

PGRS TRACKIN'



The Newsletter of the Piedmont Garden Railway Society

October 2023

Editor: Wayne Hamilton

Greetings

Our Fall Train Fest is near. We hope you can attend. Please send any idea, project, tips, photos, 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 A special thank you to this month's contributors.

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Club Messages

The PGRS Board met on September 26th to complete the planning for our Fall Train Fest. The next PGRS Trainfest will be held on October 28th, 2023, from 10am – 3pm. We will begin with a brief business meeting. The position of Vice President is vacant, and a member is encouraged to fill this post. We will have the same room we used last spring at “Lutheridge” at 2511 Hendersonville Road in Arden, NC. The room is also available from 8am-5pm for set-up and break-down needs.

Coffee and donuts will be served in the morning and a light lunch with beverages will also be provided. As before, a drawing will be held for some great door prizes. We are looking for donations from the members to supplement those prizes purchased by the club. We have two formal presentations scheduled:

Going vertical with your layout: This session will focus on benchwork and other considerations for layouts that are not just at grade level.

Powering your trains: This session will focus on battery power, but track power will also be discussed. Several knowledgeable members will present information on how to accomplish these tasks.

There will be a third informal portion to showcase our member's modeling efforts with a show and tell session. Members are urged to bring their latest or best projects / railroad-related items for the show-n-tell.

As we need to plan for the anticipated attendance, please RSVP by email to Doc Watson at docwatson@morrisbb.net by October 20th.

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Scott Williams reports the layout at the Apple valley Model RR in Hendersonville is really coming together from the new maintenance work. Can you say, "Rehab My Railroad?"



You can see the new frames behind the sawmill that we will add cement rock background too. Come visit when you can.

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The PGRS held its second Fun Run at the Model Train Station (MTS) facility in Taylors, SC on Saturday, September 16th. It was an opportunity to both view this spectacular multi-scale train display and run some of our own equipment on their large-scale layout. Scott Williams also provided this report:

It was a nice visit to Taylors Saturday. We were met by Bob, one of the volunteers and we went into their multi-purpose room and got a nice little PowerPoint presentation of the facility. It is a collection of 6 nice, large, donated layouts in various scales. About 9 club members showed up and two of us ran our trains on the G scale layout which was a large LGB layout and modelled in a German setting. Around lunchtime we adjourned to the adjacent Eatery and got burgers and pizza delivered to us next door at the 13 Stripes brewery. Some folks wandered off after lunch and several stayed a bit longer and enjoyed the trains more after lunch. It was a worthwhile visit and if you're traveling to the Greenville area, I recommend that you drop in and check it out.



Scott's engine



The G Scale Layout

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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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Fran Monahan has decided to dismantle his train layout. All bridges, track, & trains are for sale; contact Fran @ 828-674-0707 or margemonahan2@gmail.com.

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Railfanning - Prototypes to inspire a garden railway layout.

The Blue Ridge Southern Railroad (reporting mark BLU) is a Class III shortline railroad operating over 91.8 miles (147.7 kilometres) of track in Western North Carolina. The railroad is owned by Watco of Pittsburg, Kansas, and operates three lines that connect in the Asheville area that were previously owned by Norfolk Southern. The railroad is based out of Canton, North Carolina, and utilizes 11 locomotives. Operations began on 26 July 2014.



The Blue Ridge Southern Railroad was formed on 25 June 2014 when Watco reached a definitive agreement with Norfolk Southern for the purchase of 91.8 miles of branch lines in Western North Carolina. The railroad began operations with a fleet of 11 diesel electric locomotives, which consisted of three SD40-2s, four SD40M-2 rebuilds, and four GP39-2s.

