

October 2020

Greetings – I hope everyone is keeping well and healthy despite the current Covid-19 situation. That brings me neatly on to my next subject. Several people have asked what is happening about the convention in March 2021.

I'm afraid that at the moment we don't have a clear answer as no-one can predict where Covid-19 will take us next. The planned dates would put the event just at the end of the government's 6 months of "bumpy road" but at the present no one can tell us what the conditions for an event will be or even whether the event can take place at all.

Russ Cook is keeping in touch with the hotel, who have no better idea than us, so all I can advise at present is to keep the dates in your diary and hope for the best. Obviously, if we find out more, we'll pass it on as quickly as we can.

Now another area of query – dues! Can I remind everyone that we no longer collect Ntrak membership dues at regional level? All dues should be paid directly to the USA via the Ntrak website. You can use a credit card or PayPal to make your payment and it actually works out cheaper than the old method since the exchange rate is better and PayPal doesn't charge the exorbitant commission fees that banks used to charge and we had to add to the dues. It only takes a couple of minutes to sort out and you'll keep getting the Ntrak journal every two months.

This month I'm pleased to say we have a number of articles from members. Jonathan Small has sent a piece on tree making and developing a forest on his layout. Chris White reports on new developments on his new micro-layout and Rex Nichamin tells us of his experiments producing realistic rockfaces. Finally, we have the first of a series of short illustrated articles by Russ Kaufman covering a miscellany of railroad associated topics.

Chris has also reminded me that the photo of one of his old layouts was called Meadow Ridge and still exists, now resident in a day care centre in Bromley – what a great use for a retired layout!

I mentioned Jonathan Small's contribution to this issue. Jonathan is the current vice president of the British Region of the NMRA. In that capacity he's trying to put things together for a bid to stage the NMRA convention for 2022 in Crewe, hosted by the NMRA Calder Northern group. In that context he'd like to hear from any N scale modular groups who would be interested in taking part. If you are interested, please contact Jonathan directly, or I can pass details on to him. It would be good to see a major N scale presence at this event.

That's enough of me waffling on, so let's start the main event!

Hogs Hill

My micro layout is almost complete, all that's left to do is tidy up the fascia board, do the name, and fit the lighting.

Most of the structures were in place, but it was awaiting the sand towers and some figures.



Hogs Hill sand towers (Chris White)

These duly arrived, so I set to with the towers which were very fiddly, with many small parts, I do wish I had the fingers of a very small child, the towers were eventually finished, painted and weathered, the sand hut and drier was a lot easier to do.

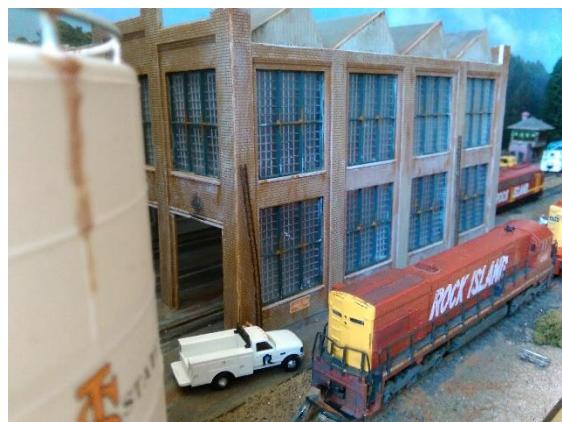


Rock Island red (Chris White)



And a hint of UP (Chris White)

I did do an extra with the sand hut and drier. I put them on a 2mm plasticard base with a paved surround to hide the base. I dug out the ballast areas around all the bases of the towers and driers so the items could be seated. A small job I must do is to add more ballast to cover them. The whole area was weathered more to make it grubbier.



Grime! (Chris White)

The last thing I did was to fit the people and glue down the vehicles, again a fiddly job!

