



The DERAIL

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President's Message

Bob Werre

I just returned from the left coast on the 15th so this message is a bit hurried. As I mentioned last month I would be attending the national NMRA convention in Sacramento, California. After that event I joined with a well-known S Scaler near San Jose to create several articles about his layout.

The NMRA convention itself seemed to go very smoothly with tons of activities, clinics, ops sessions, and tours. The temperature was actually fairly moderate during the day and pleasantly cool in the evenings. I attended as many clinics as possible but only scratched the surface. The contest seemed to have some outstanding winners in a wide variety of sizes and specialties. During the week I bumped into several Texas folks and fellow Club members. I understand the convention attendance was around 2000 while the train show drew around 20,000. The train show seemed somewhat muted with several large manufacturers choosing not to attend. Some blame the high cost of booth space and, of course, the western location. Some very excellent modular layouts made up for the venter. A large HO layout from Canada was my personal favorite with an On30 coming in second. Near the back of the hall was an unusual American Flyer layout on display that had been built for a department store back in the 50's. It has survived the last 55 +years in better condition than many of us!

Since I was attending a joint convention with my fellow S modelers, much of my time was devoted to that effort. One interesting note regarding that was a very well built and operating model of the single leaf lift bridge that we've all seen just before entering Galveston. The California modeler received the highest score and Best of Show in our contest.

During my post-convention stay near San Jose (Silicon Valley), I was able to visit three additional layouts in the area; one was O scale and two were HO. Both HO layouts were heavily into operations and one had a whole series of 'flat computer panels' mounted into the fascia for controls. I guess when you are around computer technology all day you have a tendency to take your knowledge home to the layout. The downside seems to be spending a great deal of time programming and not building scenery nor running trains! The modeler I was working with had put together a team of people to help build his layout. Early on he had a background painter do his work, modelers from around the country built cars, engines and structures and now he to is getting into a phone system, signaling, and remote operations. Since I'm totally a novice at operations (but liking it very much) these systems seem way out of reach to the first time operator.

Now refocusing back to our club, it seems as though the call has gone out for the upcoming tour season. Please help Craig to get this year's tour off to a good start with the information and photos for the website. I do hope we have all made some progress on our layouts to impress the viewers and your wife. Don't underestimate the second part of that last sentence...once in a while you need to prove that all that time and money are going to a greater purpose, so they continue to put up with us!

Please brave either the heat or the rain for our next meeting at Bayland Park. We'll have some interesting things coming up; and do bring a friend.

My Helix In a Closet

Dick Setterlund

Jim Kelly's article in the July 2011 issue of Model Railroader entitled



Helixology for N scalers states that the typical closet is too small for an HO helix. While Mr Kelly has many valid points in this article, my layout shows this statement to be in error at least in the case of Marklin HO layout.

Placing a helix in a closet provides me with a much longer route in my upstairs bedroom layout and making it single track is not a bottleneck as suggested in the article, rather, it provides a challenge in my point-to



-point operation. Trains have to check signals for clearance to enter the helix which represents the open areas between towns. Train positions are shown on a dispatchers board mounted above the layout.

The upstairs bedroom was approximately 10.5 by 13.5 feet while the closet that was used was 54 inches wide by 48 inches deep with a 24 inch wide door and fairly typically sized for a bedroom. I removed the door and constructed a helix inside the closet. The track radius was 17.25 inches which corresponds to the "wide" (R2) radius for Marklin

M-track giving me a run of 108.4 inches, or approximately 9 feet , per turn. The rise per turn was $3 \frac{7}{8}$ inches corresponding to a grade of approximately 3.6 %.

My layout is on three levels with 15 inch spacings between levels. The levels are 37 - , 52 - and 67 - inches above the floor.. The climb from Level 1 to Level 2 is done with four turns. On Level 2 the track is out and back and gains $7 \frac{1}{2}$ inches leaving only two turns to reach Level 3. The upper level is flat and will consist of only a passenger station and a double ended staging yard..

While the layout is free standing, the helix is bolted to the back wall of the closet. The helix is constructed from $\frac{1}{4}$ " plywood and is supported by eight threaded steel rods. The local Lowe's had three foot sections of threaded rods in $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{3}{16}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch diameters. I felt that the $\frac{1}{4}$ inch rods were too flimsy and the $\frac{3}{8}$ inch rods too large and employed $\frac{3}{16}$ inch rods with matching nuts and washers. The steel M-track was screwed to the plywood and the turns were adjusted and



leveled after all the track was laid.

Marklin engines are designed for a R1 radius of $14 \frac{3}{16}$ inches (360 mm) and most are constructed of cast metal with rubber traction tires giving them outstanding pulling power. While I do not run 10 foot long trains like Mr Kelly , they can be as much as 8 feet in length. I did not use the R1 radius in the helix but used them for double tracked curves in my layout. I had been warned that Marklin engines can pull cars off the track in long trains in a R1 radius helix.

Another " advantage " of Marklin engines is that they are somewhat noisy and it is not difficult to tell when they stop which I find to be an advantage with my hidden helix.

Station Stops

Aug 20 - Houston Railroad Museum - Building Trees and Bushes, by Jim Lemmond, 10:00am - 11:30am

Sep 21 - Houston Railroad Museum - Decaling, by Tracy Mitchell, 10:00am - 11:30am



MODELLING TUNNELS

Last month, I spoke about prototype tunnels, and this naturally leads to the subject of tunnels on layouts.

Aside from the scenic appeal of mountains, tunnels can dramatically increase a layout's credibility, because realism suffers if trains are always in full view. Instead of just traveling around in a circle, model trains should always look like they are going from somewhere to somewhere and this illusion is heightened if they appear from a tunnel, travel across the layout, through bridges and valleys, and then disappear into another tunnel again. Another advantage is that since tracks are hidden in tunnels, staging yards can be incorporated out of viewers' sight, thus one train can enter a tunnel and disappear, while another one exits.