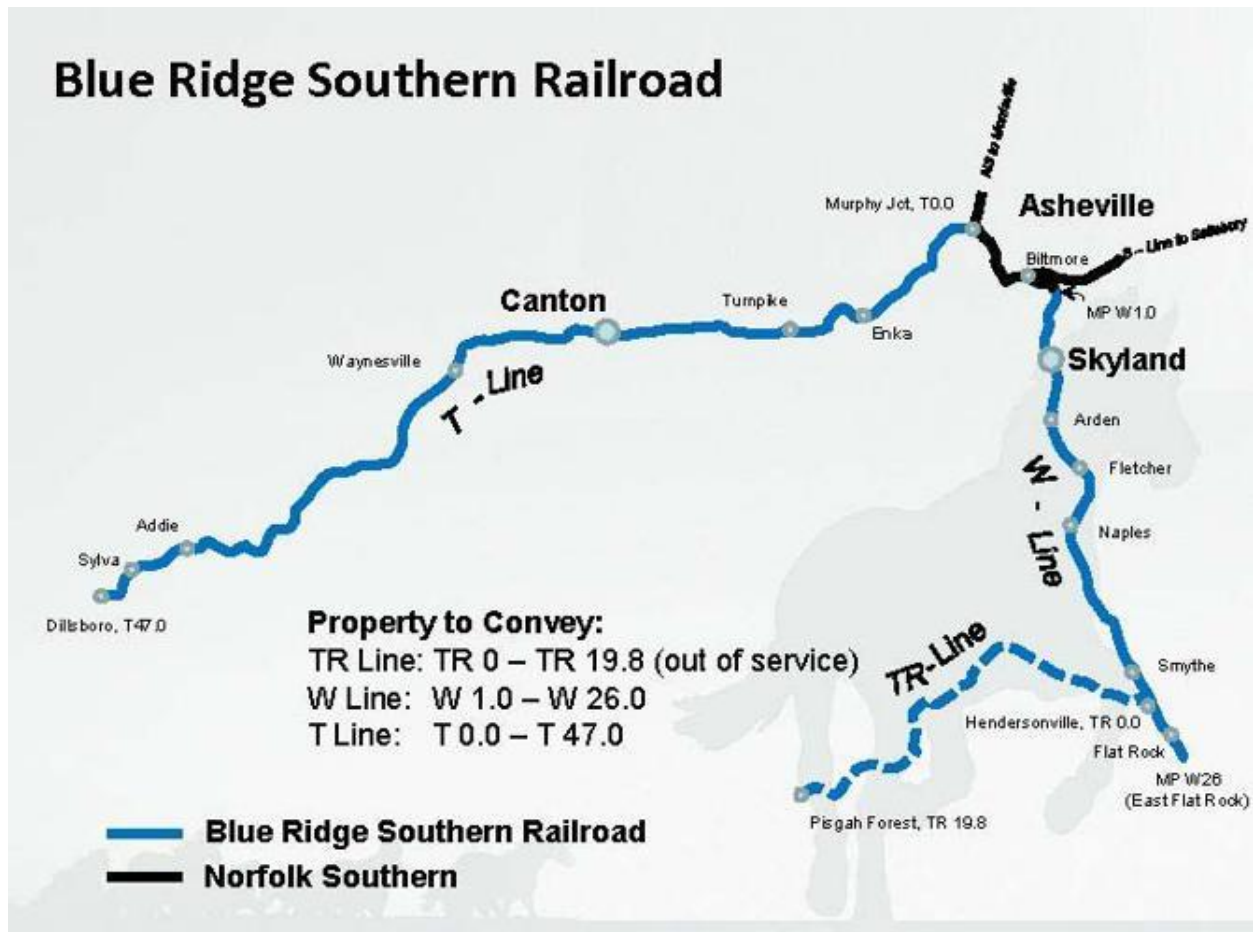
The railroad operates the W Line (Saluda Line) from Asheville to East Flat Rock and the T Line (Murphy Branch) from Murphy Junction to Sylva. The railroad also formerly operated the TR Line from Hendersonville to Brevard. This line has since been abandoned and is being converted to a rail trail. BLU interchanges with NS at Asheville and [Great Smoky Mountains Railroad](#) at Sylva.

Watco moves any commodity, and on this railroad, it's primarily wood chips, paper, plastics, cement, coal, and products used in the manufacture of Epsom salt.



The paint scheme reminds me of the Clinchfield meets CSX.

