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Ge6/6II No.702 '*Curia*' on the viaduct outside Valcava. Fishermen pay no attention but a photographer is in place to record the train.
Photos: Martin Fisher

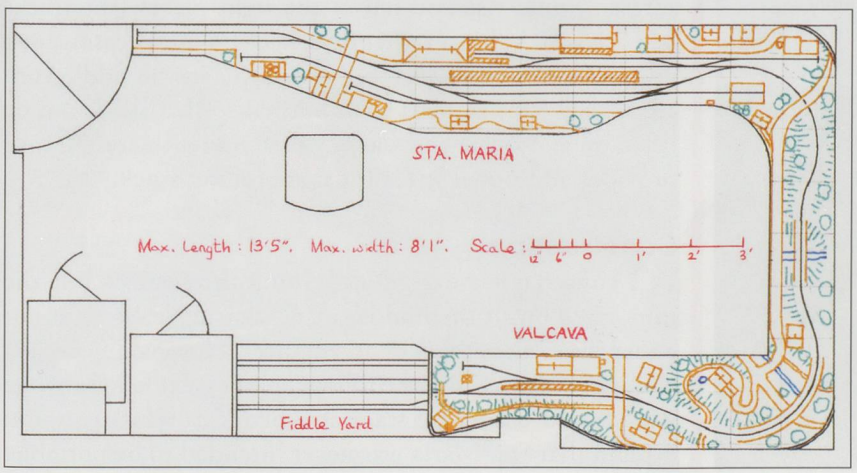
Sta. Maria – Part 1

Martin Fisher describes the construction of his RhB layout.

History

I progressed from Hornby O-gauge clockwork on the lounge floor, to Hornby Dublo 2-rail on a rather flimsy baseboard and then a series of GWR-based layouts the largest of which was a somewhat compressed "Kingswear". Cyril Freezer's magazine had the strap line "*for the average modeller*" but if people like the Rev Peter Denny, David Jenkinson and a certain Dave Howsam really were producing 'average' layouts, my efforts were decidedly sub-standard. Eventually I gave up railway modelling and sold everything. A few months later we took the family for their first visit to Switzerland. Alas, I wandered into Bühler in Interlaken and discovered Bemo. It had been some years since I saw the RhB and I was unaware then that the RhB had gone from green to red in the interim, but on display was a green Ge4/4I and a short rake of matching carriages. Unfortunately, I was hooked; boys and their toys.... An experimental layout followed, as did ones based on Tiefencastel and Filisur. "Filisur" had been built in a converted garage but its main shortcoming was that it took up too much room, making access difficult to various other things. So a wall-hugging layout was devised which would free up the central part of the room and provide storage room underneath.

The RhB's terminus at Scuol-Tarasp was laid out as a through station in case the Engadin line could be extended to Landeck in Austria. This gave me the inspiration for my design. In 1906 an independent line was proposed from Zernez via Santa Maria to Schluderns, then in Austria but Italian since 1919. In reality the Ofenbergbahn was never built but I have assumed that it was built as far east as Sta. Maria (virtually 36km (22½ miles) from Zernez); that intention to go further was abandoned; and that, unlike the original proposal, in Zernez the line did join up with the RhB who ran it with standard stock.



The model described

As Scuol-Tarasp and Sta. Maria are not too far apart, it seemed reasonable to assume that Sta. Maria might resemble Scuol with some adaptations to suit local (i.e. my) circumstances. The plan shows the outcome. Two sidings beyond the main part of the station occupy the intended track-bed east of Sta. Maria and provide useful storage for spare trains, augmenting the fiddle yard. Sidings for cement and mineral water traffic have appeared very roughly where the

1. Ge6/6^{II} No.707 '*Scuol*' and Ge6/6^{I} No.414 with stock in the carriage sidings; industrial plant to the left.
2. The station building at Sta. Maria.
3. ABe4/4 No.502 and Ge6/6^{II} No.702 '*Curia*' await departure time at Sta. Maria with a local and a freight respectively.
4. Ge4/4^{I} No.601 '*Albula*' with a short freight mid-way between Valcava and Sta. Maria.

locodepot is sited at Scuol; a smaller loco shed (actually the building I made for "Filisur") has been provided at the opposite end. The loop nearest the front edge of the layout is kept clear for these roads and for running round; the next loop in is used to hold freights ready for departure. The short bay between the main station and goods shed was a late addition and provides somewhere to park a PTT van or similar. At Scuol there was considerable space for sidings beyond the opposite end of the goods shed; I had to be rather more circumspect in Sta. Maria – and also introduce a sharp bend whereas the prototype heads up the valley on a straight alignment.

