

The Mail Car

Newsletter of the St Lawrence Division – NMRA

Issue no. 24 - May 2003

St. Lawrence Division web site: www.cyberus.ca/~g_knowles/sld/sld_main.htm

From the Superintendent's Desk

By Stanley Conley

This early spring has certainly been a busy time for the SLD, a train show appearance, a very well attended meet, planning for the last meet of the season and some long term planning for next year has kept the division and it's exec hopping!

On Saturday the 21st and Sunday 22nd of March the SLD was hard at work representing the NMRA to the fine folks in Kingston at the model train show organized by the Kingston Division of the Canadian Railway Historical Society. We had a core group of members and volunteers demonstrating their unique skills to the public and fielding questions on trains, models thereof, techniques and materials and of course our association with the SLD, the NFR and the NMRA. The individuals who devoted their time were Peter Joyce, Alex Binkley, Peter Nesbitt, Chris Butler, Stanley Conley, Vic Dohar, Bob Hobbs, Grant Knowles, David Steer, Gary Baillargeon, Carl Swail. A hearty thank you goes out to each of you from me for stepping up to the plate and offering your time.

Saturday March 29th found a great many of us at the Public Library in Carleton Place, so many of us in fact that we had a standing room only crowd! I believe the official count was 37 attendees which makes this the largest gathering yet. The library provided us with a very nice meeting room, bright and airy with tables and chairs to meet our needs, however the room dimensions might be a good thing to include on the library's web site for future reference, as we did fill the room. It's a good thing we are all friends.

The meeting began with short official announcements and moved right on to our first presentation, an NMRA video of Pete Moffet providing tip and tricks on finishes and weathering techniques for a wide variety of models. The video was warmly received, the information was well presented and Pete has an enjoyable sense of humor to punctuate the delivery.

After a review of the models and other items brought for display and a short refreshment break, the meeting continued with Grant Knowles providing a walk through on how to install an operating flashing crossbuck on the SLD module. Starting with a description of the components, crossbuck, sensors and electronic modules the clinic

continued with the trials and tribulations of mounting the crossbuck on the existing module, locating the operating electronics and sensors and finally the adjustment process to actually get the sensors to detect the presence (or not) of the trains. This little bit of animation will definitely enhance the module when displayed at public shows. Grant's answer to the question 'where is the sound of the crossing alarm?' was, 'do you want to listen to it for 9 hours straight at a show?'



Grant Knowles leads the members through the installation of a set of working highway crossing signals.

We managed to wrap up our meeting before 1pm, which might also be a record, and immediately proceeded to our first visit, the restored and rehabilitated CP train station a couple of blocks from the library. The station has been converted to a day care facility with the outside preserved close to it's operational state, and the inside completely renovated to meet the needs of a modern child care facility. The original use of the building is not forgotten though, everywhere there are details to remind the users of the heritage of the building, from wallpaper borders with trains, bathroom tiles depicting trains, signs for each room with railway connotations, and there is a wainscoting that reminds one of the original finishes. The highlight though is the model railroad built into a space that supports a raised activity area. The layout is visible through windows in the support walls, at small child height, both in the children's area and in the entrance lobby for the building. The layout is very simple but is a great way to tie the idea of the building and it's past use together in the imagination of a small child, future model railroaders all.

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August issue - July 15

Special thanks to Diane Dodds for proof-reading and general nit-picking

The March display report

By Alex Binkley

This reviewer will likely be accused of sporting a bias but it has to be pointed out that models in the 1/64 scale dominated the March SLD display table.

Bill Meredith led the way with some of his highly detailed Sn3 steamers and cars. He brought out the finished version of the Denver South Park & Pacific Mason Bogie 2-6-6. The locomotive was on display in its unpainted state back in November. Still to be added to the loco is DCC sound and more weight and coal. Bill notes that the design of the loco makes it a finicky model but then so was the prototype.

Bill also had a pilot model of a locomotive that he intends to construct six more copies of to get freight cars up a 4% grade on his under-construction layout. Bill started with items from his scrapbox and added parts from a variety of suppliers to produce a loco with a top scale speed of 12 miles an hour. The work that goes into these models is quite impressive.

