

THE LOOE BRANCH



Despite its small size and simple track plan, the Looe branch enjoys a good standard of N scale modelling. On the 'hinge' side are the station and sidings, as seen here. Station is a typical modern type as seen on many 'pay train' branches. The Class 08 is shunting the adjacent yard.

Engaged on the Looe Branch

A layout for the smallest room, described by

Geoff Latham

No potted history of what is, was or might have been on the prototype; the Looe Branch exists only as an essay in small space modelling, drawing on the essence of the original and its name an irresistible pun.

The project began with the presentation of a wooden lavatory seat bearing the remnants of an 009 layout and a request for a working layout for the club stand at the forthcoming exhibition — time was against this but planning commenced on putting it to proper use.

I have long had a fascination for modelling small layouts — my model railway philosophy paralleling the theme of *Scale Model Trains* so aptly, summed up in the articles in the December 1985/January 1986 issue. To hand were two yards of Peco Super N track (bought for evaluation); a large radius N point (surplus to a previous project), a Farish 08 shunter (bought 'on offer' for the chassis) and a photograph of 08 938 in Railfreight livery. Scale, gauge and period were thus determined.

Baseboard

Construction was novel; all debris was removed, holes and cracks filled and the whole rubbed down to bare wood. Decorative wooden moulding was glued and pinned to the rear to cover the rough edges. One coat of wood dye and four coats of varnish produced a lavatory seat much improved in both appearance and smell!

Three rubber door stops screwed to the underside provided a stable, if not level, surface and modelling could commence.

Track plan

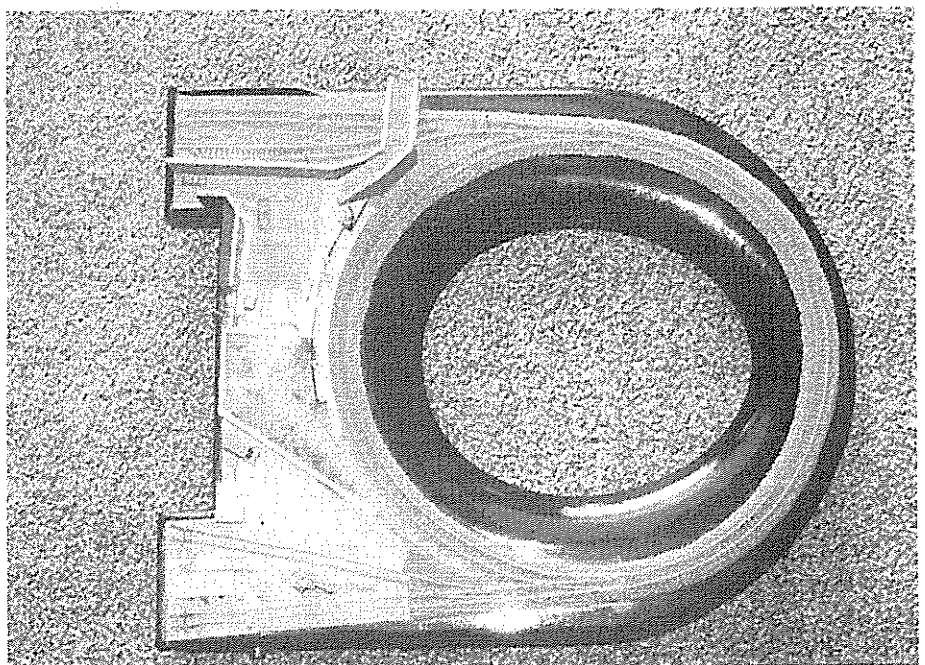
The shape and size left little scope, but the large radius point was quickly found to be too large so was replaced by four Peco Settrack points and an

acceptance of very tight curves.

The main idea was to use the wider area at the rear for scenics, split into four mini scenes — quayside freight yard, grassed scenic break, station square and fiddle yard — visual separation of the latter being provided by a high brick wall and footbridge.