Another electrical test was carried out, but the points rather had a bit of struggle to throw so I have a CDU which does the trick; I thought the Kato points would work without any extra help. At least my work on the hard area paid off as the locos now run on the shed roads without stalling, making the sound switch off. James will give me a hand on the DCC side; my knowledge on it is

a little limited, as I have always run analogue.

Hogs Hill will be a Rock Island engine yard, with visits from Union Pacific and Amtrak, just to add a bit of colour and variety, and the sound of three turbines being run up to full power, but don't tell Sue! (*Poor Sue, I've heard Chris' turbines!* Ed.)



And blue (Chris White)

Hogs Hill has been a nice little project to do over lockdown. I may take it to a show once this Covid-19 has passed, also if my frozen shoulder which now has arthritis in it has settled down, but it may end up just a home layout which I can run from time to time.

It will be featured in the N gauge journal, and Continental Modeller in the future. I'm now looking to do a new project on this side of the pond. As I do not live far from Cannington on the old Lyme Regis branch, I am drawing up a plan to do the Cannington Viaduct. I have done a number of site visits to take measurements, but that is another story.

Chris White

Model Rocks

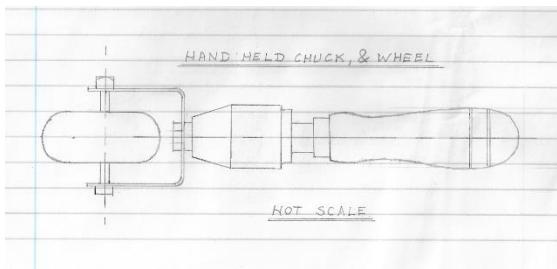
In any scale, where mountain scenery is needed, rocks will be present and through the year's modellers have produced convincing and realistic efforts. However, most methods involve the use of moulds and plaster. So, a little messy and inconvenient perhaps, and also fairly heavy.

I have been experimenting with metal pressings, and with some success.

Briefly, the idea is to use real rock as a form and to press the aluminium over the rock face, following every contour – near enough an exact copy.

Tools for the task: -

1. A couple of hand held 3 jaw chucks.
2. Model aircraft wheel and tyre approximately 4cm diameter.
3. Slot car wheel and tyre approximately 2cm diameter. You need to make up a bracket and shaft for each wheel to be held by the chucks (See diagram)
4. A rounded plastic toothbrush handle is also useful
5. Aluminium sheet of the right thickness. I use used foil food containers from leading supermarkets. Kitchen foil on the roll is **TOO** thin and delicate and will tear during the forming process. A suitable thickness is approximately .003" - .004". Any corrugations can be smoothed out on a flat surface.



General arrangement of rolling tool (Rex Nichamin)

The rock used as a pattern should be mounted on a kneeling pad of rubber or foam so that it will remain stable when pressure is applied.

Starting in the centre, roll the aluminium foil gently all over to conform to the rock shape, then repeat using increased pressure to obtain more detail and finally coming to the edges, turn the edges of the foil over to form depth. There is no setting time, or clock watching in this process and you can roll away, bringing in the detail, without hurry.

Some food containers have peel back aluminium lids and these have a textured inner surface which improves the effect. Try to turn the edges over and roll in some detail. This will give a more three-dimensional effect and possibly improve strength.

Strength is an issue, since the form is made of thin material but it can be reinforced.

So, another process: -

Cut absorbent kitchen paper (or model aircraft tissue) into 2cm wide strips and glue them, in a criss-cross layout on the rear of your newly formed rock face. (Initially, I used two-part epoxy, but "Gorilla" works well too and is easier).

Now mount your real rock on the kneeling pad on a plywood base and cover it with cling film. Reposition your newly reinforced aluminium rock back

in place. Place another pad on top of the aluminium and either clamp them or place a heavy weight on top while the glue sets. "Gorilla" needs to set overnight but epoxy is much quicker. Once the glue has set your rock face will have gained real strength.

