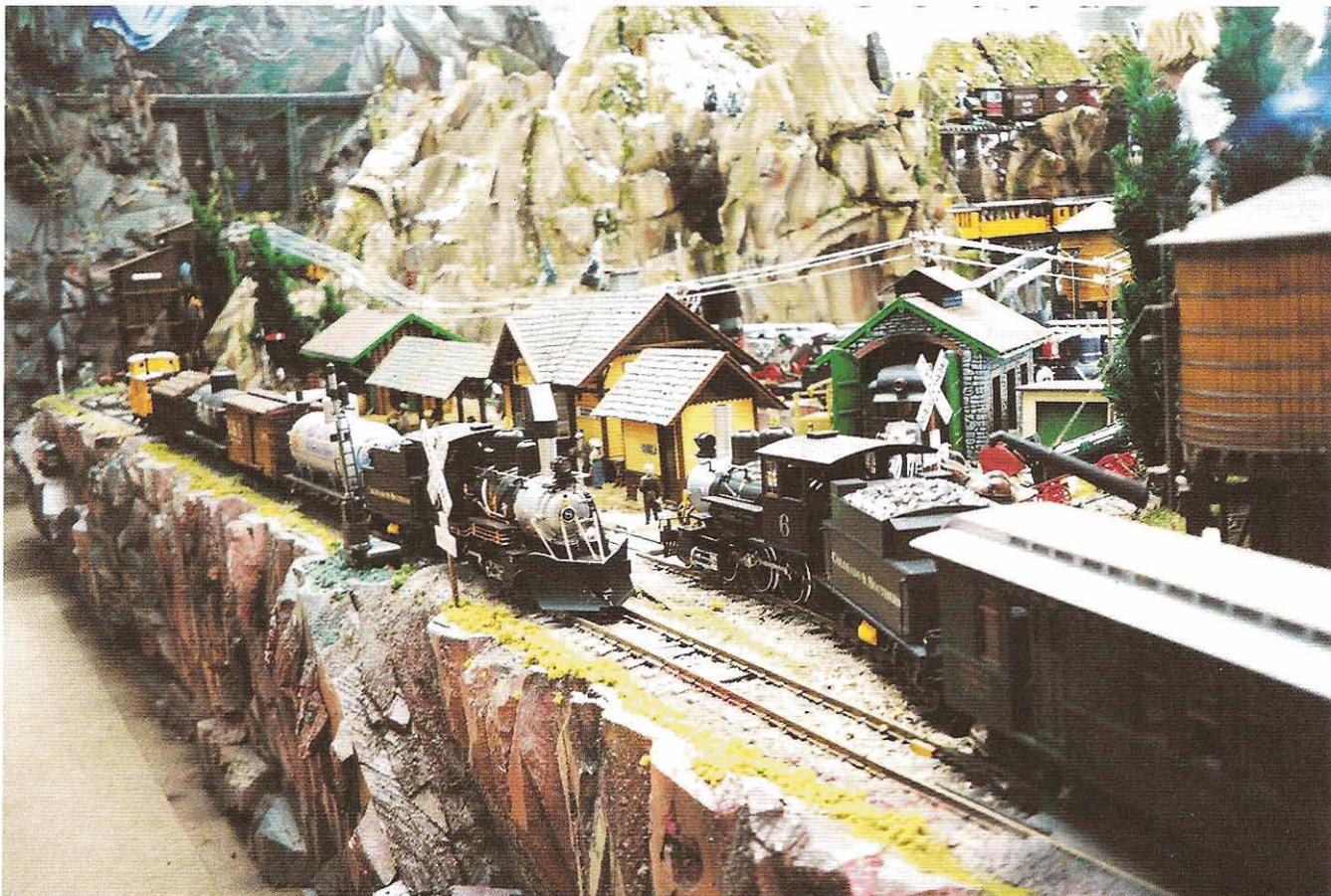


# The Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg & Pacific Railway



The Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg and Pacific Railway is named after two local communities served originally by the Canadian Northern Railway.

The town of Rocky Mountain House was a fur trading post established in 1799 by the Northwest Company on the North Saskatchewan River in Rupert's Land, now the province of Alberta, Canada. A competing post was set up at Acton House the same year by the Hudson's Bay Company, a mile downstream. ("House" was the term used by fur traders to indicate the non-threatening nature of their business with the aboriginal population, contrasted with "Fort," which connoted a different relationship.)

The Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) came to Rocky in 1912 and went 60 miles further west to Nordegg to service the Brazeau coal mine. Rail service to Nordegg was halted in 1955 due to low coal demand caused by railway dieselization. The line from Rocky still runs eastbound to connect to Red Deer, Calgary and Edmonton, carrying sulphur and grain to the Pacific Ocean ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert.

The fictitious RMHN&PRy took over the line to Nordegg with the objective of crossing Howse Pass over the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean, a shorter but steeper route than the CPR or CNR lines. Like most ambitious plans of other operators, the railway never reached the Pacific, but instead turned south to serve tourist and ski resorts in the Rocky Mountains.

At the same time, the Denver & Rio Grande and the Colorado & Southern were scaling down operations, so rolling stock for the RMHN&PRy was purchased or leased from these roads. Most equipment is still painted in the original D&RGW or C&S/DSP&P livery. Due to passage of Planet Earth through a rift in space, time slipped back 20 years leaving the railway running permanently in 1939.

## The Layout's Inception

The model railway started life in San Diego as "Malcolm Furlow's LGB Empire," designed and built as a display railroad for LGB of America. It was a sectional layout with styrofoam scenery, track on three levels, and a desert/mountain motif to enhance the appearance of both U.S.- and European-style LGB rolling stock.

As a side note, Furlow also built a smaller, highly detailed U.S. Western-style layout for the LGB showroom in Nurnberg, Germany, as well as several G scale model railways featured in *Model Railroader*, and one for the Children's Hospital in Dallas.

After several years of use, LGBoA donated the layout to the San Diego Model Railroad Museum, which continued to run the display using LGB equipment loaned to them by LGBoA. When the museum needed space for new exhibits, the railway was offered for sale.

After brief negotiations and a fax of the track plan, I decided this was the railroad for me. It was similar enough to my dream design and with addition of a large staging yard, would offer both point-to-point and continuous operation of my LGB trains. Museum volunteers separated the layout sections, filled a 65-foot electronics moving van, and said goodbye to "the monster."

A few days later, it arrived at my ranch near Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, some 185 km north of Calgary. Getting the van down my narrow, winding, steep hills was interesting. The empty truck had to be pulled back up with my tractor because it had poor traction when empty.