No prizes for guessing why it's called the Looe Branch. Despite the light-hearted theme, the layout is a good one for a beginner in any scale. The track plan is self-evident from this overhead view.

Judicious juggling created two sidings able to hold three Peco 15ft wheelbase wagons and thus the ability to operate on the 'Wright Lines' basis. The passenger area was just sufficient for a rationalised platform and shelter.





Set up for running at exhibitions on top of its carrying box, the Looe Branch has something of a 'Thunderbox' look about it. The entire layout is roughly 2ft square in N gauge – very portable!

Track laying and wiring

Frustration was caused by the height of the new Peco track not matching the pointwork, but the use of varying thicknesses of balsa sub-bases overcame this and permitted a deep shouldered ballast to contrast with the varnished base.

The track lengths were cut to fit and soldered up using small pieces of copper wire and temporary pins put through the sleeper ends to prevent gauge narrowing. Two wires are sufficient and these were soldered to the outside rail in the yard and the inside rail of the oval, buried in the balsa sub-base and connected to wander plug sockets set in the rear.

The base was painted grey and, after it had been painted brown and rust, the trackwork was laid in place on a coat of 'Grab' adhesive. Granite ballast was tamped into place and the surplus removed, resulting in disappointment. Ballast coverage was poor and the sleepers appeared too thick. On completion of the scenic work further ballast was brushed into place and bonded with diluted white wood glue. The track was secured by pins in countersunk holes in the sleeper ends.

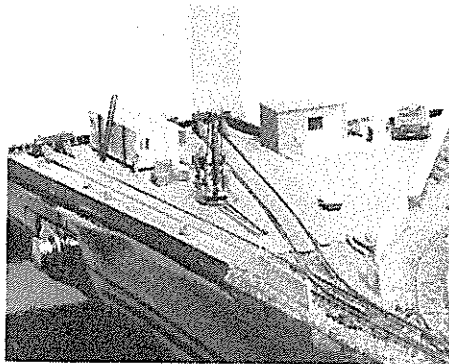
Point operation and uncoupling is by hand – part of the fun of a small layout.

Scenics

The various areas were marked out and road surfaces and balsa wood dividing walls, platform and bridge covered in scribed card or 2mm Scale Society embossed styrene brickwork and stonework. All buildings were constructed from styrene sheet and scrapbox oddments; the hill from scrap balsa, kitchen towel and brown tinted filler finished with flock and ground foam; the tree from an unravelled short length of multi-strand layout wire covered in Woodlands Scenics foliage. Most of the detailing items were made from scrap plastic (pillar box, telephone kiosk, station lamps) or oddments from the scrap box (people, telegraph poles). Bought-in items were yard crane, buffer stops, etched fencing, gas lamps (bargain box) and motor vehicles (two white metal cars from a bargain box).