When planning a tunnel, the first thing to consider is its height and width. It must be high enough to provide clearance for your tallest engine, freight or passenger car, plus the height of the track and roadbed. If there is a curve within the tunnel, there must be sufficient clearance for the longest railcar, bearing in mind that it will need more width than when running on straight track.

My tunnels run through a mountain that I built using pink insulation foam. After laying the tracks I cut and laid initial pieces of foam in the 'footprint' of the mountain, and after ensuring that the track clearances were sufficient, I glued the foam pieces to the base using Liquid Nails.

I then glued individual pieces of foam one on top of the other until I reached my desired mountain height, mostly – but not always, setting each one back a bit from the one that went before.



After the glue was dry, I cut furrows into the foam to simulate streams and then smoothed a light layer of Plaster-of-Paris onto the foam, together with some pre-molded rock outcroppings as well as actual rocks. When the plaster was dry, I painted the mountain with various earth-shades and water-painted the rocks with inks and dyes to simulate weathering. Finally, I added 'water' to the rivulets running down the mountain into a small lake below, and added grass, trees and bushes to the terrain. I used Faller tunnel portals for my tunnel entrances, but before gluing them in place, I built plaster rock castings around the visible portions of the tunnel entrances and painted them black. This ensured that all of the tunnel entrances had realistic and dark appearances. I also added cuttings to the tunnel approaches, since these are necessary unless there is a sheer

cliff involved.

The next item I considered was accessibility. Aside from the need to be able to clean or work on the track, Murphy's Law of Model Railroading states that 'any track location on a layout that has little or no access, is where train derailments will occur'.

One way to gain access is by cutting a hole in the back-side of the mountain - if it is not visible to viewers. (See photo below.)



I used this method but due to the two layers of track within the tunnel on my layout, I elected to also have a removable roof with seams that are invisible when covered with trees, buildings, etc. (see below).



As can be seen here, the entire top of the tunnel, including the town and scenery, can be removed.

The tunnels on my layout have been a great success and talking point among visitors. Now all I have to do is figure out a way to get my grandkids to stand in front of the layout instead of preferring to watch the trains go by through the rear access holes!

One of the important things in having an operating railroad is an easy to understand operating system. I looked at many ways to run the West Virginia Western RR from car cards to many computer generated programs. After careful study I chose the RailOP operating system. It is easy for my crews to use and very easy for me to set up an operating session. In fact it takes me less than 15 or 20 min. to set up and run out all that is needed for a three hour session. The beauty of RailOp, and my opinion is that if you only run part of the session (I keep my sessions to three hours unless it is out of town guests. I know that wives like their husbands home at a reasonable hour and Susan for that matter. If you do not get all the trains run, then you simply reset the trains you did not run. That makes for an easy way to run a session for beginners when we may not get through the whole session and RailOp is very easy to use. If I can do it and make it worked to perfection anyone can!

Along the lines of an easy to understand operating system, is the selection and use of a control system. Of course in this day and age this is DCC. I use the wireless easy DCC system from CVP Products in Richardson Texas. It is very reliable and new crew members like the idea of walking around without having a throttle tethered to the layout. In over 200 operating sessions I have had on the West Virginia Western since August of 2003, I've had very few problems with the Easy DCC wireless system.

As I've mentioned before, if you have an interest in operating on the West Virginia Western, you are always welcome. Simply give me a call at 832-237-4388 and I will put you on my invitation list.

ATTENTION LAYOUT OWNERS/ OPERATORS

SIGN UP FOR THE ANNUAL FALL LAYOUT TOUR

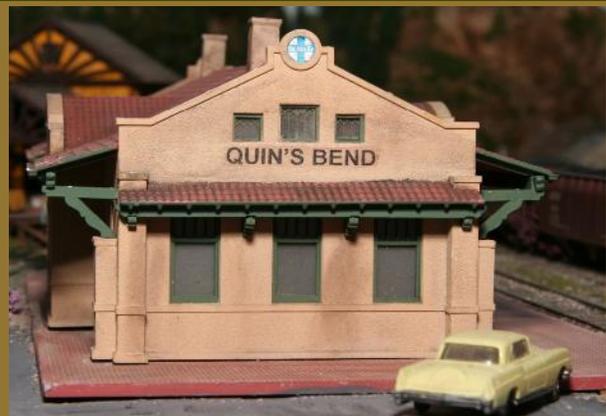
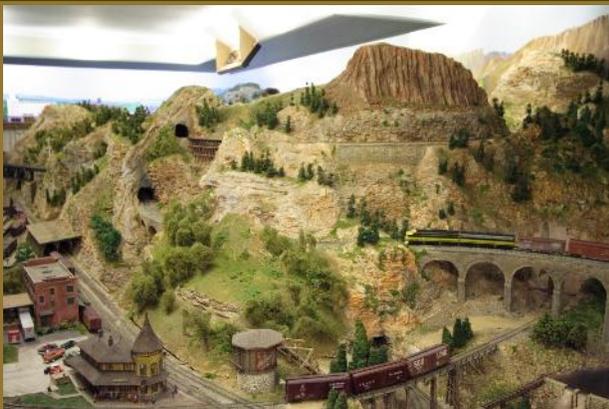
DATES	LOCATION
Oct. 15-16	Northeast (Hwy. 59 North, Crosby, Kingwood, Liberty)
Oct. 22-23	Far North (Bryan/College Station)
Oct. 29-30	Northwest (Hwy. 290)
Nov. 5-6	South (I-45 South, Dickinson, Galveston, Pearland, Texas City)
Nov. 12-13	North (I-45 North, Conroe, Tomball, Spring)
Nov. 19-20	West (I-10/610 West, Memorial)
Nov. 26-27	Southeast (I-45 South, I-10 East, Beaumont, Orange)
Dec. 3-4	Southwest (Hwy. 59 South, Bellaire, Manvel, Richmond, Rosenberg)

You may choose any date to host your open house however you should receive the most visitors if you select from the dates above based on your location.