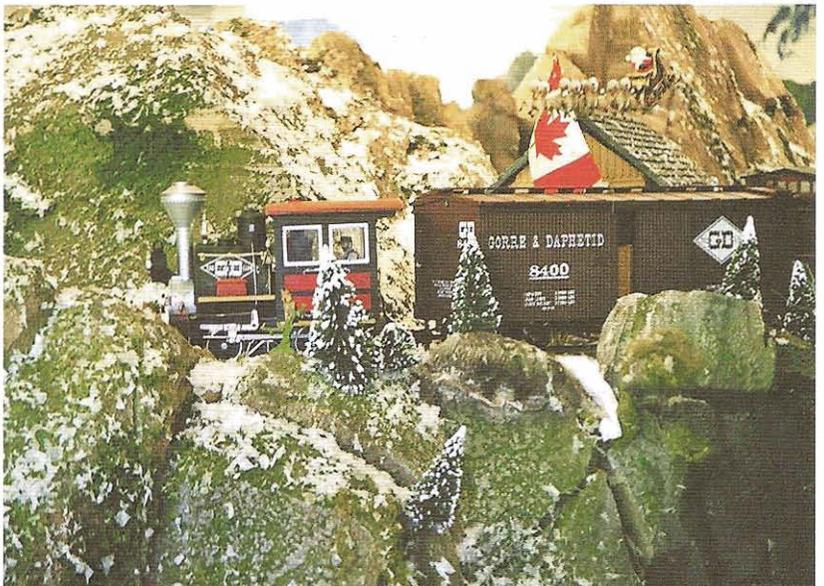
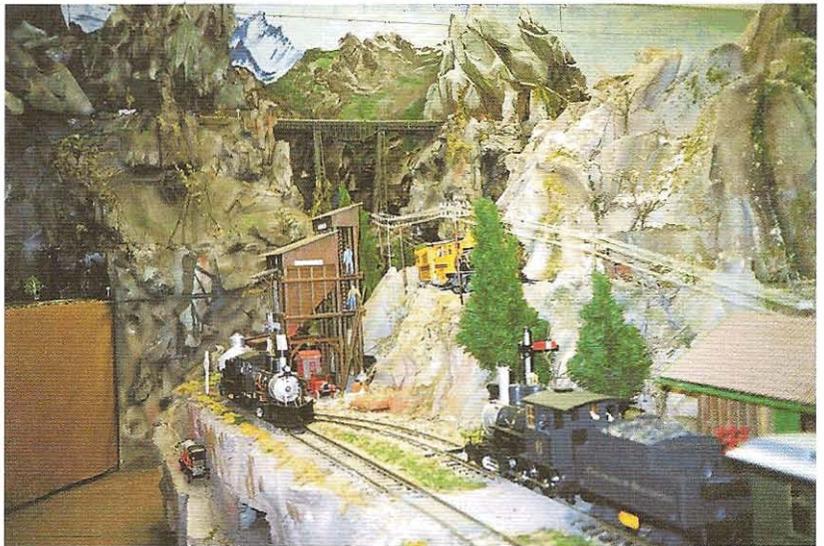
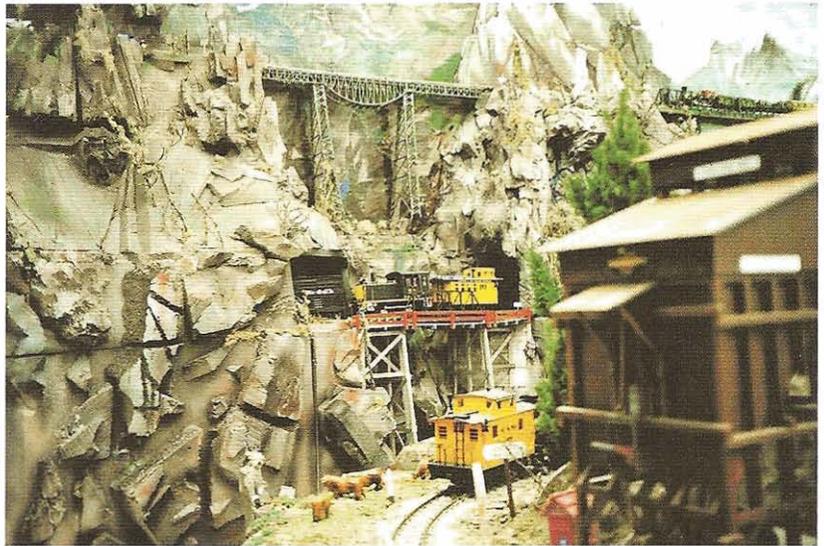
Unloading the layout sections was fun! The largest piece was 7x16 feet, fully scenicked and sat about seven feet above ground on rails in the moving van. It weighed about 450 pounds!

