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President's Corner

Hello Everyone.

Well, it looks like we might finally be getting through this whole Covid 19 lockdown and pandemic experience. With a vaccine on the market we just might be able to finally start getting back to normal.

It is with sadness that I must announce our annual meeting has been canceled due to covid. With luck we can reschedule later in the year.

It is unlikely that we would be able to find a venue to host a group of our size and at a price we can afford.

It is also time for all members to pay dues. As you know we suspended dues for 2020. If you paid last year you are good to go this year. If not, please pay for 2021 as soon as you can. Expenses are still ongoing. Expenses include insurance, trailer registration and so on. Unfortunately they didn't stop last year.

Until our next run, stay safe and my wishes to you for a happy New Year.

Bill



Annual General Meeting
Date – TBD

Jim Marsh's Train Display
Spring 2021

Bob Odell's Train Run
Coming soon

Al Kramer's Train Run
Coming soon



TOWARDS THE ILLUSION OF REALISM

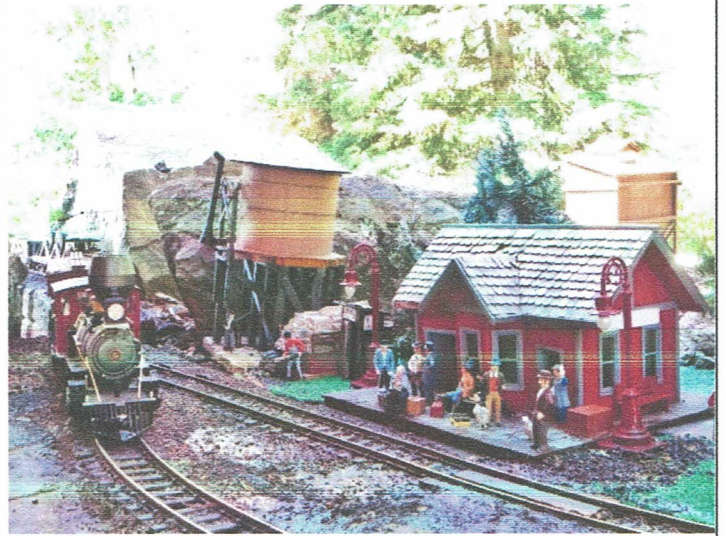
Part of making a railway believable is the creation of a reasonable imitation of recognizable scenic features such as roads, grass, trees, and water. Indoors, we have to simulate living things the best we can. Outdoors, we can combine the real thing with some artistic fakery.



Trains pass at Nordegg Station on my indoor railway

Any good model train hobby shop will have several softcover books on the subject of scenery, covering methods and materials. Most methods used for HO and N scale railways work fine for indoor large scale railways. Outdoor scenic effects are not as well covered, but a few books and videos are available to guide you. My railway is indoors, so my experience with outdoor railways is limited to that of my friends and my reading of hobby magazines over the last 40 years.

My objective with my model railway 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. I can run it any way I want!



Train approaching Glacier Station on my outdoor railway.

Set some ground rules for yourself. Choose an era, plus or minus about 20 years. Pick a typical locale - mountainous, prairie, sea port, river and lake, or urban. Select the operating style - main line, branch line, terminal, standard or narrow gauge. Allow for some operating flexibility - continuous running and switching. Keep the engineering reasonably simple so it is fun to build and easy to maintain.

Establish two or three major scenic elements - a station, an industry, or a town. Choose rolling stock and buildings that mirror your ground rules. If gardening is part of the plan, allow for growth of the plants. Keep garden maintenance chores in mind. Plan your drainage very carefully and integrate scenic features such as bridges and trestles into this plan.

Lots of mini-scenes, some good sound effects, some lighting for evening operations, good scene separation by trees, mountains, or buildings, and some elevation changes help provide the illusion of distance and space. Properly scaled figures, animals, and vehicles make the scenes come alive. Avoid mixing different scales or eras of rolling stock. You can own a variety - just don't run them all at the same time. You could "update" a railway in minutes by changing vehicles and people to "set the era" and run the appropriate trains for that time period. You could even swap out a few buildings to give appropriate background for a modern train

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and swap them back again for an old-timer.

My 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 right doesn't bother me. I love to look at other people's fine-scale models but I can't build them myself, so it's the illusion of realism that counts with me, not "real" realism.

