

THE CALL BOARD



A 100% **NTRAK** CLUB

Celebrating Our 12th Year!

March 2003

VOLUME XII NUMBER 3

Convention Update

John Drye

We're slowly making progress towards opening registration for 2004. We still need to do a little coordination with the hotel, but hope to open registration for club members this month. We're also starting to work out the details of planned trips to Houston for the NTRAK show and to Toronto for the NMRA. We'll also go to a bunch of other shows starting this fall to ring the bell for '04.

The Landmark Mall show was a great place to start thinking about some of the layout topics we'll have to work out for 2004. Just to put it in perspective, multiply the Landmark setup by ten, and that's about the size of the '04 layout. Paul, John, Matt and crew put together a pair of pretty neat layouts. We had a lot of visitors and ran a bunch of trains.

The two layouts did remind us why NTRAK has three (sometimes more) main lines, though. There were always crowds around the 3-TRAK and 4-TRAK loops, because there was almost always a train in sight, anywhere on the layout. The DCC oNe TRAK section was able to match this at times. In fact, for a while, as many as six trains were running on the single loop, with four engineers (a neat trick). During the times when the DCC crews had to go to beans, though, few wheels were turning, so we had few spectators (*Ed—Looking down from above, you could tell the DC loops, they were the ones with the Captain's chairs. The four people who did most of the running on DCC stoof ALL weekend.*)

We'll have to keep the key NTRAK mission (put trains in front of the public) as we continue planning for '04. It is easier to keep a train on "autopilot" on a more conventional analog loop. Of course, flawless track-work helps.

That's another topic worth discussing. Most of the modules worked well (almost all of the time). However, others were still experiencing "growing pains". We're going to be VERY busy running the convention in 2004. There will be little time to fix modules on the fly once we start setting up the layout. Fortunately, we have 18 months between now and then. We will schedule regular module MASH sessions at backshops--- THAT'S where we're supposed to be testing modules anyway.

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The View from the Gap

Cotton Bowen, President

Well! A recent New York Times article proposes that model railroading is a dying hobby!?! I don't think so! Maybe in downtown Manhattan, model railroading is dying; a thought I can't debate directly since I'm not in Manhattan, but in Washington, D.C., I can, and I will take issue with that thesis.

It is easy to concede that the nature of retailing model railroad supplies is changing, but that is true of almost everything in retail operations these days. We have all seen "brick and mortar" hobby shops close. In five years I've seen four stores close, including one of our own member's, "Obie's Trains". Fortunately, others have opened. I met the proprietor of the newly opened "Leesburg Hobbies" at the Princes Georges County Equestrian

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California Railfanning Pt II
How to use the lift bridge
How to use DCC equipment
CSX Pope's Creek Sub

HOST CLUB OF THE 2004 NTRAK EAST CONVENTION



MODULE OF THE MONTH



Brian Chibbaro's "Cruisin' Weekend"

Mat Chibbaro

The "seed" for this layout lies in my son Brian's interest in cars (the road kind, not the rail kind). He has quite a collection of micro-machines vehicles from widely different eras. During one of our trips to the annual "Cruisin' Ocean City" weekend, we came up with the idea for this layout, where any vehicles of any model year would look good. Thus began Brian's graduation

from the Pip-squeek Division to his first Ntrak module. Although I helped along the way, Brian did almost all of the construction.

We decided on a 2'x4' size. To make the frame as light as possible, we used 1"x4" pine for the short ends, and 1/4" thick plywood for long sides. I cut the pieces with my power tools, then Brian assembled them with drywall screws. I cut some scraps to form the pockets for the removable legs. We sized these pockets so one thickness of 2" foam would sit on them and be flush with the

frame top. Brian mounted a tee-nut to accept the eyebolt which holds the legs, then he assembled these pockets with more drywall screws.

For legs, I donated to Brian a set of the removable legs that I make for the lightweight frames I sell. They are made with 1/2" EMT. The carriage bolt levelers on the bottom are held by a dowel/insert nut assembly.