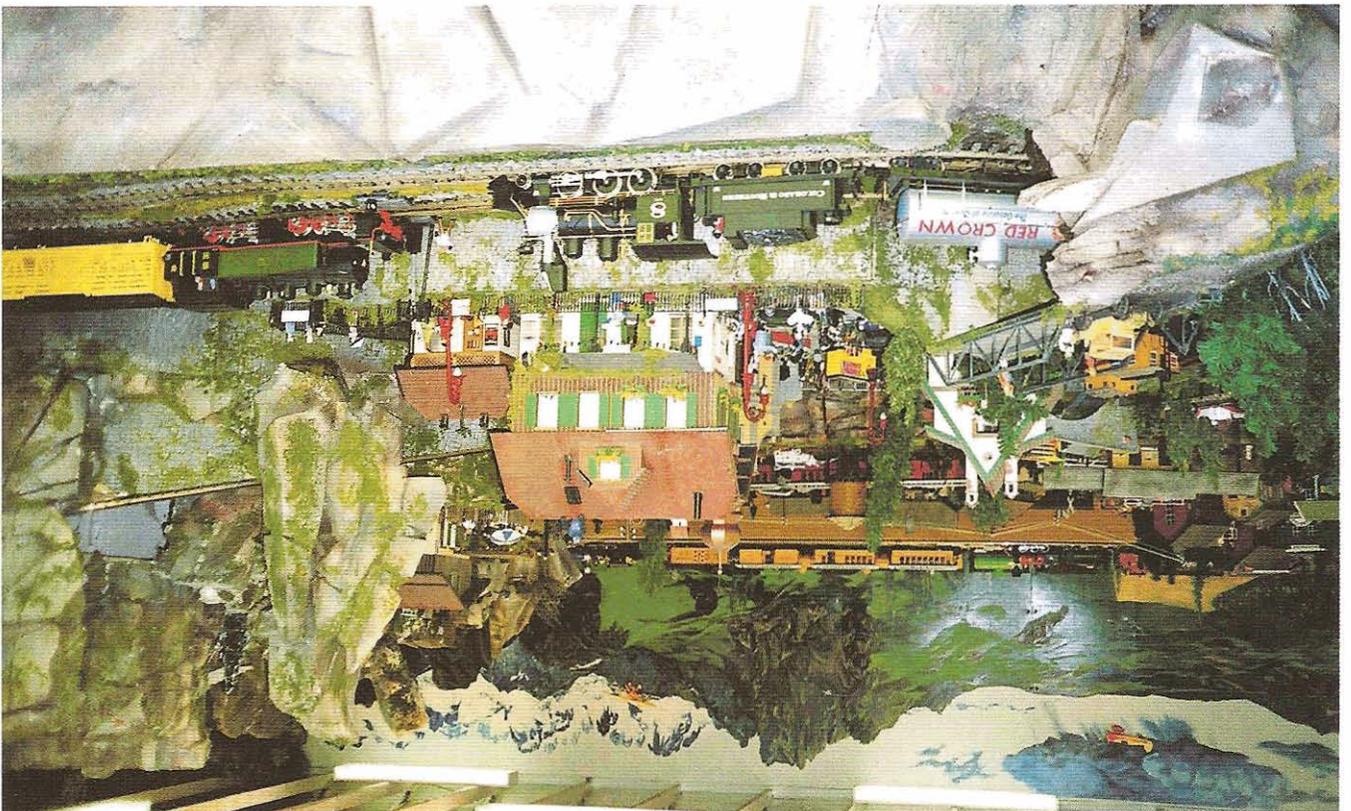
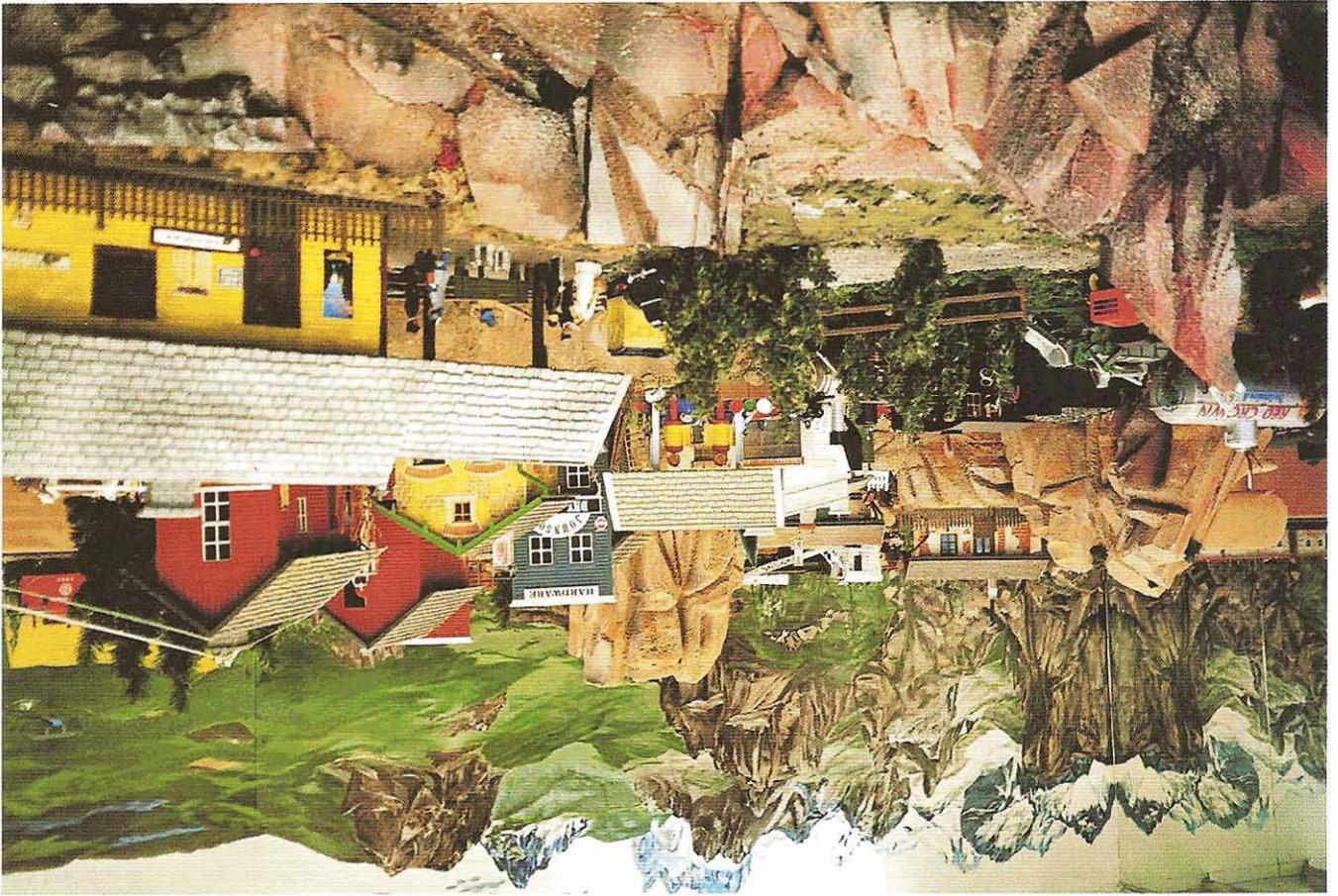
Fortunately, my brother and his family and some of their friends were visiting, so we had lots of strong bodies to lift this piece out of the truck. If I had been forced to ask my rancher neighbors for help, they would probably still be laughing at me.

