



THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity

Volume 9 no 2 February 2021

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Editorial

In these troubled times readers deserve something special. Pendon Museum which from a fine scale modelling perspective has built the finest large scale diorama in the world, was featured in Volume 4 no 5 of the NSC (available on the North Star Railway website – see above). It is not the intention to write another article about Pendon but to refer readers to the free virtual tour available on the Pendon website at <https://pendonmuseum.com/highlights-of-the-vale-scene/setting-the-scene-for-the-tour>. When you access that page, to continue the tour, click on Cowleaze Farm.

Many people including myself embarked on a journey when we became involved with model trains. My first model train associated recollection when small, was playing with a clockwork Hornby 'Zulu'. From there we as a family moved on to 3 rail Hornby Dublo with which I have stuck ever since. In the early eighties thanks to the late Sheldon McGlone, John Everitt and Keith Stamper I diverged into North American HO and HO_{n3}. A further diversification took me into LGB when I bought the collection of the late Mike Humphreys. There was an ulterior motive to that. I had always hankered after owning a live steam loco and Mike's collection included an Aster for LGB live steam 'Frank S'. Insofar as live steam is involved the rest is history as they say. I was thoroughly hooked and have since acquired several other live steamers including several locos modelled on South African prototypes.

To assist people who are interested in live steam but have not yet taken the plunge I suggest you refer to an introduction to the subject from the

American magazine, sadly now defunct, Garden Railways.

<https://grw.trains.com/beginners/live-steam/2019/06/common-questions-about-live-steam-locomotives>.

This month's main feature is again N gauge and in particular N gauge modules built by members on the N Gauge Guild which is based on the Reef and is now in its 27th year of operation. But before moving on to the Guild and courtesy of the President of NTRAK (N/Rail – see below), here is the background to the development of N gauge modular modelling.

NTRAK/NRail

“1973 was a very significant year in model railroading. The first N Scale modules were designed, constructed, and displayed at a public show. That show was the MRIA show — no layout, just modules displayed. The first public NTRAK layout was the NMRA convention in 1974. These were the seminal NTRAK modules, and their debut began the widespread use of modular layouts, not only in N Scale, but in other scales as well. With the definition of NTRAK standards and the founding of the NTRAK Newsletter by Jim FitzGerald the modular concept took off. Today, almost one-half century since their freshman assembly more than an estimated 7,000 NTRAK modules have been built.

Over the years NTRAK has evolved with variations on the basic NTRAK module including oNeTRAK, Ncat, BendTRAK, TwinTRAK, and others. Technical advances were made in the form of wireless throttles and Digital Command Control.

In 1996, Jim FitzGerald took steps to ensure the ongoing viability of the organization with the formation of the NTRAK Modular Railroading Society, Inc. (NTRAK, Inc.). A Board of Directors was appointed to oversee the organization, which continues to this day.

The next major advance in N Scale modular railroading was made with the introduction of T-TRAK in 2000 by Lee Monaco-FitzGerald and Jim FitzGerald. After a slow start, the growth of T-TRAK was rapid and now has more modelers than NTRAK. Standards for T-TRAK were established by Lee and Jim, and they started building T-TRAK modules and module kits. Today, multiple manufacturers are making T-TRAK module kits.

NTRAK, the organization, has continued to be the standard bearer for NTRAK and T-TRAK by maintaining the standards function, as well as providing support to NTRAK and T-TRAK clubs, publishing the newsletter, organizing layouts at major shows, maintaining the web sites and our social media presence. But NTRAK has become more — promoting N scale in all forms including home layouts and supporting N scale activities including Free-moN and giving N Scale clinics at major shows.

As we have expanded our scope over the past few years, it has become evident that we are more than just NTRAK and the newsletter and our show activities have reflected that. But for many N scalers, NTRAK is a specific modular standard.