Provide 4 photos (800 x 600) of your layout for the San Jac website.

Send your name, open date/time, contact information and photos to: sanjactour@sbcglobal.net I will send you a layout description form via email.

Guess the Layout!



All pictures are from the same layout.

Answer to last months' Guess the Layout: Steve Sandifer

This installment we are going to discuss something that is a must to use if you want good running trains, but few modelers know exactly what everything it has to offer....so what am I talking about? Why the NMRA track gauge of course.

The first item the track gauge can check is the gauge of the wheels. These are the two thin notches located on the side marked "wheels". If you have to force the wheels into the gauge then the wheel sets are out of gauge by either being too wide or too narrow. This is a common problem when derailments are popping up on your layout. Even new wheel sets need to be checked. I have been replacing wheelsets for TX Children's hospital on our rolling stock and I have found about 5% of the new wheelsets are out of gauge. This might not sound like too much but it is, when you consider a box of wheelsets have 100 in it and 5 are out of gauge. That means that for every 25 cars (4 wheelsets per car) that are on the layout 5 cars have the potential of having a derailment. Remember all it takes is for one wheel set to cause a problem. So this is a very important thing to check.

Another thing you can check is the width of the wheel with the notch that is cut out of the gauge. This is the widest notch that is located on the side marked "wheels". Wheels that are too thin can be a problem and the wheel will not be able to track as well. The gauge can also check the flange. For most modelers this is not a problem, but on a heavily used lay out such as TCH this is a very big concern. We have discovered some wheelsets have razor sharp flanges or even worse no flanges at all.

The NMRA gauge also has a slot to check the coupler height. This can be found using the side marked "track". This is also very important because if the couplers on your rolling stock do not match, then you can have uncoupling, and that is just as bad as a derailment. This couple gauge is good, but to really do a better job, please purchase the Kadee height gauge and use this instead. If you don't have access to the Kadee then the NMRA gauge is a suitable replacement.

To check the track gauge you need to use the two pins located

on the bottom of the gauge. Again this can be found on the side marked "Track". The right one has a lip that when you press the left one against the track the right should set on the lip. If this lip doesn't, then the track is out of gauge. Don't just think that because you don't hand lay track that the track you use is in gauge. Sectional or flex-track can also be out of gauge believe it or not.

You can also check the switch points with the gauge ...just use the side marked "points". Set the gauge just ahead of the switch points and slide the gauge down the switch. The gauge should slide freely without any hang ups. This will work no matter which way the switch is thrown.

You can also check the flange ways or the spacing between the frogs and the guardrail. Use the side marked "Flangeways". This will check the spacing between the running rail and the guardrail. If the spacing is too tight, it will pinch the wheel causing the wheel to ride up on the switch.

The overall gauge is also the correct height and width a tunnel should be. You will find that the gauge has a hole in the middle of it. Simply attach the gauge to a wooden dowel with a screw and slide the gauge all the way into the tunnel. Using the gauge in this manner makes checking for tunnel width and height on your lay out quick and easy.

Placement of structures and platforms is another function performed with the gauge. Simply set the gauge on the track using the two pins on the side marked "Track". You will find a right-angle cut out on the gauge that will give you the correct height of a platform or structure. This also is helpful in setting the structure to the proper distance away from the track.

Model Railroader Magazine has a short video on the NMRA track gauge if you are having a hard time following what I wrote. To find it just Google model railroad magazine track gauge and you will find it.

I hope this helps you to run derailment free operations on your layout.

Member Query....



When I was in B.C., the Canadian Pacific track had a wooden peg driven through the tie plate and into the tie approximately every 5'. I have never seen this before. What is the purpose of these pegs?

George

If anyone has an answer for George, please forward it to the Derail, and we will publish it in next months issue.

When Things Go Wrong

David Currey

Some people, probably not too many, may think that a railroad runs like a well-oiled machine--hardly ever any problems. Trains come and go orderly as planned--like clockwork. Well, to those I say, "Wake up and smell the sticking brake shoes!"

When I was working for the Missouri Pacific, I used to enjoy telling people, who asked me how often trains derail, that derailments were almost a daily occurrence, and less fondly, I said that the railroad was run by crisis management: from one crisis to another.

Indeed, such seemed to be the case. On my very first trip on the North End out of Houston, I was called as the extra brakeman on a pool crew. We were deadheaded to board a freight at Mykawa on the south side of Houston on the ATSF. That was as far as the original crew got from Houston: 14 miles.

We got on and promptly waited 4 hours before the dispatcher could move us. The other thing I remember about this trip was that I had my first conversation with a dispatcher. They didn't cover that in brakeman school. After we boarded the train, the engineer told me to go talk to the Santa Fe dispatcher and see when he could get us a clear signal.

I walked down to the phone box, opened it with my Santa Fe switch key, and put the head set to my ear. I could hear some static and that was it. I knew it was a "community phone line", so to speak, so when I decided that nobody else was using it, I said, "Dispatcher." That was met by silence. Maybe he was out of pocket for a moment. After about a minute, I said, "Dispatcher" again. Still nothing but silence.

Eventually, I heard two people talking on the line. When they were done, I said, "Dispatcher" once again. Somebody else came on and said, "Dispatcher." Great! Now two of us are trying to get ahold of the dispatcher. Silence. I finally said, "Dispatcher" again, and so did the other person. Silence.

