

Houston N'Crowd



2010 Highlights

# THE ORDERBOARD

## Busy year for Houston N'Crowd

This special edition of *The Orderboard* features highlights of our 2010 activities and members' submissions to the newsletter.



*N'Crowd President Ted Davis grudgingly hands over payment for our very nice BLMA brass bridges to Tom Cobb at Papa Ben's Train Place.*

# The Rock Springs & Sweetwater County Railroad

by Tom Wayburn

I was raised in a home with no tools. For that reason and perhaps for other reasons, for the first 30 years my interest in model railroads was confined to the “armchair”.

Now that I have begun modeling, I rarely look at a book, which is unfortunate because I am far behind the current technology in model railroading. Despite all that, I began building what has become the Rock Springs and Sweetwater County Railroad about ten years ago in a desultory sort of way without any help. It was based upon John Armstrong’s modification of Atlas N-107. I added mountains to hide the small-radius turns and added two straight tracks at the highest elevation that were supposed to meet NTRAK standards. Also, I added two very short narrow-gauge pieces that may be a little difficult to find. I purchased only one Nn3 freight car. The layout had to be free standing and portable.

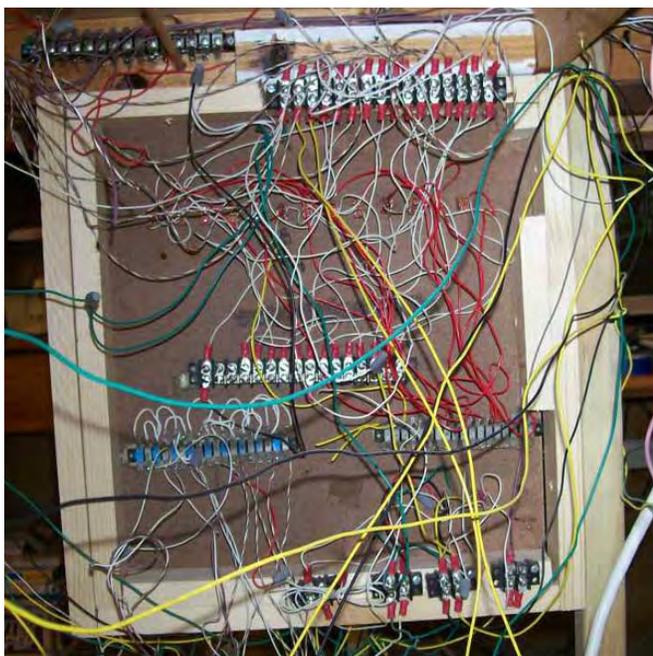
About two years ago, I sent some photos to Loren Neufeld that I described as representing good conception and bad execution. I knew Loren because of earlier involvement with the N Crowd. He noticed the bad colors immediately. He suggested that I find someone in the current N Crowd at Papa Ben’s who was not color blind and get some help.

On the day I visited the old layout on South Blvd., Steve Lancaster was working on the scenery all by himself, a fairly typical circumstance in those days. Steve agreed to help with my railroad, and the two of us painted out all the old scenery and began again.

During the new construction, I built a few of the smaller DPM buildings. I added Walther’s Cornerstone roof details and window dressing from the internet. I modeled asphalt streets with vinyl spackle and added road markings using my computer’s printer and Chart Pak tape. Ted Davis thinks that Chart Pak tape looks too three dimensional, so I am considering printing all of my roads and parking lots using the method of trial and error to get the size and shape right with inverted color to save ink. The next time I will let the printings determine the widths and directions of the streets.

Early on I determined that I would not dwell upon any item of the construction that did not appear on the table top. The result is ragged carpentry and bad wiring. Despite my admiration of Steve Redd’s construction and Hugh Boyd’s control panels, I have persisted in my slipshod methods since I possess neither the skill nor the money to produce anything that I don’t find at least a little embarrassing. But, we’re among friends here. Right?

