

A FINE DAY FOR FOUR FINE VIRGINIA LAYOUTS

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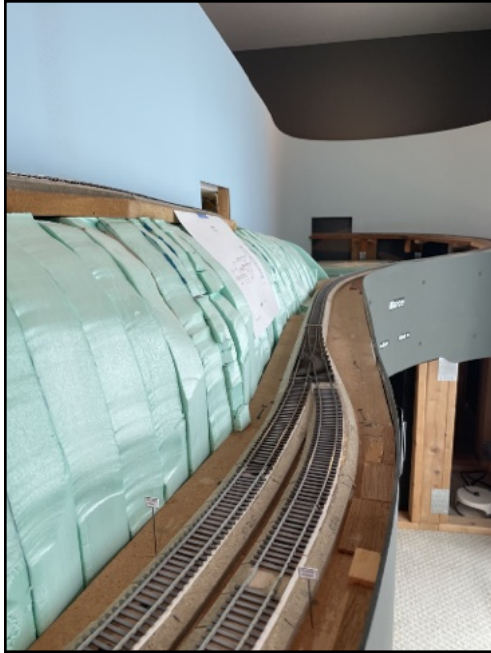
On March 7th, three of our members in the Gainesville, Virginia area and one further north in Hamilton, Virginia opened their layouts for visitors. The weather was fantastic, but I was worried that we might lose potential visitors because this was one of the first days of warm weather following weeks of cold, and outdoor home projects might take priority. I was pleasantly surprised with the attendance, which was between 16 and 26 at each layout. This was better than at previous open houses.



My first visit was to see **Bob Gifford's** HO scale Waterford Creek Lines in Hamilton ([photo above](#)). His layout is large and features two levels but no helix. He told me that two of his "must haves" when designing the layout were no helixes and no duck under. Seeing what Bob has created so far made me look up to him, both as a modeler and, frankly,

frankly, a rather tall individual. I think the "no duck under" requirement was his main priority. His trains start and end in an adjacent room where he has built two staging areas stacked upon each other with a 21-inch differential. It takes over 20 minutes to run the entire railroad, and the grade changes are very subtle. Standing in any of his aisles, you can see the slight difference in the heights on either side. However, the most





obvious elevation change is at one end of the layout where trains disappear through the backdrop and reappear on the return loop at a different level. It's the steepest grade on the layout, but his trains do not require helper engines (photo left). Bob is in the early stages of scenery, and this gave me the opportunity to look closely at his trackwork. His curves are not tight, but I noticed in an area without ballast that he has added thin



styrene strips under the outside rail to superelevate the track (photo right). I had the chance to run a train on the entire route and didn't experience a single problem. He has a painted fascia, but no masking skirt below, and I couldn't help but notice the massive construction he employed for framing and legs. His explanation was simple: the cost of 2x4's was cheaper than thinner 1x lumber or 2x2 legs. I look forward to returning to see how his railroad evolves.



My next stops were to see the three Gainesville layouts. I started at Lee Stoermer's HO rendition of the Codorus Subdivision of the Northern Central RR. It was my first visit, but I have seen a small tease of his layout during Potomac Division Board meetings on Zoom. I took a photo of Lee (in the back wearing the green shirt photo left) standing in front of the

area visible during those Zoom meetings. Several of us in the group noted that we had a quorum of board members present to conduct a meeting. Fortunately, enjoying his railroad overruled that silly idea. It was great to see the whole thing with many small

details to be appreciated at each turn. During the Potomac Division annual meeting last May, Lee demonstrated how he uses natural materials for scenery detail. I enjoyed seeing the finished application of his technique, most notably the presence of deadfall trees and shrubs. (photos right and below left) Lee's railroad is single level, but the many bridges, streams, and occasional tunnels give visitors a sense of a real railroad overcoming the various obstacles of nature. No area of his layout



looks like it is waiting for his scenic treatment. However, like all model railroaders, he is constantly working on such details as weathering rolling stock. His work area might be called "snug", but that doesn't restrict his talent.

My next stop was a revisit of John Whittaker's HO narrow gauge layout. He didn't have a name for it back in 2024, but now it is known as the Colorado and Silver Hope Railroad. It's a bit of a whimsical name since John (photo below right) bases his fictional railroad on one

that is down on its luck hoping for the local silver miners to strike it rich and keep the railroad solvent. In the meantime, the railroad uses equipment borrowed from the D&RGW. John's railroad has multiple levels, but again, this is accomplished without a helix. His little HOn3 steamers struggle with the steep mountain grades, and thanks to long runs and curves, John has created some spectacular views of the Rockies. He has added to his scenery from what I had seen two years ago. I might have missed seeing the snow shed before, but I believe this is a nice new feature. He told me during my prior visit that a waterfall was planned for a location that was just in the earliest stages of formation. I was pleased to see now how it turned out.





The Potomac Division has recently hosted a series of virtual clinics presented by Ed Koehler that detail the history of various narrow-gauge railroads—a topic that has always captivated me. The chance to see John’s layout (photos left and below right) again was a timely opportunity to further satisfy the narrow-gauge fever. We don’t have many narrow-gauge layouts to visit, and I highly recommend checking this one out the next time John hosts a tour.



I saved my last stop to see Jim

Rogers’ massive HO layout. No helixes to be found here, since he’s modeled a condensed version of the B&O from Cincinnati to Baltimore. Jim’s layout is well known for operations, and there’s plenty of opportunity for as many as 14 operators. This is the first layout at which I tried my hand operating, and thankfully I had a seasoned conductor to keep me from losing my mind! For a layout designed and focused on operations, Jim (photo below) has created extensive scenery. This includes several



large yards, and from what I’ve witnessed during operating sessions, they provide some of the biggest operating challenges. His paper mill complex is, well, complex. As this was my first operating job, I quickly learned to be very frugal with the number of cars being moved. Those short sections of track are very unforgiving. Jim used to have a lift-up section that met visitors as soon as they entered his railroad, but he rebuilt that section to create a new island that he calls the Front Street Yard. There’s plenty of opportunity for switching with the various industries and tracks there, and it takes two operators to keep up with the schedule. The advantage of visiting during this open house was that it gave me the time to enjoy seeing other areas of his



layout that I hadn't operated on, both the scenic details (photo left) and the track arrangements (photos below).

Our next opportunity to visit layouts will be June 27 when four layouts in Maryland will be open to members. Once again, we will have the opportunity to see the HO, N, and American Flyer layouts at the Leisure World Model Railroad Club thanks to Henry Jordan. Tom Matty will show us his HO scale Western Maryland Thomas Sub, and then there will be two O-scale layouts: David Vaughn's rendition of the Kentucky Western Division of the Nickel Plate Road, and Andrew Dodge's Central Maine Railway in the 1890's. Save the date!

