BANTRAK News
A Monthly Newsletter for BANTRAK Members • Volume 33 • Issue 11 • December 2020

The Engineer's Cab: LeRoy Brandimore

Here it is, the last month of the year-December 2020. At this time, we are usually looking forward to the activities of the season, some of which are the many train gardens / layouts set up for the season. Ours being setup at the B & O Museum. As of now we are currently on schedule for the setup of our layout on December 16th. Meeting at the back gate (Schroeder St.) of the Museum at 8:00 A.M. Breakdown is schedule for Sunday Jan 3. It is looking good for us doing the show; the main factor is the museum being open. You don't have to have a module in the layout to help out. Things will be different this year. We will set our ropes around the layout at least 4 ft. out. We are required to wear face mask at all times on the Museum grounds, indoors and outside. We will have hand sanitizer within the layout. We are working on a run schedule with staggered run blocks so that everybody will not be setting up their trains at the same time. Although some people may not feel comfortable participating at the B & O that's OK. Whatever you do, remember to wash your hands (personal hygiene) and wear a face mask.

If you haven't heard yet, the February GSMT Show has been cancelled. This is not a big surprise. The next GSMTS is scheduled for May 8 & 9, 2021. Hopefully, the situation will be have improved by then.

So may Santa be good to you all and enjoy all of the new trains you will be getting this Christmas.

Happy Modeling,

LeRoy Brandimore

Yard Replacement Exploratory Committee: Bob Bunge

For a number of years, there has been discussion about either rebuilding or replacing the four yard modules (and by default the two throat modules). The modules have served extremely well, but are aged. This is best seen in how they sag towards the center of each module, have a few electrical issues, some jury-rigged track repairs, the condition of the scenery, and the state of the purple wooden boxes used to store and carry the scenery, among other things.

At the October meeting, Jack Welsh brought up putting a line item in the budget for a yard replacement project. During the New Business section of the meeting, being in agreement with Jack, I raised a motion to form a committee. After some discussion, it was agreed to form a committee to poll club members and present options at the January meeting. The overarching concept is to replace the yard. Martin Myers pointed out this relieves the club of the logistics of moving the modules to someone's home as well as the pressure to have the refreshed modules available for the next show. It also allows the exploratory committee more room to express its creative energy.

This is a call for members to help with this yard exploratory committee. We are asking for members who are willing to talk to other members personally and during the B&O display to understand what club members are looking for that will enhance their running trains on Bantrak layouts. We also ask for members to make themselves available for several meetings (likely zoom) to both brainstorm and complete the final report.

Some options to consider:

- Number of modules, length of those modules;
- Number of tracks per line;
- Manual or machine turnouts?
- Track power options;
- Integration into existing DCC and DC system;
- Track connections between modules;
- Module construction material;
- Module leg construction and set up;
- Storage in the trailer to include any modifications to the trailer, totes;
- Scenery and overall visitor experience.

The January report should include estimated budget(s), recommended schedule, ideas for work space. If desired, it could include more than one option to be voted on during a club meeting.

The yard is almost always the backbone of every Bantrak layout. When you design a layout, I know I often start by balancing member modules on the other side of the layout against the yard. During set up, we almost always anchor the rest of the layout against the yard.

If you are interested in contributing your ideas and creative energy into a core piece of any Bantrak layout and play a part in something that will be used for the next 15-20 years, please send me an email at bbunge@ladyandtramp.com or call me at 301-526-7666 (leave voicemail and I'll call you back).

Father Daughter Railfanning: Bob Bunge

Twenty-year-old Maggie and I were driving from her summer job in Florida to her new job in Utah. We had three days. The computer took us across side roads in Louisiana (not a good experience), Texas (a great experience) and Arizona (a great experience).

She was driving when we passed through small Childress, Texas, when I had a sudden feeling and said "Pull over! Steam locomotive!" We back tracked a couple of blocks, moved off main street, heading towards the BNFS main, through the town square and there she was! A billboard I had seen along the road triggered a memory of an article about the locomotive. I then proceeded to annoy her by looking up if there were more locomotives along our path. A couple of locomotives were not open to the public, one small mining engine did rate the lost time. Each stop cost me, allowing her to choose where to have dinner and my buying. I enjoyed seeing many old box cars in use as sheds along the way.

Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (CB&Q) 4-6-2 Pacific type locomotive #501 on display in Childress, Tx, Sept 2nd, 2020. Sitting a few yards from the BNSF, former CB&Q (Fort Worth & Denver) main, no doubt she dreams she could one day return to the rails and make those 90mph dashes across the flat landscape.

AT&SF (Santa Fe) 2-10-4 "Santa Fe" type locomotive #5000 on display in Amarillo, Tx, Sept 2nd, 2020. Famously known as "Madame Queen" she is the original of her type and represents the pinnacle of modern heavy-power steam power on the Santa Fe. Built by Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1930, she is, in effect, a Berkshire with an additional driving axle.

