre-set period, the train sets off for another lap. The electronic module has a couple of LEDs on it to indicate what is happening; I turned these into a

simple red/green signal above the entrance to the building. This all works very well.

For the low level tuning fork my aim was to have a loco and single wagon shuttling between the two tracks. Indeed I bought more modules from Heathcote Electronics to achieve that. After installing it I got a drop of glue on the point, fixing it permanently in the straight direction. Digging the point out and replacing it wasn't possible without wrecking the entire layout, so instead the loco and wagon shuttle up and down the straight line using a **GAUGEMASTER** shuttle unit. Fitting this required cutting rails in two places with a slitting disc, very carefully. The automation means I can leave the layout running itself automatically at exhibitions while I chat to visitors or have a look round.

However, I learnt the hard way to cover the controller with a box; at one exhibition a

very interested and inquisitive young visitor came round the the back of the layout and turned the low level controller up to maximum speed, as a result the brand new loco and wagon shot through the isolated section, through the aperture at the end and landed on the floor in bits.

With the help of a friend it has been put back together and it works again. People have asked me how I made the infill between the rails on the low level tracks; it is simply 'U' section plastic channel filled with plaster and painted. It is slightly lower than the rails so the track can be cleaned without damaging the scenery.

So, that's how I built 'Fryden Brick' which has been well received at several exhibitions. Once it was built I had a few lengths of KATO track left over, to use them up I have made another two micro layouts.





The layout, and how it fits into its “Really Useful Box” container. Boxes like these are available around the world and I’d like to see more layouts built in them in **THE DISPATCH**

Pictures from Exhibitions

Paul Corkrum shares pictures of his micro layouts on show.

Paul writes:

I was at the Swindon Model Railway Club's MODRAIL 2026 exhibition at Steam (the museum of the Great Western Railway in part of the old Swindon locomotive Works), with Autenbak & Box Metals.

Colin Peake's Box Metals does gain a lot of interest at shows, and I had a lot of positive comments about it.



I also attended the Bourmouth (BMRE) show (organised by the East Dorset N Gauge Group) in Feb where I also had a good response. A number of visitors had downsized and were looking at how they could have a model railway in a limited space. People photographed **THE DISPATCH** notice I put out. Hopefully the magazine will gain some new readers.

Fiddle Yard

Some thoughts from the Editor

The past five years may have been good for **THE MICRO MODEL RAILWAY DISPATCH**, but they have also been good for me in the hobby too. Seeing all your work as I have assembled issues of the magazine has inspired me hugely. To that end, here's a some images of my layouts that you all spurred me on to create. Thank you all.



North Cotes was my first serious foray into O gauge. You all gave the courage to actually stop twiddling my thumbs and get on with it.

Bontoff's Sand might be my best layout to date. The huge size of 16mm scale items opened up my eyes to new techniques and levels of detailing. This scene of the rusty tipper at the end of the siding with the weeds around is one of my favorite vignettes ever.





I built **Grainthorpe** for the Micro Model Railway Cartel Christmas challenge one year. I was embarrassed to almost win. Since then I have been very nervous of entering, as the competition is my idea.

The **Stafford Ledge Tramway** was a spur of the moment project bought on by the impulse purchase of a picture shelf in a local DIY store, just to see if I could build a layout on it



Clyde House Farm Sidings is my latest layout. I built it to commemorate 100 videos on my YouTube channel. I really enjoyed sharing the ups and downs of building this layout with Dispatch readers and the watchers of my YouTube channel.