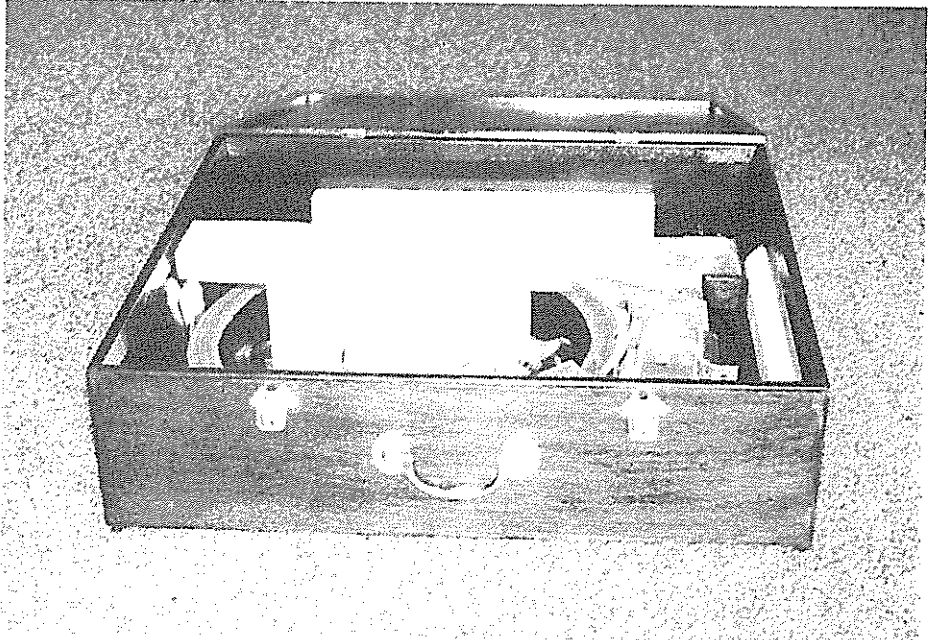
Stock

Small layouts only require small trains and stock is limited to eight wagons (as per 'Wrightlines') with



The goods yard is a neat example of the modern scene – a Speedlink terminal where a crane and fork lifts replace the old traditional goods shed. Note modern office and Portakabin.

Everything packs neatly inside the box for transport, including the controller. If you are short of space this could be the layout for you, virtually no bigger than an attaché case.



the 08 for freight services and a diesel railcar for passenger duties. The wagons are those in the Peco range with modern liveries chosen for variety and appearance rather than accuracy.

The 08, originally sporting LMS livery, has been modified and detailed in similar manner to the magazine's previous articles on OO and HO versions and repainted in Railfreight livery. Given the nature of the layout the lack of outside frames has been accepted.

The diesel railcar was obtained by butchering the Farish 1012 car set, which with a little detailing and repaint in chocolate and cream looks the part without being strictly accurate. The GWR railcar (in this case in BR finish) would be a better alternative as another option with the 08 'back dated' perhaps, to the 'green' period to match it. For this sort of small layout period and stock, can match your favourite era.

Presentation

One of my objectives is to keep each layout as compact and self-contained as possible, and the Looe Branch comprises the lavatory seat and a single small stock/control box which in operation doubles as backscene. The box was made from scrap ply covered in card and painted with light blue emulsion from a match pot.

The controller is a basic Hornby train set model, as it was to hand and fits the box. For protection and easy carriage, the components are housed in a ply box measuring 24in x 21in x 7in.

Operation

Despite the simple design, the layout can be operated in three ways: (1) Continuous run for display. (2) Timetable operation from fiddle yard to station and quay. (3) Shunting and sorting.

Conclusion

A quart into a pint pot maybe, but the layout achieves its primary objective of producing a colourful, rational, modern era layout with reasonable operating potential in an area 22in x 17in and has provided an opportunity to indulge in 2mm scale scenic modelling without having to fill a large space.

On the deficit side, the tight radius curves, dead frog points and poor controller do not provide spectacular running but it does prove that the step

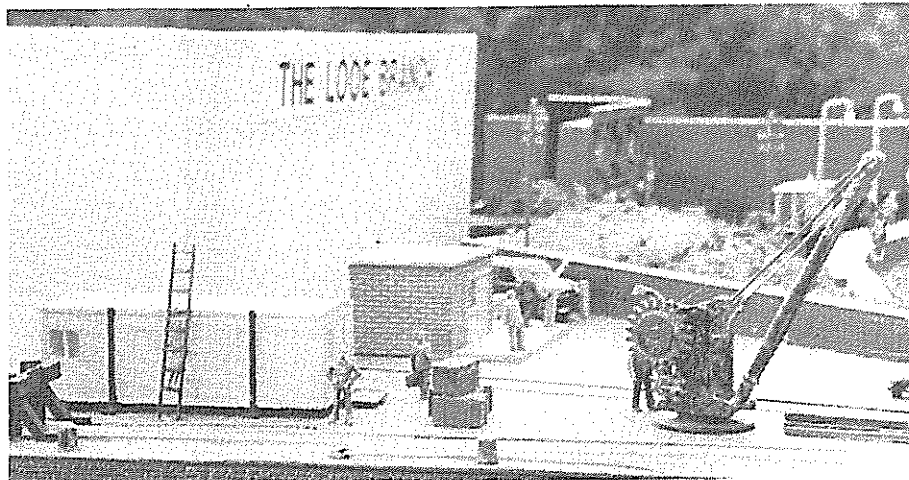
from train set to model railway need not be large or expensive.