After a while, I jumped to a great revelation: maybe the other guy saying, "Dispatcher," was actually the dispatcher. Sure enough. The next time I said "Dispatcher, the other guy said "Dispatcher". He *was* the dispatcher, so I told him of our train's readiness to leave Mykawa, and he promptly told us it would be a while, then the four hour wait.

Back on the engine, I asked the engineer. He said all you have to say on the phone to get the dispatcher is your location. I should have said, "East end of Mykawa", and nothing more, or possibly, "MP Extra XXXX at the east end of Mykawa".

(A little reminder here about railroad directions on the ATSF south of Houston as the crow flies: Heading south from South Yard is east on the railroad. Turning to head southeast at Alvin is west. Turning to head northwest at Alvin is east. Got that?)

Back with the derailments: It sometimes did seem like derailments were a daily affair. Mostly they were minor things. The wheels "got on the ground". You could sometimes get them back on the track at a switch—just like on a model railroad.

I'll never forget a derailment we had in the Sweeney Phillips plant. We were just about done and ready to drag our shippers back to Sweeney. Unfortunately, we had a trainmaster there observing us, and he decided to "play trains" and do a little straightening up. There was this old track that curved to the right, and used to go down into the plant to some racks, but now it was only long enough to hold about three cars. The trainmaster decided to move some cars into that track temporarily while he tidied up. Bad idea. All the crews knew to tread lightly in that track, and used it only infrequently. The trainmaster's tidying up move derailed some cars, and blocked the other tracks. That was the end of our

work for the day. The shippers could go out a day later. Call the Phillips track gang.

Another time in the Phillips plant, the conductor and us brakemen were riding the rear platform on the last tank car we were hauling out to the run-around track. The last truck on the last car split the switch. The wheels "got on the ground", and that was one heck of a bumpy ride until the conductor could radio the engineer to stop. Those wheels pulled the diverging rails together like a big zipper. Once again, that was the end of our work for the day. Call the Phillips track gang. The Phillips plant had a four-member track gang whose most modern equipment seemed to be sledge hammers, and I'll bet they were 50 year old sledge hammers if they were a day old.

One time on one of the Angleton south end switchers we derailed, blocking all movement on the south end of the yard. We were writing out the accident report in the crew shack near the depot at the north end of the yard, when an engineer walked in. He was a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, liked to play practical jokes, hated trainmasters with a passion, but was all serious when behind the throttle. From the wye just north of the building came a loud reverberating bang. This engineer threw open the door, and proclaimed, "Turned 'em over in the wye." We all jumped up to have a look, but he was just pulling our legs. We sat back down and continued with the report. Shortly thereafter there was another big bang. We got up, and this time there was indeed a covered hopper laying on its side at the north wye switch. That sewed up the entire yard—both ends. A switcher had to be sent out of Freeport on the branch to clear the crossing by the depot.

Earlier, grease had somehow gotten on the rail on the north leg of the wye. The North End switcher, running up to the depot, had slid on the oil through the power switch, messing it up. It was supposedly repaired, but maybe not good enough. Call the Mop track gang.

Actually, I always felt I was lucky for my crew. Once, while I was on vacation for a couple of weeks, my crew was northbound out of Vanderbilt and hit a sun kink somewhere south of Sweeney. The train derailed in several spots, tank cars caught fire, and some exploded. I talked later with another brakeman who was on a traveling switcher that came out of Bloomington to pull as many cars off the train as possible to get them away from the fires. The brakeman was walking up from our caboose with a trainmaster to make a cut when suddenly a tank car blew up. That was that as far as he was concerned. He high-tailed it back to his engine and let the trainmaster make the cut.

Another time, I was on vacation again, and my crew was northbound out of Vanderbilt again. At Angleton, the "Freeport Man" ran into the side of our train. When they finally got things cleaned up and my crew could proceed on to Houston, on the East Belt in Houston, an HB&T switcher shoved some cars into the side of their train. A train getting run into twice during the same tour of duty must be some kind of record. To put that in context, in my five years on the railroad, no train or switcher I was on ever was run into.

Enough on derailments. What else can go wrong? How about this: I was on a North End switcher at Angleton. We had just finished a long day of switching, were tired, and just needed to park our engine somewhere. We had hold of a caboose, and were shoving it into the yard to tie up. I was down on the ground—the head brakeman was on the engine steps. The conductor gave the engineer the stop sign so we could line a switch, but the other brakeman thought it was to kick the caboose into a track, so he pulled the pin. Here came the free-rolling caboose! I quickly checked the track switches and saw that the caboose was lined

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into a track where the Freeport Man was waiting to depart for Freeport. I could see the engineer's and brakeman's feet propped up in the front windows. This is going to be one hell of a way to get their attention! However, I was able to swing up on the caboose as it zipped by, and got a handbrake on it before it rolled into their track. Whew! The conductor was very pleased.

How about this: I was on a train northbound out of Vanderbilt. We were stopped at a red signal at Buckeye, about 55 miles south of Angleton. I walked up to the phone and talked to the dispatcher. He said, "Ya'll are going to be held at Buckeye to meet a train that's not off the Santa Fe yet." (All the sidings north of us until Algoa on the Santa Fe were full of cars.) Holy @\$%! I did the math in my head, and when I got back to the engine, I told the engineer we were going to be there about four hours to meet another train. When the train finally got there, it was more like five.