With that in mind, the Board of Directors has considered a new name and approved NRail as a more appropriate name to match our goals and our ongoing evolution as an organization. Legally, our new name is NRail, Inc. What does this mean for members? NRail will continue to focus primarily on the two most popular standards, NTRAK, and T-TRAK, but we will also continue to expand and increase attention to the other aspects such as Free-moN, Clubs, and Home Layouts. And NRail will continue to expand and enhance our relationship with the various N Scale manufacturers.

Already our efforts have resulted in the following:

A new, improved web site with a members' only section.

Monthly ZoomTRAK meetings for members.

Expansion of the Newsletter and its staff.

Recognize and promote Super Clubs.

Expand the use of social media channels.

Other programs are under way and will be announced as they are ready for unveiling.

*Although the new website is **NRail.org**, it will continue to be available using the existing URLs of NTRAK.org and T-TRAK.org.*

We look forward to continuing the 47-year-old tradition under the new name, NRail.

NRail, NTRAK, T-TRAK and ZoomTRAK, and their logos are trademarks of NRail, Inc. Permission to use for commercial purposes is required.

More information is published in the January/February 2021 issue of the NRail Newsletter”.

NTRAK Standards

Those who want to research NTRAK/NRail further are advised to consult their website at <https://www.ntrak.org/>. This website contains a huge amount of information.

The following was extracted from the Standards page of that site. This gives access, including specifications to the various NTRAK ‘families’.

BendTrack	http://bendtrack.com/
Free-moN	http://free-mon.wesleysteiner.com/
Modutrak	https://www.modutrak.com/
NTRAK	https://ntrak.org
OneTRAK	https://ntrak.org
T-TRAK	http://t-trak.org/

N Gauge Guild of South Africa



If you would like information on the Guild and access to excellent informative newsletters, please refer to the following Facebook page from where a lot of the information herein was drawn.

<https://www.facebook.com/NGaugeGuild/>

N GAUGE GUILD MODULE SPECIFICATIONS (updated 20/10/2011)

(Please see diagrams for all dimensions and measurements)

Profile Boards

- Side profiles to be 95mm in height (refer x & y).
- The 'x' profile to be a straight profile.

Fascia Board

- 3mm Masonite to be used.
- Colour specification: Universal Paints 'Chocolate Brown' PVA. The club has stock.

Backdrop

- 3mm Masonite to be used.
- Colour specification: Universal Paints 'Oriental Blue' PVA. The club has stock.

Track

- Use only Peco or Atlas Code 80 flexible track.
- Points:
 - use only Peco Code 80, medium or large radius.
 - no points within 100mm of track ends.
 - all points must have insulated rail joiners on both inner frog rails. These are points that should be used for passing loops on the same track, siding, etc.
 - all points used to cross from one line to another, i.e. from main 1 to main 2 to branch, must have double insulated rail joiners to isolate them completely from the other loops.
- Track bed - 10mm softboard.
- Sub-roadbed - 3mm plywood or equivalent.

Track Placement

- Main line 1 (outer track) -
 - position centre of rail at 508mm (refer to drawing).
 - minimum radius 610mm.
- Main line 2 (centre track) -
 - position centre of rail at 470mm (refer to drawing).
 - minimum radius 610mm.
- Branch line (inner track) -
 - position centre of rail at 432mm (refer to drawing).
 - minimum radius 458mm.
- Any joined track on straight lengths must be soldered together.
- 50mm of the track ends must be flexible to make allowances for misalignment. (refer to drawing).
- Rail joiners are not to be soldered to track at module ends.

Joiner tracklets

- Each member is required to purchase 3 vario tracks (Minitrix 14975) per module.
- These can be obtained from the club.

Ballast

- Grey ballast to be used. Fine to medium grade.