Operations map



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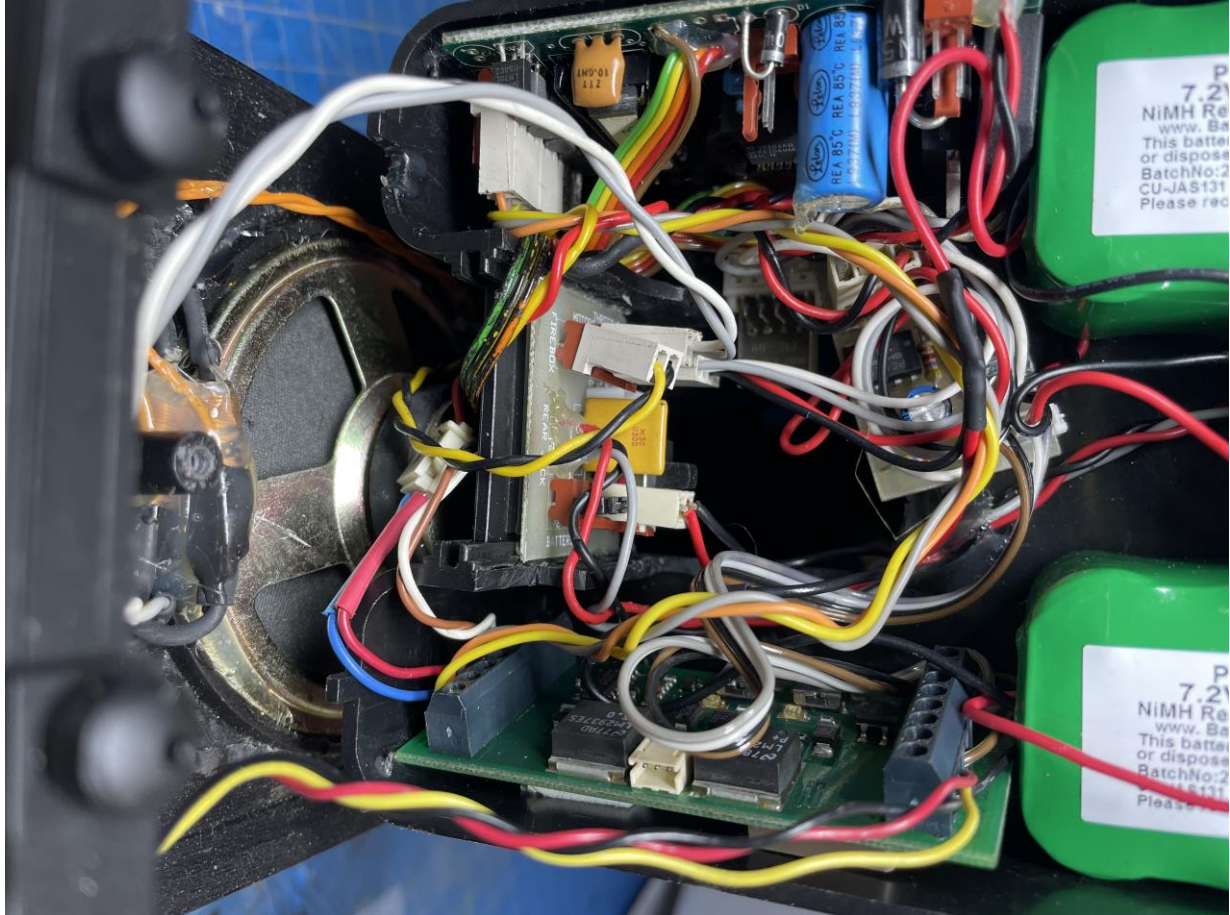
The Backshop – Modeling Tips and Projects

WHAT'S A BLUNAMI SHAY?

By: Dave Smith

Twenty years ago, we converted a large-scale Bachmann 2-truck Shay to a radio control, battery powered, sound specific system. The radio control was manufactured by Remote Control Systems (RCS) of Australia and consisted of a receiver, a distribution board and a handheld transmitter. Batteries were Ni-Cd and the sound system was a separate Soundtraxx, Shay only, sound card. The limited space in the Shay required components to be installed in the tender, inside and under the cab.