Sometime in July of 2008, a woman from Texas Children’s Hospital (TCH) called Papa Ben’s and asked Steve Lancaster, who answered the phone, to provide a small portable layout that could be moved from room to room for the benefit of children who could not visit the big layout on the ground floor. Steve suggested that we collaborate. After Hurricane Ike struck and Papa Ben’s moved, we could not find the



woman who spoke to Steve and no one at the hospital had ever heard of the project. It occurred to me that I might build a transition module and connect the Rock Springs to the TCH layout. I wanted a nearly square compact layout with the modules connected side to side rather than end to end, but I found minor differences in the relative heights of the three modules each time I bolted them together, which made it difficult to join the track and blend the scenery.

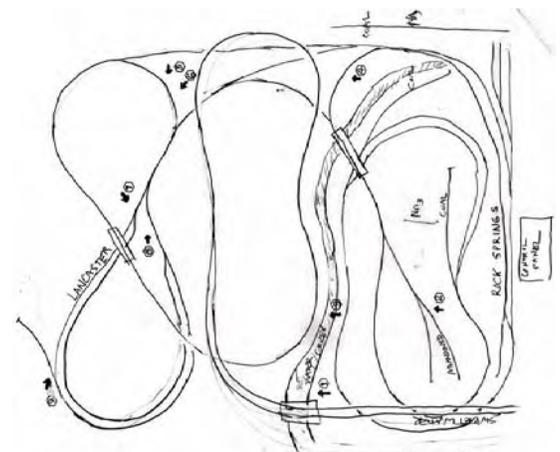
The metal bolts were enlarging the holes in the wood sides of the modules. I partially solved that problem with metal mending plates through which

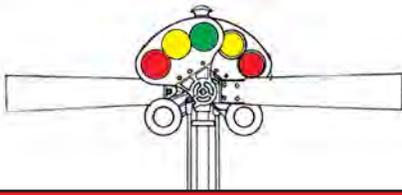
holes were drilled with a Unibit. These holes do not change diameter, but a better tool would have made better holes. Since the layout room is only slightly larger than the layout, it was necessary to put all three modules on casters and play a game of movable squares to work on them. My casters don't have ball bearings, but I have plenty of WD-40.

Unfortunately, I forgot what I had done to color the water on the Rock Springs. Beavers bailed me out in one place and a sand bar in another.

Photos can be an important part of the fun. These photos were taken with a Kodak Easy Share, which is the digital equivalent of the old Kodak Brownie. It makes nice photos so long as you don't ask it to do something it can't do. If you want to see some more photos, see the ones with captions on my Houston Chronicle blog at <http://www.chron.com/commons/persona.html?newspaperUserId=TomWayburn>. Additional photos can be found on the N'Crowd Web site and on Facebook with many repetitions. Photos of the TCH layout can be found at <http://tomwayburn.net/texaschildrenshospital.htm>. A few photos of the first combined layout with the transition, which was never completed, are at <http://tomwayburn.net/rr1.htm>. Photos of the new combined layout with the new track plan upon which construction has just begun are at <http://tomwayburn.net/zrr2.htm>.

If I had this to do over again, I would be much more careful with the roadbed to make the levels level and the grades uniform except in the transitions to level ground. Finally, I would do whatever was necessary to increase the minimum radius of the curves. As much as I like the look of SD-40s, I should confine my motive power to locomotives with four axles.





News from Houston N'Crowd



April 2010

# THE ORDERBOARD



**Union Pacific 844 visits Houston!**



## N'Crowd meets 844!

Everyone probably knows that Union Pacific 4-8-4 No. 844 passed through the Houston area on its way to and from the Rio Grande Valley, where it participated in the City of Harlingen's 100th Anniversary celebrations. Here are some pictures of the big Northern taken by N'Crowd members.

*On the cover, Jason Smith scored a short cab ride. At left, Gordon Bliss captured some steamy action. Above and below, Steve Lancaster intercepted 844 at Alvin.*



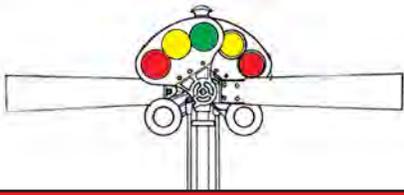


*The southbound steam special arrived in Houston on April 11 and departed April 13. On its northbound return, the train arrived in Houston on April 17, and departed April 19.*