You may decide to have more whimsy, or more fidelity to scale, or more prototypical operations), or more garden and less trains. It's your choice and you are free to change your mind any time. Whatever illusion you strive for, have fun!

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SCENERY FOR LARGE SCALE RAILWAYS: TRACK BALLAST

Begin the scenery effect by building roads and ballasting the track. For indoor railways, let's assume the plywood and Styrofoam terrain is painted in reasonable rock and dirt textures. Let's also assume most of the buildings are in place and have been fitted to the terrain - there is no more glaring error than an unsupported corner on a building or a bridge. For outdoor railways, there are two approaches. The most common is the "real" garden railway with real dirt, real plants, real ground cover. The other approach is to use weather resistant scenery like AstroTurf and plastic trees and foliage. Buildings can sit on the diet, on the carpet, or on movable modules that can be brought in out of the weather.

Chicken grit and white glue are used for track ballast and to surface gravel roads. Concrete can be used for paved roads. Sifted sand from the kids sandbox is fine, too, as long as it is not too fine. Chicken grit is sold in 20 pound bags at agricultural supply stores. Be sure the grit is crushed stone and not crushed sea shells - the shell fragments do not make realistic ballast. I used two bags for 500 feet of track and 50 feet of roads across about a 3 year period.

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Real ballast stones vary from 1 to 3 inches – that's the equivalent of 8 to 24 sand/grit grains laid end to end on a one inch strip. Do not use "pea gravel" – it is often recommended for ballast, but it is far too big to be realistic on most large scale model railways. Pea gravel is great for an underlay below the finer ballast on outdoor railways.



Chicken grit and white glue ballast on my indoor railway represents high grade limestone gravel



Chicken grit and outdoor white glue, painted with a mahogany stain to represent a granite or sandstone gravel.

I paint the visible side of all rails with Floquil "Rail Brown" before laying the ballast. Some people paint the ties a more weathered gray-brown

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to eliminate the “fresh creosote” look of commercial track. Clean the top of the rails with paint thinner on a paper towel, then scrub with a dry towel after painting.

To ballast the track, mix 1 part white glue with 1 parts water in a large squeeze bottle. Add a good squirt of dish detergent to make “wet” water. Stir well but do not shake. Squeeze the glue mixture out of the bottle between the track ties and beside the ties for a stretch of 4 feet or so. Don't worry about glue on the ties - it will run off or get wiped off when you spread the ballast. Buy the glue in 1 gallon (4 liter) containers from hardware stores - I have used more than 20 gallons in 10 years on roads, ballast, and grass on my indoor railway and about the same on my outdoor railway. Indoor white glue is cheaper but can only be used indoors. Outdoor glue is needed for the outdoors..

Pour the chicken grit ballast between the ties (between the rails first). Spread and level the grit and tamp gently with a blunt instrument. Ballast should not fill above the ties. Brush all excess ballast from the rails and the tops of the ties. Keep grit out of switch machines, guard rails, frogs, and switch points. Finally, pour more glue on the top of the ballast until it is soaked through.

Then pour more ballast outside the rails. Shape the slope outside the ties, tamp gently, then pour the glue on this part of the ballast. Wipe top surface of rails clean with a damp paper towel then scrub thoroughly with a dry paper towel.

The glue may run to undesirable areas. Use paper towels to soak up excess. Protect floor and carpets with plastic sheet. Move on to the next four foot section and start over. Repeat the glue mixture at least two more times, spaced 24 or 48 hours apart. The glue dries clear and the ballast returns to its original color. Indoors, sprinkle brown and black powdered chalk or poster paint sparingly to the ballast to give some color to the monotonous gray of the chicken grit. Real trains dripped a lot of oil over time, not to mention what comes out of older passenger cars. A one inch dry paint brush is helpful in spreading the loose powder off the ties, while leaving hints of weathering. Add some weeds on branch lines and along the edges of the ballast.

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Outdoors, I use mahogany stain to create a brownish tinge to the ballast. For mainlines, you might leave the ballast natural gray.

Indoor white glue is water soluble so if you want to rip up some track, soak it for a few hours first. Then pry gently. When lifted out, soak the track sections in a large pail and scrub off excess glue and ballast. Outdoor carpenters glue also dries clear, but it is not water soluble, so you cannot recover the track easily. It is, however, pliable like the soles of running shoes and can be peeled from the track, with some effort.