The loco shed and an over-bridge hide the sharp bend. The line then heads out into hopefully typical RhB scenery, running along a ledge on the side of a valley with a road near at hand and crossing a stream low down in a side valley. Another sharp curve, this time on a viaduct, brings trains to Valcava. In the original proposals for the Ofenbergbahn, Valcava would have been the first station west of Sta. Maria. It is a matter of conjecture what this wayside station would have looked like but the opportunity to use the plastic kit for stations like "Susch" was too good to miss. Incidentally, when I designed the layout I had not intended to include Valcava but when I came to set things out I realised there was just enough room and that this would help to add to the operational and visual interest. Beyond Valcava the railway goes into a tunnel –on the model to hide the entrance to the fiddle yard; on the prototype it would have marked the start of an ascent, a bit like the Albula, to Fuldera and the Ofenberg Tunnel.

Design

I already had a book of RhB station track diagrams so had a basis from which to condense Scuol-Tarasp. I knew the length of Bemo locos, carriage, vans, etc., so could decide how long platforms and sidings should be. Also, I had several buildings - mostly assembled plastic kits from earlier layouts, so I knew their footprint. The major obstacle was the station building at Scuol-Tarasp. A conveniently timed holiday enabled me to take some photos and from these I could get an approximate size for a model, of which more in Part 2. The scenic section had to be planned fairly carefully so parts of the baseboard surface would rise and fall in the right places (the trackbed is level). Valcava rather designed itself, for reasons just given. An obvious point, but the tracks in the fiddle yard are spaced further apart than normal so that stock can be lifted on and off as necessary. A shelf under the fiddle yard provides additional space for spare rolling stock.

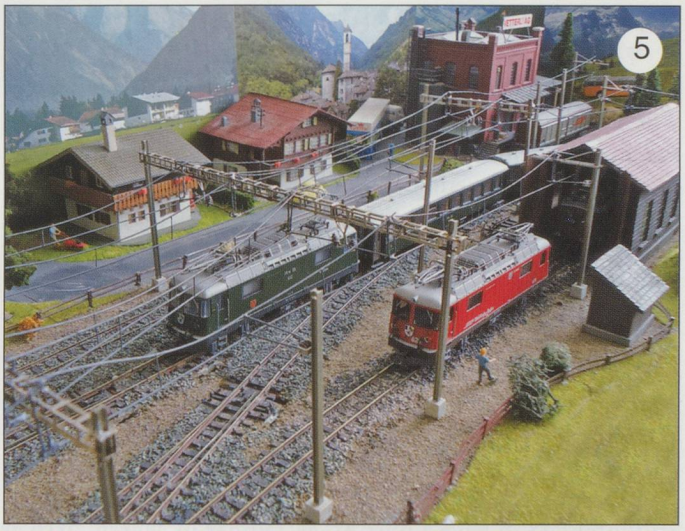
Construction

I enjoy layout design and doing the scenery but the important bit in the middle I find a struggle, as I am not a carpenter, electrician or an engineer. However, I can just about get by so I offer the following in case it helps anyone who would otherwise stare at a blank canvass. I should explain that Sta. Maria was never intended to be portable.

It fits an irregular wall-profile and I could not afford the input to a swear box that would be required if I had to dismantle, transport and re-erect an exhibition layout.

The layout is supported on 2" x 1" timber. The shelving lower down helps to give the structure rigidity. The timber varies in height according to whether it supports the actual baseboard or a lower-level surface for scenery below the line of the railway. Those lower-lying areas are usually supported on thin ply; Sundeala supports the railway. I have used Sundeala for many years as it can be cut easily to any curved profile and readily takes track pins. However, Sundeala does need adequate bracing, roughly every 18" x 12". Careful thought needs to be given to the bracing in advance to avoid having timber exactly where you are going to install an under-track point motor. Sta. Maria is my first layout to use a traverser-style fiddle yard as including Valcava meant I had not got the space for a traditional fan of turnouts. I knew my lack of technical know-how might cause problems but overcame this by simply fixing the fiddle yard baseboard to plastic-coated chipboard runners that slide on a sub-base of the same material. This provides for smooth operation, the runners being kept in place by more pieces of chipboard that are fixed to the sub-base. Bolts lock the assembly in place for each of the four possible track alignments.

In Part 2, I will provide a commentary on track-laying, wiring and scenic work plus a brief look to the future.



5. A brace of Ge4/4^{II}s; No.612 '*Thusis*' arrives at Sta. Maria, passing No.624 S-chanf on shed.

6. ABe4/4 No.502 has left Sta. Maria and makes its way up the valley.

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Easy - or was it?