*Your editor staked out photo locations east of Navasota, above, and at the Lavaca River, left, to capture the 4-8-4 in full stride. The action at Alvin, below left, was a little more sedate. A big crowd turned out to see the engine headed north on the return trip.*

*Below, Steve Lancaster was trackside at Liverpool for this shot.*





July 2010

# THE ORDERBOARD



Outlaws on the Santa Fe - All the Way!  
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## ‘Outlaw’ operations on the Santa Fe - All the Way

Story and photos by Gordon Bliss

With the National N-Scale Collector Convention coming to town in June, we wanted to host the out-of-towners to an operation session on my Santa Fe - All the Way. After talking to the convention staff, we decided we would need to handle the session separate from the convention - an “outlaw” session!

After a couple of emails to Kirk Reddie of *N Scale Railroad-ing* magazine and his group, the list grew to about 20-plus people from all over the world. The Sunday evening session filled up very quickly so a second session was set for Monday evening prior to the convention.

On Sunday, we formed a caravan from the pre-convention visit to Houston Area Live Steamers at Zube Park and we made a quick stop at Jason Smith’s Union Pacific Overland Route layout. At the operation session, we had Kirk Reddie and Keith Lyons from Washington state, Marc and Hans Starman from The Netherlands, Dirk Warvel from Germany, David and Collin Reinhart from Pennsylvania, and Kim Saign from Austin. Operations ran into the late hours, with the BS flying for another hour or so, so morning came way too early.

After flipping the railroad for the next session, I met Digitrax’s Rich Businger at Papa Ben’s Train Place; he was

driving Kirk Reddie around to the hobby shops. At the shop, I asked guests to sign the BC&G log and offered latest issues of *The Orderboard* while running a train around the layout. Rich left to pick up operators at the hotel and airport, and we started a caravan from Papa Ben’s Train Place to my layout.

After stopping to pick up pizzas before the session, we all arrived and had a feast. Operations started with Paul Graf from Atlas Model Railroad Co., Matt Gaudynski from Fox Valley Models, Chuck Ciaccio of Feather River Train Shop, Mal Rigsby and Steve Walker from Australia, Flash Blackmon from San Antonio, and Jim Hinds from Richmond Controls. We also picked up a couple of tag-alongs from the store, Dirk Warvel from Germany, Kim Saign from Austin, and Kirk along with Keith Lyons from Washington state.

Jason Smith and Rich Businger helped dispatch and make the sessions run smoothly. At the Monday session, we also talked Kirk into dispatching and I thought we would have to pry him out of the chair as he took to it like a fish to water. Monday’s session went to about 11:30 p.m. and a little BS flew till about midnight. Everyone had a great time and we all made some great new friends!





*Action on the Santa Fe - All the Way: Preceding page, Paul Graf runs the Super Chief through Kingman Canyon; top left, Kirk Reddie works passenger trains at Union Station; top right, Mal Rigsby and Steve Walker switch Marceline, Mo.; above left, Matt Gaudynski works Argentine Yard; above right, Chuck Ciaccio is in charge of the local at Argyle, Iowa; below, Hans Starmans gets a helper over Ash Fork, Arizona.*