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RAIL EVENTS TIMETABLE

March	2	Backshop Prince of Peace Church, Springfield, VA	20	VA, Setup Foreman: Peter Pfothenauer Fairfax Station Show, Fairfax, VA Setup time 11:30 am Show time: 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	16	Fairfax Station Show setup time: 11:30am Show time: 1:00pm - 4:00pm	May	4
	15-16	Boy Scout Troop 964 Train Show Saunders Middle School, Woodbridge, VA Setup foreman: Bill Rutherford		18
April	6	Backshop Prince of Peace Church, Springfield, VA Sun 12:30 - 6:00	June	1
	5-6	Great Scale Model Train Show Timonium Fairgrounds, Timonium, MD Road trip on Saturday - get your feelers out to form carpools!		7
	12-13	Spotsylvania Mall Public Show, Spotsylvania,		14-15
				Manassas Railfest, Manassas, VA Setup Foreman: Bill Rutherford
				Alexandria Red Cross Waterfront Festival

View from the Gap, page 1

Center Greenberg show. Additionally, *Ryder's Hobbies* in Sterling, although well established, at about four years old, is a relative new comer. One of our own members, Brad Petersen, works at Ryder's. Other stores, like our own Doc Pritchards' *Granddad's Hobbies*, are well established and doing well. But, I digress and do not mean to provide a commercial message. The point is that hobby stores, like all retail operations, open and close regularly; some are well established, others are new. But, stores of all types open and close all the time and that's really nothing new. Concurrently, we all know that the Internet has taken up the slack and maybe even expanded the overall market.

Speaking of the Internet, sometimes things work backwards. At the Greenberg Show, I spoke with the proprietor of *Storm King Hobbies* out of Manchester, Maryland. He started in Internet sales, and is now looking to open a retail shop! However, he does acknowledge that much of his business will remain on the Internet. So what's my point? The retail market may have changed, but it's still there; it's just not quite the same as when we grew up! Change is inevitable, get used to it!

So, who does Model Railroading? Most of us have fond memories of getting electric trains as children. Many of us older guys remember well that Lionel or American Flyer set that we got for Christmas and debating with our friends, who owned the competing set, the virtues of our particular make. I can't begin to count the number of parents and their children I have met at Fairfax Station, or a Greenberg show, that have an O, HO or N scale set at home. I have also observed the fascination on the faces of the children that visit our layouts. There's something in their faces that tells me that not only are they enjoying the experience, they are also impressed. That kind of impression stays around for a long time. Later, when their stars align, they will need a way to mix with their contemporaries, and do something with their free time. Some will return, as did I, to model trains. My point is, that few of us just jumped into model railroading, we sort of eased into it over a period of years or decades. Just keep those sets, kits and outfits going to the young set. Lead, and they will follow.

Some of us got into model trains earlier in our lives. They're the lucky ones, how I envy them! Like many, I had to establish a career(s), raise a family, and devote my non-work time to family needs. I did this kind of life for years (decades) before I suddenly popped out of the family-raising mode, and emerged into the empty nest mode. Now I can do some of these neat things that I observed in my childhood and kept in the recesses of my memory for all those years. My father was right, "son, just wait until you grow up, then you can do those things. In meantime you've got a life to start."

Yes, model trains are a hobby for all ages and both sexes, but let's face it. Unless you are one of the lucky ones, the

opportunity necessary to demonstrate the level of expertise and achievement that produces real enjoyment, and impresses our public sometimes takes time to develop.

Young adults often have families to care for, and that is a large commitment; the children who operated trains in their elementary years grow to become teenagers and graduate to other activities, usually the opposite sex, and rightly so! So, that leaves the model railroad community with the lucky few who have the time as twenty some-things, the thirty-ish folks who are starting to have time and opportunity, and then the rest of us in our forties and above who are past, or passing, the intense trials of raising families and establishing careers (of course, we have our own challenges-but let's not talk about those) to pursue model railroading.

The point I make is that hobbies, like model railroading, are there to help us use spare time, enjoy those rare moments when nothing else demands our attention, and most importantly, to provide an escape from the routine of every day life. As long as there is spare time, intellectually and technically challenging things to do that result in a sense of achievement and a sense of escape, when all is said and done, there will be model railroads to build, run and love. This hobby just isn't dying! It's just getting better! If you want model railroading to survive, just keep doing what you're doing-RuNNiNg TraiNs!!

Landmark Mall

Cotton Bowen

What a great set-up, and time we spent running trains! The setup was one of the smoothest I have seen. We had a few nominal electrical glitches on the Red Line Route, and those who were running the DCC loop had to deal with logistics, but everything was up and running in good order. Our public was well entertained, and I dare say that we impressed some potential Railroad Modelers. Just wait! Some of those toddlers will be N-trakers someday. Two comments to encourage improvement in the future. *Keep the trains ruNNing*. The public doesn't like static displays near as much as live running trains. Lastly, my many thanks and appreciation to those who showed up early and stayed late to setup and tear down. For those who left early, you missed the "full Monte." I know that other Presidents have written about the need to stay or come back to pack up many times. I know that I cannot change human nature, nor can I always successfully ask those who slide out without helping to pack up, to rearrange their schedules. BUT! Every set of hands available helps to do the job that much quicker. It seems that there are those who stick through thick and thin, and those who habitually cut and run. In the end, it is your reputation that either grows or diminishes with your fellow members. Stick around next time! You might become one of the "Band of Brothers"!