The remaining sections were easier to lift, but more complicated to assemble, as they had as many as three layers of track hidden in tunnels. The railway is now housed in a 28x36-foot three-car garage, with room for workbenches, storage boxes and visitors. The railway is wheelchair accessible and visitors are welcome by appointment.

## Renovations

A year later, the railway was finally running with new, simplified wiring throughout. New power packs and walk-around radio controls were in-







stalled. Since then, I have added hundreds of details, a staging yard, automatic passing sidings for running trains in opposite directions during show-and-tells, and I've completely renovated the scenery.

The automatic passing sidings use LGB's EPL switching system in conjunction with the momentum features built into the LGB JUMBO power supplies to prevent sudden starts and stops. The added realism and less wear and tear on drive gears is worth the effort.

My original momentum circuits were home made based on an article published in *Garden Railways*, but the JUMBOs do a better job with easier setup, no external relays, more precise speed controls—and I get automatic station stops for free!

Some track had to be replaced. During use as a display railway for several years, engines had snagged scenery and spun their wheels in place for hours or days, wearing notches in the railhead down to the web at several locations. In addition, continuous wear of the railhead on sharp curves had reduced the rail height from Code 332 to about Code 232.

Several changes were made to the track diagram at this time to enhance operational possibilities and the staging yard lead was cut into the middle level trackwork.

Scenery on the original railway was dramatic but bare. I have repainted all the styrofoam, which had faded badly. I used spray cans of acrylic enamel in many colors and overlaid this with a pebble finish spray, without using the clear gloss overcoat provided.

I replaced the original oversized ballast with scale-sized ballast (#1 and #2 chicken grit), and added grass, weeds, trees, roads, people, signs, vehicles, animals, fences and snow on the upper elevations.

It utterly amazes me how these details determine the character of the railway. These changes represent Western Canadian prairie, foothills and mountains rather than the desert and the dry Alps of the original.

The European theme of the mountain town was converted into a typical Rocky Mountain resort town with only minimal effort, mainly changing the language of signs and adding local signage and names.

I also added tabletop-to-floor scenery around the layout, thus breaking up the straight lines of track along the edges. It is now much easier to photograph the railway with this scenery in place of the original green curtain.

