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SWISS EXPRESS SCENERY CLINIC MAKING ROCKS - PART 1

Lalden



Real rocks at Lalden on the Southern Ramp of the Lötschberg line.

All photos: Peter Marriott

Peter Marriott explores the huge variety of products available to reproduce rocks in miniature.

Most Swiss layouts require rock faces, rocks dotted on the landscape, or cliffs. These might include a mountainous line such as the Lötschberg Southern Ramp or one of the many other rocky locations within Switzerland. There are various old established methods of making rocks and rock faces. These include:

- Cork bark. This is still readily available from garden centres and model shops and some modellers still use it, and sufficiently “bedded in” with foliage or talus (small rocks) it looks quite effective. If its natural colour does not reflect the location of your layout it can be painted by building up layers of thin washes of acrylic paints.



DIY stores. When sculpted with an old knife and then painted with acrylics these too can look good.

In addition there are also an increasing number of proprietary model railway scenery products on the market to make rocks and rock faces from companies including Busch, Faller, Heki, Model Landscape Company, Noch, Woodland Scenics and others. Most of these products are easy to work with and with a little practice the results are good. In this two-part feature we will demonstrate how to use some them.

Looking at the real thing

Before considering how to make a rocky outcrop on your layout it is best to study photographs of prototype rock faces for the area of Switzerland that you are endeavouring to replicate in miniature. Not all rock strata and colours are the same, whilst different rock types have distinctive strata formations.

Using DIY products

A few words to begin with about using Polyfilla or similar DIY plaster products:

- Always mix the product in accordance with the manufacturers instructions. If too much water is added the mixture will not harden properly. Alternatively for a quicker result a ready mixed product can be used.
- It is advisable to use several thin layers of the mixed plaster material to build up a rock face rather than just one layer. One thick layer will not dry so well as several thinner layers and it might not adhere to the underlying foundation of the landscape.
- Mix a little PVA adhesive with the plaster in the prescribed quantity of water as this helps the mixture to stick to the underlying landscape, and to the other layers. Putting a thin film of PVA onto the landscape foundation before coating it with the mixture ensures this is firmly fixed to the landscape.
- When the plaster is mixed into a smooth but sticky substance an old kitchen knife, or wooden stick, can be used to “push” the mixed plaster onto the landscape. Allow each layer to dry fully before adding the next layer.
- A minute or so after putting on the final coating of plaster onto the landscape shape it whilst it is still damp. This is where the pictures of the prototype are invaluable. Sculpt the

rock into the formation that you have observed on the real thing. Are the real rocks fissured, broken or crumbling? Try to reproduce the appropriate effect.

- Once the plaster is fully dry (usually the next day - longer if the conditions are damp) use a variety of acrylic paints or weathering dyes or Woodland Scenics Earth Colour Liquid Pigments to "paint" the rocks. Run thin washes of colour over them and for the later colours dry brush darker and lighter shades to give the finished rocks some contrast and depth.

- On the horizontal sections of the rocks use PVA glue to fix pieces of foliage and scatter material or static grass to represent weeds.

Using Woodland Scenics products

Rock pieces of varying sizes can be made using Woodland Scenics Lightweight Hydrocal and their Rock Moulds. The moulds are flexible rubber pieces that are shaped into different rock shapes. They are sold in numerous shapes and

sizes. This technique works the same way as making jelly and in my experience I find that making rocks with these products is simple and the end product is very good indeed. The stage-by-stage method is as follows:



- Choose the most suitable rock moulds for your layout. See the choice available in the Woodland Scenics catalogue or on their website at www.woodlandscenics.com.

- Mix the Hydrocal mixture (1 1/4 cups of Hydrocal to 1/2 cup of water) in a mixing bowl that is used only for scenic work. Stir it well until all of the powder is mixed thoroughly with the water. Be careful to follow the suggested quantities in the instructions precisely. I recall adding too much water once with the result that the mixture became too sloppy and it never dried in the moulds.

- Wet the inside of the rubber mould with water and a few drops of washing up liquid. This will stop the Hydrocal mixture sticking to the mould as it dries.

- Pour the mix into the mould ensuring that it fully covers the indented shape of the mould. Do not overfill the top edge of the mould. Tap the sides of the rubber mould lightly to dislodge any bubbles of air that are in the mix.

- Leave the mould somewhere warm to dry and after about an hour (on a very damp day this might take longer, on a very hot day this might take less time), then "peel" away the mould from the rocks. Leave the rocks to fully harden overnight before moving onto the next stage.


- Do not be surprised if some of the rock pieces break as they come out of the mould. It does happen however carefully you try to release the rocks. This will not matter too much because you may be able to get two rocks for the price of one! They can be used together or independently.

- Once the rock sections are fully dry fix the rock pieces to the landscape using PVA or hot glue. Again,

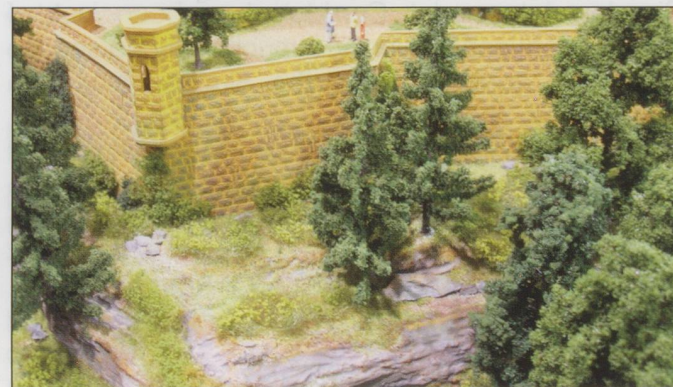
leave them to set overnight.

- To blend the rocks into the landscape mix up some more Hydrocal and "brush" it around the rock pieces so that the rocks do not look as if they have been just "plonked" onto the landscape.

- Apply thin washes of acrylic paints or Woodland Scenics Earth Colour Liquid Pigments over the rock face in different colours to highlight the crevices etc.

- Hide the edges of the rocks with scatter materials, foliage, Poly Fibre or Woodland Scenics Fine Leaf Foliage. 

Next time we will show how to use the hardfoam rock pieces by Noch plus a number of tips for blending the rocks into the landscape.



TOP: Two pieces of rock made from Woodland Scenics Hydrocal in one of their Rock Moulds. Once the plaster had dried I used thinned acrylic paint to colour the rocks. Woodland Scenics Poly Fibre was used to represent the foliage.

ABOVE: The rocks that the castle stands on are Heki Rock Foil sheets which are flexible and retailed in a number of colours and rock types.

BELOW: A nicely made quarry in a diorama on the Lädgutter Bauer stand at the Nuremberg Toy Fair 2012.