Quarantine Time = Modeling Time! : Ethan Bernstein

How to Reletter Hopper Cars Without Paint

What if I told you that you do not need paint or commercially available decals to reletter hopper cars for a different railroad? I found the solution to this question in two three-bay open-hoppers lettered for D&RGW. As a CSX modeler, these cars seemed a little too out of place to seem realistic in a unit train or manifest running outside of Baltimore in the present day. I did not want to sell the cars or send them to be "scrapped" (salvaged for parts), as they are nice models and the prototype cars can still be seen on the rails today, including in CSX badging. I looked up some photos of CSX open three-bay hoppers, and inspiration struck. This month, I will describe how I "repainted" two D&RGW three bay open hoppers to resemble weathered, modern CSX prototypes. The techniques I use cover all scales and railroad letterings, it is just up to the modeler to decide how much detail they want and how much effort they are willing to invest, as with all scale modeling projects.

CSX lettering is quite straightforward and minimal, so I decided I could make my own decals on my computer. There are several ways to design accurate decals using the correct font and letter spacing, two of which I will explain: find a clear image of the lettering on the prototype on the internet, copy the image then crop and resize it to just the desired lettering, or type your own lettering using the actual font used on the prototype or a close match, then resize the text and color the text boxes accordingly. I will describe how I have created accurate decals using both methods, beginning with the former. First, I found a side-on image of a prototype car with the correct lettering and similar paint color to that of my model, copied the image onto a document (both Google drawings and Microsoft Word work well), cropped the image so just the text is visible, and then scaled the image down to N scale. This method is fast and works well so long as good quality images are used. I made the decals for my scratchbuilt bulkhead flat car (see the July column) using this method. I have also used pictures of models to make my own decals as well. For the small details like maintenance stencils, it was difficult to find high-quality, close-up pictures on the correct prototype car, but it was easy to find flat, zoomed-in images of stencil decals on HO model train cars, so I copied the image, cropped it so just the stencil was visible, and resized it down to N scale (some of the lettering it is almost legible under magnification). When scaling the images, I used prototype photos as a guide, determining, often eye-balling, dimensions until the image looked suitable to fit on the side of an N scale train car.

The latter method is more time consuming, but often yields better results. First, create a textbox for each set of letters (for example, one textbox for CSX, then another for CSXT, and a third for the road number). Next, look up the type of font the railroad uses to letter train cars. If the font is not common and thereby not available in Word or Google, find a font that looks similar to the actual font type, using prototype images as a guide. Once a font is decided upon (usually the most time-consuming step), change the fill color of the textbox to closely match the color of the model train car that is being "repainted." It is okay if the color is not exactly the same, as, especially if it is meant to look worn or has experienced a change in ownership, as many cars have, the difference in background color resembles a newly applied stencil. Since the hoppers I wanted to reletter are black, I was able to match the color nearly seamlessly with the rest of the hopper, and after some weathering, the color difference is indistinguishable. With the background color set, now color the letters, again using prototype photos for reference. The "painting" should be done background first and then letters, as otherwise the chosen letter color may not look right once the background color is applied, and depending on the amount of weathering desired, the letter color may end up too bright or too dark as it was chosen on a white background without any other color to reference. With the lettering created, resize the textboxes to look right for the scale you model. The resizing step may take a few trial prints to determine if the lettering is the correct size, I often print several different sizes of each decal to see which one looks best.

Quarantine Time = Modeling Time! : Ethan Bernstein

Once a “painting” method of choice has been decided and completed, it is now time to print the decals. No decal paper is needed (though could be used if your printer is capable of printing onto this type of paper), just plain white printer paper will suffice. Once the decals are printed, check them against your model to make sure they are the appropriate size and none are too blurry or colored too bright. For my CSX repaint, I made decals for the bold “CSX” lettering on the upper side of the hopper, and the smaller “CSXT” and road number lettering below. I also created decals for the lettering on the ends of the car, which is just “CSXT” in smaller lettering with the road number underneath. In addition to the reporting marks and road number, I also printed a maintenance stencil typical in shape and size for those seen on open hopper cars, as well as two sizes of thin yellow rectangles for the reflector stripes mandated on all rolling stock and locomotives in 2005.

For the placement and sizing of each decal, I printed out a picture of a prototype car as a guide, referencing this picture again for weathering later on. Before cutting out each decal, I sanded the back of the printer paper underneath each decal to make them as thin as possible. I stopped sanding once I could clearly read the decal through the back of the paper and the background color of the decal was clearly visible. Use a very fine grit of sandpaper for this task. Additionally, always print spare decals as it is inevitable you will sand through a decal or two. Once the decals are sanded, carefully cut each letter out individually in a square-shape, leaving as little space as possible between the edges of each letter. Do not try to cut the letters out so no background is visible, as this is near impossible in N scale without a laser cutter (even then it is still iffy). We want some background to be visible in a square shape around each letter as is often done on the prototype during relettering. Since I wanted my cars to look some-what recently relettered, this step was especially important.