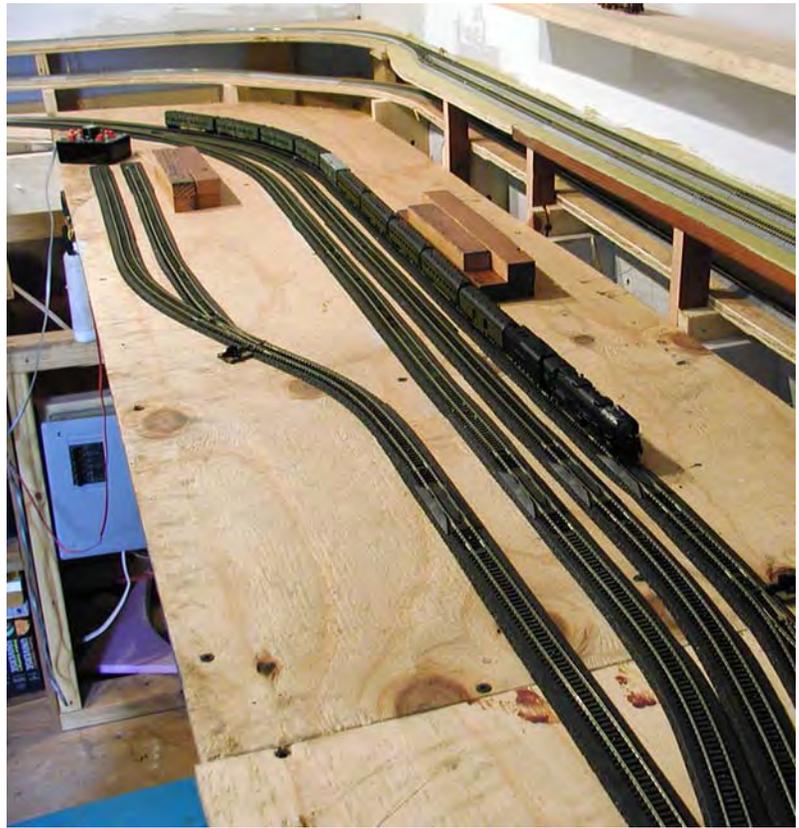


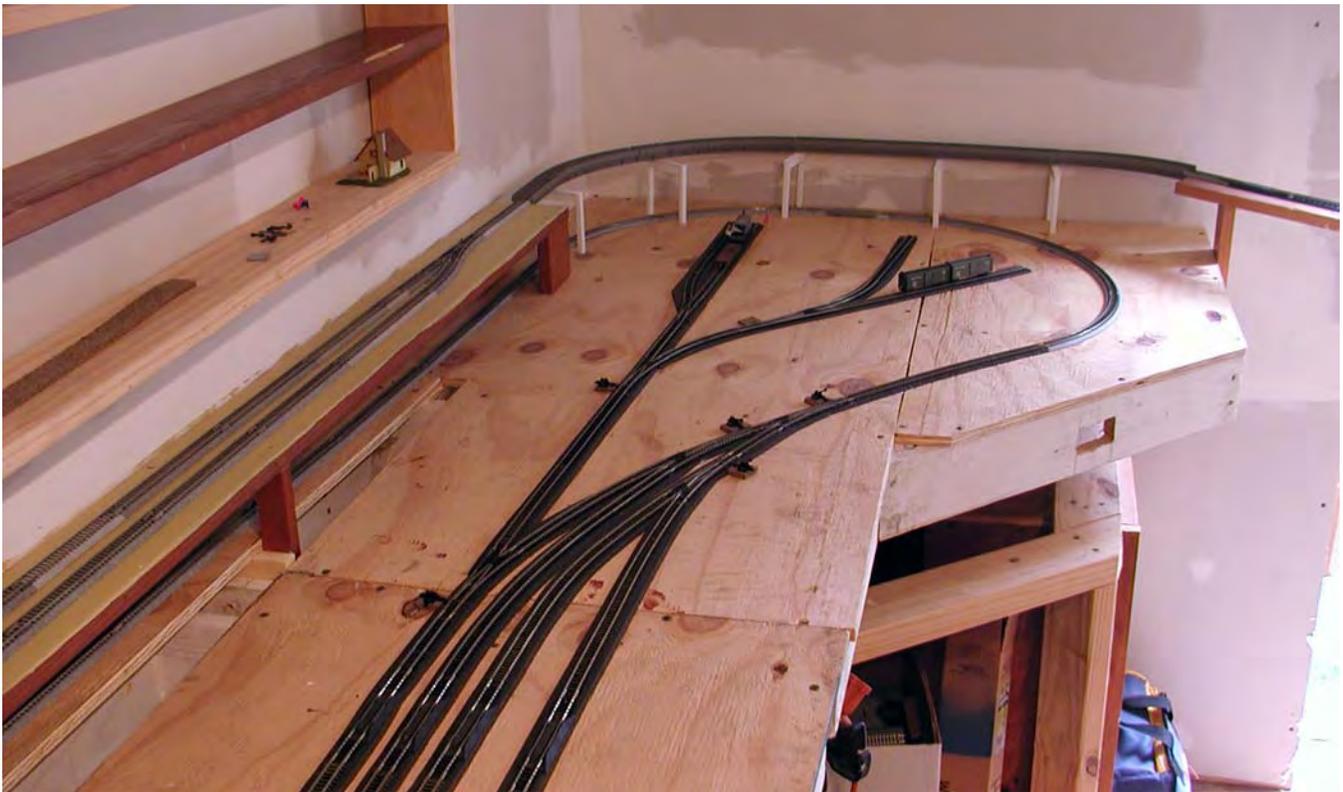
# Progress on the SP in Appalachia

by Steve Lancaster

The track gangs are packing up after a grueling five-month slog through the Appalachian hills near Alvin, Texas. The mainline is complete, although the great doorway bridge is currently a temporary 1-in. by 3-in. board screwed in place, which is extremely inconvenient to the massive vessel trying to traverse beneath it. The permanent bridge will be built off-site and trucked in, and will be of the removable variety.

Completion of the mining branch has been suspended due to a faulty Kato turnout, but local crews will finish the run soon enough for harvest. The mine in question will produce gold, we expect at a rate of four to six gondolas a day. The idea of extending this branch towards some unused real estate by the door has been studied, but no firm plans have been made.





The main town, as yet unnamed, has trackage for a large freight house as well as a privately-owned railcar maintenance facility. The plant will handle local engine maintenance for the host road. Contracts are forthcoming. Bad order cars have already begun to arrive, even though it could be months before the facility is complete.

All of the completed track work has been wired to a single circuit. The layout will be controlled from a single Digitrax Zephyr which will be quartered in the yard tower at the main town. Main line turnouts will be controlled at a panel in the same tower, however the yard and maintenance facility turnouts are ground throws.