Mounting the finished rock face is down to the individual modeller. There are lots of methods available and what you choose will depend on the basic structure of the scenery. Most adhesives could be used but check that it is compatible with your base structure.

The finished surface is, of course, bright aluminium. I have not yet experimented with a painted surface other than a quick spray of grey auto primer. That's a start but you'll need to work on producing shades, cracks and vegetation using conventional methods. I recommend *The Scenery Manual* by Woodland Scenics here, an excellent guide.

Rex Nichamin

Modelling the Pacific Northwoods.



Photo 1 - East Portal at Berne (Jonathan Small)

Selecting which railroad to model brings with it choosing between very diverse locations and environments around the U.S., each with its geographical and scenic challenges. I chose the Great Northern Railway over Stevens Pass in

the Cascades, and this means mountains and verdant temperate forests. Washington state from Seattle inland is notoriously rainy, until some distance east of the Cascade watershed. On the west side and over the pass the forest is thick, constant and coniferous. To model any part of this area clearly means installing a great many trees.

Take the scene on my layout at the head of this article, the East Portal of Cascade Tunnel at Berne, WA. The scene is high in the mountains, the portal being about 2800' above sea level, and the forest rears up high above the rails on the surrounding mountainsides. In this photograph there is in excess of 1500 trees, all individually made and planted in the scene. And this is one scene. To accomplish this clearly demands that the trees be cheap, and quickly made and planted, or the task would be discouraging or impossible.

For some years now my scenery has been essentially complete in its topography and basic texturing, but extensive forests have taken a time to grow. Having now focused on afforestation in several key areas, the transformation has been quite astounding. I'd like to share with you my method, which I've been able to hone and make quite efficient.

Dave Frary, and Astilbes

One of my most valuable early purchases was Dave Frary's book, published by Kalmbach, on scenery building using his water-soluble method. I've learned 90% or more of what skills I have as a scenery modeller from this source. In his chapter on trees and vegetation (note that I am referring

here to the 1980s first edition), Dave mentions, almost in passing, a plant he describes as a weed – *Astilbe Arendsii* – and that its dried flowers make quite a decent tree if treated carefully. I mentioned this to our Head Gardener (Mrs. Small...), who knew of these as garden plants.



Photo 2 - Astilbes in bloom (Jonathan Small)

Astilbes are perennials which grow complete anew each year. Being essentially woodland plants they like damp shade, and bloom in July and August in a variety of colours from white through pink to deep red. There are numerous varieties, with different characteristics and flower shapes. Although dismissed by some horticulturalists as "the candyfloss of the garden", they are especially appreciated by Head Gardener since, as she puts it "Nothing eats them!" In the autumn the summer's lush green foliage shrivels away leaving only the stiff flower stems, which will be our raw material for the Pacific Northwoods. I found through my researches that for coniferous forest, *A. Chinensis* gave the best results since its flowers form tall spears, already perfectly shaped for the purpose. If you're interested in these species, they are readily available from most garden centres each summer, and I'd recommend going in July to August when they're in bloom to be sure they suit your garden and your model

railroad forestry needs. [Footnote: For those of us fortunate to live in the northwest (of the U.K. rather than the U.S. that is), there is a National Collection of Astilbes at Holehird Gardens, above Windermere in the Lake District.]

We have planted quite a few patches of Astilbes around our garden, giving me an annual harvest, and in the early days a neighbour had several mature plants which he allowed me to deadhead for him, increasing my supply considerably at the time.

The first thing is that the flowers do need to be dry. Don't be tempted to cut them too soon, especially if it is your first crop. The flower fronds become quite fine, delicate (but not too brittle) when dry, but while still green they are quite succulent, even for a time after the colour has faded to brown. I usually cut them in November to December, watching out for strong winds that might damage them. I cut them at ground level (which is appreciated by H.G.) which also gives plenty of tough woody stems from which very good model logs can be fashioned. I then hang them under my garage roof to dry out thoroughly (H.G. says this is the same method as used for drying lavender) and keep them safe until needed, for a year or more is fine.

