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First Quarter 2009



The story behind the Bear Creek & South Jackson

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**– Will Ayerst,
Model Rail Cast show**



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Contents



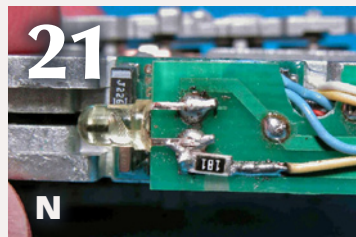
The story behind the Bear Creek & South Jackson

by *Chip Engelmann*



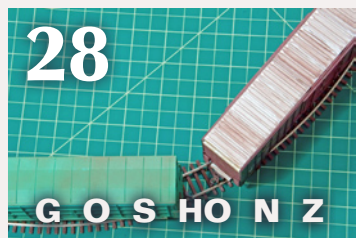
Modeling the steel business on your model railroad

by *Ken Larsen*



N-Scale decoder installations

by *Denny Turani*



How sharp is too sharp?

by *Joe Fugate*



Part 1: Track planning on computer using 3rd Planit

by *Ryan Boudreaux*

Columns

Up the creek

Here comes the peninsula
by *Charlie Comstock*

New media railroading

How-to tips in the darndest places
by *Ryan Anderson and Will Ayer*

Keeping track

Little known trackwork hints and tips
by *Tim Warris*

Reverse running

Obvious facts about DCC?
by *Randy Rinker*

Coming next issue

- What's the best DCC system?
- Realistic weathered telephone poles in HO
- Part 2 of Track Planning on computer using 3rd Planit
- Athearn Blue Box decoder installation
- Zip texturing scenery reborn

... and more!

Model Railroad Hobbyist magazine™

For the love of model trains



Front Cover: What makes model railroading such a fascinating hobby? The trains move! Charlie Comstock perfectly captures this motion as 2-8-0 number 29 rumbles down the track on his new Bear Creek & South Jackson layout.

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About the chief curator



Joe Fugate is the featured expert in many Model-Trains-Video.com videos, and he's also acting as the "Chief Curator" for *Model Railroading Hobbyist Magazine*.

Joe has been a model railroader since 1967, when he saw his first copy of *Model Railroader Magazine*. Joe currently models the 1980s Southern Pacific in HO scale. Joe's background is in computer software and database design, and he's also been a professional magazine publisher for science-fiction games.

Welcome to THE MODEL RAILROAD HOBBYIST Magazine

Editorial from the Chief Curator

The online adventure begins with our premier issue!

Welcome to this short demonstrator issue. This is only a demonstrator and not the final magazine, as if you couldn't guess!

We wanted to give you a taste of what we have in mind, and what you can expect from us later with this little sample.

We felt it's important to get a few sample pages to you, to give you some idea where we're headed with this "rich media" publication thing.

We're expecting the final first issue of the magazine to be somewhere around 60 pages – 40 pages of article plus column content, and 20 pages of ads (we hope).

We're also hoping future issues will grow, both in article and column content and in ads. Our ads will always be discrete and helpful, so you should welcome them - they're what will keep us growing and coming to you completely free!

The value of subscribing

If you're not already a subscriber, we encourage you to subscribe. Subscribing is free, and you get extra benefits like downloading the magazine a

month earlier than non-subscribers, and you automatically get entered in each issue's contest!

The value of participating

Did you know that fewer than 20% of the members of online forums ever actually post something on to the forum?

Yes, that's right! Over 80% of the members of an online forum are lurkers and they *never ever* contribute anything and never post!

We hope you'll help us change that with **MRH!** One of the real values of an internet magazine like this one is *your* feedback. We see **MRH** staff more as *curators* of information rather than as authors or gatekeepers.

You are the real source of the best hobby how-to information. So dust off your keyboard and post some comments!

An even better way to participate is to write an article for us. Our already overworked staff can't do it all, not even hardly. If you don't contribute articles, we'll eventually shrivel up and fade away without good article submissions from modelers like you.

Don't just figure that's the next guy's job to write the articles. Almost everyone who's been in the hobby a

few years has something interesting they're doing and can tell us about.

So take a crack at doing an article for us, especially if you've been in the hobby for a decade or more. That's one donation you can make to this magazine that can keep it going for a long time to come.

The value of rich media

With this first tiny demo issue of **MRH**, we're only scratching the surface of what's possible with a rich media PDF magazine.

In a traditional paper publication, for instance, using color printing costs more. But there's no premium for using color in our magazine!

And that's just a start. We can easily include audio or video clips. We can do virtual reality (VR) still photos. To see the power of a VR photo, check out the sample NCE ad in this issue.

There's so much more that we could say about the cool things we're able to do in this new medium, but we think it's better if we just *show* you.