Or maybe this: One time we had a train southbound out of Angleton. We had just enough time to make it to Vanderbilt 81 miles away if we didn't have any kind of a delay. Conditions were extremely foggy. When we got out to "the milepost" south of Angleton at milepost 315 pole 17, we had a red signal, and it wouldn't clear. The dispatcher finally gave us rule 350 (no opposing trains in the block). The rule states that you're supposed to proceed no faster than 20 mph prepared to stop short of switch not properly lined, cars on the track, or broken rail. Visibility was about 100 feet, so we went about 5 mph until the next signal about 2 miles away. That took about 20 minutes. Again another red signal. 5 mph to the next signal about 4 miles away. That took about 45 minutes. Again a red signal. 5 mph to the next signal at the north end of Brazoria about 2 miles away. Again a red signal. It was nerve wracking. I kept picturing a big box car looming up out of the fog. Of course, at 5 mph, it wouldn't be much worse than a rough joint (coupling), but still, it was nerve wracking. We had red signals all the way until the south end of Sweeney. By then we had less than 10 minutes before we hog-lawed. The dispatcher said go until you run out of time, so we did just that. We found a crossing, and stopped just short of it. Protected by the signal system, we sacked out in the cab and caboose. Eventually, a northbound train came and hauled us down to Buckeye, and finally, a southbound train hauled us into Vanderbilt after 17 ½ hours on duty. What a day, but that 5 ½ hours past 12 was all overtime! Yep, sometimes things go wrong!

One time I was deadheaded up to Palestine to catch the interdivisional run down to Angleton. That was going to be my first run on the Palestine Division, and I was looking forward to it. I visited my grandmother Ruth Currey in Groesbeck on the way up. The next morning I was at the depot in Palestine getting out of my car. A Kingsville brakeman walked up to me with a personal problem. He had been deadheaded to Palestine by mistake for the same job I was deadheaded for. He said he was just back from some time off and needed some trips. Since I was senior, I would normally be the one getting the trips. Out of the kindness of my heart, I let him have the trips. I figured I'd get a deadhead to Palestine again one of these days, but it never happened. That's one of my biggest railroad regrets—missing out on working on the Palestine Division. As for missing out on the trips pay-wise, I came out okay. I received 300 miles in deadhead pay (100 miles is a days pay), and got to see my grandmother, who passed away a year or two later. So sometimes when things go wrong, it's not really a bad thing.

The previous story and this next one sort of seem like I wrote about them before, but they fit the topic, and maybe this time there will be a different spin on them.

One time I was on a crew headed north on a mainline freight out of Vanderbilt. We had two engines: an old MP drusty (dusty and rusty) GP18, and an ICG GP20 or something. The ICG unit wasn't running at Vanderbilt. The engineer checked it out, and found it to be out of fuel. The lead engine was low on fuel. He reported this to the trainmasters in Angleton. (You got to love those trainmasters.) They told him to get as far as he could go with them. (Must have been kin to the dispatcher from the earlier story.) When going downhill, we could sometimes get going as fast as 11 (eleven) mph. The engineer kept the throttle in run 8 the whole time. We were headed around the big banked curve on the approach to the Colorado River bridge just past Buckeye when the fuel in the tank must have drained away from the out pipe, and the engine ran out of gas. We were coasting along the fill and coming up on the wooden pile trestle that led up to the through truss span. "Should I stop short of the trestle?" he asked. I opined that it would probably be better to be on the fill in case we had to walk back to Buckeye to get a ride or something. The trestle had no walkway. It was about 3 hours before the Angleton yard switcher could dig himself a hole out of the yard and come tow us in.

There were times when more than half the sidings had cars stored in them. When you have an hour or more running time between usable sidings, that can lead to some serious delays trying to get trains over the road. There were times when the trains were so badly delayed, we earned a full day's pay sitting in the Vanderbilt railroad motel watching TV. A couple of times, they pulled us off the train in Angleton, let us sleep 4 or more hours in the motel, and then put us back on the train for Houston. The 4 hours didn't count against the hours-of-law, but did count towards our pay. One time I made 5 ½ hours of pay sleeping like a baby.

We needed about 3 hours run time to make the 81 miles from Angleton to Vanderbilt. You might think at 40 mph you could make it in a shade over 2 hours. Hey! Wake up and smell the sticking brake shoes! This is not the Interstate we're talking about here. This is a railroad. There's a walking train inspection to be done at Buckeye. There's probably several 10 mph or 20 mph slow orders. There's yard speed exiting Angleton and arriving Vanderbilt. You're not going to make it in 2 hours. Forget that impossibility. We sometimes hoped that on arrival at Angleton from Houston, we'd have a little under 3 hours left to work. That'd give us time to get back to Houston (at least to New South Yard), but not time enough to get to Vanderbilt. When that happened, and there was an Angleton-originating train ready to go, they'd send us back to Houston. Another instance when things going wrong was not such a bad thing.

How about busted knuckles? Had several, and not much fun. Two of the three busted knuckles were on the same run with an ex-steam locomotive engineer. As it was told to me by an engineer raised on diesels, ex-steam engineers had a tendency to work the independent brake too much, which could cause slack action in the train, hence the busted knuckles. Also made it rough on the rear end crews. It was a good idea, if you had an ex-steam locomotive engineer on the point, to sit braced on that caboose back there.

Anyway, back to the busted knuckle. They weigh 60 pounds, and carrying one of them along the ballast beside a train can be a little bit rough on the brakeman. Our conductor just dropped the knuckle off on the side of the track, pulled the forward part of the train ahead, and put the knuckle on the platform on the end of the car, and shoved back to the break. Much easier on the brakeman. On the second busted knuckle of the day, the engineer was so embarrassed, that he personally got the knuckle off the locomotive and tossed it on the ground for us.