With the mainline completed, scenery supplies have begun to arrive by the trainload, being stockpiled for the next phase of construction. The fun part, as I like to call it. Of course, the oppressive heat, budget issues, prior commitments and the threat of wayward hurricanes are all conspiring to delay the project. But isn't that prototypical, too?



# A visit to Eddie Aycock's layout

by Amy & Tom Wayburn

On the last Sunday in June, Amy and I visited Eddie Aycock's layout on Town Creek Drive (not Towncreek Drive as listed in the club roster; this doesn't matter unless you are trying to find it with Google Earth! Operation is the name of the game as far as Eddie is concerned, which explains why he is so anxious to finish the upper track on the club layout. His layout is a point-to-point run from Houston to Dallas with reverse loops at each end. According to the large printed signs identifying each town, trains leaving Houston pass through Spring, Magnolia, Navasota, Hearne with its large freight yard, Mexia, Corsicana, Rice and Ennis on their way to Dallas.

Although none of the scenery is finished on this fine open benchwork layout, industries are identified by printed signs. Some of the cars in the Houston yard have been the object of Eddie's special attention with respect to weathering and appropriate loads. Notice the flatcar loads in particular.

The two finely detailed Caterpillar machines that Eddie purchased at the recent NSC National N Scale Convention in Sugar Land make an especially interesting flatcar load.