So sit back, flip through *Model Railroading Hobbyist* magazine on your computer, and enjoy an entertaining new experience in model railroad hobby magazines! ■

The story behind the Bear Creek & South Jackson

by **Chip Engelmann**



ARTICLE SUMMARY

Award-winning model railroad photographer Charlie Comstock's current under-construction layout, the third Bear Creek & South Jackson, has a fascinating history. We delve into Charlie's journey that resulted in this great example of 1950s-era layout design. ✓

Photos and diagrams by Charlie Comstock

Charlie Comstock is a fountain of information. His current layout, the third Bear Creek and South Jackson, was featured in Kalmbach's *Model Railroad Planning 2003*. The April 2007 *Model Railroader* has an article that demonstrates how Charlie uses outdoor scenery as a backdrop for model train photographs.

For Charlie, model railroading is a hobby with two separate aspects. First, there is operations. People drive from miles around to operate his layout on a regular basis. The ops sessions are organized and well-structured – just like everything Charlie does.

The second aspect of the hobby is model railroad photography, and he, in fact, won *Model Railroader's* Photography Contest in 2000. He jokingly cautioned me against buying a video recorder – they take a lot of time from working on the layout. Video, evidently, may become a third aspect of the hobby for Charlie.





“When I was three, I liked to go walkabout. There were train tracks in the neighborhood — it was in Massachusetts. I escaped one day and I found the tracks and went walking down the middle of them ...”

In conversation, both on the record and off, Charlie is articulate and measures his words. He wants to convey his thoughts with precision. This precision manifests in his layout design, his op sessions, his scenery and his photography, as you can see in the following pages.

Chip: As we began talking, I learned something significant of a railroad nature happened when you were three years old. And what was that?

Charlie: When I was three, I liked to go walkabout. There were train tracks in the neighborhood — it was in Massachusetts. I escaped one day and I found the tracks and went walking down the middle of them.

A handcar crew found me and pulled me off the tracks and a few minutes later — I have the vaguest memory of something big and black come thundering by.

My mother told me later that those tracks were mostly not used, but there was a bridge out and the main-line freight traffic was being routed across these lines. There were quite a plethora of trains at this time.

My reward for all this was that they cut my bedroom door in half horizontally and put me in “jail.” I think I took my screen off my window and climbed out, but I’m not sure about that.

I remember being very indignant about being in jail. I also remember

riding home in a police car. The crew took me down to the grade crossing and I rode home in a police car. They let me blow the siren, then I think I pestered them quite a bit to let me do it again but they wouldn’t let me.

Chip: You have had 3 versions of the Bear Creek and South Jackson and the layouts have grown, but your vision is strong and constant. You really know what you want to do. How did that vision come about?

Charlie: I don’t think that I had a “vision” — it was more fortuitous situations and building upon what I had. Once you start acquiring stuff, there’s a bit of momentum involved.

Before the Bear Creek and South Jackson 4 x 8, I was mad about California narrow-gauge. I had plans of building an On3 of the South Pacific Coast, but the track plan was multi-level and involved a bunch of exotic construction to fit it in the garage space available.

After looking at it for a while I started thinking, “You know, this is going to be an awful lot of work.” I had never built a model railroad to any degree of completion up until that point and I thought I should tackle a starter project.

I shifted to back to HO because it’s hard to bend On3 equipment around an 18” curve. How much [On3] railroad can you put on a 4 x 8?

There was a hobby shop in Sunnyvale, California that had a 3-times-around layout that had quite a bit of 3rd dimension scenery. I remember looking at the trains going round and round and round in the old style 50’s design with tunnels and the train would come popping out who-knows-where. I thought you could get a lot more railroad in with a twice-around than a once-around.

The first Bear Creek and South Jackson was a starter layout designed from the get-go for mountainous terrain. Actually, I built a model of the model before I built it. I used foam-core and clay to mock things up and I printed out track plan and that gave me a 3D idea of what it would look like.

Chip: You said you built upon what you had, that you acquired stuff and it gained momentum. But the designs look totally consistent, like they were meant to be that way. At what point did it click for you?

Charlie: I’m not sure there was any one point at which it clicked. I knew I liked switching — well I thought I liked switching — never having a real layout at home before. So I put a bunch of switching on it, but I didn’t get it quite right.

I had the leads off the main-line to get to the spurs in South Jackson — they were disjoint from the passing siding of the runaround and it was impossible to switch them without