It's a dirty, boring job, but someone has to do it!

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SCENERY FOR LARGE SCALE RAILWAYS: ROADS

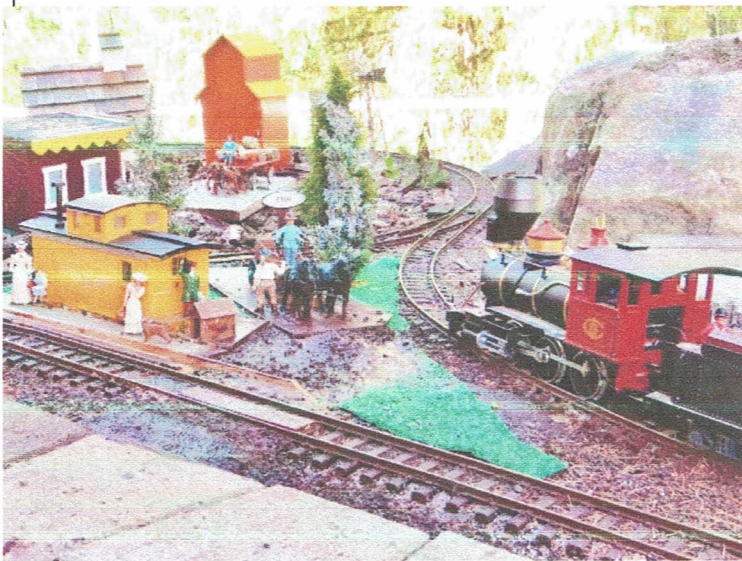
For indoor gravel roads, outline the roads with a felt marker. Sculpt or laminate the road profile into or onto the Styrofoam terrain using more Styrofoam and the vinyl glue. Most modelers have to selectively compress their roads by minimizing ditches and creating a fairly narrow road surface. Mine average only 6 to 8 inches wide and cars can not easily pass each other. Seven inches is more realistic, but still very narrow.



Road crossing on my indoor railway

Paint full strength white glue inside the road outlines. Pour on a one-eighth inch (3 mm) layer of grit onto the glue. Wait 2 hours. Then fill a squeeze bottle with white glue, diluted with 1 parts water to one part glue. Add a squirt of dish detergent and stir well before applying the glue over the gritty surface. This will seal the road surface. While wet, you can sculpt ruts or potholes. Wait 24 hours and apply a second seal coat. Repeat as needed for thicker grit. Be sure the grit is slightly below track level at rail crossings.

Build a plank road crossing using Popsicle sticks (craft sticks at craft stores). Be sure to cut off the rounded ends of the sticks. Weather them a bit by scuffing with a razor saw or hack saw blade. Paint light gray or tan. Fasten the crossing to the track ties with full strength white glue. Use the same technique to build board side walks and steps.



Road crossing on my outdoor railway.

When the road is really dry, a thin wash of brown or gray paint may be desirable on the gravel. I used the same acrylic spray paints as I used earlier on the Styrofoam - a very light over spray of several shades looks best. Powdered chalk or a dusting of dry poster paint sealed with a light spray of Krylon matte finish also works well.

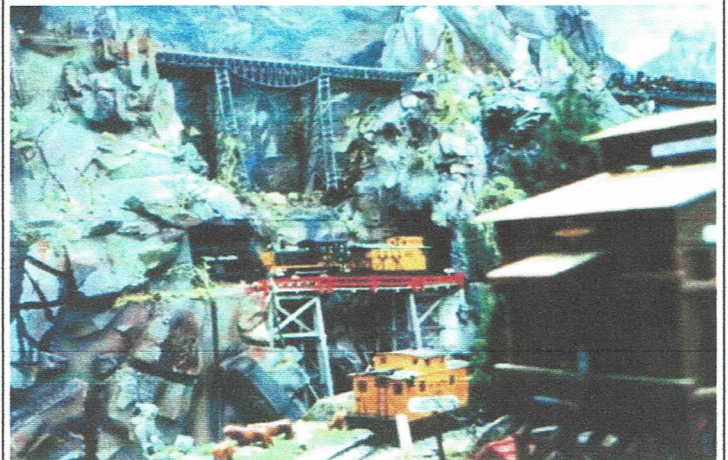
Good quality art board painted light to medium matte gray makes an attractive paved road. Only brand new pavement is black. Score minor cracks with an Xacto

