



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

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Editorial

More bits and pieces this month (and a few bitches – you have to take the pain with the gain!) starting with a report on Roving Rails first public excursion.

World of Miniatures Exhibition – 29th May 2021

My first observation is how well the event was attended. Although it is clear people are suffering from Covid weariness, particularly the associated restrictions on social gatherings, the interest in miniatures such as dolls houses was a revelation.

Roving Rails participation was well received. As we have discovered in the past, there is considerable interest in the model railway hobby. The public like to see how we do things – construct benchwork, lay track etc.

There are a lot of people working away on their layouts in isolation.

Events such as World of Miniatures bring them out of the closet (so to speak!) and get them interested in joining a club.

The single issue which generated the greatest interest was operating the locos with cell phones.

Of course this was only a ranging shot. There is a lot of work still to do to streamline loading, transporting, unloading and set up of the modules.

Minds are beginning to gravitate to racks in cars and trailers but all things considered this was a successful first outing.

Some photographs of the event taken by Gravin Phyfer are shown below. These are also on the North Star website of which more later.



Dual gauge HO/HOe Continental orientated module



Station on the above module. One member of society obviously over imbibed at lunch!



Tipler made by Colin Healey on module featuring a wood pulp mill



Another shot of the pulp mill module set



A UP visitor from the US on a British OO two module set



And finally a dual gauge HO/HOn3 two module set based on a Colorado prototype.

The business of business is business – Economist Milton Friedman

It never ceases to amaze me how bad so many businesses are at doing business yet stay in business. A couple of examples in the non train world first and then on to the train world; 18 months ago I was in the market for my third car in a row of the same make. Took my then model to the dealer and said I want exactly the same vehicle except with the new gearbox. Heard nothing. Time passed so I sent an e-mail reminder. Nothing. My wife phoned to inquire – nothing. I phoned again. Nothing. Eventually in exasperation a couple of months after my initial approach I went up the road and bought a different make. While I was signing the paper work, there was a call from the original dealer – sir I have a quote for you. Too late she cried!

Another example: I was tasked with organising the repair of a 200 metre fence. Five companies were phoned and asked if they would like to quote. One declined but the rest assured me they would contact me the next day to come and view the job. I am still waiting for four of them a month later. Only having one quote, I approached yet another company. A representative was on site the next day and the quote was received the day after. I was pleased that as his tender was cheaper, the trustees could award the contract to the company concerned.

Now trains: Lets start in South Africa. The Outeniqua Transport Museum is currently closed on Saturdays, normally its busiest day, because Transnet will not pay the Museum's sole employee overtime. What sort of management permits this situation to endure?

As an aside, nearly three years after the fires, the line up the Montagu Pass having been fixed as far as Camfer, I am informed the Powervan is operating again up the mountain but not on a Sunday.

Now let's move to the UK where there are some good people with whom to do business, David Williams of Resurgam and Steve Foster of Fosworks come to mind, but there are unfortunately others whose levels of service leave a lot to be desired. Accepting that Covid has created difficulties for everyone and living in South Africa creates additional problems, the lack of proper communication on the part of some suppliers is frankly a poor show. In this day and age surely you should not have to request an updated price list when the company concerned has a website?

Then there is the issue of delivery. To give an example, on the 14th May I ordered some parts from Arcomoro based in the Netherlands. The order was delivered to South Africa a couple of days later – unfortunately into the hands of our postal 'service'. Just like everything else in this country with which the state has a direct or indirect association, education, healthcare, security, electricity provision, clean water, Transnet, the postal 'service' is in a shambles (deliveries to us on one day a week only). The situation has been brought about in most cases by 'cadre deployment' and BEE (Black Economic Enrichment) for the uninitiated) and unfortunately all too often sheer incompetency and grand larceny.

Insofar as the postal 'service' is concerned, items from overseas apparently are delivered to Jeppe Street depot in Johannesburg where they disappear like things into my wife's handbag into the local equivalent of the Bermuda Triangle, emerging only months later. The solution is to use a courier but for some reason one major UK supplier will not do this and insists on using postal delivery. Then, when the situation is queried, the e-mails are ignored.

Finally, the USA where one would think the service ethos is ingrained; well not always so! On the 27th of April I ordered some TCS decoders from a Yankee supplier who dabbles in the market concerned. UPS was specified as the delivery contractor to a US address. The parcel not having arrived, on the 20th May, the supplier was e-mailed. Nothing. E-mailed again – nothing. Phoned, line continuously engaged. Phoned the next day and left a message. No response. Phoned the following day and spoke to Bob. His response was he could not find the order with the order number I had given him. E-mailed the order confirmation back to Bob and the next day received the explanation. YD was out of stock and was struggling to obtain new supplies. Ok Covid etc. but firstly to accept the order without indicating to the buyer that you have no stock is tantamount to fraud in my book (especially as the following appears on their website: [A\) YES YD carries a full line of following Brands in stock at all time. ESULoksound, TCS, Soundtraxx, NCE, Digitrax and RailPro along with speakers and accessories.](#)

There has been no contact from YD to indicate when my order is likely to be delivered despite further reminders from me. All in all, most unsatisfactory and not the way to run a railroad. I guess the answer is one has to be more careful than ever about choosing a service supplier. End of bitch. I feel so much better now.

