

BEEN THERE...DONE THAT!

Building a model railroad is very much like taking a train ride. You get on at one station and arrive at many stops along the way to the final destination. The final destination is a completed layout. At each stop along the way, you must decide to stay on route or to get off. This winter, I arrived at a point where I wanted to go in another direction.

Building the Denver & Rio Grande Western was a fourteen year 'journey'. I had created a railroad that reflected the things that I enjoyed and wanted to model, even when they were not always necessarily prototypical. To me, that's what model railroading is all about. Along the way I enjoyed the sharing of ideas, the camaraderie of other modellers and the enjoyment of visiting enthusiasts, railroad buffs or not. My layout was first published in the July/August, 1990 issue of the Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette.

Layout concepts don't always come easily but develop over a period of time. I started my layout in 1981 after moving into a new home. I decided on a point-to-point design with a 2% grade between them. I had numerous discussions with friends before designing the layout although I always knew the general direction it would take. On3 does have its limits for operations if space is restricted. For me, operation was secondary to visual interest. I wanted a layout where I could develop my modeling skills and share my knowledge with friends. I also wanted a model that would photo well and still provide a story. Although there wasn't room for sidings along the way, it was surprising just how much operation could be accomplished with two cabs and making and breaking trains at each end. The wye at one end

gave a different means of turning trains from the turntable at the other. Therefore, the satisfaction for me was in the doing, not in the having.

As in any layout, there are stages of development. Anyone starting in this hobby should remember that a layout takes a long time to build and is never truly finished. There are many layers to the construction, i.e., the track work, the scenery, the structures, the small details, the smaller details and so on. Each time I went back, I added a dog, a pigeon, some debris, fish in the river, grass, more grass, more weeds and on and on.

Over the last couple of years I had been thinking of doing different things with my layout. I was able to do some minor changes, such as improving the yard area. Other changes would have meant complete renovation. I considered tearing down the two islands and simplifying the railroad into a loop extending around the layout room. In this way I could have still kept a large part of the finished scenery and roadbed.

However, I recently made a different decision. Just prior to a scheduled meet of our local On3 group, the 'Maple Leaf Mafia', at my home, I decided that I had done everything that I wanted to do. The layout would come down! It was also a week before an Open House for the NMRA International Division meet in St. Catharines, Ontario.

In the two weeks before these scheduled meets, I completed numerous items that I had been putting off for some time. It's true that a meet will spur one on. I completed the river with its rapids and fish, the telegraph poles and lines with perched pigeons, the fire hose shack in the yard, the

pair of eagles and their nest and all the right-of-way signs. Then, two days before the meet, I decided that I had reached the station at the end of the line. While I had truly not completed everything, such as the town and its many buildings, I knew my interest was coming to an end for what truly inspired me; i.e., developing and building the concept.

Not being one to waffle on decisions, I prepared the following notice to distribute at the meet. Needless to say, I did not know what reaction to expect. Before I made the announcement, I noticed that the guys spent the entire afternoon inspecting the layout and admiring the effectiveness of the detail that I had added. At no time did anyone operate the layout, even though I had spent a lot of time cleaning the rail and making sure that everything would run smoothly. It was as though they had a subconscious awareness of things to come! When I handed out a notice that the Denver & Rio Grande Western would soon cease operation, there was a stunned silence. After I explained the reasons for my decision, they were all very supportive. Some were quite sad about my decision. They took as much pride in the layout as I did and admired it greatly.

In the days and weeks following, I continued to get calls of support and shock from the many people I had met over the years. It is gratifying to know that my layout will survive through the many videos and photographs that were taken for record by visitors, friends and myself.

I arranged to have a final run with members of my group on March 4, 1995. In form true to the Rio Grande, the equipment was gradually brought in from around the layout. RGS 461 with 3 flat cars was sent out to retrieve

the last of the equipment. In the traditional ceremony of the MLM, spikes were pulled and track lifted. After returning to the Chama yards, the whistle was tied down and the cocks opened allowing the locomotive to slowly die. With all lights turned off, leaving only the glow from the windows of a few illuminated structures and the distant flicker of the hobo camp, we toasted the end with Champagne.

The good news is that the layout will survive, albeit in sections, as it was divided among several friends who are presently building new layouts. It is testimony to me that my friends feel they will be inspired by having sections to work from close at hand.

I will now be taking a new route. I have several ideas of what I would like to try in the next layout. I am considering a continuous loop for long running with some limited operations to satisfy those who want to operate. I would like to model different topography as well. A shelf layout will still be the basis of construction. I am also considering a shadow box effect, which would allow me to control the amount of daylight in each section or scene.

In the last layout, a thunder storm reverberated in the background with dark ominous clouds while lighting flashed occasionally from a strobe light. This was an extension of established sound operations with PFM units. I will want to continue this and add many more sounds, such as singing birds, running water, a distant dog barking, talking voices and equipment noise.

My purpose in writing this article is to encourage other model railroaders to keep taking new challenges. The adventure is the journey, not the final station. ENJOY THE TRIP TO THE FULLEST!