Before I glued the decals onto my cars, I first needed to do something about the old lettering. There are again two approaches I have used for removing lettering: use Q-tips soaked in rubbing alcohol to remove each letter individually, or paint over the lettering using black Sharpie. The lettering does come off relatively easily with 73% isopropyl alcohol, however it is quite time consuming and risks damaging the car due to the pressure required to remove the decals. For this project, I opted to use the second method, as it is fast and gives the car a story, making it look like it has had several owners and a long service life. Using two different sizes of fine-tip black Sharpie markers, I colored over the old lettering, creating a box around each decal as often seen on the prototype when old reporting marks are literally crossed-out. Since the cars are black in color, it is very difficult to make out the original lettering, especially on the finished, weather cars.

I then secured each decal to the car using wood glue (general-purpose white glue also works well), taking my time and constantly referencing the prototype photo. Securing the decals is quite fast, and very rewarding after all that meticulous cutting! I let the glue dry overnight, and then moved onto the final step (and in my opinion, the most enjoyable): weathering. Since these three-bay open-hoppers are coal haulers, I needed to make them look “rusty and dusty.” For the rust, I first used a silver Sharpie, placing randomly sized dots and marks all over the car, focusing on the tops of the vertical side sills and on the trucks. I then colored over the silver with brown Sharpie, creating the rust spots. The reason for the silver underneath the brown is the brown marker alone will not be visible on the black paint of the model. The silver also gives the effect of chipped paint once more weathering is applied over top. While I had the markers out, I also painted the couplers using the same technique.

Quarantine Time = Modeling Time! : Ethan Bernstein

With the car thoroughly rusted, I then used black water color paint (I know, I said no painting, but there are many different ways to weather without paint, such as with pan pastels or chalks, I just happened to have watercolor on hand) to give the car a dusty appearance. When using water colors for weathering, be sure to use a downward stroke to look like rain water has pulled dust down the car or coal has spilled down and over the sides. Warning: be careful not to get too much paint on the paper decals, as the paper will absorb the paint and it could ruin the lettering (this potential issue is also why some background should be left surrounding each decal so that there is room for some paint to be absorbed). I also blended some red and brown water colors to make a rust color which I applied to the truck side frames, the latches on the sides of the coal shoots, and on the couplers. A layer of dullcote is useful if the car is going to be frequently handled to protect the decals and the weathering. The water color paints do a good job of eliminating sheen so the dullcote is not necessary for this purpose.

The final result is very convincing, and in my opinion, the “repainted” car looks way better than the factory-painted model. Total project time was around four hours for two hoppers - exceptionally fast by my standards! Total cost (excluding printer, computer, and Microsoft Word) was a few cents plus $11 per Atlas Trainman hopper car (which I purchased about a decade ago and were collecting dust in a drawer, so their value was near negligible to me at this point).

This project turned out to be way more fun than I had thought, despite some tedious steps, and yielded models that put my remaining factory-painted hoppers to shame. I hope this article provided you with inspiration for your next project or at least some new skills for your toolbox! If you have any old, unused cars sitting around, give these techniques a try! Feel free to reach out with any questions or comments, and stay tuned for next month’s column!

BANTRAK 2020 Calendar

December 16, 2020
B&O Museum Setup and club Meeting
Location: B&O Museum

December 17, 2020 - January 3, 2021
B&O Museum Festival of Trains
Location: B&O Museum

October 21, 2021 - October 24, 2021
2021 NMRA MidEast Region Convention
Location: Mount Clare Junction
See Alan Del Gaudio for details

BANTRAK Membership: Al Palewicz

BANTRAK does a significant amount of charitable activity, although we rarely think of it that way because we get pleasure out of it. When you think about it, that is as it should be with all giving from the heart.

What is our charitable activity? Our major participation is in the B&O Museum's (which is a charitable organization) Annual Festival of Trains. Our display has been a major draw for people to come to the Museum for many years, both recent and in the past. There are plenty more examples, this is just one.

Please contact Treasurer Tim Nixon for more information regarding your membership status and roster questions or contact Al Palewicz with general questions.

Member Benefits:

- Sharing of your knowledge (railroading and modeling) with others of similar interests
- Access to railroading and modeling knowledge of other members
- National exposure and recognition of your endeavors in modeling
- Hands on activities: Club modules - track, wiring and scenery. Raffle layout - track and scenery Members' layouts
- Recognition as being part of a Nationally known club.

Train Spotting: Ryan Jones

Hollins Ferry Road yard
Monday September 28th
11:40 am.

BANTRAK was founded in 1983 as the Greater Baltimore N-Scale Associates. Begun as a “round robin” group to share skills and experiences, we have expanded our focus to include participation in many diverse activities to promote model railroading in general and N-Scale model railroading in particular. Activities include participation in local, regional and national shows, meets and conventions. BANTRAK membership includes membership in the national NTRAK organization.

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This is ***your*** newsletter! Please send articles, photos, and suggestions to newsletter@bantrak.net
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