Cutting the trees

Let's take a good look at a typical A.Chinesis stem, one that has been well dried:



Photo 3 - Astilbe stem ready to cut (Jonathan Small)

You'll see that the 2 to 3 inches at the tip of the spear will make a perfect conifer, a mature tree about 150 feet in height, but that's far from all. Starting at the bottom, we can cut several side spears of varying "height", some of which if curved can be straightened to some extent as we go. As I model in N scale, I cut trees as short as an inch, which is 10 to 15 scale feet.

We're then left with a length of the main shaft, and from this one or two trees can be cut which, while not forming ideal shapes will serve perfectly well in the middle or rear of a forest, where their individual shortcomings will not come under close scrutiny. So, from this one stem we can obtain perhaps a dozen trees:



Photo 4 - over a dozen trees from this stem (Jonathan Small)

I tend to make up trees for a particular area I'm working on at the time, rather than make too large a number ahead of

time. This means I can be sure to have trees of just the size I need there.

Treating the trees

For the next step we'll need a bottle of plain white p.v.a. glue, water, wetting agent, a tall jar with lid (Mango Chutney ones are best), several plastic food trays, a pipette, spoon, strainer and a supply of the right coloured scenic scatter material: a selection of greens, which I mix to give some natural variety of colour shade. I also use a lighter green for birch trees and smaller bushes which we see growing at the forest edge.

I've read some articles on the use of plants for modelling, where complicated treatment is required to stabilise and preserve the trees. With Astilbe flowers this isn't so necessary, as they are quite strong already when dried, and with the following treatment they become quite durable.

I mix up a jar of ordinary white glue, about 1 part to 4 parts water, and a few drops of anti-static wetting agent. (For those not familiar with "wetted water", this is water with a small amount of wetting agent added, to prevent the formation of a meniscus, balling up of the fluid, and to aid absorption. It should not be overlooked in traditional scenery treatment.)

I work my trees in batches, dipping each one tip first with tweezers into the thinned glue for a few seconds. I then put them in a shallow glass dish until a dozen or so have been soaked. Excess glue runs off and collects in the dish, and can be returned to the tall jar to be reused. I then take each tree and cover it in green scenic scatter. I put plenty of this in an old plastic food tray, and apply it to the tree by spooning it over,

ensuring that every part gets a good coating, especially the tip.



Photo 5 - coating the trees (Jonathan Small)

I then hang the trees up to dry, upside down. Early on I tried laying them out to dry, but this flattened them on one side. They would also stick to the surface. Then for some years I had a long strip of Blu-Tack along a shelf edge above my workbench, but this wouldn't always hold the wet trunks, and some trees would annoyingly fall off, losing some of their leaves. I now use miniature clothes pegs, threaded onto a brass rod and affixed off the shelf with pieces of wood and clamps. Hanging the trees upside down is the most efficient way to dry them, but this is also why it is important to allow excess glue to drain off in the dish. If there is too much glue it will run to the tree tip, taking some scatter with it, and the trees will have bulbous tips. It is pretty difficult to get truly pointed tips in N scale conifers anyway, so we want to avoid this mistake.



Photo 6 - drying trees (Jonathan Small)

I fill up all the pegs with trees, about 80, per session. It takes me about an hour from start to finish, which is a pretty good return. Favourite audiobooks and podcasts help. Making a batch of trees like this is a great late evening relaxation! Once hung the trees dry overnight at room temperature, after which they are quite tough, stiff and strong (within reason) and the leaves will not fall off. I drop them from the pegs into another food tray ready to plant on the layout.

I finish with a good clean-up, and this is a good time to strain the glue jar for bits which inevitably fall in during the dipping process, and refilling it for the next batch.