The wiring looked like this:



Recently, Soundtraxx released a sound decoder, BLU-4408, that can handle large scale trains and I thought this would be a good opportunity to upgrade my Shay. I wasn't disappointed! At a retail price of \$205, this sound decoder is not inexpensive. However, considering the cost of the old system twenty years ago needing a transmitter, receiver, distribution board(s), RF filters and sound card, the BLU-4408 is a lot less expensive in terms of dollars and installation headaches.

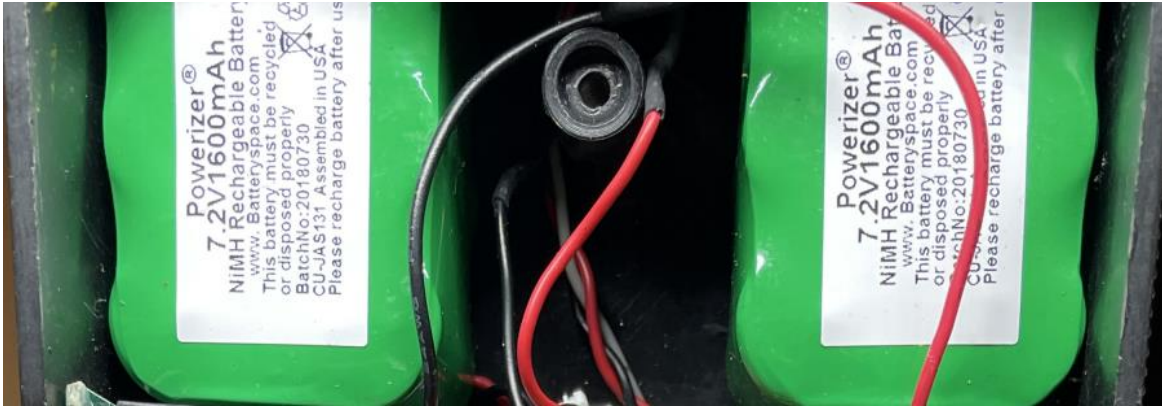
The BLU-4408 is controlled by a free APP from Soundtraxx and can be run from an Apple or Android smartphone, tablet or iPad with Bluetooth capability. Yes, I wrote Bluetooth! Controlling the BLU-4408 is done via Bluetooth and means compatibility and upgrades are available across all systems. Too, instead of just a fixed locomotive sound there are dozens of whistles, chuffs, bells, and other sounds that are EASILY selected through the APP. No dealing with DCC CV values. Simple touch and select options from the onscreen menus.

Installation starts with removing the one screw under the water fill cap and then labelling all the wires. A very important step! Taking a few photos of the wiring layout before cutting is also my recommendation. The BLU-4408 board is clearly marked and, unlike some other boards, reversing the polarity hookup will not burn out the board. Almost fool proof but, I digress.