With changes of detail to the buildings and fittings one could similarly model the GWR or BR(W) using a 94XX pannier tank, diesel railcar and 10ft wheelbase wagons, as noted, but this little layout can take stock from virtually any period and nationality.

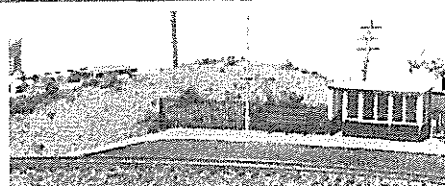
It is hoped that the model will be operating at Dacorum Railfair at the Pavilion, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead, on September 12th (only a year late!). Any reader who wants to come and see the little layout will be more than welcome.

Bibliography

For further reading and inspiration I suggest the following: *The Railways, Canal and Mines of Looe and Liskeard*, L. Popplewell, Oakwood Press. *Branch Line around Britain in the Diesel Era*, J. A. M. Vaughan, D. Bradford Barton Ltd, *Modelling BR Today*, Chris Ellis, Ian Allan Ltd, (locos, stock, Coombe Junction). *Scale Model Trains*, Dec 84/Jan 85, (Ideas), Feb 83, (Par Junction for Newquay), July 83, (Newquay Branch), August 83, (Coombe Junction), May 84, (Liskeard - Junction for Looe). *Railway Modeller*, November 79, (Plan of the month - Liskeard).



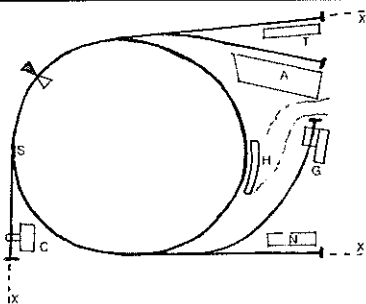
From low angles even a tiny layout like this one looks a lot bigger because you can only see the nearest segment of the setting. Above: Excellent modelling in the goods yard. You'd hardly know it was N gauge because the detailing is deftly done. Right: The station with etched fencing and good grass texture displays a high standard of modelling.



NOW READ ON . . .

The light-hearted nature of the Looe Branch, should not disguise the fact that the track plan has a lot to offer the modeller who likes to keep life simple. As Geoff Latham remarks, it is another variation on the original Wright Lines ideas of Alan Wright (see Dec '84/Jan '85 issue) and can use the tiddleywink computer idea also, for all train make up. Sure, it's a development from the basic train set oval, but there is nothing to be ashamed of in that. You can make it in any scale from Z up to gauge I or LGB, and the only difference will be the area required, but even in the larger scales it need not be enormous. For example, LGB and Märklin gauge I curves are quite tight radius and acceptably compact with their shorter locomotives. For a garden railway the circle of track could go round the rockery.