*Tabletop-to-floor scenery enhances, rather than detracts from, all the details on the layout.*



*Above, a background mural makes the layout seem even larger than it already is!*

Blue carpet with a white fleck was used to cover areas of floor that represented water, and a brown runner was used elsewhere to represent dry gulch areas. These also help photography as well as the overall visual effect.

My hired hand at the time, Eric Hazen, painted the 60-foot backdrop behind the staging yard (along one side wall) and along one end wall. It makes a great photographic background from nearly any angle. An obligatory mirror is used to double the size of the staging yard (and the backdrop). Eric also did most of the floor-to-tabletop styrofoam, and deserves a lot of credit for the overall artistic effect.

## Operations

There's lots of action on the RMHN&PRy! Three independent loops can run two LGB trains, each in automatic mode. The mainline oval can be separated into two ovals, allowing one additional train to run. An O scale 4-4-0 General runs continuously in the distant background.

A 1/8th scale amusement park train (N scale) hauls children around its oval at TINYTOWN. An LGB cog locomotive automatically climbs and descends a 25% grade and a Lehmann Rigi Duo cable

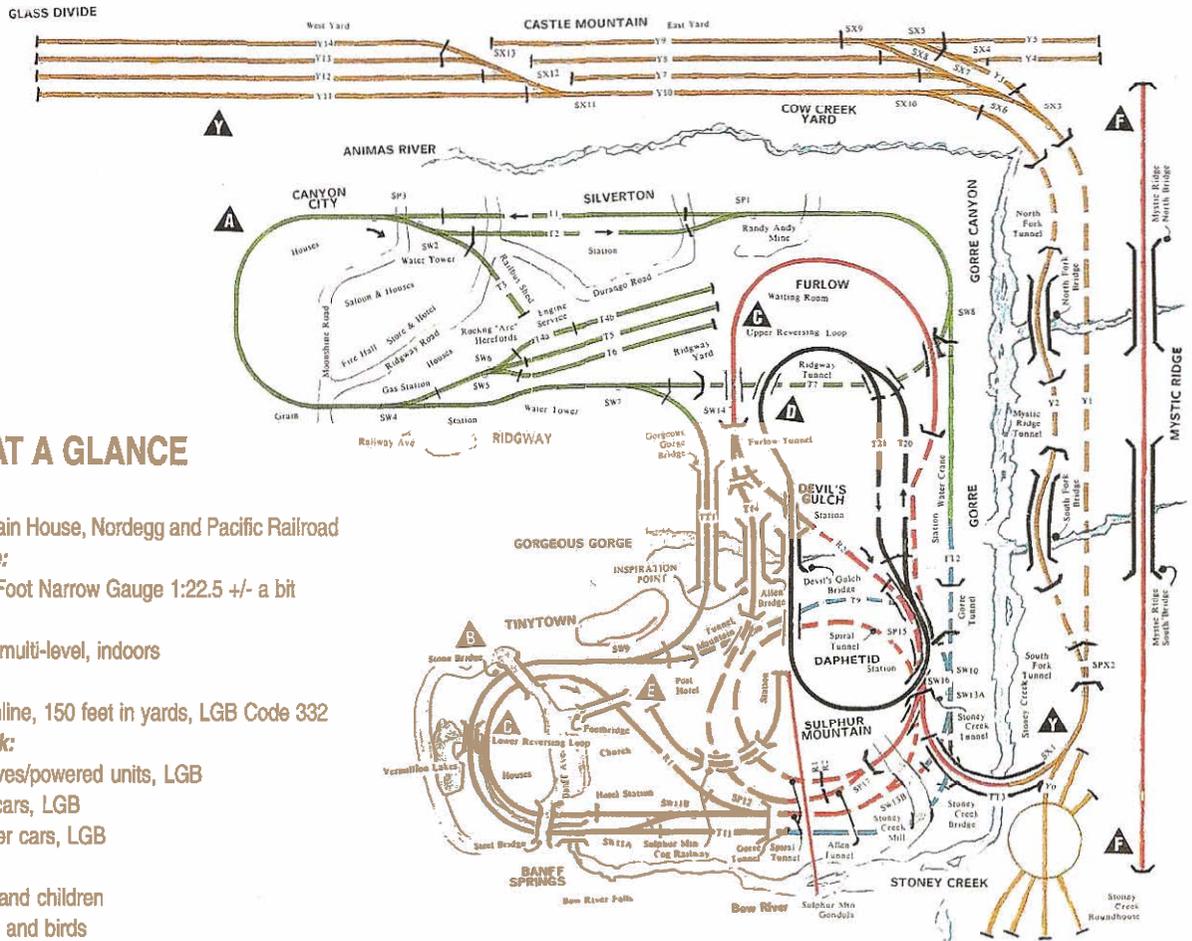
car hauls skiers from the upper cog station to higher peaks. And the yard can be run independently to make up the next train—a total of 10 trains plus cable car!