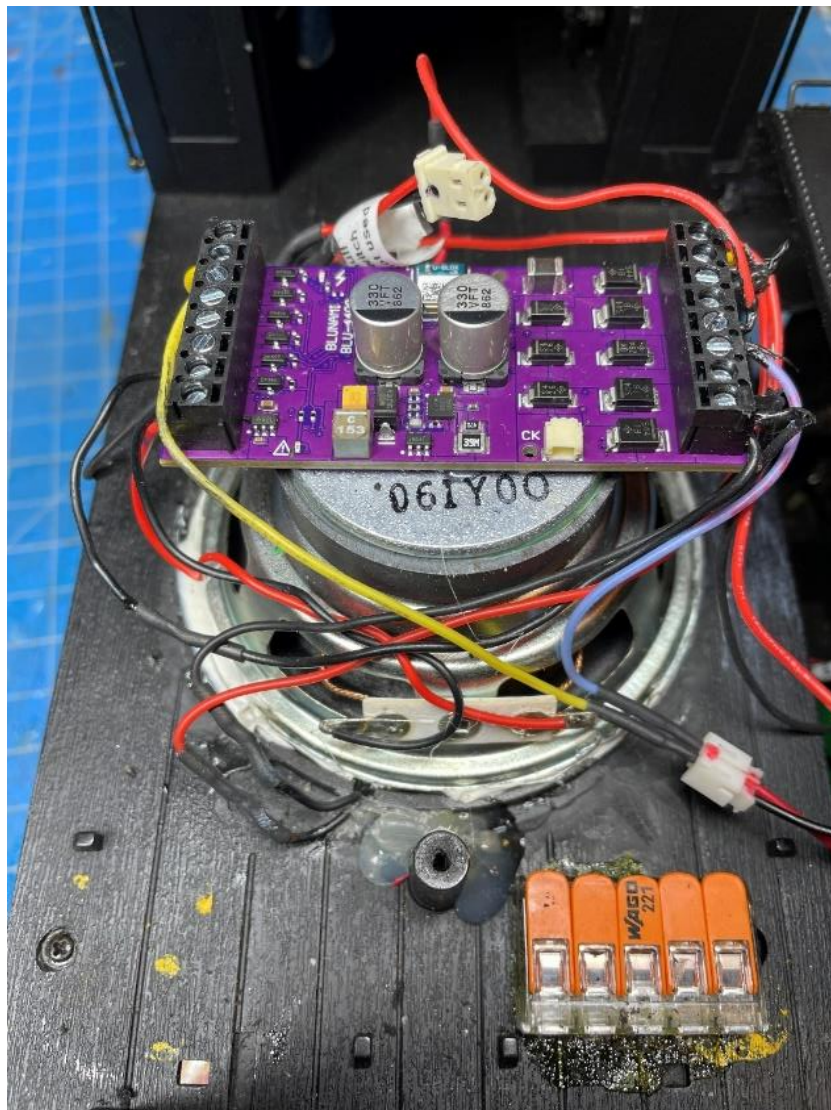
I hooked up the new BLU-4408 board to the existing Soundtraxx speaker of twenty years ago and promptly blew out the amplification circuit on the board. Soundtraxx, under warranty, repaired it. IMPORTANT: since the BLU-4408 amplifier circuit is rated at 3 Watts, you MUST use a speaker of 3 watts or greater. My old speaker was rated at two watts and was the cause of the failure.

I needed to call Soundtraxx to clarify some points and specialist George was most helpful. There is a hookup called "Function Common" where any positive accessory wires from lights (cab-rear-head) or glowing firebox must go into. I use LEDs in my lights and had to be certain to connect negative wires to board labels and positive lighting wire to the Common Function for the LEDs to light. The board is clearly labelled for ALL these hookups so there is no guess work once you understand the function of each hookup. Speaking of hookups, all terminals on the board are screw down type so there is no soldering needed. A real plus from the "old days". The original Bachmann chuff activation wires were no longer needed as the BLU-4408 has the capability of adjusting the chuff through Back EMF.

I'll quickly mention the batteries I used. The space in the Shay tender is tight and I used two 7.2V 1600 mAh NiMH batteries in series to fit the back of the Shay tender and get my required 14.4 V. These are perfectly shaped for installation in the Shay, and I purchased mine from BatterySpace.com part# CU-JAS131.