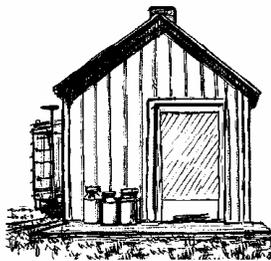
THE HOSTLER'S SHACK



Matt Schaefer

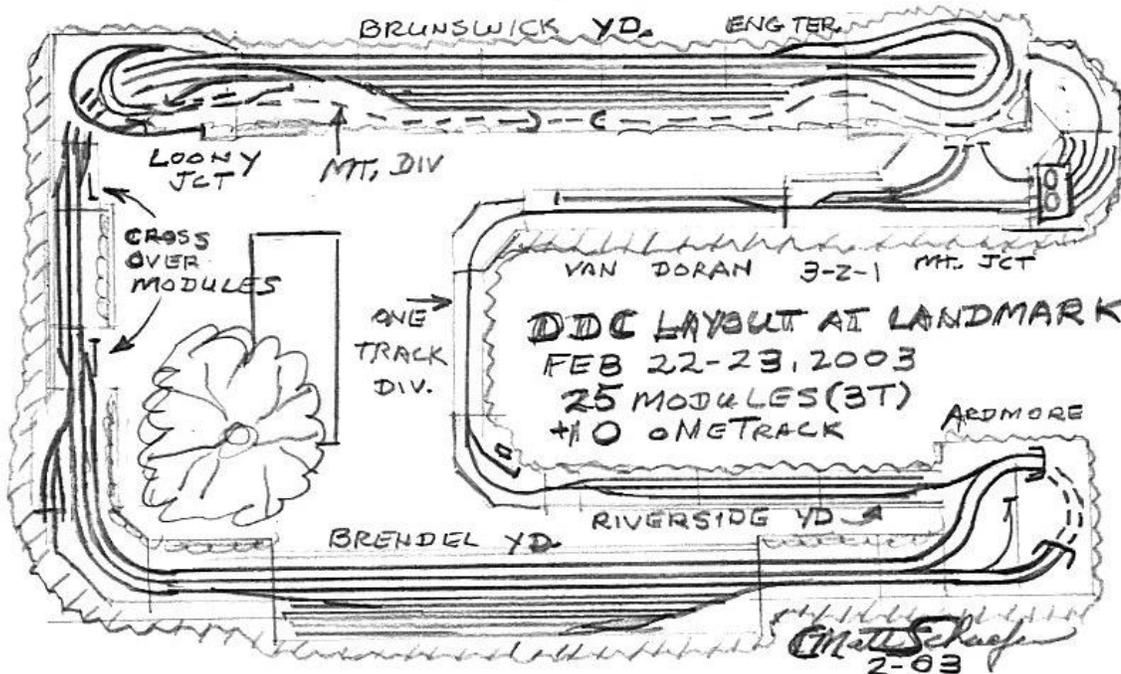
SHAKEDOWN - Landmark had more questions going around than trains. Do we have enough trains running for a public show? Is it better if our DCC and DC are on separate layouts or attached? How do we get traffic up to track capacity? Specifically how can we test reliability of modules at the back shop? Do we need a check list for module inspections? How do we get better reliability? We all know the questions by now. I will throw in a few solutions.

FROM THE DARK SIDE – At Landmark, I set up on the DCC side, the “Dark Side”. I felt like we were on the “far out” side too. Also, I enjoyed the spice and variety where we could divert red trains up to green, through the 1T division cutoff, run the long dog bone or the short dog bone around the Loony flyover (see diagram). This was a Steitz master maze including 34 modules with 2 flyovers, 3 loops and many junctions, 3 yards and several long passing tracks and 10 oNetrack modules. This style has developed from the NJS layouts seen at Edison and Richmond. I wished everyone in the club had experienced a ride around that railroad, but it was not to be.