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When Things Go Wrong

David Currey

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One time we had one of those old dusty GP18s on the Sweeney traveling Switcher. (Note: The town name is spelled "Sweeny", but the Mop timetable has it spelled "Sweeney", so I'm deferring to the Mop misspelling. Sorry.) The locomotive wasn't braking too well. The engineer was one of the old guys near retirement, and as we were switching that day, it always seemed like the locomotive sped up just before it stopped when you gave the engineer a stop sign. In one case, I was on the footboard on the engineer's side of the engine and we were heading into number 3 track on the north end. The engineer could see the cars we were going to couple into just as easy as I could, but I gave him the hand signals anyway. I gave him 5 car lengths, and then quickly an easy sign. By the time I got to the three-car-lengths sign, it was pretty obvious he wasn't going to be able to stop the engine. I quickly gave him the washout sign, and bailed off. WHAM! That was one heck of a joint! We checked things out, and there was no damage. The other brakeman told me in reference to the engineer, "That had to have knocked him off his seat."

Later, the locomotive died on the mainline, and when the engineer started it back up, I wish I had had my camera along. A big white cloud of smoke billowed about 75 feet up into the air. It outdid any steam locomotive or Alco diesel.

One last story: I was head brakeman on a train that had arrived at the yard in Angleton. After breaking for lunch, the trainmaster (Did I mention you got to love them there train masters?) told us to go get a track together—without a radio. Say what? The cars were down in about track 5 or 6. We got our locomotive and coupled into the car first out in the track, and began to couple up and lace (connect the air lines) up the

cars. It was close to midday, but there were dark shadows between the cars on adjoining tracks. Being the head brakeman, I went as far down as I thought I could go and still have the engineer see me. At least I could see his head sticking out of the cab. This worked okay for awhile, but finally the rear brakeman got so far down the track, I could not see him in the shadows. If I went any further down the track, I doubt if the engineer would be able to see me.

Eventually, after I could no longer see the rear brakeman for about 15 minutes, I gave up and started back towards the engine. Somebody began walking my way. When he got close enough to be recognized, I saw it was the trainmaster. "What the hell's going on down here?" he yelled at me, angry as all get out. I yelled something back, because I was pretty mad myself, and then walked on up and sat on the engine. This particular trainmaster was the least liked of any of the ones in Angleton, though there were several good ones. He was a hothead, not very experienced, lacked common sense, and seemed to think that trainmen had nothing better to do than try to mess up the smoothly running clockwork. Privately, we all figured that sooner or later he was going to yell at the wrong trainman at the wrong time in a secluded part of the yard, and get "educated" a little bit. Don't know if that ever happened.

We never did get that track together without radios. Don't remember what happened. They probably either gave us some radios, or got the yard job to get the track together.

In conclusion, let me say that when things go wrong on the railroad, it's just the expected thing to happen. So if it's expected, then it's the normal thing to happen, right? And if it's the normal thing to happen, then is it really wrong? Maybe things don't go wrong on the railroad. Maybe it *is* a finely oiled machine. Yeah. Right! Wake up and smell the sticking brake shoes!



Later David shared his love of trains with his family.

Left to right, Kenzie Hannah, David Hannah IV, David Hannah III, Richard G. Hannah, and John M. Hannah

Thanks for sharing these great photos David!

San Jac member David Hannah already enjoying trains at an early age, seen here with local channel 13 morning news anchor Tom Koch in 1989.



There is A Prototype For Almost Everything Robert Ellis

Often when someone sees a craftsman model they feel that it has been somewhat exaggerated for realism and nostalgic effect. However, occasionally we come upon a sight that helps us realize that there truly is a prototype for every model.

Recently eighty miles northeast of Houston, Texas on U.S. Highway 59 in a community called "Fish Branch" which almost coincides with another very small Texas community, inappropriately named "Urbana", we came across an unbelievable lumber industry scene. It was right on the highway and just a half mile from the Trinity River Bridge. We had previously noted it when passing at highway speed but on those occasions it seemed we were past it before we realized what might have be there to see. However, on this day, my friend Bob Fisk. With his trusty camera were with me and we were looking for the site.



wet."

This small gas engine was what they used to run a small saw for small jobs like the one planned for that day, to cut tomato stakes from scrap lumber. Evidently these stakes were a commodity they would sell to local gardeners and hopefully to passing motorists. The Fairbanks Morse gas engine was connected by a belt to a shaft on which was a saw blade. The blade protruded up through a rather crude wood platform. *I don't believe the safety of this arrangement was ever even a consideration.*

From that point on Bill was the talker. Robert just looked on hoping that his 'knowledgeable' partner would soon solve their problem and that they could get started on today's work.

BILL PHILPOTT

As we engaged in friendly talk we kept eyeing the idle "BIG SAW". It was just on the other side of a small pile of pine logs and quite a large pile of saw dust.. We continued friendly conversation hoping that at the right time Bill would be receptive to showing us the "BIG SAW". I asked him if they mostly sawed on local pine logs and he said, "Yeah! once in a while we get a good piece of hardwood but it's mostly pine." Trying to seem informed I pointed and said, "that's a piece of oak there isn't it Bill?" Bill said, "no, it's sweet gum". I guess if there was any doubt before, he now knew that I a true novice and that I had little knowledge about timber and saw mills. (I think Bill knew we were city boys.)

Still waiting for the right opportunity to ask to see the "BIG SAW", I asked another dumb question. "Are you a seasoned Mill Man" Bill said, "What ?"

I said, "you been doing this sawmill work all your life?" Bill said, "nope." Persistence prevailing, I said, "Bill, what kind of a background do you have to be able to do this kind of work."