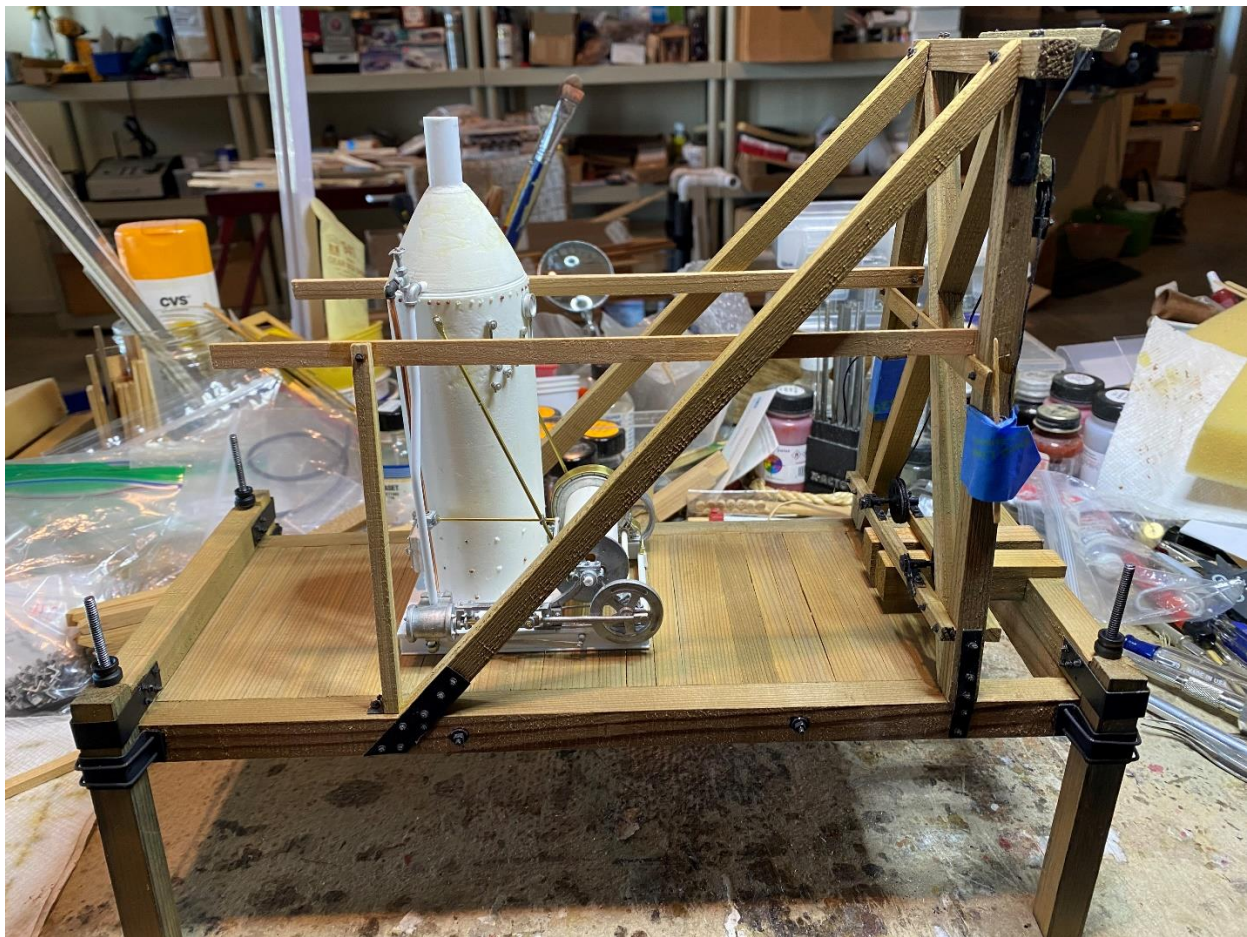
Here is what the BLU-4408 installation looked like:



After completing the installation, I bench tested all functions. Then came the scary part for me. Putting it all back together and perhaps finding a wire connection came loose or something I hadn't planned on occurring. Fortunately, when taking the locomotive out to the layout, it ran flawlessly and with a transmitter range I haven't seen in years. Given the quality and functionality of the BLU-4408, I would recommend it to anyone looking for a premium sound decoder that can be powered by track or battery, with an outstanding App and all controlled via Bluetooth.

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President Huntman is still working on a 1:20.3 Surry-Parker log loader with a bit more progress. I need to mount the boom, make the donkey water tank, and add some paint.





The blue tape on the mast holds the stabilizing cables out of the way. The cable is stretched out to each side to stabilize the loader after it is located at the work site.

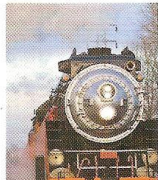
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Railroad Trivia

What was the “Merci Train”? The answer is found later in this newsletter.

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Businesses associated with our Club

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|  | <p>Jim's Train Sales O & G Gauge New & Used Trains Jim Hendley Etowah, North Carolina 28729 <i>Lionel, MTH, USA Trains, PIKO, LGB Bridgwerks Power Supplies, Bachmann Split-Jaw Rail Clamps, O & G Gauge Track</i></p> |
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Garden Railroad Design, New and Used Track
You can now reach Jim at: hendleyjim4@gmail.com
Or...(828) 333-2523

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.