PROBLEMS – 1) We just did not have enough engineers to run as many trains as the DCC layout was designed for. 2) Two of us had to be out for extended periods Saturday and Sunday, and we couldn't recruit enough members to help us for the full 2 days. 3) Some members probably did not know we were asking for crews to run trains. That was our shortcoming. Running more than one train per loop and per operator (either on DCC or Aristos) is one approach I like, but requires reliable operations and more operator attention, so we did it! Did we have too many modules setting up 135' of DCC for just 2 to 4 operators and for 2 days? We thought if the modules were in a peninsula off of the main layout, maybe we could have worked together more and run more trains together. By adding Aristos, a peninsula can be switched over from DCC to Aristos as desired or disconnected by pulling the interface plug. We ought to be able to coordinate something along those lines for a back up.

THE COUNTRY CLUB SIDE –The lift bridge worked flawlessly for me and looked neat. It made it easy for old folks to get in and out of the pit. Both were fun layouts and I wished I had more time to run on Aristos but those week ends go so fast and there were problems. I had a slow order for track replacement (stuff happens) but that backed up the RLR. It would be nice if we could cross over and use a passing track around work zones like the prototype. Next, my train stopped each time it entered a new block and the quick solution was to make the RLR all one block. We are looking for solutions but the layout is no longer there to troubleshoot.



DOG BONES - The dog bone with passing tracks is the type layout we will have at Hawks Nest Lodge, WV, March 27 – 29. For more on this style of operation, see my article in Jim FitzGerald's March/April 2003 newsletter. NVNtrak is fortunate it can offer a variety of features and games to attract a wide variety of model railroaders.



The Ntrak lines sit on a length of 1/4" plywood, which is supported on the bottom by pine stiffeners approximately 1/2" x 3/4" in cross section. The rest of the area in the frame is recessed 2" thick foam for removable scenery, ala Gil Brauch, our illustrious life member #1. We painted a base coat of gray latex paint on both foam pieces, since much of the scenery was road surface.

To plan out the roads & structures, we first decided on the backdrops we'd use (from Instant Horizons), and then took cues from that. For instance, a road in the backdrop fades into the horizon at the intersection of the 2 backdrop pieces. We located a front-to-rear road here. This would also dictate the location of the grade crossing of the Ntrak lines, for which we used atlas re-railers. To the left of that, in front of the factory on the backdrop, we'd have an industrial scene. The remainder would be an urban setting, with lower buildings and a park, closer to the viewer. After Brian built some the structures, we tried different locations, and decided on the locations & widths of the rest of the road grid.

When all of Brian's structures were done (He built all except for the gazebo and the large hotel), we could get the exact sizes for the blocks. He cut out matte board blocks to serve as sidewalks & structure bases, then painted them with a beige color. When dry, we glued them in their correct locations.

I then showed Brian how to weather roads with an ordinary pencil and a finger; he thought that was really cool. The final step on the roads is the lines. We got yellow & white paint pens, then Brian made the lines with the help of a straight-edge. When the roads were done, Brian added the grass in the park area with ground foam. After we were sure the roads & the park looked good, the structures were mounted using full strength matte medium.

As of this writing, Brian has started to add details. He has a lot more to go, with figures, cans, boxes, junk, old newspapers, etc, expected to complete this module. The structures still need to be named. Brian adds his vehicles to the layout during shows; they are not glued down.

This city does not have a name, even though the module does. In fact, only one road has a name: Noll Avenue. This is where Brian likes to place his prized possessions, vehicles painted by fellow club member Noll Horan, including a model of the '57 Chevy Noll used to own.

Once again, another thanks to all the club members that have accepted Brian & Stephanie into the group in our true "Semper Gumby."



Once again, a great weekend for NVNTRAK at Landmark Mall. Over 250' of modules came out to the public show. Everyone that come out for the setup had fun running trains for two to three hours at a times. Trains where running on three loops, one had all DCC and the other two where DC, connected together with junctions to form a six block Red line route, allowing up to three trains on the RLR.

I would like to thank John Steitz for organizing and setting up the DCC loop for the Landmark Mall Show. I also would like to thank all the members that came out with modules, or members who just came out to help out to setup or tear down the Layout. We only had about 25 members come out to help, although we had some other members come out, but only to run trains. If you plan to be at a show, I ask that you come and help setup or tear down. This will make everything get done faster.

TRACK WORK - The most important aspect of an NTrak module is the track work. If track work is not done right, we will always have problems with running trains. This is BAD. Check and double check your module's track work and if you need help, you can call me and I can arrange for help at the next back shop. From now on, I plan to have a small layout setup for testing members new or rebuild modules at all back-shops.