knife. Patches made with tar can be drawn with fine black felt tip pens. Apply white or yellow lines with thin drafting tape. Minimum pavement width should be 8 inches. A coat of Krylon matte finish will seal your artwork and allow you to wipe off dust and dirt once a year. Shoulders on paved country roads can be the same grit as described for the gravel road. In urban areas, concrete sidewalks may be needed. Build up the sidewalk with art board to 3/16 inches above the road surface. Test fit the pieces then paint with Floquil "Old Concrete" and draw or score the expansion lines. To install roads and sidewalks, use white glue and weight the art board while the glue dries.

Outdoors, I use green-treated plywood cut to the correct shape, covered with the glue-grit mixture, painted to the tint of my choice. In many cases, the road and adjacent buildings are on the same piece of plywood. and the whole can be brought indoors for maintenance and winter storage. Since I use AstroTurf for grass, the underlying redwood bark is shaped for ditches and hills, and the carpet laid in place. Bushes and weeds can be added with plastic foliage, indoors or out.

This is your chance to become a qualified civil engineer!

SCENERY FOR LARGE SCALE RAILWAYS: GRASS AND WEEDS



Rugged Styrofoam scenery is dotted with weeds, grass, and trees on my indoor railway.

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Indoors, I use either the carpet trick or loose ground cover glued to the underlying plywood or Styrofoam. Several manufacturers offer grass, weed, and foliage products.

Grass is often made from "ground foam" - it is foam vinyl that is ground up into fine, medium, or coarse texture. It's also called "turf". It comes in many shades and colors and variety is the spice of live grass. I use coarse ground foam in several shades of green, gold, and brown. Spring time may need some brown and lots of bright green. Summer needs darker green. Fall is more yellow-green with shades of tan and brown. For winter scenes, I use flaked plastic snow available in all department or craft stores at Christmas time. Colors in your area may vary.

Decide where you want wild grass to grow - ditches, rural country side, open fields, behind factories, any crevasse or flat area in your mountains. Paint full strength white glue where you want to grow grass. Sprinkle coarse ground foam liberally then soak it with a 1:2 glue/water plus soap mixture. Protect your floors. Soak it again in 24 hours.



AstroTurf pastures at Rocking Are Herefords Ranch on my outdoor railway.

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Outdoors, I use indoor/outdoor carpet (AstroTurf) as a starting point. It is laid on a two inch layer of redwood bark which sits on the soil underneath. This allows the carpet to drain and dry properly and the bark prevents mold. Where trees, roads, or buildings coincide with greenery, I place everything on green-treated plywood, with lots of outdoor white glue. The carpet extends as far as necessary to reach the rocks or track ballast, so that it blends into the permanent scenery. In turn, all this sits on the redwood bark.

Tired of white glue? Use cheap indoor-outdoor carpet to make a manicured lawn or a shaggy cornfield. The kind I use is called "artificial grass" - how original can you get! Wheat fields can be mimicked with long shag carpet in green (growing) or gold (mature). A shaved portion behind a swather or combine would be neat. The vinyl glue used for the Styrofoam holds carpet easily.

Weeds between the rails or in the ditches can be made from small tufts of ground foam spotted in individual drops of white glue. Shag carpet tufts and knitting wool are also used. Some decorative dried flower leaves look like broad leaf weeds. Wild flowers come from tiny dried flowers found in the craft stores. Spanish moss, also available at craft stores, hobby shops, and my back yard, can represent wild bushy areas.