Clearly, to populate a forest area that needs 1500 trees, well, you can do the math, but although repetitive it can be done and the results are very satisfying indeed. It is possible with an observant eye to replicate different species of trees in shape and colour, from different varieties of Astilbe flowers.

Afforestation

Let's take my Cascade Tunnel east portal scene above as an example. This area is on the upper deck of my layout, barely a foot or so below the ceiling at its highest point. I'd built the scenic base to resemble the scene at Berne,

Washington from photos, painted and textured the ground, and painted the backdrop and sky. I learned a lot about doing this too from Dave Frary's book. Forest floor can be quite drab in colour, as the trees tend to take most of the light, and cone and needle debris in coniferous forests acidifies the soil and suppresses much growth beneath the canopy. I wanted to give the impression of a recent snow shower here, so the trees in this area were treated with a light scattering of snow powder when the green was nearly dry. (This needs care as the green dye can otherwise taint the snow. Green snow is not very realistic!) I avoided overdoing the snow effect, as it needed to blend into neighbouring scenes where it hadn't snowed. (Observing the appearance of this on trips to the Scottish Highlands has been invaluable.)

I use forced perspective to increase scene depth, planting small trees at the furthest part of a scene and bigger ones near the front. For small to medium trees I found the best tool to be a steel sewing needle held in a pin vice. This pierces my plaster shell scenery surface well without creating too big a hole. I also use a drill or a bigger awl if need be. I then dip the foot of the trunk in undiluted white glue and insert it into the hole with tweezers. Excess glue will dry clear around the trunk, looking quite realistic, or it can be smoothed away as desired.



Photo 7 - starting at the back (Jonathan Small)

I started by planting small trees (those 10 to 15 footers) high up on the ridge at the top of the hill, in front of the painted backscene which had similar sized tree shapes painted on it. I planted them as close together as they would go while keeping them upright. Crooked trees only look realistic in the real world, strangely. I plant about ten trees across to start with, then start working forward, filling in the gaps and working my way downhill, bit by bit, increasing the size of the trees as I go. This is why it's important to make the trees for a specific scene at the time. Model trees can be planted on steeper slopes than in real life, and still look good. I work my way down to the front, gradually increasing the size of the trees, until I get to the real fun of placing trees by the structures and tracks. The effect on a scene is utterly transformative, and extremely rewarding.



Photo 8 - filling out (Jonathan Small)

None of the trees needs to be a brilliant scale model. All it needs to do is to say "I am a tree" when seen from a distance, far or near. When you look at a model forest populated with approaching 2000 trees, you have to look closely to see detail on any individual tree. Those at the front edge can be more carefully chosen, and I put in a bit more effort here, scraping green sawdust off the trunks, for example, and choosing particularly good specimens for scenes which will draw the viewer's eye, such as separate stands of trees in the foreground.

Those ugly ones from the middle of the stem can be planted in the middle of the forest, where they just won't be seen at all as individuals, but they'll contribute to the extent of the wood and do their job anonymously.

As I say, the forest can be planted on more unrealistically steep slopes in the model environment than in the real world. Where the slope is too steep even for this, I texture it with ground foam and other materials to resemble such surfaces. Above the highway (U.S. 2) at Berne there is a scree slope, well seen in photos, and this I reproduced with plaster rocks, decorating it with dead trunks and other forest debris.



Photo 9 - working down the mountain (Jonathan Small)

I've experimented with making trees high enough to be proportionate to the models as real trees would be, but in my view it doesn't really work. I've seen superb large-scale logging layouts complete with Shays with huge trees, but in N scale and particularly in my layout I found that they just looked too tall, and being very large they shrink the scene. My advice is to keep the trees to not more than two to three times the height of the trains. I've found this gives the best appearance, and keeps the thickness of the trunks proportionate to the Astilbe tree's height more realistic too. For those looking for that extra bit of Pacific Northwoods realism, scale model Bigfoot tracks could be made with plaster casts. Reliable prototype photos of these can be hard to find, however.

