

PGRS TRACKIN'



The Newsletter of the Piedmont Garden Railway Society

May 2023

Editor: Wayne Hamilton

Greetings

Our officers and board are seeking input on our next Train Fest. We are also continuing our monthly newsletter series on “So, You Want to Build a Garden Railroad?” with this issue. Please send any idea, project, photo, or something you found surfing on the Internet, etc., no matter how great or small they may be, to your newsletter editor. Send your materials to: railman1959@aol.com Special thanks to this month’s contributors.

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Club Messages

President William Huntman had these thoughts to share from the last Train Lovers Lunch:

It’s not too early to start planning the November Train Fest. First, I believe the track discussion at the TrainFest was well received by the less-experienced members who attended. I suspect the more experienced members found it interesting but basically boring. I believe we need to have talks, etc., that support the different needs/interests among the PGRS membership.

I propose we set a goal for the next Train Fest, possibly most future Train Fests, to have at least 3 different talks or presentations. One talk/presentation should be focused on the needs/interests of the less-experienced members.

Another talk/presentation should be focused on the needs/interests of the members with moderate to advanced experience. This could include how to assemble craftsman kit, how to bash a piece of equipment or how to scratch build a piece of equipment. A third talk/presentation should be on general (any) railroad related topic. This could be an invited speaker, a video, or a presentation by a member. For example, Larry Williams about Cabooses was very interesting and enjoyed by everyone. Another possibility for this session at the next TrainFest could be to ask each person who brings something for show-n-tell to spend a few minutes talking about their items. If we aim for 1 to 1 1/2 hours for each session, we would still have time for breaks, lunch, door prizes, etc.

These are just some thoughts on how to make the next TrainFest better. What are your thoughts about making the next TrainFest the best we ever had? Ideas can be shared at the train lovers luncheons, via email, or by telephone to President Huntman @ whunteman@gmail.com

Here are several Train Shows you can place on your calendar:

June 2-3: Johnson City Train Show – Johnson City Tennessee

Sept 14-17: SER Convention - Cartersville, GA

April 14-15: East Coast Large Scale Train Show – Annapolis, MD

July 1-8: 38th National Garden Railroad Convention – Santa Clara, CA

Aug 30-Sept 2: 43rd National Narrow-Gauge Convention – Denver, CO

As always, consider sharing this newsletter with friends who might be interested in our club and if they wish to become members ask them to contact our PGRS Secretary/Treasurer for a membership form or download a form from our website:

[Join Us – Piedmont Garden Railway Society](#)

Dues can be mailed to PGRS Secretary/Treasurer at:

Doc Watson
125 Mistletoe Trail
Hendersonville, NC 28791
docwatson@morrisbb.net

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Railfanning - Prototypes to inspire a garden railway layout.
By: Wayne Hamilton

Last month the Norfolk Southern Haz-mat train was in town. However, there are many other railroads that provide training to first responders. A few more examples are included in this month's newsletter.



BNSF 99911



KCS 972



GATX Tank Trainer



Rhom Haas Tank Trainer aquired by DOW



DOW Chemical Tank Trainer



CSXT 911005

MTH produces the DOW and CSX tank cars in O scale. Otherwise, these are custom creations if you want one for your layout. A good starting point for a kit bash would be a USA Trains 29 ft. Beer Can tank car or any of their other tank car series.

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The Backshop – Modeling Tips and Projects

So, You Want to Build a Garden Railroad?

Once you have a layout, it's time to run trains. There are choices to make here on power. To power or not power your track? There are advantages and disadvantages to both. The easiest by far is a nonpowered track. It's almost as easy as just properly putting it together considering all the above information on laying track. You don't have to worry about good electrical connections (The source of most garden RR problems).

You can use battery powered engines that carry their own individual battery packs. You run these trains with a wireless remote to control all functions. The other advantage is you can run this train anywhere. Many garden RR fans choose battery power because they can easily bring their engine to other layouts. You don't need to know if their track is powered or not. Track wiring is not needed, and neither is track cleaning for engine electrical pickup.

The disadvantages are it is difficult for one person to run more than one train at a time as each train has its own controller. Also, not too many trains come set up from the factory to be battery powered. You must convert it yourself or have someone do it for you. If you are a collector, that kind of modification to a collectable train usually destroys its collector value. Another disadvantage is battery life (2-4 hours before recharging?) and rolling stock (does it also need power for lights?). Battery power is still my choice.

Powered track: There are basically two types, DC and DCC. DC has been around for 100+ years. The farther you turn up the transformer, the faster the train goes. The problem here is you can only control the speed with your controller. Also, since you have less power to the track at slow speeds, your engine lights are sometimes low intensity at slow speeds.