We have many shows coming up in the next four mouths. Please check the events calendar to see which shows you would like to attend, and if you are bring out a module, please contact your Superintendent or the show Setup Foreman ASAP. Some of these shows provide us with limited space.

The new lift bridge has been finished and was working great at the Landmark Mall Show. Members no longer had to crawl under the layout. It was great to see Gene on the inside of the layout for the first time.

I would like to thank everyone for your time and lets all work together to make NVNTRAK better and have fun ruNNing trains for the public.



Landmark Mall—DCC Loop

John Steitz

As part of the NVNTRAK Landmark Mall set-up on February 22-23, a few of us crossed over to the "Dark Side," to run a DCC layout adjacent to the analog loops in Center Court. Actually, our Superintendent, Paul Diley, had asked me several weeks ago to organize a repeat of the ops layout we had at the Arlington County Fair last year. The club had gained extra real estate in the court in front of Lord and Taylor, about 100 feet away from the main part of Center Court, and Paul wanted to fill that space with a self-sufficient circuit of modules to give us even more opportunity to run trains. At that time, it also looked like a good opportunity to bring out oNeTRAK modules that hadn't seen a set-up in quite some time.

With plans well underway, Paul came to me a week before the show and asked if we would move our "ops loop" to Center Court, to fill up space recently vacated. Due to unavoidable conflicts, illness and injury, the analog section had lost over 90 feet of modules in the preceding weeks. It's a comment on our good fortune in NVNTRAK that the club could afford to lose 22+ modules for a show, and still manage to fill up the Center Court of Landmark; many NVNTRAK clubs don't have 22 modules altogether!

Friday night and Saturday morning, we repeated the classic drill of setting up a large layout in Center Court. Matt Guey Lee, Dave Davies, Matt Schaefer, Mat Cibarro, Jay Keese, John Drye and yours truly all contributed modules to our layout, and most of us set-up more than one. Throw in a few club modules and bridges and the DCC supplies (and a lot of blood, sweat and tears), and we had ourselves a layout!

As with Arlington Fair last summer, we ran a 3T/4T trunk line on a folded dog-bone layout in between Matt G's return loops. This time, the layout formed a big "U" shape. The trunk line ran along the outside of the "U," from Gallitzen Loop, through Matt G's NE Corridor Engine Terminal and Dave's Brunswick Yard, and around the corner of Matt Schaefer's Looney Jct. From there it ran through Mat Cibarro's Boulder Jct and across two offset bridge modules built by Matt S. and Ad Tower, a club module. Rounding another corner (my own Black Diamond #1), it ran behind my Brendel Yard and across Matt G's Reservoir to the other return loop, Matt G's Ardmore Loop.

The oNeTrak section ran between the return loops on the *inside* of the "U." My Riverside Yard led to Maxie's Farm (a 3' 1T corner, used as an inside corner, from John Drye) and then across a club bridge module. Another 1T corner, the 2' Yasgur's Farm from John Drye, was used as an inside corner, leading to Jay Keese's Van Dorn Intermodal Terminal. From there, Dave's CP 3-2-1 led to a club Junction module, my own Black Diamond #1 (the Power Plant scene) and the club's Turntable corner (together forming a

180 degree half-circle) to Gallitzen Loop, where the 1T branch rejoined the main line. The last three 3T modules were used solely for the Red Lines and for storage sidings, showing again that a 1T layout can use 3T modules to complete circuits.

What made this layout interesting was the choice of routes for every train, every time it traversed the layout. With right-hand running, every train ran from Gallitzen down to Looney Jct. on the Red Line of the 3T modules. At Looney, trains had the option of looping up to the Mountain Division, going the other way back to Gallitzen. If a train continued on the Red Line around the outside of the U, they again faced a choice of routes at Ardmore Loop. They could return to Gallitzen on the Yellow Line, or take the Blue Line as far as Matt's offset bridge modules. Or they could take the 1T branch around the inside of the U back to Gallitzen, and perhaps do a little switching along the way.

I'm happy to report that we accommodated any operator with a Digitrax throttle (and several without, who borrowed throttles from the club or from other members). Traffic was lighter on Saturday, as we were wiped out from set-up, but heavier on Sunday, when we peaked at 6 trains running simultaneously. As Matt mentions elsewhere, this was only one less than the entire Analog section, though that section had twice as many modules. We all got our fill of running trains!