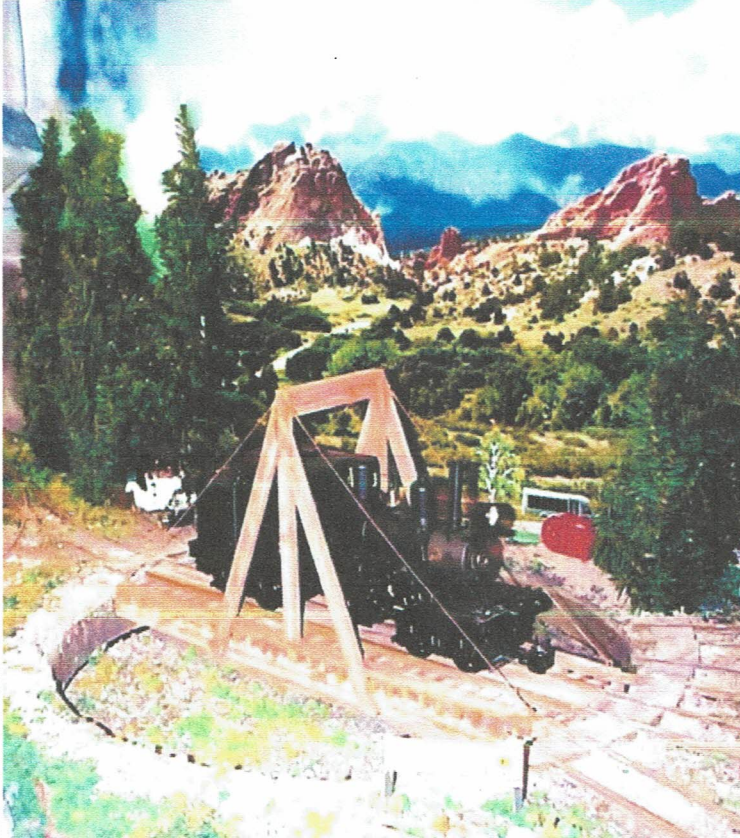
Mice got into my train shed this year and harvested much of my natural scenery materials - they'll get mouse bait next year. I've also had to apply ant bait in a few locations from time to time. Grass and weeds grow everywhere, except maybe on mine railings, paved roads, and deserts. Spread greenery liberally just as nature intended.

PAGE 22. SCENERY FOR LARGE SCALE RAILWAYS: TREES

Before you plant trees, be sure your track work, roads, and ground cover are finished in the area. Trees are big and get in the way. Most of my trees are of three types: Christmas decorations with no

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snow for summer scenes, Christmas decorations with snow for Alpine elevations, and bare fir, birch, and unidentified deciduous trees at high elevations. This works for both indoors and outdoor railways and is the cheapest stuff you can buy at craft stores, especially a day or two after Christmas.

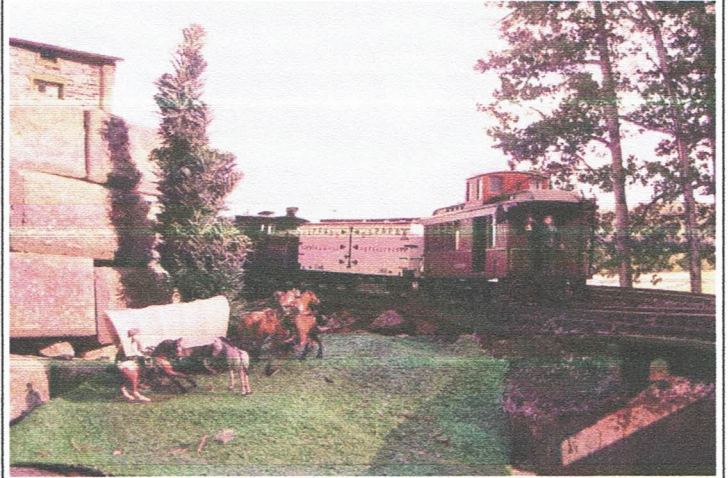


Trees on my indoor railway bracketing an enlarged photo of the Colorado Rockies, taken from the parking lot at Garden Of The Gods

My trees range in height from 18 inches (used as scene dividers) to 3 inches at high elevations (to help create perspective). Selective compression is needed with trees. A 100 foot spruce would be 4 feet high in large scale and 12 inches across near the bottom. We can't afford this much realism, indoors or out. The max that survives the eye is about 20 inches tall.

Small cuttings from these trees form bushes and shrubs. Each tree is doctored or cut to individual shapes - too many identical trees won't look right. Some Christmas decorations are too conical. These are hard to fix and I still have a few that need to be replaced.

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The cowboy camp at Lone Pine on my outdoor railway. The trees in the background are the real thing, about 40 feet away.