DCC has been around for about 10 years for large scale and is a huge improvement. The track has constant 12-18 volt DC power. The lights are on full brightness before the train even moves. There is a state-of-the-art handheld wireless controller (minicomputer) that can control dozens of train functions including speed, lights, smoke, all the sounds (bells, several whistles, some even have station announcements and people/cab talking). The same controller can even control electric switches throughout your layout. Another big DCC advantage is you can run up to 30 trains with just one controller that has an emergency stop button turning off all power if things turn ugly. Keep in mind that most central stations have only about 5 amps. This is enough power to run only about two trains and their rolling stock. To add more trains, you will probably need to add boosters to provide more power. Technically you divide your layout into separate electrically insulated sections. All the sections can still operate with just one controller and trains can seamlessly travel from one section to the next. DCC can run forever and not worry about a battery losing its charge. Yes, there are DCC disadvantages. One disadvantage is if you have other DC engines, they won't run on a DCC layout. You may need to buy all new engines or convert old ones to DCC. DCC engines are usually more expensive (but they can do a lot more). Also, DCC may limit your traveling to other layouts as DCC can only run on a DCC layout and your controller usually has to be the same brand name, or it probably won't "talk" to the "central station". The biggest disadvantage of DC and DCC powered track is you need constant good track contact. Some rail joiners and rail clamps are pretty good. The problem is that most of them oxidize and break down over distance (if each joint loses 5 % contact, after 10 joints you have lost half your power). The best solution is to solder every rail joint together (typically there may be as many as 200 solders for a 300-foot layout. Remember if you have 50 track pieces then that's 100 connections as you must solder both sides of the track. Also, you have two solders for each connection. So, connecting two pieces of track together is four solders! This can be extremely time-consuming. It usually requires drilling a hole in each rail inserting a copper wire and then soldering all the wires to the rail. It is best not to solder the rail joiners to the track as it's nice to allow the rails to expand and contract as the temperature changes.

The proper soldering iron is key here. Too weak of an iron will take 15+ minutes to get hot enough to get a good connection. Too powerful will heat so hot that you will melt the plastic ties. Many like the induction soldering iron. It is almost like arc

welding with solder. It makes a very focused hot spot that instantly heats a very small area. These induction soldering irons can be very expensive (+/- \$500). This soldering iron is a serious tool, and you cannot visibly tell if it's on or off. It is large and heavy. It doesn't look hot at all. Plan your work area. Clear away anything flammable. Don't put it somewhere where you could sit, step, or accidentally touch it. Know where the hot tip is always. Never let a child or someone unfamiliar with tools use this tool or even be around it when it's on.

Good electrical connections: Remember to also use an acid paste flux to help make a good solder. Odds are you will have one or two weak solder joints. Make it a practice to run powered wire all around your track. Run powered wires every 20-40 feet. Make sure to not cross wires and keep positive and negative rails consistent or you will short out the entire system! This sounds easy enough, but people can get confused. Consider a large oval. You put the positive on the right side of the track. You go to the other side of the oval and connect the positive again to the right side. You have just crossed the wires! I like to think outside track and inside track. If a train is traveling the same direction which rail will be outside and which inside? Use your own methods, but make sure you're right before you solder!

Wire: I recommend 16 gauge stranded low voltage burial landscaping cable for most of your outside electrical connections. I recommend this link for more DCC information: <https://www.wiringfordcc.com/garden.htm>

Next month we'll discuss ballasting track and useful tools you may wish to acquire.

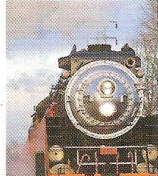
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Railroad Trivia

The National Railroad Passenger Corporation, later known as Amtrak, provides passenger service to 46 states. What states are not served by Amtrack? The answer is found later in this newsletter.

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Businesses associated with our Club



Jim's Train Sales
O & G Gauge New & Used Trains
Jim Hendley
Etowah, North Carolina 28729
*Lionel, MTH, USA Trains, PIKO, LGB
Bridgwerks Power Supplies, Bachmann
Split-Jaw Rail Clamps, O & G Gauge Track*

Garden Railroad Design, New and Used Track
You can now reach Jim at: hendleyjim4@gmail.com
Or....(828) 333-2523



Peggy Keyes
Owner / Chief Conductor
RightTrackTrainMuseum@gmail.com
828.625-5551

The Right Track Toy Train Museum
A non-profit museum to benefit Pancreatic Cancer
research
2414 Memorial Hwy (Rte 64/74)
Lake Lure, NC 28746
Find us on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Right-Track-Toy-Train-Museum-141291999274246/>

I am planning to close the Right Track Toy Train Museum at the end of 2023. Also, when I do open for this year I could use some help, particularly with running the trains. Since everything in the museum must be sold, I could not handle the sales and the trains. I plan to open on April 14 with it being open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1PM to 5PM and would love some help. Everything that is for sale is 50% off.

A reminder to all our members of the Train Lovers Luncheons:

The Asheville Train Lovers Luncheons are on every 2nd Thursday of the month at the Post 25 restaurant in Arden, NC at 11:30.