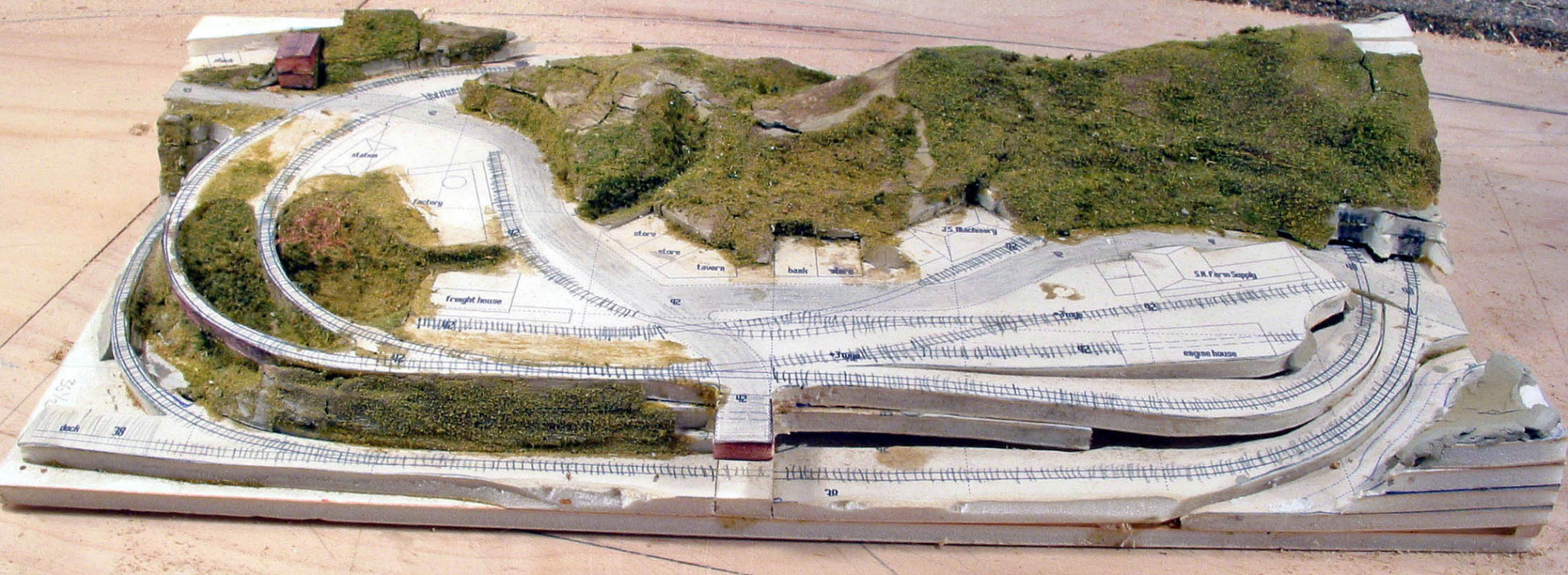


FIGURE 4: One great way to visualize your layout design and discover any design issues early is to build a small model of the layout. Charlie Comstock built this model to check out a 4x8 layout design idea, using a scale of one-half inch to the foot.

tying up the main. That wasn't a big problem until I started running with other people.

There was a Tuesday Night group I became involved with, and I started hosting that occasionally. It was wired with cab-control for two, but you couldn't have someone running on the mainline when someone else was switching the towns.

The mainline was too short for a train that was orbiting to give the local any time to get stuff accomplished.

There were some other things I found out from that layout. When it was first built, the access to the branch line and the far side of the run-around was easy to do because you could see it.

But it was on the far side of the layout from the control panel and when I put the row of hills down the spine of the layout, suddenly I couldn't see whether the train was clear of the turnouts so I could back the train up.

And I couldn't see the clearance point of turnout that went up to the

area that was originally supposed to be a mine. Actually it became an oil field, and eventually became access to the Jallen Branch.

I had an electromagnet that I couldn't see – it forced me into walk-around control. I couldn't use my MRC power pack any more. I needed a tethered throttle.

It just sort of evolved. When I started building the second layout I wasn't really keen on inventing things all over again. I had buildings, locomotives and rolling stock. So the second Bear Creek extended what I already had. I hadn't planned it that way.

I thought I'd make [the 4 x 8] nice and pretty with furniture grade plywood on the fascia and that was go-

ing to move into the house. And the garage would become available for building the On3 [layout] I wanted.

Somewhere along the line I decided that building another HO layout would be better. Through the Layout Design Special Interest group I met Joe Fugate who I knew was looking for operators.

I started going down to operate on Joe's layout and that introduced me to the concept of formal operations. I thought for my next layout I wanted to expand and do something that was operations-oriented.

I tried experiments using layout software to try to incorporate the 4 x 8 layout I already had into a larger design. None of them worked out

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(Click on the above image with your mouse and rotate the 3D image!)

Charlie Comstock is ... **Up the creek**



A regular report on the construction of a 1950s-something layout



Serendipity

Sometimes good things happen even when they're not planned in advance ...

This is the first of a series of columns about the evolution of my Bear Creek and South Jackson Railroad. Expect some factual information, some speculation, and a good bit of USDA certified prime malarky.

Be careful what you ask for! You might get it. When we moved into our new house almost 5 years ago (guess it isn't so new anymore) I had asked for and been approved for a large train room.

Large turned out to be almost 1100 sqft. "Wow!" I thought, "I can't wait

to get started on construction." The house and the track plan had been evolving with each over the last year and once the obligatory 'honey-do' was handled it was time to start construction.

Walking into a large new train room is an interesting experience. There's excitement in the air, but also a sense of "Oh Lord, what am I getting myself into?" when the magnitude of the project goes from being an intellectual affair on paper to experiencing just how big the project really is.

I'd contrived to pack the entire Mill City area, an L-shaped chunk of the previous BC&SJ about 10' x 14' into



DASHBOARD

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This is the magazine dashboard, and will do a lot more in the final issue.

This page also will have logo buttons for all our sponsoring advertisers. By clicking on the logo, you will immediately be taken to their ad in this issue.

We'll probably dream up some more things this dashboard will do before January 2009!