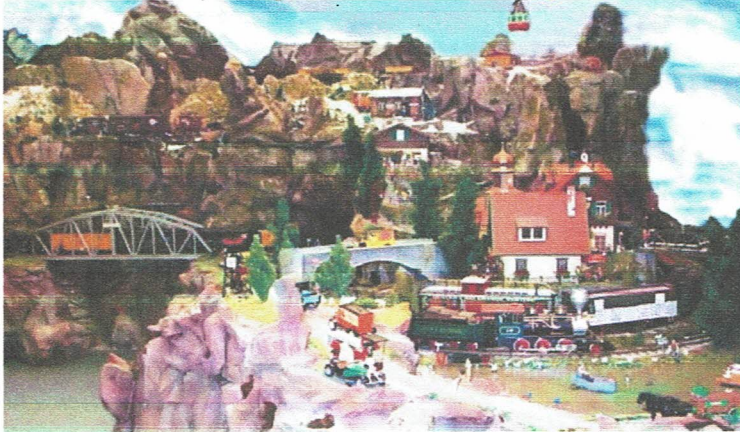
LeMax, Department 56, Dicken's Village, and others offer many tree varieties, mostly for wintertime. Some are more realistic than my trees - some are no better - but all are more expensive. I did buy some two dimensional trees at close out prices to place along my backdrop. These help ease the transition from tabletop to backdrop. Most trees have a wire mandrel in a base so they will stand up on their own. Pull off the base. Drill a hole in the plywood or poke a slim hole in the Styrofoam for the tree. More white glue and plant the tree. Tree size and spacing should be quite random, but there is no point hiding small trees behind big ones - we don't have to be that realistic. Most should stand vertically, but near dead on wind blown slopes could lean a bit. Gather some small branches from the nearest neighbor's hedge and use these for dead fall under the live trees.

Several detail parts suppliers sell tree stump castings to use in a cut-over woodlot. Pola and others have axes, bucksaws, Swede saws, logging tools, and wood piles to add to the forest scene. Some deer, moose, and birds, a hunter, a hobo, a moonshine still, or a family picnic could improve your forest immensely.

A recent Model Railroader article was titled "Trees Are Models Too". If you have the time, you can model trees to very realistic standards. So far, I have not tried this - I guess it depends on your personal priorities.

SCENERY FOR LARGE SCALE RAILWAYS: WATER

Water features on an indoor large scale railway are tricky. Outdoors, of course, we use the real thing. Real water is almost out of the question indoors, but I'm sure it has been done. Several good articles have appeared in recent Model Railroader magazines and the topic is covered well in most scenery manuals from the hobby shops. I have three suggestions.



The duck pond (lower right) on my indoor railway

1. For lakes, use a flat piece of Styrofoam surrounded by higher sculpted landscape. Paint the lake very dark blue-green or black with lighter blue to brown around the edges. Cover this with three coats of clear varnish. Decorate the shore with real sand, fine dirt, weeds, logs, a dock, some trees, a moose, a fisherman and you are done. Don't forget the white glue to hold everything down.



Hereford cattle graze beside Shadow Lake, which is spanned by two bridges on my outdoor railway. The Lake is a vinyl garden tub fed by the rain trough downspout and is almost always full to the brim.

2. For flat, meandering streams use the same technique but paint some white water around rocks and dead fall in the water.
3. For water falls, make several small pools as above at various elevations, then connect the higher pool to the next one down with silicone caulk. The silicone can be spread on white polystyrene first and then cut to length. Touch up the silicone where it leaves the upper pool and where it joins the lower pool. Paint some white water on the silicone and where the water hits the lower pool. Use some white glass wool to represent foam. Lots of rocks and white water make the scene. Vegetation abounds around the spray.

There are several low melting point plastics on the hobby market that can be used to replace the varnish. The plastic runs like water, so it is still difficult to get any depth to the scene. You can't see into most water in North America anyway, so this is no great loss. However, you can tease this stuff into waves as it cools and a little paint can create white caps. CAUTION: the low MP plastics can melt Styrofoam.

I have two other water features. One is a large blue carpet with white fleck on the floor to represent ocean in front of Gorgeous Gorge. This photographs beautifully. Gorgeous Gorge is a four foot water fall, but not built exactly as described above. It is carved from the Styrofoam, painted, and decorated as for the meandering stream. The reason for this is that most of the waterfall is hidden by three bridges and lives in shadow most of the time - no fancy details needed. A few beaver, some bears, and a troll inhabit the dimness.

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