Down in the smaller scales there are other advantages. For OO/HO and N you can use the basic train set circle or oval, and for those who



This is just one variation on the Looe Branch idea, this time on an ordinary baseboard with a little more useful area available. Size will depend on the scale and make of track, but essentially it is not much bigger than the basic circle/oval of track whichever gauge you choose. Key to possible features (but choose your own setting): (A) Factory. (G) Goods shed. (H) Halt/station. (T) Coal bins. (N) Cattle dock. (C) Ore tippler. (S) Optional extra siding. (X) Possible future extensions.

aren't starting with a train set, the circle of track can be purchased separately, and sometimes very cheaply at sales and shows where ex-train set contents tend to be sold off by traders. As only four turn-outs are required, and one power connection, both cost and technical ability required will not be high. A fifth turn-out would be a luxury worth building in to give one more siding or allow for a future extension. The sketch shows just one slight variation on the Looe theme if you are not restricted to a toilet seat for a baseboard. On a conventional small baseboard the centre of the circle can be scenically developed, and a lake would be one possibility. Even better would be a hill or mountain, as that would break up the circle best in a visual sense and could give scope for dramatic landscape work.

This is definitely a 'fun' layout that can give lots of enjoyment with minimal fuss - well worth thinking about.

Chris Ellis

CLUB NEWS

Sunderland, Tyne and Wear

Sunderland and District MRS have an exhibition on Saturday and Sunday, 5-6 September 1987 at Wearmouth Hall, Sunderland Polytechnic, Chester Road, Sunderland, Saturday 10.30 to 18.30, Sunday 10.00 to 18.00. Adults 80p, children and Senior Citizens 40p.

Manchester

There will be a Manchester MRS meeting on Friday 7 August 1987, at 19.30 at Dean Hall, Mersey Road, Sale. All are welcome.

Hawick

Hawick and District MRS will be holding their annual exhibition at the Town Hall, High Street, Hawick on August 29 and 30. Saturday 10.00 to 18.00, Sunday 12.00 to 17.00. Adults 60p, children and Senior Citizens 30p.

Gauge O Guild

The following meetings have been arranged: **Wimborne** Sunday 16 August at the Allendale Community Centre, 10.00 to 17.00 hrs. Admission £1.00. Car park, refreshments. Organiser: D. Bailey, 0344 423256 of the Brackwell O Gauge group.

Bridgewater Sunday 30 August at the Sydenham Community Centre, Parkway, 10.00 to 18.00 hrs. Admission £1.00. Car park, refreshment. Organiser: D. Moorcroft 0823 81955 of the Somerset O Gauge group.

Somerset

The Minehead MRG announce their annual exhibition at St. John Ambulance Hall, North Road, Minehead, August 29, 30, 11.00 to 18.00 and 31, 11.00 to 16.00. Adults 60p, children 30p.

Huddersfield

An exhibition, hosted by Huddersfield RM will take place on September 5 and 6 at Colne Valley Leisure Centre, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield. There will be twelve layouts of various gauges including 16mm live steam. Free car parking. Adults 90p, OAP and children 45p.

Naming Ceremony

A steam locomotive naming ceremony will take place on Sunday 23 August 1987 at 12.45 hrs, when the South Tyndale RPS Henschel 0-4-0 side and well tank steam locomotive No 6 will be named *Thomas Edmondson*. The naming ceremony will be performed by the Earl of Carlisle, at

Alston Station, Cumbria CA9 3JB. The naming ceremony will be followed by a special train from Alston to Gilderdale.

North Yorks

Skipton and District RS will be holding their 20th Annual Exhibition, Saturday 29 August, Sunday 30 August and Monday 31 August, at Skipton Town Hall, High Street, Skipton, North Yorkshire. Opening Times from: 10.00 to 18.00. No trade stands on Sunday. Adults 70p, children and senior citizens 30p.

Somerset and Dorset

As part of the 125 anniversary celebrations of the S and D, various events will take place in August, including at Wells a *Railwells* model railway exhibition in the Town Hall on the 8 and 9 August. Also on the 27 August, there will be a lecture including slides and recordings on the S and D at St. Johns Church Hall, Midsomer Norton, Avon, starting at 20.00

Ottawa, Canada

Railfair '87 takes place at Algonquin College, Woodroffe Campus, Ottawa, Ont. on October 17-18. Adults \$3, teens/pensioners \$2, children \$1