At first sight, the most remarkable feature of Eddie's layout is the helix

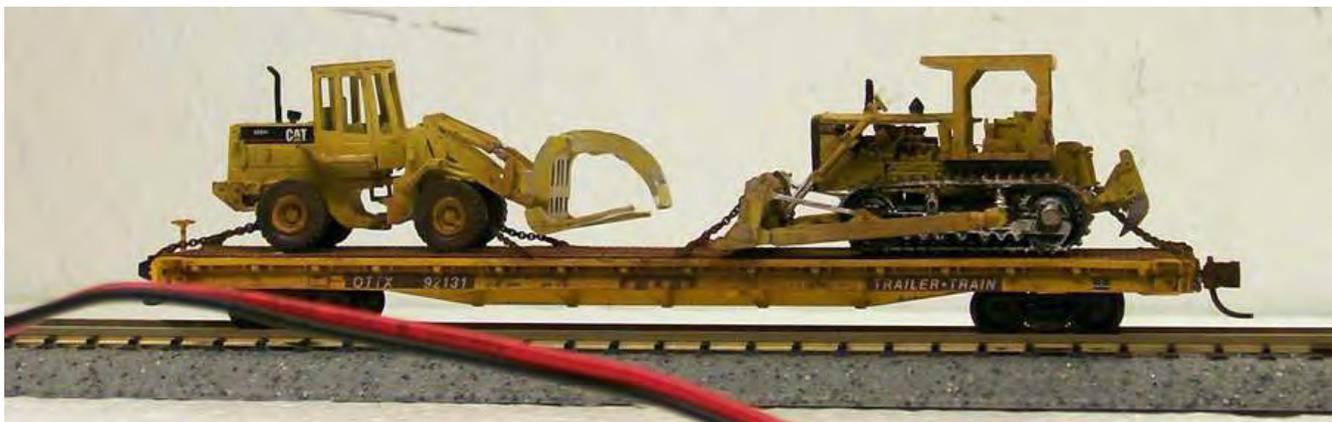


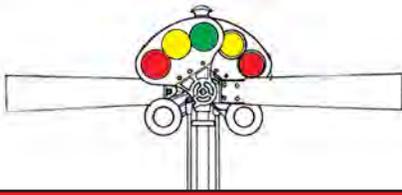
made from structural foam at a very low cost. Eddie has used foam throughout the layout and is a great believer in its usefulness. If I am not mistaken, the foam risers in the helix come from Woodland Scenics.

The well-known computer program Rail Ops is used at operating sessions. The small blue plastic pieces lying on the outer edge of the Hearne yard platform are used to identify which cars are to be moved in the next freight consist made up by the yard crew during operating sessions.

The track is exclusively by Kato, which has the very attractive feature of automatic switch machines concealed in the base of each turnout. Anyone who has experienced as much trouble as I have with Peco switch machines will appreciate the convenience and the boon to operations provided by Kato. The trackwork covers two levels in each of two rooms, with staging tracks below the lower level.

Eddie is planning scenery for everything but the staging tracks.





News from Houston N'Crowd



# THE ORDERBOARD

September/October 2010



We visit **THE OVERLAND ROUTE**

# We visit THE OVERLAND ROUTE

by Tom Wayburn, with photos by Amy Wayburn

Inasmuch as Jason Smith's fine Union Pacific Overland Route N scale layout has been photographed extensively lately, Ted Davis suggested that Amy and I concentrate on the Houston N'Crowd aspect of our trip.

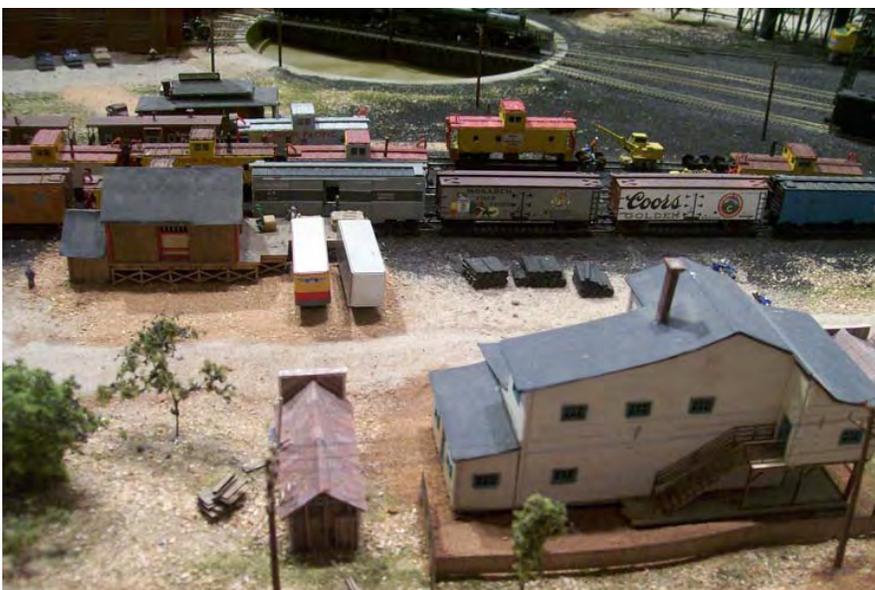
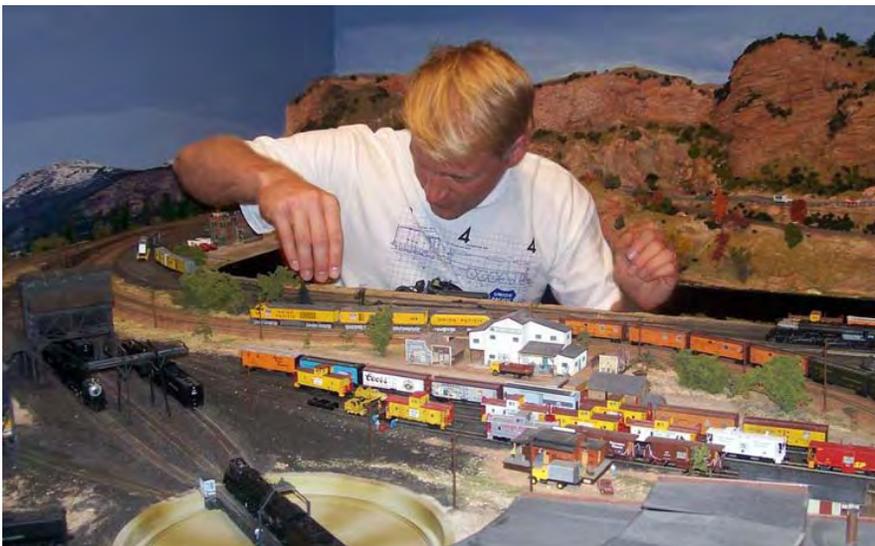
Most readers of *The Orderboard* will know that Jason's layout was the cover story for the March-April issue of *N Scale Railroading* magazine with professional-quality photographs by N'Crowd member Gordon Bliss. Gordon used Photoshop to replace Jason's painted clouds with photographs and to blend smoothly any two sides of the background that intersected in an edge.