It will take quite a while to plant forest over the whole extent of my layout, though the upper deck is nearing completion now. Detailed planting of certain scenes at various points is a good way to begin. Other types of Astilbes would make good representations of other tree species. A.Arendsii have rounder blooms and can make good deciduous trees.

Future proofing: I've recycled some older specimens by "felling" them carefully and refurbishing them with fresh glue and a new coat of leaves. Looking to the future it is clear that over a long time (a decade or so) the tree colours may inevitably fade. When this becomes too obvious, I am intending to restore the colours by gently spraying the trees in situ, with diluted acrylic paints. Recipes for this are to be found in Frary's excellent book.



Photo 10 - the completed forest (Jonathan Small)

Jonathan Small – May 2020

(This article has previously appeared in N Scale and the NMRA British Region magazine Roundhouse. Published here with kind permission of Jonathan Small.)

Spotlight:

'The Mother of Invention...'

Passenger cars, carriages or coaches first started appearing on railroads as early as the 1830's. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway, as an example, was one of the first railroads to offer regularly scheduled passenger service. Steam locomotives resembling George Stephenson's famous Rocket 'whisked' customers at speeds of up to 36 mph between its two namesake cities.

These early coaches were made mostly from wood and provided fairly rudimentary accommodations by today's standards. The ride was rough, fire was a constant threat, and wrecks were almost always fatal! On the positive side, these coaches were works of art often featuring ornate carvings, gilded scrollwork and hand painted murals.

This trend continued through the 19th Century but, by the 1920's, steel was becoming the preferred material for coach underframes and sheathing. More powerful locomotives and longer

trains were putting pressure on car capacity and safety that wood construction could not handle... many of these old coaches soon found themselves out of jobs!

So, what happens to an unemployed coach... as they say, necessity is... see the photo below for one outcome.



Photo - (Collection Russ Kaufman)

Russ Kaufman (The N Scale Architect)

(This series of articles by Russ were previously published in the journal of N Scale Enthusiast and are reproduced here by permission of the author.)

New to You

I'm always on the lookout for new and unusual products that help our hobby and I recently came across these new figures from Smart Models

www.smartmodels.co.uk.

These figures, representing 1970s pedestrians are supplied as unpainted 3D prints and a set of five costs £4.99.

I've tried photographing them but the result is not very flattering to the product, which is clean and sharply printed (unlike my picture). They come packed in a good strong carton and the label shows a set of the larger scale figures painted in full 70s style. Very nice if you model that period and have good eyesight for the painting!

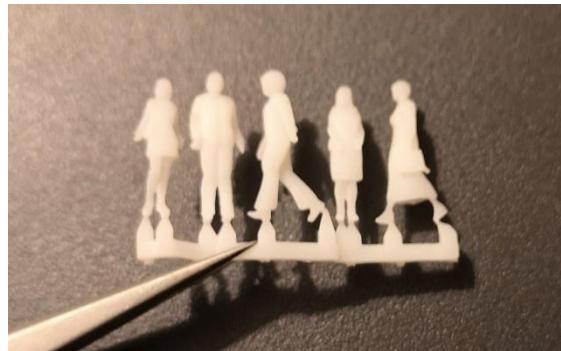


Photo - Ralph Snelling

By the way, Smart Models produce a lot of 3D printed components for structures, which, although aimed primarily at the modeller of the British prototype, have plenty of applications in American modelling as well.

Another firm that keeps coming up with new 'bits' in N is DM Toys from Germany

www.dm-toys.de/en/index.html

Their range is huge and constantly expanding and their mail order service to the UK is excellent. If you want a beer sellers' kiosk – they've just brought out 3 different ones – static, on wheels and a wooden, market version, all priced at around €9.99!

And Finally

That's about all for this issue folks. My heartfelt thanks to those kind folks who sent me articles to share with you all. Please keep safe and well and please keep sending in material so that the next issue can be as full as this one.

Ralph