"Well", Bill said, "I'm a machinery rebuilder." I didn't want to ask any more 'city boy' questions so I just said "Oh!" Like I really knew what a



We exited from the main divided highway and almost immediately entered a relatively small open area between the highway and the north/south branch of what was then the Southern Pacific Railroad (*sometimes referred to as "The Rabbit"*). Tucked away in this rather obscure setting was a small but wonderful old time saw mill. The mill far surpassed what our wildest imagination could imagine. On this wet August morning the only occupants of this sawdust matted plot of ground was the proprietor, Bill Philpott and his assistant, Smiling Robert Stark. At that point we weren't sure if Roberts wide smile was a natural part of is face or if he was just happy to see some guests. At any rate he was just beaming.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Robert met us near our car. When we expressed our desire to just see their saw mill Robert's seemingly always present smile enlarged to include his entire face. He welcomed us with a friendly hand shake and escorted us across the loosely packed wet sawdust to meet his boss, Bill Philpott. As we approached Bill stood up from his kneeling position in front of an old two cylinder Fairbanks Morse gasoline engine. He seemed friendly but annoyed that his silent engine was not giving him the slightest encouragement. Bill picked up his remaining half cup of blacker than black coffee and cuddled it between both hands as if it was the only friend he had. He took a slow sip and only then greeted us. Bob Fisk, said, "got any gas in her". Bill grunted, "Yeah she's just wet from last nights big rain. We had 4 inches of rain last night. The magneto got all



Machinery Rebuilder was. I guess he meant that he likes to take old broken machinery and fix it up. And he sure had been practicing his trade on this old Mill.

SUPPLEMENTAL PRODUCTS

Unable to wait any longer, I finally just blurted out, "would you mind if
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There is A Prototype For Almost Everything Robert Ellis

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we looked the mill over." Bill said, "Nah!, go ahead." On our short walk past the pile of logs and around a pretty good sized pile of sawdust I asked Bill if he burned the sawdust and lumber scraps. He seemed rather surprised and maybe a little miffed, that I thought he might just burn up that valuable stuff. He said, "I bag the sawdust and sell it", pointing off to a previously unnoticed large stack of plastic bags filled with saw dust. Bill explained that saw dust mixed with the dirt in your flower beds is the best thing there is for growing stuff. I thought, stacked back out of the way like those bags were, sales of sawdust might be kind of slow. However, they were ready just as soon as the customers came.



Continuing with what seemed to be an effort to impress us with his good business sense, Bill explained that they also used the scrap lumber to make tomato stakes. That is better than burning them. Bill said he had one fellow from Houston that stopped by a filled up his pickup with tomato stakes. He said "he didn't know what he was using them for but he wanted to be ready with more stakes if any other big spender from Houston stopped by for some of his hand made rough cut tomato stakes." I wonder why they need so many tomato stakes in August when folks are through planting and harvesting tomatoes. Perhaps their project for the day was to get that Fairbanks Mores Engine going so they could keep busy as much as to cut tomato stakes. **THE BIG SAW !**

Bills "big saw" was partially shielded from the rain and sun by a slanted corrugated metal roof that looked like it had been worked on with Radio Shack etching solution and Floquils rust paint.

The Saw was crude. Big unshielded "C" shaped teeth of the saw blade looked lethal as they protruded out of the hand made wood table/platform. From the bare ground a couple of hand crafted welded steps led up to the saw platform. The saw platform was made up of springy flexible widely spaced rough sawn boards. *The lack of any safety standards almost made us glad the saw wasn't running.* Unconcerned with our safety, Bill left us to explore Big Saw on our own.



The shaft that turned this big blade was connected on the other end by several narrow belts to a huge old General Motors diesel engine. *(Bill had said, "It's the only thing to have to run a saw!")* Midway on that shaft was a smaller ordinary pulley which used an ordinary automobile type belt to operated a squirrel cage blower. The blower was mounted under the saw blade and it propelled the sawdust out a homemade metal tube to the sawdust pile adjacent to the saw. *(no telling where "The Rebuilder" had found these parts)*

Horizontally to the right of the saw blade was a crude log carriage. It moved with the aid of a power takeoff from that same saw blade shaft with the aid of a cable wrapped around a small drum and attached to the front of the carriage. It moved the log in the carriage along a narrow track to the whirling saw blade. The other end of the carriage cable went

past the carriage to a pulley and back to the back of the log carriage. The power take off could be directed to either side of the saw shaft and thus pull the log carriage toward the blade or away from the blade--ready for the next pass at the blade. On the Machine Rebuilder's carriage were some other interesting features. A long leverage producing handle projected above the log carriage on which had been attached a wide flat log positioner with many tooth like projections. We determined this was how Bill moved the big pine logs into position and held them in position while feeding them into his whirling ominous saw blade.

Horizontally to the left of the saw blade was a well worn conveyor belt. We surmised that the sawed off boards must have dropped off on the belt rolled down to a stacking rack where Robert or some other able assistant man-handled the boards onto the rack. Later they were sorted and placed in stacks to dry until sold.

THE END PRODUCT

This was rough sawed lumber, I mean really rough. Those big widely spaced "C" shaped saw teeth just kind of ripped the boards out of the logs. Tough on the hands of those using the end product. Bill told us that the smooth building lumber that we see and buy goes through planers at the large mills. He said that before the forties most of the houses in that area were build of rough sawed lumber like what Bill cuts in his Fish Branch/Urbana Mill.

Bill explained that in the old lumbering days companies would set up a saw, somewhat like Bill's, in a lumber area and run little small gauge tracks out in many directions like the spokes of a wheel. Small steam engines (Bill called them puffer bellies) went out on these peripheral tracks and brought the lumber to the central saw mill.

Though this unique mill was stationed right beside the railroad the railroad had little to do with the mill. I think this site was chosen because it was there, unused and cost little or maybe nothing to use. The pine logs were brought in by truck and the sawed boards were hauled away in trucks by the customer. Bill said they used the boards to build barns, sheds and in general out buildings.

Bill's customers often brought him the logs from which he made them the boards and posts for building. He then tried to use all or most of the products not taken by the customers to make a little extra money. There were stacks of smaller cut lumber along the edges of the area. As we snapped pictures of this wonderful industry our eyes could hardly believe the many wonderful characteristics of Bill Philipott's saw mill.