Electrical

- Bus wires to be no smaller than 1.5mm (15A rating).
- Male and female plugs:
 - transfer leads to be 500mm long.
 - female plug must be on the left hand side when facing the module from the front.
 - available from the club.
- Extension lead:
 - each module to be fitted with a 3m 220V extension lead with a minimum of two 3-pin plug points.
 - two 3-pin plug points to be mounted on inside of front (left hand side when facing the module from the front.)
- One dropper wire per rail, ie. 6 droppers in total.

Legs

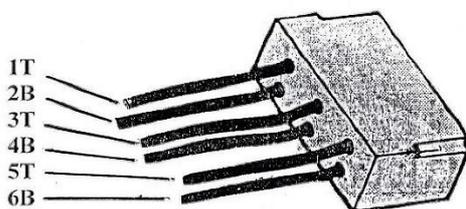
- Each member will need 2 legs per module.
- Two leg receptacles on right side of module, front and rear (25mm x 25mm).
- Available from the club.

Three-phase test

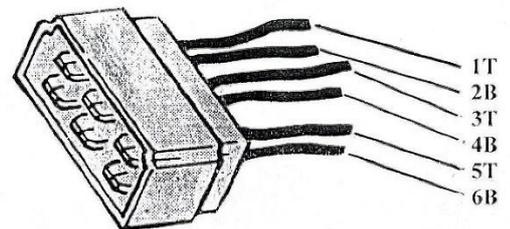
- All modules **MUST** be tested and approved before proceeding to the next phase.
 - Phase 1: module structure and rail layout.
 - Phase 2: electrical test, prior to the commencement of adding scenery, especially the ballasting of track.

Phase 3: completed module with scenery added, ready to be admitted to club layout.

WIRING ORIENTATION FOR 6-WAY TRACK WIRE CONNECTORS



FEMALE
Attached to LEFT side of module (facing front)



MALE
Attached to RIGHT side of module (facing front)

T = TOP
B = BOTTOM



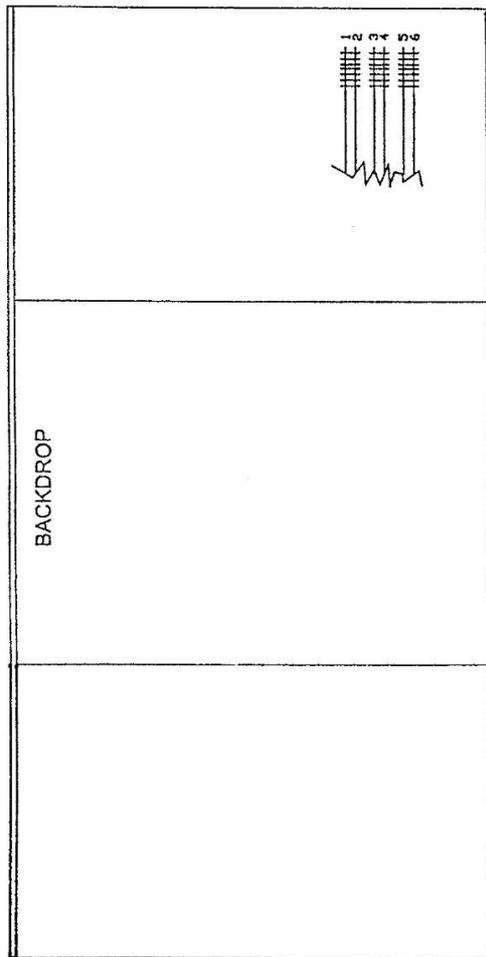
ANY QUESTIONS?

