

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2011)
Heft: 108

Rubrik: Modelling news

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In a new scenery modelling series Peter Marriott explores the challenges for those modelling the landscape for Swiss alpine layouts.

The Alps are the largest mountain range in Europe running from southern France in a wide arc of nearly 1000km across Austria, northern Italy, southern Germany, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland. The width of the arc is around 200 km and the mountains peak at 4807m above sea level. The Alps have long formed an obstacle to European north/south and east/west travel but mountain-climbing railways; road and rail tunnels (new and old); cable cars; funiculars; and Post buses on hairpin bends (!), have all contributed to the accessibility of the Alps for travellers, freight haulage and tourists. Many modellers reproducing European railways are drawn to the Alpine scene because the scenery is glorious – mountains, lakes, trees, river gorges, rushing streams and wild flowers. Another reason to model the Swiss Alps is that the architecture (timber built chalets, etc) is so attractive. Then there are the trains – who of us in this Society is not drawn to the sight of a standard or narrow gauge locomotive with carriages or wagons, winding their way up or down a mountainous line or alongside a lake?

In future issues of Swiss Express we will cover the main scenic aspects of how to model the Alpine scene. The series will include:- making the landscape; raising the track above the baseboard; architecture; rocks and rock faces; trees foliage, shrubs and vegetation for Alpine locations; the huge variety of

water such as rivers, streams, lakes, waterfalls etc. We start by considering the best foundations for the scenery.

The best scenery foundations for an alpine layout.

The location of railway lines in the Swiss landscape differs from Canton to Canton. It even differs from river valley to river valley. Some railway lines are positioned high up on a mountainside (such as the Lötschberg south ramp); some lines are single track; others are double track; some are standard gauge; whilst others are narrow gauge; some use bridges and viaducts; others meander across wide river valley floors. Some lines feature numerous tunnels and snow sheds and others run around the sides of lakes. Then there are spirals of track and of course the new base tunnels. The scenic possibilities for anyone modelling Switzerland and its railways are endless!

The foundation materials that are suitable for building an Alpine layout depend upon:

- How much of the Alpine mountain landscape that you may want to reproduce in miniature. The taller the scenery that you wish to model, the stronger the support for the scenery will need to be.

- Is the layout to be portable or permanent? If the layout is to be taken to shows it needs to be both strong and also as light in weight as possible. For portable layouts where the scenery is likely to be heavy (such as a lot of rock faces), it is possible to build this in detachable sections. However for realism the joins between the baseboard and detachable scenery sections do need to be as seamless as possible.

- If the landscape is to be covered in conifer trees, buildings, rock faces etc it is likely to be heavy. Scenery that

is simply foliage or grass will be a lot lighter in weight. The more weight that will need to be supported, the stronger the baseboard, the land contours and the scenery foundations will need to be.

All of these considerations will dictate the best materials to be used for making the foundations of the layout.

Making the contours of the land.

Once the size of the layout is determined, consideration needs to be given to the materials to be used in the construction of the baseboard and landscape. A good baseboard gives not only good support for the scenery but it also provides the trains with the best possible chance of running well. Derailments can cause frustration and might ultimately lead someone to give up hobby. There are many good books and DVDs available about how to make baseboards, but it is not necessary to have a qualification in carpentry to build a baseboard. Building baseboards is a skill that can be learned.

Whilst layout builders will use their favourite type of timber for the baseboard and framework of the layout, there is an increasing choice of materials when it comes to making the perimeter contours of the land to form the rear and side edges to any layout. Land contours can be made from various materials. Timber including hardboard; plywood; OSB; Sundeala or MDF all available from DIY stores. Thick cardboard, such as mounting card, is readily available from art shops, etc. Polystyrene blocks come as packing around white goods such as dishwashers, fridges, televisions and PCs. Household insulation foam material is available from builders' merchants and DIY stores. Woodland Scenics Sub Terrain System is also available. The formers of the contours of the land need to be shaped to follow the desired shape. Depending upon the type of material used for the formers they may either be cut with a saw, a jigsaw or a sharp craft knife. When using timber or card for the land contours it is necessary to use intermediate land contours at approx 15 cm intervals. The contour sections can be fixed to the baseboard with PVA woodworking adhesive or by using a hot glue gun. Masking tape can be used to hold the upright land contours in place whilst the PVA glue dries – joints fixed with hot glue may need no support except from your hand for a few seconds.

Next time we will cover methods of raising the trackbed above the baseboard. 🇨🇭

Editor's note: This article is based in part on one by Peter Marriott that originally appeared in Model Rail International magazine.

1 & 2 The finished layout with track on a raised embankment.

3, 4 & 5 This shows the author's Swiss based layout with the trackbed raised above the baseboard on plywood and timber supports.

PHOTOS: Peter Marriott