We tested a few concepts that we might want to use again in the future. The section from Gallitzen to Looney could be a side on a regular oval at some point, giving Red Line trains the option of switching or running through the Mountain Division. A stretch of oNeTRAK as an alternate to a section of the 3T line could be done on any layout with analog power - nothing in it required DCC. And we took what formerly was a simple siding on Ardmore loop, and turned that into a one-way junction. It was hard work, but we were able to push the envelop for running trains, something for which NVNTRAK was known for during the 1996 Convention, and something we need to recapture for our Capitol Limited next year.

Many thanks for all who contributed modules, to those who crossed over to the Dark Side to run a train or two, and to Paul, for giving us the space to play all weekend. We put Gumby to the test, and he came through for us.

Now, to catch up on sleep until the next time.....



Northern Virginia NTRAK Annual Meeting

February 2, 2003

The NVNTRAK Annual Business Meeting was convened at 2:55 PM. The 2001-2002 president, Noll Horan, offered a very short departing speech. Jim Labaugh provided the treasurer's report. The club is in excellent financial condition. Income from dues essentially pays for the running of the club. Additional income from shows, the annual auction and donations contribute to the club's coffers.

John Drye stated that the current focus of the 2004 convention committee is to update the Web Site, plan for a convention car and ramp up the publicity campaign.

New equipment is required for the club, both DC and DCC. The BOD will work this issue. Additionally, Jim Labaugh is going to place an order approximately 300 pairs of Cinch Jones connectors.

John Cook mentioned that NVNTRAK, at 76 members, is still the largest NTRAK club in the country. Edd mentioned that we should use the York, PA, Greenberg show as a venue to publicize for the 2004 convention. Dave Freshwater mentioned that this is the 175th anniversary of railroading and there will be events held at the B&O Museum in Baltimore. Several folks talked about potential new shows. Paul Dilley is working on the schedule for the year and should be contacted with this information to see how it fits into the planning process.

Edd brought up the subject of a club-owned yard. Many felt that this was a good idea. John Drye said that he has a start to a "T" junction that is designed to be part of a yard. Fred Obermyer has a door yard module set that may be a potential solution to the requirement (if available). Paul Dilley will work on this.

Paul Dilley is working to sort out the club's track boxes and make sure that all connecting track is cut and marked properly. Members should not cut this track during setups as it is designed to fit specific gaps between modules. If none of the connecting track fits in the space required, then flex track is available for this purpose. The Superintendent of the show is responsible for the track-work during setup.

Ken Allan suggested that the club enforce the NTRAK standards better. Check modules during Backshops for proper operation. All modules should have a proper skyboard and skirt. Let's be proud of our modules and put our best collective foot forward to the public. A discussion of skirts ensued. Options discussed were for each club member to own/keep the skirts with their module or to have the club collect all skirts. The BOD will discuss this issue and the issue of reviewing the new member Call Board for the purposes of updating and "getting back to standards."

The Annual Meeting was adjourned at 4:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc Sisk
Secretary, NVNTRAK

Convention Update from page 1

NVNTRAK is fortunate to have folks who are great at all any aspect of model railroading: bench-work, track-work, wiring and scenery. The MASH crews are available to get all of our club and individual modules in tip-top shape for 2004. We'll start this week by trying to figure out why the Aristos continue to blow fuses and how to fix that.

We're the hosts for 2004. If we're going to ask our guests to bring modules that look and operate well, then we sure better do so ourselves. Painted plywood, whether it's painted black, green or brown still looks like painted plywood. Kinked track and faulty or incomplete wiring will keep us and our guests from having the fun we expect to provide.

Landmark Mall was a great setup and did provide an interesting preview of how much fun 2004 can be. In order to make that happen, each of us has to make sure our modules are ready to go well before we open the doors. Your superintendent and I are going to make sure that happens. Please, take advantage of our upcoming MASH sessions. We want everyone to be able to bring a great looking/great running module to the convention.

To All,

I want to thank all club members for the help and support for the drawbridge, and especially to two Matt's for really doing the work. I used it, and it was nice to get in the center area and then out again. The bridge was wide enough so even while I went in and out backwards, there was enough room on each side to allow a margin of error.

Next time we have a set up where I can get to relatively easily, I will bring a train I can run.

To the two Matt's, I want to say a heart felt **THANK YOU** for your time and efforts.

It was good to see all of you.

Gene Aldridge

(Ed.—Picture of Gene's first trip inside loop on next page)

MARCH PHOTO ALBUM

Landmark Mall — Dave Davies