In manual operation, trains start at Cow Creek Yard, traverse all track (except the upper oval) and return to Cow Creek. Allowing for station stops, this takes about 45 minutes plus a thorough knowledge of the track diagram.

## Rolling Stock

Locomotives are all LGB—Moguls, Forneys, Porters, a steam tram, a Mallet, and a diesel switcher. Some are modified to allow double-heading. These are dressed in D&RGW, C&S, and DSP&P liveries (a little time-sliding here) and are unweathered. I like to think that the railway is well-maintained even though it is 1939.

Passenger cars are also all LGB to attain consistency in size and shape. Freight car stock is mostly LGB and some kitbashed work cars. All have knuckle couplers added for realism and ease of use, as well as metal wheels for rolling and tracking improvements. The wheels are currently being painted with Rust and Rail Brown to tone down their appearance.



## LAYOUT AT A GLANCE

**Name:**

Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg and Pacific Railroad

**Scale/Gauge:**

G Scale / 3 Foot Narrow Gauge 1:22.5 +/- a bit

**Size:**

28 x 36 feet, multi-level, indoors

**Trackage:**

400 feet mainline, 150 feet in yards, LGB Code 332

**Rolling Stock:**

20+ locomotives/powered units, LGB

110+ freight cars, LGB

20+ passenger cars, LGB

**Population:**

350+ people and children

250+ animals and birds

**Prototype:**

Freelance (D&RGW/DSP&P/DG&H)

**Locale:**

Western Foothills and Rocky Mountains

**Period:**

Late 1930's

**Scenery:**

Styrofoam floor-to-ceiling mountains and walk-through valleys

**Sound:**

LGB steam engine, cattle, sheep sounds, ambient sound with thunder, wolves, loons, distant trains

**Operation:**

Multiple independent and connected ovals, independent point-to-point, and loop-to-loop, automatic or manual routing control of independent blocks, electric turnouts

**Power:**

LGB JUMBO transformers with momentum and station stop

**Track:**

LGB 15000 curves, 16000 switches, 11000 curves on loops

**Visitors:**

Welcome by appointment

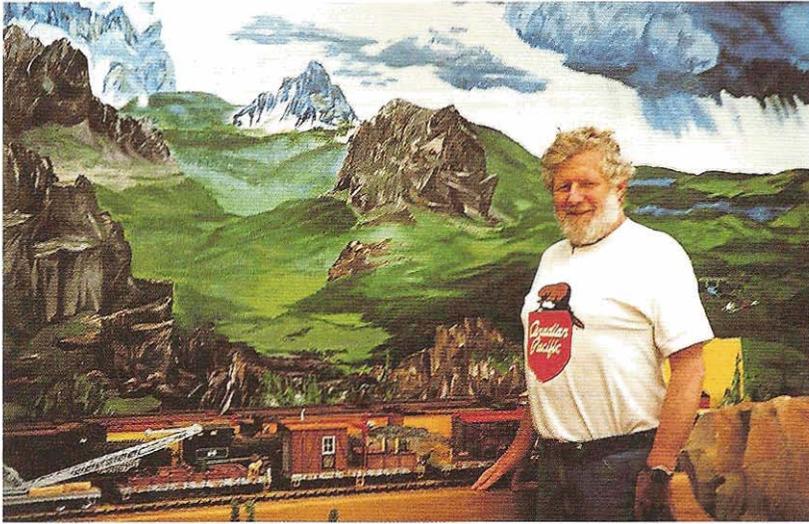
Some locos have LGB sound built in; others are being updated to sound as time permits. Sound really makes a difference in large scale, especially when trains are hidden from view or lost in a tunnel. LGB cow and sheep sound cars are also helpful in tracing specific trains.