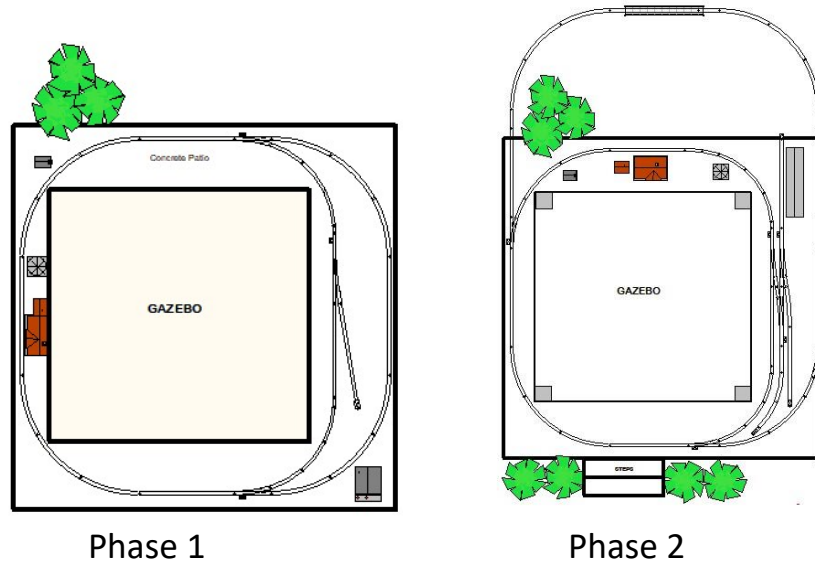
The Columbus Luncheons at Rural Seed are held at 12:00 on the Third Thursday of each month.

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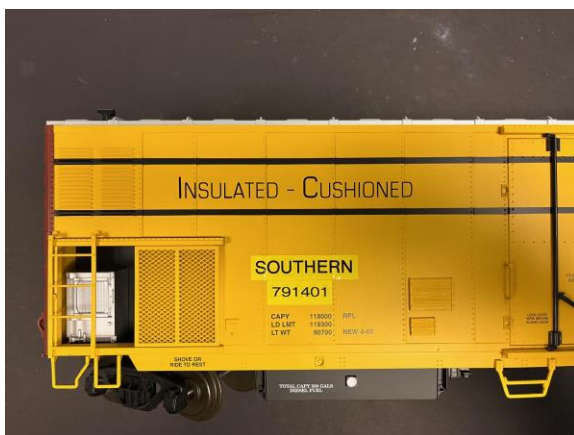
PGRS Member Stories

Your Editor's Murphy depot is now complete and on the layout. It still needs some weathering and a few trackside details. If you remember from a few newsletters past, I have a multi-phase track plan for my Murphy Branch layout. I am starting