Contact Mike Conacher (079-503-9808) or Gordon Matthews (081-391-8550)

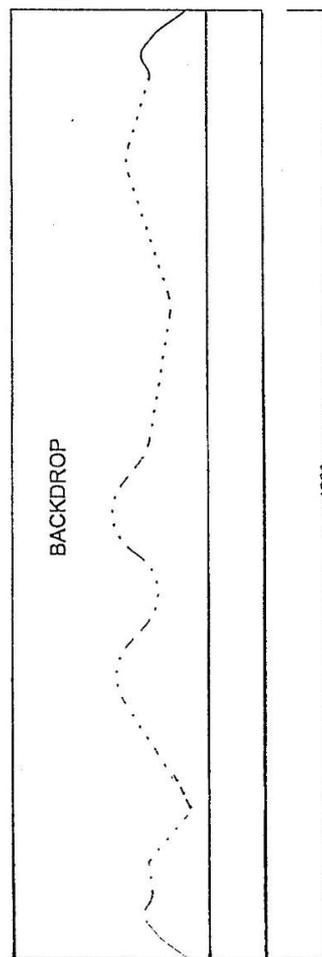


MODULE CONSTRUCTION & DIMENSIONS (all measurements in millimeters)

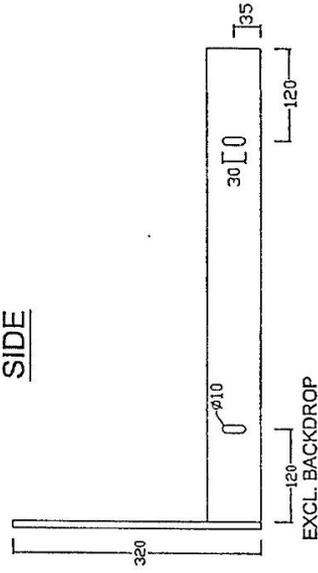
TOP



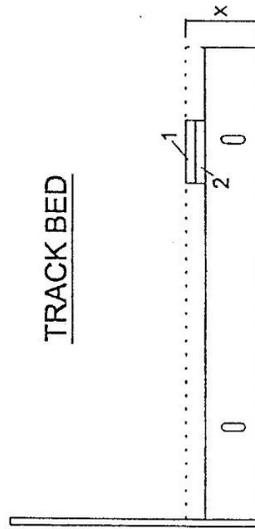
FRONT



SIDE



TRACK BED



- 1 - SOFT BOARD (10mm)
- 2 - PLYWOOD (3mm)

A comparison of the NTRAK and N Gauge Guild's specifications will show that the latter are based on the former. There are only minimal differences between them, mainly with respect to materials. Arising from the Corona virus pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, the last meeting of the Guild was in March 2020 at Hobby-X. The photos below were taken at that exhibition.



Overview of the layout



No prizes for guessing which prototype in the front is modelled here! British blood and custard coaches pulled by Tornado at rear.