More of the Machinery Rebuilder

None of Bill's tools or rebuilt products were smooth or finished in appearance. Everything was put together with gloppy looking crude welds. Like Bills large shovel on which the wooden handle had been replaced with a welded metal pipe handle. It sure looked strong but it also looked heavy. Then we notice a flat instrument welded from sheet metal with a pipe handle that we guessed Bill and Robert used to perform a number of functions like clearing the sawdust away from the mouth of the blower or to edge a log in the right direction as it was being sawed. We had already asked so many questions that we let that one go so Bill wouldn't be too

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annoyed with those city dudes from Houston.

After taking pictures of the saw mill from every conceivable angle we walked back over to Bill. He was once again bent over the old Fairbanks Morse engine and still was not having any luck getting it to burp out a note of encouragement. Robert was close by, still smiling and seemingly still hoping they could cut a few more tomato stakes.

At that point another truck pulled into the lot and three apparently local guys sauntered over to Bill. One of them said "Ya gotta put gas in her Bill. Bill looked up with one eye and grinned. Guess he had heard that before.

All this took place just a few years ago. The story is true and though the

mill has now been moved away and Bill took his machinery rebuilding talents to other areas. We will never forget our visit with Bill Philipott, the Machinery Rebuilder or smiling Robert Stark the dutiful Saw Mill assistant. I'm not sure but I bet somewhere in the Texas Piney Woods there probably is another Saw Mill much like that of our Machinery Rebuilder. Maybe so or Maybe Not!

As you put all those primitive characteristics in your next model believe that in some small rural community there is or was a prototype scene with almost anything you can imagine just like we saw in Bill Philipott's East Texas Saw Mill.

July Minutes

Gil Freitag

Meeting minutes July 5, 2011

Treasurer Gilbert Freitag called the meeting to order at 7:05PM, due to the absence of the President and Vice President, and welcomed all.

Bob Barnett introduced the night's presentation:

Chuck Lind on Saw Mill Operations.

Chuck gave a powerpoint presentation on saw mill operations, main focusing on the Texas/Louisiana area. Sawmills started out as two-man manual pit saws – very hard work and extremely slow. The plant layout of various sawmills were shown illustrating the position of items like the receiving area, log ponds, sawmill, planer mills, drying storage, sawdust burners, and steam power plants. Chuck stepped us through the steps used in industry to go from upright tree in the forest to finished lumber heading to market.

Most lumber was cut using either circular saws with had a kerf of about 3/8" and bandsaws with a kerf of about 1/8". The narrower kerf on the bandsaw plus its much faster cut speed, made it the desired method to use: more boards per log, less kerf waste, less time to cut. The drawbacks to bandsaws were that they were more expensive and time consuming to install and needed stronger foundations due to their greater weights. Chuck wrapped up by showing various lumber/log handling pieces of equipment.

In August we plan to have an UP RR guest speaker: Yardmaster Brenda Bob

We still need ideas for future clinic ideas.

Old Business:

none

New Business:

Gilbert Freitag reported that he has gone through the directory and email requests to try to make sure every member now has a nametag. Two more were requested at the meeting and anyone else needs a nametag should email or contact Gilbert directly to have one made.

Derail: Bob Sabol

Bob asked that anyone not receiving the Derail via email to contact him and he will get you on the list. Bob thanked all those who have contributed material. Still could use new material.

LSR:

Convention, Lubbock, TX June 9-12

It was hot, it rained, food was good, had some "interesting" tours, about 150 in attendance.

NMRA:

The convention is in Sacramento, CA. July 3-9.

Division 8: Jim Lemmond

There was a good clinic on hand laying track at the Houston R.R. Museum on June 25th at 10AM. July 23 will be on airbrush painting by Bill Reid. August will be Jim Lemmond on tress, September: Tracy Mitchell on decals. The annual picnic at Zube Park will be on October 1st.

Fall Layout Tours:

Craig Brantley is getting things moving on this years event and is changing things up a bit. He would like to try to have people open on the weekend chosen for their area of town to help minimize drive time for attendees. As a layout host, you are welcome to open any weekend you desire due to work or personal schedules but try to stick to these dates. The old layout tour database has been lost so Craig will be emailing you for the desired info to put in the handout. He would like to keep the write-ups brief and informative in the handout and more elaborate write-ups and perhaps pictures can be placed on the web version. Craig would like to have all this done by the end of August, so he needs our fast responses.

Refreshments were thanks to Robert Ashcraft and Virginia Freitag. Bob Barnett volunteered to bring the treats next month.

Treasurer's report, Gilbert Freitag:

\$6904.78 Beginning balance

Expenses:

\$51.95 Club name tag supplies

\$500.12 Two years of Freitag/Loeffler bowl awards

Income:

\$393.00 Club Shirt sales

\$80.00 Sale of damaged tables

\$6825.71 Ending balance with all bills paid.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40PM

-Respectfully submitted,

Gilbert Freitag, Secretary / Treasurer



San Jac RR Club Meetings take place
the first Tuesday of each month

Bayland Community Center

6400 Bissonnet St. Houston, Tx

[Click here for directions](#)

Visitors are always welcome!



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Tuesday

August 2

Brenda Bob

**Manager of Train
Operations**

See You There!

Special Guest Speaker at August Meeting

Brenda Bob, Manager of Train Operations (MTO) at Southern Pacific's Eureka Yard will be speaking at the **August 2** meeting at Bayland. Ms. Bob has been with Southern Pacific since 1979, and is responsible for training new-hire Managers of Yard Operations.

She has many interesting experiences to draw upon, which should make this an exceptional program.

Mark your calendars, you don't want to miss this!

Congratulations to Bob Barnett, recently elected Vice-President of the Lone Star Region, NMRA!



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Here's to hopes for that forecasted rain!