The Greater Greenville Train Lovers Luncheons. They are on the first Tuesday of every month at the A&P Restaurant in Greer starting at 11:30 AM.

The Columbus Luncheons at Rural Seed are held at 12:00 on the Third Thursday of each month.

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PGRS Member Stories

By: Fran Monahan

Here is the story of the F & M Railroad. I was always interested in trains. Like many of you I was born at an early age, very close to mother. As a child I had some Lionel Trains. When my boys were young, they also had some O gauge trains. My 4-year-old daughter Katie would lead me down to the basement. She was nose high to the platforms and loved to watch them go around. That was it until I was in my sixties.

Retired, I now have the time and location to invest in some G scale big toys. I met Jim Hendley (a PGRS member and USA Trains dealer) at a train show and purchased a long Pennsylvania passenger train pulled by a GG-1.

My goal was to build a single-track layout in my backyard. It ended up being about 60' x 120'. However, I did not want to build it on the ground and do a lot of scale scenery, which is what my wife Marge wanted. She was not a participant in the construction, so tough toenails. I also did not want to carry trains in and out every time I wanted to run them. The solution was to build an elevated railroad. The elevation was determined by the bottom shelf in my garage which is 29" off the concrete floor. The track started in the garage, goes through the back wall and heads out into the backyard. This allowed me to put my long passenger train inside my 28' garage. If I had a longer garage, I would have a longer train!

As I was building the layout, Jim Hendley suggested I build a double track. I said "NAH"! I was only planning one train. That was a mistake because I have since doubled the track and added a car barn on the side of the garage with 2 more spurs. This runs at the same elevation as the track inside the garage.

The structure consists of a framework of stained pressure treated 1x4's supported by 3" PVC pipes coming out of the ground. The layout is level but the grade of my yard changes a little. The track varies from 10" above the ground to 48" This makes it a great place to run long trains.



For power I use a Bridgewater's Magnum 100DL 15amp transformer and a model UR-15 throttle. Both have power remote control.

I built a train depot with benches for train watching. Marge has always accused me of thinking outside the box and I guess that is true. I built a 1/8 scale caboose that is actually a tunnel. It is about 6' long. The train goes in one end and out the other. Any goof ball can do that, but I also built it on a curve. I named it "Bent Caboose Tunnel". Marge was right.



In the beginning (no, not that beginning) the trains ran past my screened in porch. I was not content with that. I wanted my trains to go through the porch. But it was not big enough. Solution? I built a 5' extension onto my porch. Now the trains run through it on a 15' bridge. Marge was right again. But then she is always right.

In the beginning (no, not that beginning) I kept a record of my expenses for this endeavor. One day, Marge asked me: How much money are "We" spending on "Your" hobby? I informed her that in my desk drawer there is a log which contains a running total of all I have spent to date. I strongly suggested that she not look at it until after I am dead. Then as fate would have it, she did accidentally find this log. At least she said she found it accidentally. But fortunately, I was still in the clear because I told her I was no longer keeping that up to date, so it is not accurate any longer. I consider it a blessing now that neither one of us knows the bottom line which I most likely have not yet reached.

In addition to my passenger train, I have a string of 13 flat cars with an antique car on each one. Power is supplied by A-B-A diesels. I also have 2 long freight trains pulled by a GP-9 and a Mikado steam engine.

I have been in the hobby for about ten years now. Many changes have been made to the layout and I have learned a lot. Being in the PGRS has really helped to make it enjoyable and establish friendships.

There are no houses, buildings, trees, mountains, or other scenery to look at on the F & M Railroad, but you can run trains. If anyone like to visit my railroad and/or run their trains, just contact me at 828-674-0707 or email at margemonahan2@gmail.com. You will have to go through Marge because I am computer illiterate (by choice) and hearing impaired (not by choice) so I try to avoid the phone.

A special thanks goes out to my wife of 54 years. Her patience and kindness know no bounds.

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Railroad Trivia Answer

I would hope that everyone would guess Alaska and Hawaii as two of the four states. The other two are Wyoming and South Dakota.

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Web Bits

Carl Wagner, from Northglenn, Colorado USA, built this G scale layout in an old washtub that his wife's grandmother provided. The tub measures 36×21 inches inside dimensions. The scale of the model is 1:24. "The track is regular Aristo Craft 45mm gauge, G scale track," Carl explains. "I bent the curves on my homemade track bender. The radius of the curves is 8-1/2 in.



“I scratch built the little critter using an old Lionel four-wheel drive mech. I cut the frame apart and shortened it as much as I could so it would make the curves. The wheelbase is 2-7/16 in. I scratch built the two ore cars also, kind of a generic design. The complete train including the loco and two ore cars measures 18 in from the front pilot to the rear of the coupler. The train runs around the oval just fine but even as small as the cars are they just barely make the curves. “I scratch built the mine shaft and house copying a little sand mine on Poncha Pass in south central Colorado. My wife and I stopped to see the little mine last summer on our way down to Chama.”



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