An extensive collection of photos of the Overland Route can be found at the website for Larry's Hobbies at <http://web.mac.com/jfbrandtrn/iWeb/Site/UPOR.html> and <http://web.mac.com/jfbrandtrn/iWeb/Site/UPOR%20update.html>.

Most of the N'Crowd contingent elected to car pool. The first car left Papa Ben's Saturday morning, Aug. 7, at 8:00 a.m. with Richard Bartlett driving and Ted Davis, Charlie Aselin and LeChande Chandler as passengers. Amy and I followed in the second car, Rick Townsend made the trip alone somewhat later, and Hugh Boyd nearly succeeded in negotiating the treacherous Texas highways alone and without a map, but to no avail. The first N'Crowd contingent arrived promptly at 9:00 a.m. after an interesting non-MapQuest trip through industrial and railroad scenery courtesy of Richard Bartlett.

Everyone is initially impressed by the vast scope of the layout and large roster of steam locomotives, but after that, one of my first impressions of Jason's layout was the exceptionally fine track work, which turned out to be Atlas Code 55 ready-made track. I asked Jason about the necessity for low-profile wheels. He said that, as far as he could tell, most scale model steam engines came with low-profile wheels standard and required no special adaptation to Code 55. I believe the rolling stock must be customized with low-profile wheels, which can be done cheaply and swiftly. I do not remember seeing any operating problems while I was in the layout room.

That said, perhaps Jason is putting a new train on the tracks in the top photo at left. In the *N Scale Railroading* article, one can't help but notice the



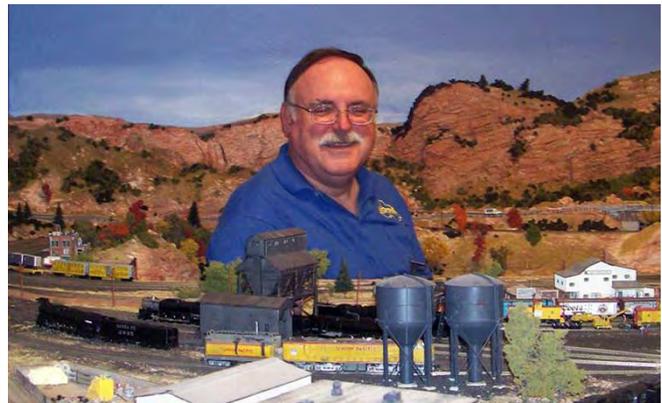
neatly strung telephone wires. Early on in the visit, I asked Jason how he did it. He said the secret lay in EZline made by Berkshire Junction Model Railroad Supplies, whose website I found at <http://www.berkshirejunction.com/>. He uses super glue and accelerator to secure the EZline. The telephone lines can be seen in the foreground of the bottom picture on the preceding page, which shows the nice detail near the Ogden train yards.