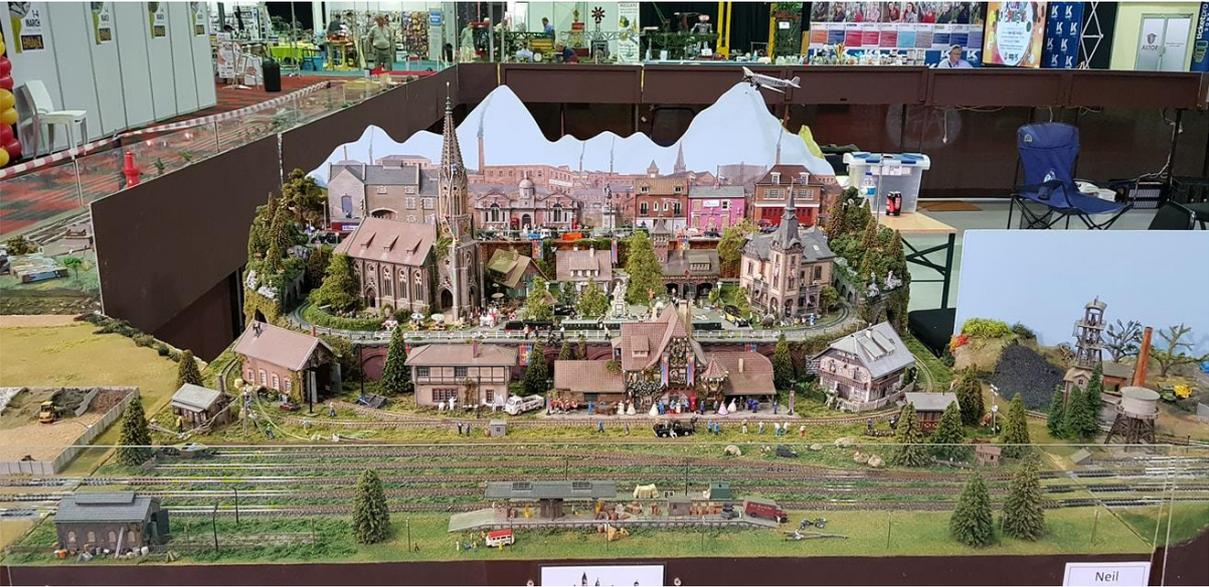
Blue Train locos



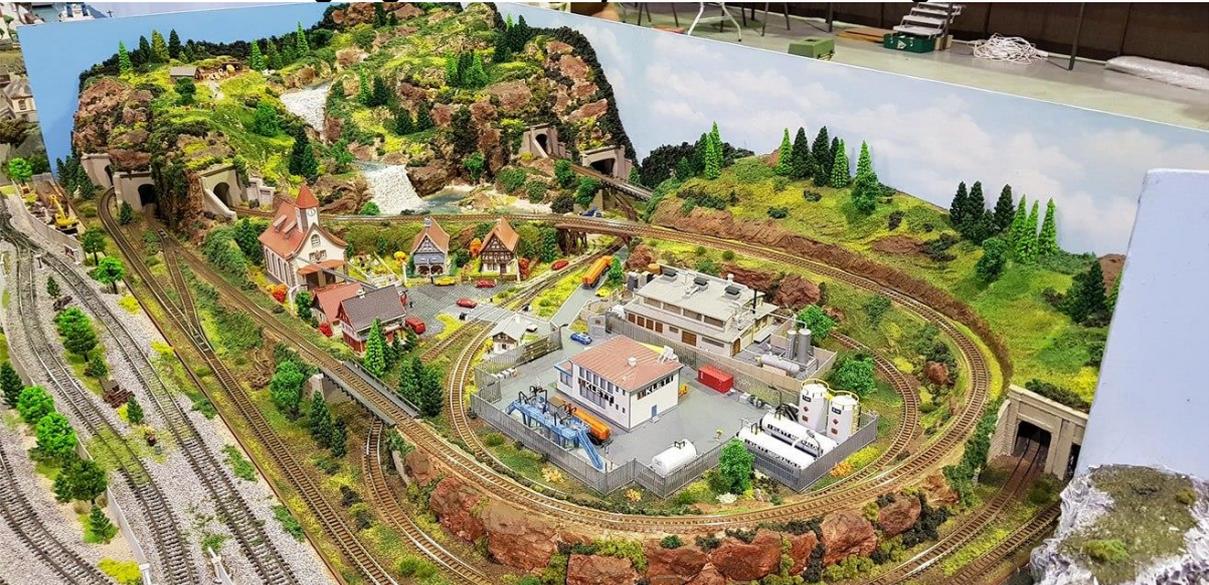
Does not have to be elaborate or complex to be interesting



Another simple scenic module



Double decker. Z gauge line on top with HO buildings!



Dual gauge. N at front and complete bolt on Z scale layout at rear.



A nautical theme. One of 4 modules nearly 3m long in total.



More nautical but with North American motive power.



A coffee table layout attached to the scenic module from page 8

As can be seen from the photos, there is no prescription on the prototypes modelled. British, Continental, American and South African motive power and buildings all make an appearance (as indeed do some differing scales and gauges!)

The great advantage of N gauge is that a lot can be modelled in a small space.

My thanks to the N Gauge Guild for permission to use their photographs and publish their specifications.

The end.