

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 1 (1986-1987)
Heft: 5

Artikel: Obermatten
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853673>

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OBERMUTTEN

By Dave Howsam

After setting up static displays to advertise the Society at local model railway exhibitions members of the Manchester branch felt the need for a more dynamic display. Dioramas were suggested, the favourite being a viaduct in a showcase. This led to the idea of the trains moving and it became obvious that the solution was a working layout. N gauge was too small for the display envisaged and HO seemed to demand too much space. Thus the notion of a HOm layout was born. The ingredients were to be simplicity, authenticity and as high a degree of modelling skill as we could muster. Neat presentation and a short setting up time were also taken into consideration. The whole project was worked out at the beginning so that the lighting and display would be an integral part.

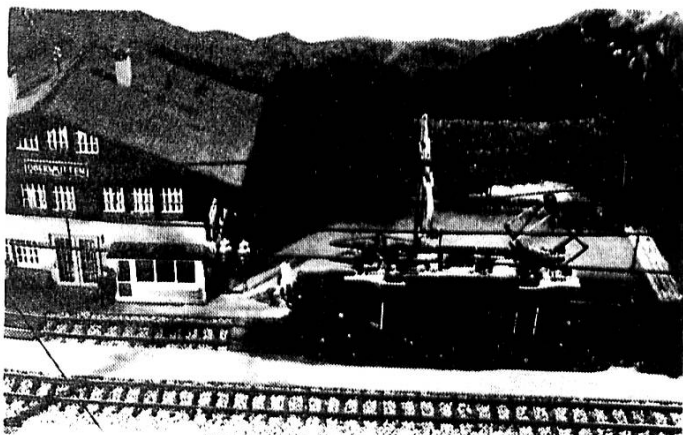
The work took five months of concentrated effort and it was achieved by team work with members supplying advice, materials, labour and personal skills. The layout is not however the property of the branch. I was commandeered to build the layout - mainly by flattery on Charlie Hulme's part who supplied most of the track. The size of 5'8" x 11½" was dictated by the bookcase on which the layout must reside at home (see *Railway Modeller* May-July 1976). As the board was already built on a solid top it was not possible to include track level variations below the board.

In theory Obermitten is a through station with a passing loop on a line branching from the Albula between Thusis and Tiefencastel. Being too small to be a genuine terminus we had to imagine that the line goes beyond Obermitten - possibly to San Bernadino - and that a landslide just beyond the station has caused the tiny station to become a temporary terminus. This perhaps also explains the many buses seen at the station. The area is supposed to be somewhat remote with a small village in the distance depicted in the back scene. The latter was made the last item and uses cut outs from assorted posters and calendars blended together.

If we imagine ourselves to be aboard the short two coach train hauled by RhB locomotive no. 609 "Linard" we emerge from a short tunnel (disguising the end of the board and serving to terminate the overhead catenary) and as we approach the station we take the left hand loop. Just before coming to a gentle stop we get a glimpse of the cement siding alongside which is located the weathered Kibri hopper. Crossing the track we see the quite large station building complete with a small goods shed. This beautifully weathered building was adapted from Blausee Mitholz. At the far end of the station the signal glows a red warning of the danger beyond. Logs are being loaded in the siding and the single cottage provides a splendid vantage point for viewing the operation. The small station yard is as usual a hive of activity and hardly typical of normal stations. The Ge4/4 is unobtusively uncoupled (using one of the six electrical uncouplers) and it runs round its train. We have time to notice that the station is not equipped with span masts (it was thought these would dominate the scene.) Single Sommerfeldt masts were used with home made attachments and home made catenary from 30 thou brass wire. The wire was blackened with a felt tip, this was "B.C." - before Carr's who have the ideal product. Finally the train departs from the scene of grey painted rock and woodlands scenic landscape not for Thusis but for a three road traverser.

It should be noted that having built the layout for the Convention in Manchester in June 1984 I then had a week on the RhB, my first visit except for a quick glimpse on the way home from Interlaken via Brig, Furka Oberalp, Chur, Zurich and Basle!

Arthur Crane (having previously built the traverser) was persuaded to start his own

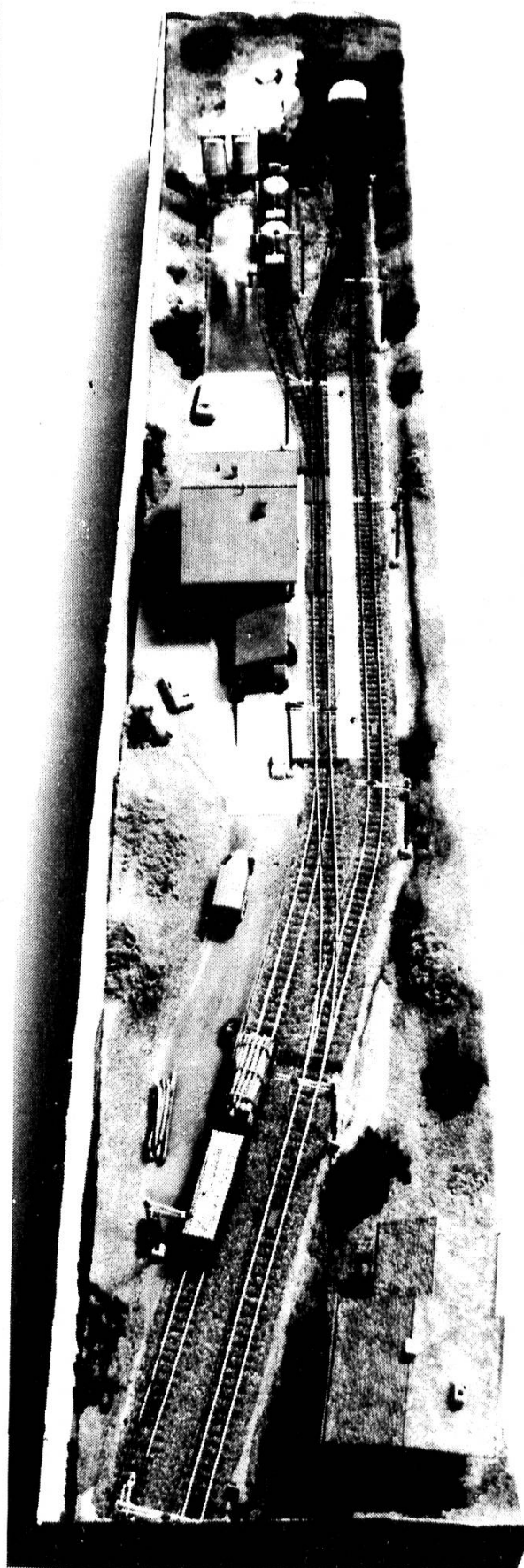


"Crocodile" arrives at Obermatten.
Photo John Stein.

layout and being a contrary sort started in the middle with a scenic section which would make Obermatten L-shaped at exhibitions. This is a masterpiece of planning and levels. After passing under the road bridge a train will coast down the falling gradient, round the curve and past the retaining wall, above which the church and guest house are located. Parallel to the church on the opposite side of the line the ground falls away at a steep angle. Moving on past a rocky outcrop with scree, a train will travel onto a viaduct (much modified) below which is a mountain stream and a road which plunges into a tunnel. Shortly after the viaduct the railway also penetrates a tunnel bored into solid rock. Beyond this point the line leads to a three road traverser with an extended deck. Unfortunately simplicity has meant that with only three roads the capacity of the line is restricted. Now what we really need is a terminus to join onto the other end of Obermatten



Church and guesthouse. Photo John Stein.



Aerial view of layout.
Photo Ron Prattley.