

November 2, 2024, Potomac Division Layout Tour

Marty McGuirk's HO Richford Branch, Jim Hellwege's Bangor & Aroostook RR, and Courtney Mallinson's Railroad without a name.

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At the conclusion of the November 2nd Potomac Division meet there was an opportunity for participants to visit layouts at three members' homes. I must admit that I have a soft spot for scenery and structures, and these layouts did not disappoint. I started my afternoon with a return to **Marty McGuirk's** HO Richford Branch of the Central Vermont Railway in nearby Gainesville. I'd been there before, but there were new things to see. Marty had been making modifications, even as recently as the day before the open house. I'm particularly fond of Marty's New England scenery and buildings (photo below), and his choice to present his layout in full fall foliage seemed fitting for this early November open house. His town featuring a covered bridge over a small river and waterfall made me want to pack up and visit for an extended vacation. I look forward to returning in the future to see what's new back in Marty's 1950's world.





Leaving Gainesville, I carpooled with another member to head to Alexandria. First stop was to visit **Jim Hellwege** and his N-scale depiction of the Bangor & Aroostook RR. It is another New England setting, but this time the vast N-scale forests are in a summertime blend of various greens. He has created rolling hills and numerous tunnels that present a wonderful setting ([photo left](#)) for viewing his trains, and he had three operating simultaneously. Despite the layout being N-scale, an incredible amount of detail and small scenes tell a variety of stories.

While I have seen his layout before, I found more things to enjoy that I had missed previously, including an unexpected visit of a bear to a small campsite. Jim has been adding lighting from Woodland Scenics, which he demonstrated by switching his room lights off. The small LED fixtures looked good when lit and did not look out of scale. This was his ninth open house since 1997. It's a layout well worth visiting, and I'm sure he will be sharing again in the future.

My last stop was to see **Courtney Mallinson** and his HO scale railroad. Courtney does not have a name for his layout, but a heavy B&O and C&O influence is present. His track does not change elevation, but the mountain backdrop blended with 3-D hills and tunnels give the impression of Appalachian railroading ([photo next page](#)). This is



the first time he has shown his layout, and there is an interesting background story. Courtney experienced a stroke more than ten years ago which left him permanently paralyzed on his right side. Undaunted, he designed his layout to be operated while seated in a rolling office chair. His reason for choosing a lower layout height is obvious, but it reminds me of **Mat Thompson's** similar decision when he rebuilt his layout following his relocation out of the Potomac Division. (See *Potomac Flyer* Oct./ Nov. 2023 and Dec. 2023/Jan. 2024 editions for full articles.) Courtney uses Kato Unitrack, which allowed him to do the track work himself. As a matter of fact, you might say Courtney built this railroad single-handedly, but he is quick to give credit to his wife for crawling beneath the benchwork to do the wiring. (She also made delicious cupcakes and other snacks for our visit!) Courtney's layout was a joy to see, and the Kato track does not look toylike when blended into the surrounding scenery. In phone conversations before the open house, he told me that he didn't feel his Kato Unitrack would be worthy of showing to other modelers. To the contrary, it was well worth seeing, and I'm humbled by what Courtney has accomplished. He is a living counterpoint to those who claim they cannot do something. I recommend taking the opportunity to see his layout in the future, and I look forward to visiting again.