Still in Sn3, Bill also displayed a DSP&P waycar that he made from styrene. He thinks more than 300 parts went into the model that has working windows, doors and brake system. He also brought out a turnout kit that he made for constructing switches for his layout. He started with a frog jig built in brass and then created a paper template up of a switch with CorelDraw so that he knows where to place the ties and switch motor. He also displayed an On3 D&RG 0-6-0 that he made for a customer from a 1975 Kemtron kit. He describes the kit as not for the faint of heart. Bill also showed some photos he took while riding in a CN locomotive over what is now Ottawa Central country.

Your humble scribe brought out two S scale locos, a S Helper Service SW9, painted and lettered for the Canada Southern. The unit is heavily weathered and adorned with added spark arrestors close to what used to be found on the SW1200RSs. He also had a new American Models unpainted SD 60. The unit comes with a standard cab and a wide cab that will be added on. The unit needs a lot of details including a new front pilot as well as the red and blue colours of the CSR.

Bob Hobbs had three HO locomotives including a P2K SD9 in those lovely Great Northern colours, an UP SD9 which Bob made by applying an Athearn shell to an Atlas SD24 frame. The unit was Bob's first stab at weathering. He also had an Atlas C425 painted for the Spokane, Portland Seattle.

Brian Earl had the latest in the NMRA's living legends freight car series, in O scale nonetheless!



Neil Lowes' Smiths Falls roundhouse on the Ashton Central Lines.

Important Dates

SLD Meetings

- May 24, 2003 Smiths Falls Railway Museum, 90 William Street West, Smiths Falls, Ontario
- September 27, 2003 TBA

OVAR Meetings

- May 13, 2003 St. Anthony Soccer Club Hall, 523 St. Anthony Street, Ottawa
- June 10, 2003 St. Anthony Soccer Club Hall, 523 St. Anthony Street, Ottawa

NMRA National Convention, Maple Leaf 2003

- July 13-19 2003, Toronto, Canada
- www.ml2003.com

Modelling Tips

from the machine shops of the

Bonnechere & Braeside Railway Company

A number of the different DCC systems use 6 connector telephone wire with RJ12 plugs for the cab bus. One can either buy the cables with plugs attached or make their own. In either case, and especially in the latter it is prudent to test the cable to ensure that all connections are made and made properly.

No doubt there are a number of ways that folks do this. I understand that Digitrax market a tester that tests the bus after a cable is connected. Since I use NCE this was of no use to me and besides which I would prefer to test the cable before installing it.

I bought a household wall receptacle that has two female 6 wire, jacks on the front and screw terminals at the back. From the rear of each jack there are 6 wires of the appropriate colours running to the screw terminals. I just plug both ends of my cable into the jacks and with my ohm meter check that there is zero resistance between each pair of the same coloured screw terminals. Depending on how the cables for your brand of DCC are set up you may be testing between other terminals, but the principle is the same.

These receptacles are available at Gervais Electronics on Industrial for less than \$7.00.

Peter Nesbitt
General Manager

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The afternoon's activities were visits to two local model railroads, Neil Lowes' Ashton Central Lines and Brian Hanna's Canadian Pacific National Railroad. The first is in the benchwork and track stage of development and the second is a mature layout with portions undergoing serious renovation and upgrading for operations.

Brian has been a long time model railroader with the current layout in development or redevelopment since the mid 1980's, the very large basement layout features CPR and CPNRR operating in the Ottawa Valley to Sudbury region in the transition era. With more than 50% scened and many areas currently under development the layout offers a nice backdrop to Brian's real interest, operation, and with 2000 feet of mainline there is ample opportunity for operation.



Brian Hanna's version of Fitzroy Harbour is a busy spot!

Neil is at a much earlier stage with his Ashton Central Lines, which centers around the operations of the Ottawa Valley Chalk River Subdivision. The layout features large sized renditions of Smiths Falls and Carleton Place as the principle visible locations and staging representing the east and west connections. Neil has the majority of his trackwork in place with some buildings mocked up to demonstrate the potential. Neil Plans to run CPR and ACL trains following prototypical practices with an emphasis on steam operations near the end of the era. Neil Displays great faith on his layout, at one point the double track main leaves Carleton place and curves around the end of the peninsula, entering a tunnel/scenic divider as it begins the climb to the upper portion of the line. The outside ends of the ties are almost over the edge of the unscened benchwork, I hope on the scened version there is a treed rise on the outside curve to keep the passengers from bolting for the inside of the curve seats!