Another interesting side note: Until recently, LGB didn't produce a really old-fashioned steam rack locomotive, so I put two extra traction tires on the LGB 2050 Steam Tram. It climbs the 25% cog railway gradient with one passenger car just fine, running on an LGB timed reversing circuit. I had to add four diodes in series on the downhill power lead, though, to slow the locomotive enough so it would stop properly at the bottom of the hill.

The spiral tunnel joining the lower to the middle level is about a 10% grade and completely out of sight. It requires a Mallet or double-headed Moguls to pull five or six cars up this grade. A train can get lost here for quite a while before someone notices it has gone missing.

My favorite train is my series of kitbashed work

*Above, a schematic of the layout shows its intricacies—and its great potential for operations!*



Above, author Ross Crain poses with his Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg & Pacific Railway

train cars. These have been extensively modified—lots of junk, dirt, tools and supplies decorate each car. I'm also working on my snowplow train—adding the snowplow tender, water car, extra coal car and crew cars. Eventually, I plan to kitbash the plow itself to make it look more like pictures of the real thing.

Weathering is done with dry tempera poster paints rubbed and brushed on. The woodgrain finish holds this well and the stuff can be washed off to create a pristine out-of-the-box look when needed.

### Scenery

Commercial coarse-ground foam is used for grass and weeds. More than 20 gallons of white glue hold all this in place. Trees are a mix of Christmas decorations (Balsami Metallicus var. Plastica) in many sizes, with some real twigs and Spanish moss from my woodlot. The original "LGB Empire" had a single, lonesome cactus.

Most buildings are kits, repainted or modified in some way, with low-fi interiors. A major project is underway to finish critical interiors and lighting.

The Banff Springs Hotel has full lounge and bedroom detail, several houses are also complete, and two of four station interiors are well underway. Most exteriors have lots of appropriate "stuff" laying about. A reasonably large population is needed to bring buildings and scenes to life. Nearly every accessory manufacturer is represented. Animals of all types, wild and domestic, are tucked anywhere an animal should be.

Vehicles have drivers, passengers and a few dogs for protection from the other wildlife. There are many "mini-scenes" to draw the eye to specific places on the layout. Mini-scenes include a Christmas party in a remote corner of the railway, a young

lady kissing her beau goodbye at the station, beavers chewing a bridge support, a hunter aiming at distant deer, ladies of the night eating ice cream on the hotel porch, linemen stringing new telegraph wire, geese escaping from a cage on a baggage cart, Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable being greeted by the mayor, a school band practicing, firemen washing the fire truck, a biker gang partying and holding up traffic, a traffic accident complete with a nurse and ambulance... there are almost too many to remember! More mini-scenes are planned to add life to the static scenery.

The track plan, on paper, looks like a bowl of spaghetti, much like the real narrow gauge railways, but scenery and multi-level track segregate the various loops.

Mountains and trees break the view so individual portions of the railway cannot be seen all at once. Various tunnels, including the spiral tunnel from the lower to middle level cause visitors to lose trains that re-appear at unexpected places and times. These features, combined with the passing sidings, make continuous round-the-loops operation interesting for at least two hours—visitors are seldom disappointed.

### Some Philosophy

My effort on the railway is inspired by the works of Malcolm Furlow and John Allen, both master illusionists and modellers, so both names appear on various landmarks on my railway. My attempts will never live up to their performance, partly because I am blind but mostly because I never had their talent. I keep on trying anyway.

My objective is to create a realistic-looking large scale narrow gauge model railroad without strict adherence to a particular prototype or era, while allowing for a bit of whimsy and "time-sliding." After all, it's my railway and I'm the President and Chief Engineer, so I can run it any way I want!

The Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg & Pacific Railway is semi-scale in many ways and there is quite a bit of leeway in what passes for realism. The fact that the track gauge is a little too wide for the scale or that Moguls are pretending to be Consolidations or that the grab irons are not quite right doesn't bother me. I love looking at other people's fine-scale models but I can't build them myself.

The illusion of realism is what counts on my railway, not real realism. The result is still pleasing to the eye, runs reasonably well and provides many hours of enjoyment (indoors, out of the rain and snow of classic Canadian winter weather).

There are more mini-scenes to build, interiors to finish, several bridges to finish detailing, an engine shed to build, and room for a 10x12-foot expansion. I'll be busy for quite a while longer. 🚂



# TELEGRAM

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