Developments on the North Star Railway

It would have been misleading to have headed this section as 'Progress on the North Star Railway'. Regress would have been more accurate. There have been three major problems with the track. The relaying of the brick paving in our driveway/yard required the lifting of the brick border on which the track sits in one small and one big section. From one perspective this was not such a bad thing as it provided an opportunity to widen some of the curves concerned. The first section went well but the curve on the second was still too sharp so five bricks had to be removed and relaid with an easier bend. This was done without great difficulty although my back does not agree with that statement.

Anyway, it was the third section which gave the biggest problem. It was not that the gradient was incorrect. It was the angle at which the contractor had cemented the bricks – too much of a sideways tilt. There were about 9 bricks involved and breaking them out would have been a major operation. The solution adopted was to build up the bricks which were at an angle with exterior Polyfilla and then paint over them.



'Raised' bricks waiting to be painted.

This section of track is still not completely level but is acceptably so. The second problem is with the points converted from gauge 1 to dual gauge. Epoxy had to be used to secure some of the chairs involved and this became detached from the sleepers because of heat and moisture. The result is that the planned passing loop for the gauge 1 track has had to be well, bypassed. New dual gauge points will have to be made. The members of the Guildford Model Engineering Society compiled a dual gauge point building how to do it manual which is on the North Star Railway website. The problem with that design is it uses brass sleepers which is fine for live steam but no use for track powered systems. The plastic sleepered approach having failed, thoughts are turning to using wooden sleepers with white metal chairs. Nobody ever said it was going to be easy!

Then finally the third problem which involves the track crossing the driveway. In the words of the song 'every picture tells a story'.



Must say I preferred the original design!

Well it was my own fault. Larger vehicles have no problem crossing the hump but smaller ones ground, especially when the hump is negotiated at speed which is the general pattern with delivery vehicles despite warnings. Not only will the damaged track have to be replaced but the 'hump' will have to be widened on both sides.

It is going to be quite some time before trains circumnavigate the house again on the North Star Railway!

Money saving hint

In these harsh economic times, techniques for saving money are welcome, especially when there is no model railway shop in the area from which to obtain supplies.

It is difficult to build a layout with live frog facing points both with DC and DCC power. To do this, insulating joiners normally have to be used. But what if such joiners are not readily available?

The answer is to lay the track with solid joiners as normal and then cut a gap through the offending rail(s) or frog, ideally with a cut off disc in a motor tool such as a Dremel (see below). A poor second would be to use a hacksaw. Again ideally, the cut should be on a straight piece of rail but in extremis, a short piece of styrene inserted in the gap between the rail and held securely by super glue should do the trick on a curve.

Resurgam NG V-16. Photos Chris Webster.

I waxed poetic about David Williams' Resurgam SAR kits last month and a friend in the UK sent me the two photos below which show what can be done to super detail one of them. This is class modelling and an appropriate candidate for the MOTY (model of the year award) at the Peterborough 16m Narrow Gauge Garden Railway Exhibition.





It takes a great deal of time and patience to drill holes for and fit each individual rivet but if one is prepared to do it, as shown in the photograph above, the results can be rewarding.

Dremel rotary motor tool.

Following on the previous page, if you are going to become seriously involved with the hobby, arguably it is worth making an investment in a Dremel or similar rotary tool. There are just so many applications from cutting rails, drilling small holes and burnishing metal. Admittedly with the Rand's depreciation this is not a cheap tool but it will last many years and additional uses will be found from the accessories that are available and of course not only in the model railway world. The battery powered 8220 would be the one I would recommend. Although more expensive than the corded version, the additional flexibility of not having to have to seek power points and use extension leads soon repay such additional expense.

The North Star Website

Enjoying challenges, some six years ago I embarked on a journey to create the North Star Railway website. The main objective was to promote the hobby. With the passage of time other objectives came to the fore – a structure to act as a data bank for the North Star Chronicles and associated photographs and to possibly assist with the organisation of events like National Model Railroad Conventions.

Initially, reliance had to be placed on Cherise Smith of Pinecom to get the website up and running but soon after I took over the reins and it pretty much stayed that way until recently when the website was hacked and Cherise had to be called upon again to sort out the problem.

Recently I was asked if I still had photographs from the Durban Modular Railroaders days. Indeed I have. They are on the North Star Railway website under 'Layouts'. Also there, under 'Specifications' are those of DMR, the baseboard module ones for the highly successful 16mm module group in the UK and finally those for the South African N gauge modular group.

There is further useful background information including the DO-RI-ME of ELECTRONICS prepared by Nigel Penfold for the 7th Model Railway Convention held in Durban in 1997. This is an excellent reference document.

There is just one aspect of the website I wish to clarify: this is not a commercial operation. I derive, nor do I seek any financial benefit from hosting the website and people accessing it. Indeed, it costs me money to cover Bluehost's annual Hosting and Domain Name Registration fees. That is my contribution to the hobby which has given me so much pleasure and fun over the years.

The end.