Looking forward the SLD will have one further meet this season, May 31st, at the train museum in Smiths Falls, with four clinic/activities planned for the morning and early afternoon. a BBQ and railfanning potential on the CP line.

Improving Peco Turnouts

By Paul Anderson

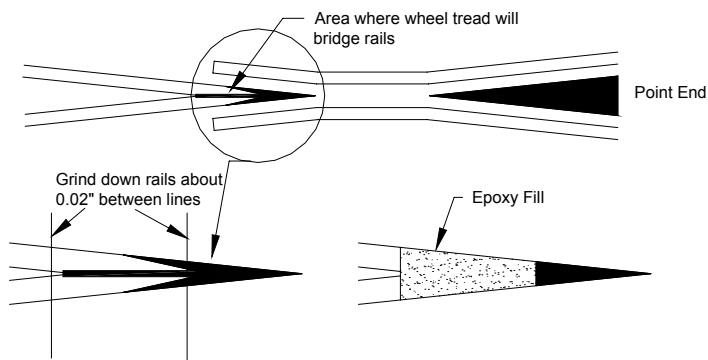
Peco Long turnouts have a minor problem in the frog area. The exit rails coming out of the frog are very close together in the frog and the wheel tread of an engine can bridge the gap.

For analog and most DCC equipped locos this is not a problem. There is a small spark but the short is so short that it does not trip the short protection of the power supply and the loco carries on with no problem.

For some sound equipped locos it is a different story. The slightest glitch in the power and the decoder resets to the beginning. You now wait for the engine to start then finally you can apply some power to get moving (very slowly if you have a lot of momentum applied) only to move an inch and have the next wheel short. Probably now the loco didn't have enough revs in the fly wheels to carry you off the short so it is now out with the 0-5-0 switcher to move your train.

My solution is grind down the offending portion of the frog and build it up again with good quality epoxy.

The diagram below shows where the offending portion of the frog is.



Grind down the rails about 20 thousandths of an inch between the two lines indicated.

Next fill this area with a good quality epoxy. Don't worry about a lump above the rails but take care that the sides are smooth and there is no epoxy in the flange way. A slow set epoxy is usually very good. What you want is an epoxy that hardens to a glass like texture. Some epoxies never get very hard and tend to wear down easily. Don't rush this step, let the epoxy cure for a few days before filing.

To file, wrap a strip of writing paper (single layer) around each end of the file leaving a one inch gap in the centre. The paper will protect the stock rails as you file. Carefully file down the epoxy until it is level with the rails and the diverging point of the frog. File the sides of the filler to smooth out and square up the edge.

You should now have a very DCC friendly turnout.



An overview of Neil Lowe's layout with some of the day's visitors.



The city of Roughrider on Brian Hanna's Canadian Pacific National Railroad.

Achievement Program Judging at the May Meet

Once again the SLD will be offering Achievement Program model judging at the May meet. Last May, we had 5 models submitted with two merit awards issued – not a bad showing. It certainly indicates there are a number of very talented individuals in our membership.

Please be reminded this is a non-competitive activity for members to have their models evaluated/graded against the AP standards. Of course, this "model judging service" is available at any time to the association members whether it is at conventions, meets or even by request. The whole process is quite painless, rather enjoyable and educational. So don't be hesitant, bring your model in with the associated forms and give it a try.

If you are interested, please contact the Achievement Program Chair, Grant Knowles, in advance of the meet to ensure we are properly equipped for your model(s). Even if you wish to receive some feed back without being "officially judged", by all means bring it out as we'd love to talk to you about it.

We will continue to offer this service at the November and May meets and on an "as requested" basis. This timing was chosen to align with "returning to the hobby" in the fall and a last "fling" before the summer break.

Should you have any questions, Grant Knowles, the SLD AP Chairman, will be more than happy to answer any questions you might have regarding the completion of the AP form, etc.