At top right is a picture of the border region between Wyoming and Utah, where at these elevations one often finds snow. This accounts for the snow fences in other places on the main line where it is currently not snowing. Jason's layout is the first I've visited that had a snow scene.

The second photo shows the coal loader at Cheyenne. I intended to show the coal loader at Ogden that has been repainted a similar dark color after it was photographed for the *N Scale Railroading* article. However, it now looks almost the same as the coal loader in this photo.

In the third photo from the top, our president Ted Davis beams behind the aforementioned coal loader and other fine models at Ogden on Jason's layout. The gas turbine engine that pulled a large number of cars at a train show is in the middle distance. Could it have been 100 cars? More?

Finally, in the bottom photo our layout master Charlie Aselin seems to be admiring the nice Code 55 track work that looks so much like the prototype.



*All of the photographs in this article were taken by Amy Wayburn, except the cover shot of Amy hiding behind the Sperry Flour factory at Ogden. Amy's photos for The Orderboard were taken with the Kodak Easy Share camera, the digital equivalent of the old Kodak Brownie.*



## This stuff really is small!

*by Tom Marsh*

Your editor was pleasantly surprised to find that Athearn had released its fine model of an SP bay window caboose with the same road number as the caboose at the Houston Railroad Museum. It seemed like a good idea to take the model to the museum to photograph it with the real thing.

The only problem is that the model is really small compared to the real thing! I could not figure out how to capture both in one shot, but the best of the lot appears above.

SP No. 4696 was built in April 1979 by International Car Co. of Kenton, Ohio. Acquired by the museum in 1994 through a purchase funded by member donations, this is the newest car in the Houston museum's collection. The car is somewhat unusual in being equipped with a large number of seats. The car was so equipped to accommodate railroad security personnel accompanying certain trains.

In late 2007, with funding from a grant by Houston Endowment, No. 4696 and sister museum caboose MKT No. 6 were shipped to Arkansas for cosmetic restoration by Cherokee Mobile Services. According to various sources, the orange paint used on SP cabooses is the famous "Daylight Orange."





*Mike Bodak and Little Stinker (says so on the shirt!) helped out at the N'Crowd's booth at the Big Texas Train Show. The show was held Oct. 16-17; the 2011 show will take place Oct. 8-9 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.*

## Houston N'Crowd at the Big Texas Train Show

Houston N'Crowd's Test Track at the Big Texas Train Show was a hit with both attendees and vendors. According to one estimate, the club tested around 100 locomotives over the course of the two-day show.

The show, sponsored by Houston Railroad Museum/Gulf Coast Chapter NRHS, attracted about 11,000 visitors in all. In addition, 83 commercial exhibitors signed up, although two canceled and one was a no-show. However, two vendors signed up as walk-ins on Friday during setup.

A total of 425 tables were leased, of which 380 were for vendors and the rest were for participating clubs and organizations, including Operation Lifesaver, Houston Maritime Museum, Houston Children's Museum, Lone Star Region NMRA and more.

Altogether, 33 non-commercial exhibitors participated, including 14 operating model railroads. One of the model railroad clubs canceled at the last minute, but another club took their place. Operating clubs received honoraria ranging from \$100 to \$786 depending on their level of participation.

One local model railroad club signed up more than 20 new members, and the Lone Star Region NMRA added 16 new members.

All-in-all the organizers believe it was a successful first effort, and a lot of positive feedback was received from attendees, vendors and exhibitors. Many vendors commented on how well organized they thought the show had been, and most vendors and exhibitors indicated they would return in 2011. In fact, several wanted to sign up right then on the Sunday of the show.

The 2011 Houston Railroad Museum Big Texas Train Show will take place Oct. 8-9.



*Traditional N'Crowd holiday party fun at the Silver Palace Chinese Buffet!*

**Best Wishes  
for a  
Safe and Happy  
2011!**