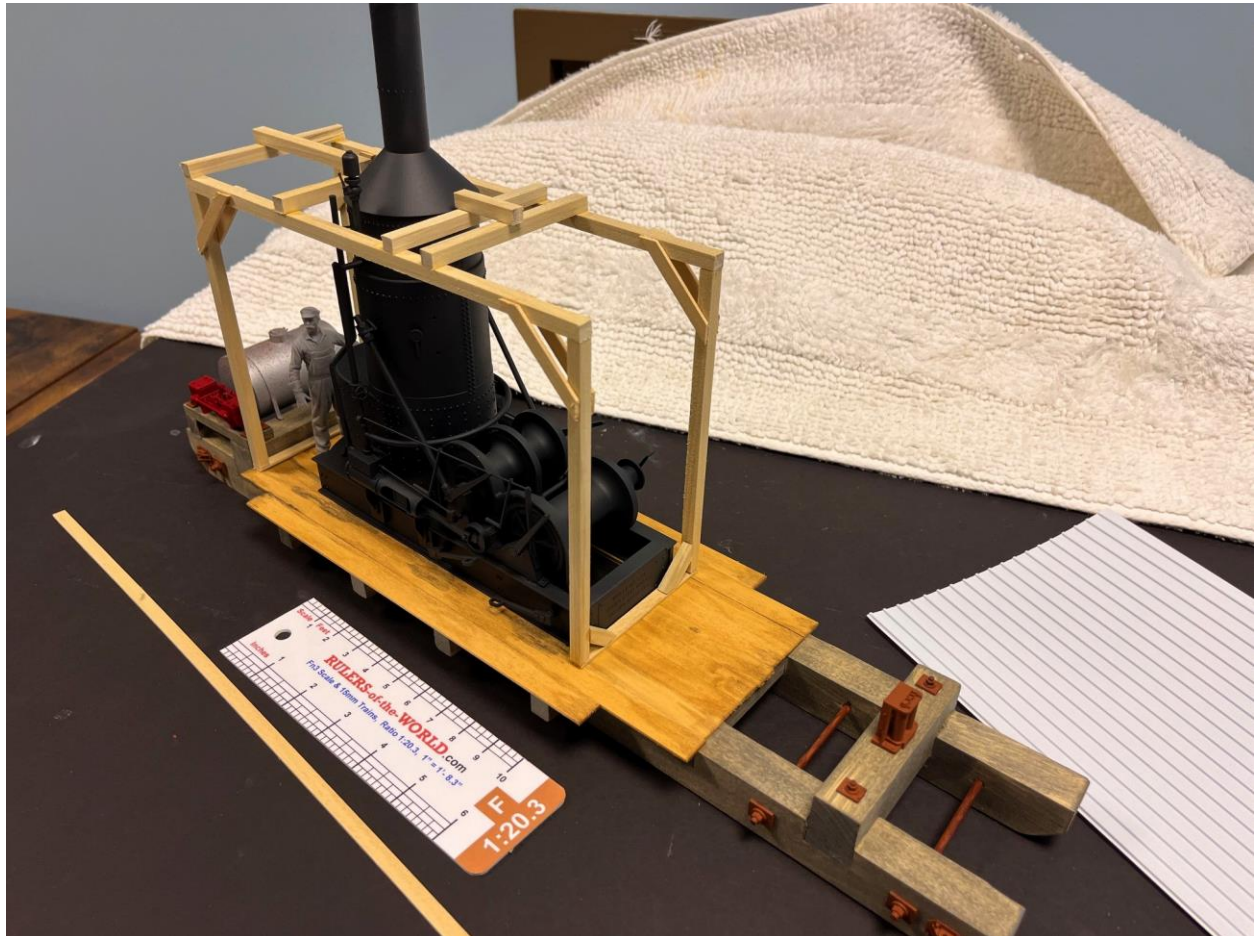
phase two which about doubles the original track length. The track laying is easy, but I will be making a ton of trestle bents over the next few month, as the gazebo slab is about 9 inches higher than the surrounding grade. The new track is at the top and right of the original loop.



I have been playing with label maker tape. A lot of railroads did patch painting on cars to renumber or change ownership. I tried some yellow label tape on this reefer. I have some silver tape and will be trying it on my silver passenger cars. The second photo shows the use of Tamiya Panel liner paint to add some shadow to the refrigerator unit and car vent. This paint is very thin and is used by aircraft modelers.



Also, I am making steady progress on my 1:20.3 scale log skidder. Framing the roof comes next.



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Railroad Trivia Answer

The “Merci Train” was a train of 49 French railroad box cars filled with tens of thousands of gifts of gratitude from at least that many individual French citizens. They were showing their appreciation for the more than 700 American box cars of relief goods sent to them by (*primarily*) individual Americans in 1948. The Merci Train arrived in New York harbor on February 3rd, 1949, and each of the 48 American states at that time received one of the gift laden box cars. The 49th box car was shared by Washington D.C. and the Territory of Hawaii. Parades and

ceremonies of welcome were conducted in the state capitols and major cities of almost all the states. The largest and most attended was in New York City where more than 200,000 people turned out to welcome that state's assigned box car.



The North Carolina car at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer.

More information can be found at these websites:

[Merci Train Boxcar Symbolizes French-American Ties | Our State](#)

[Merci Train - Home Page](#)

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Web Bits

A few more Blunami videos:

[New Blunami Decoder: BLU-4408 4-Amp Decoder - YouTube](#)

[BLU-4408 in USA Trains GP38-2 on DC - YouTube](#)

An informative logging video:

[Yosemite Lumber Company Logging Inclines With Jack Burgess - YouTube](#)

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