Grant can be reached at:

Phone - (613) 825 - 5438, or
by email at: g_knowles@cyberus.ca

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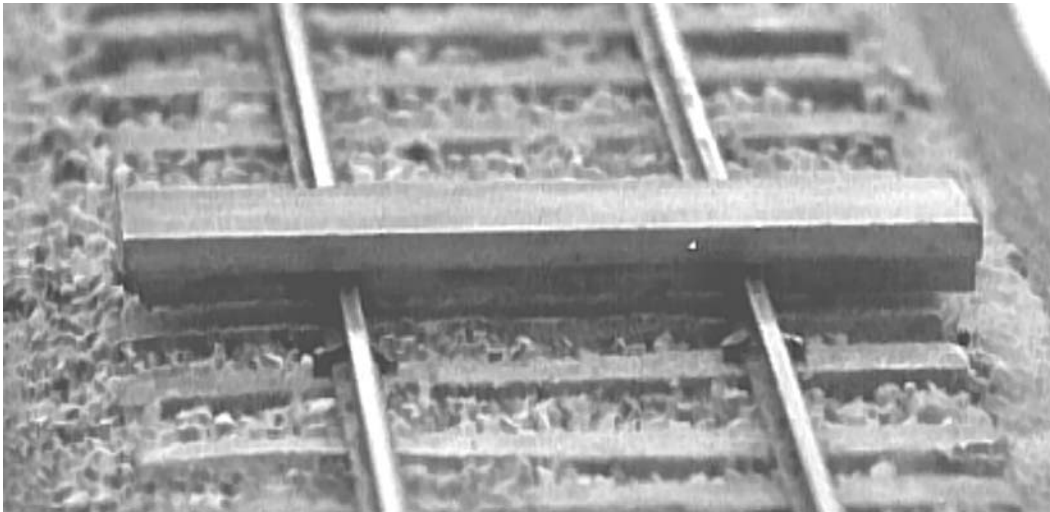
Quick and Simple Track Gauges That Are Low-cost

Make your own tools!

By Chris Butler

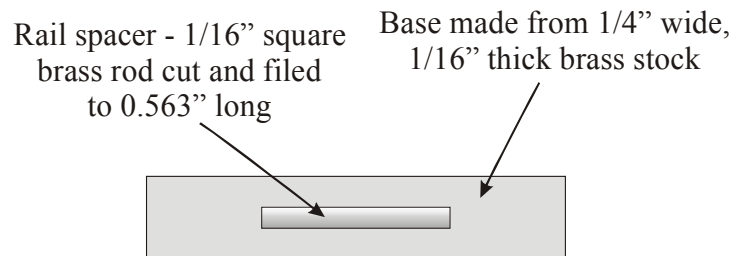
Photos and Illustrations by the author

Some while ago, I decided that I would hand-lay all of the track and turnouts on my Sn3 Goose Lake portable switching module. After the Mt. Albert sugar pine ties were glued in place, sanded and stained, I realized that I needed something to hold the rails in place while they were being spiked down. I had temporarily mislaid my one and only PBL 3-point brass gauge and didn't want to wait while a replacement was being mailed to me.



The author's home-made, solid brass Sn3 track gauge seen here checking the rail spacing of his 3' gauge code 70 test track.

Being an adventurous type, I decided to make my own gauges. I tried various ideas ($\frac{1}{8}$ " plywood, 40 thou styrene sheet and brass sheet; all with slots cut in them for the rails) but none of these approaches proved to be durable or accurate enough. A few rough prototypes later, I settled upon a really simple design. I started with a length of K&S Engineering $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide by $\frac{1}{16}$ " thick brass stock (available from local hobby shops) and cut off a length approximately $1\frac{3}{8}$ " long. This would form the base of the gauge. I then cleaned up the saw cut with a file to an overall length of 1.275" (in my case, the same as a 6" 6" long tie in $\frac{1}{64}$ th scale). Next, I cut a length of K&S $\frac{1}{16}$ " square brass stock and carefully filed it to 0.563" long (i.e. 3 feet in S scale as per my NMRA gauge) using a micrometer periodically to check its length. The beauty of this approach is that if you make a mistake, you simply cut off another piece and try again - simple. Anyway, this piece formed the rail spacer.



**Figure 1: Base and rail spacer
(not to scale)**

I then fluxed and soldered the rail spacer to the centre of the $\frac{1}{16}$ " thick base. The rail spacer sets the minimum distance between the rails.

Once the base was cool, I cleaned up the solder joint with an old file. I then cut two short pieces of square stock, fluxed and soldered them about 0.040" from each end of the rail spacer in order to clear my code 70 rail heads and hold the rails in place – cost effective plus you can use old automobile spark gap gauges (remember those?) to get the 0.040" spacing. Bingo, in 30 mins I had two good and accurate code 70 gauges - quick. As an added bonus, if you cut the base to be the same length as the tie, you can easily see if your rails are located centrally on the ties *before* you start spiking 'em down.

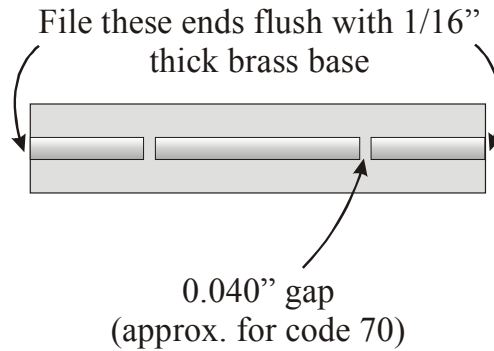
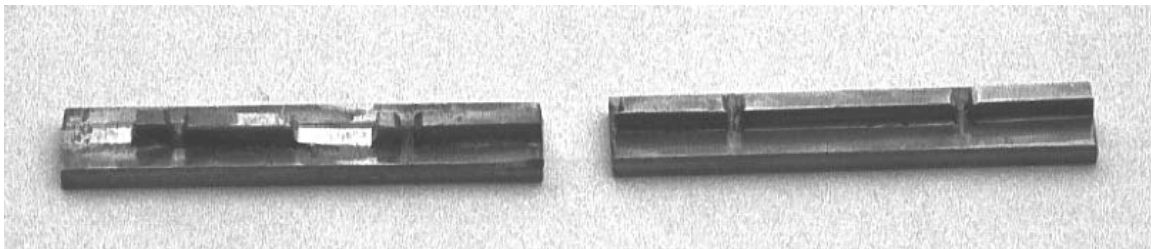


Figure 2: Completed Sn3, code 70 track gauge (not to scale)

If you want to use them to set-up the rail spacing in turnouts, simply grind the rail spacer out a bit to clear the switch rails.



The author's completed track gauges flipped upside-down – the one on the left has a ground out spacer bar in order to gauge track rails within a turnout.

The same design can be used for other scales and codes of track – see Table 1.

Table 1 – Track gauge dimensions by scale and gauge.

Scale / Gauge	Assumed rail tie length ²	Base length	Distance between rails (as per NMRA gauges)	Rail code ³	Railhead clearance
HO (standard)	8' 0"	1.100"	0.650"	100	0.045"
HOn3	6' 6"	0.900"	0.414"	70	0.040"
Sn3	6' 6"	1.220"	0.563"	70	0.040"
On2	6' 0"	1.500"	0.500"	70	0.040"
On30	6' 6"	1.625"	0.625" ¹	70	0.040"
On3	6' 6"	1.625"	0.750"	70	0.040"

Notes: 1 - Most On30 rolling stock on the market these days uses HO scale, standard gauge rail spacing (i.e. 0.650").

2 – Estimated rail tie length. Your dimensions may vary – i.e. for HO scale 8' 6" ties, calculate the Base length by dividing 8' 6" (or 102") by 87 to yield 1.172".

3 – For code 83, use a 0.045" gap.

Do they work? I've used them to hold the rails while I've spiked 'em down and find they've worked really well. The 1/16" brass stock makes them heavy enough to stay put while I push the spikes into the ties.

Are they quick, simple and cost effective? You bet! You can easily make 4 or 5 of them in an afternoon including a visit to a local hobby shop (assuming it's nearby). And, my brass stock amounted to only a few dollars with plenty over for another project.



Next Division Meet

St Lawrence Division – NMRA

When:

Saturday, May 31st, 2003

Where:

Smiths Falls Railway Museum
90 William Street West, Smiths Falls, Ontario

Doors open at 9:30am -- Admission \$5.00

What's on:

Morning:

Division Business

- Year end report

Clinics

- Smith Falls' lift bridge
- Static trackside signals
- Preview of next years theme

Achievment Program Judging

Display

- Eastern ontario railways

Door Prizes

- You never know what to expect!

Special Interest:

- BBQ lunch

