



The Supe's prize-winning photos

As we reported in the Summer edition of *THE CROSSING GATE*, our own Superintendent, Lynn McCall, brought home four ribbons from the photo contest held in May at the Mid-Continent Regional in Kansas City. Here are his two first-place shots. On the left, "CSX Coal Drag," shot in Mobile, AL, in January of 2000. The shot took

top honors in the Prototype Slide category. On the right is a shot that took First Place in the Model Photo category, "A&IB 3930." The picture shows Lynn's own Alameda & Indian Beach loco as seen on Bill Pnaik's Arlee Valley Railroad in Crystal in 2002. Once again, congratulations, Lynn!

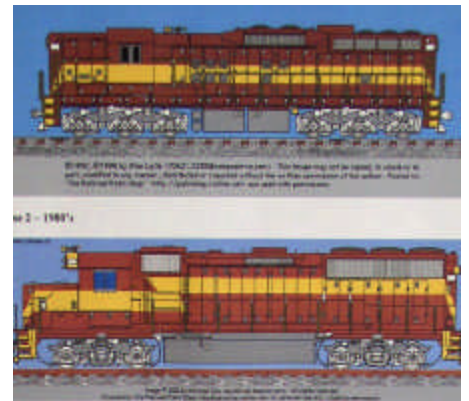
"Free-mo" modules will highlight the Railroad Club at the U's layout

By Bob Sterner

What do an engineering student, a geologist researcher, a former CB&Q and BNSF traffic manager, and a biologist who teaches university students about lakes and ponds all have in common? Why, trains, of course. These individuals and more are among the members of The Railroad Club at the University of Minnesota, a group begun in 2001 and which, in the short time since, has grown steadily. The club has organized several excursions plus a multimedia railroad

show, acquired space, and started construction on a 600-square-foot layout, which includes both permanent and modular sections.

The HO layout under construction on the East Bank campus represents the fictitious "Upper Midwest Transportation Corporation" (go ahead, check out the acronym and recall the name of our campus). When complete, the permanent layout will be multi-deck, have over five and a half scale miles of mainline, and will represent portions of a railroad stretching from Chicago (hidden staging) through the Twin Cities and westward on into prairie. A double track helix will connect the different levels and there will be a large double-ended yard. The mainline, complete with easements, grades, etc., was planned accurately using "3rd Plant" software. (Bob will present a modeling clinic on this software at our December 11 meeting. — Ed.) To date, most of the benchwork for the lowest level has been completed and track work should have begun by the time you read this. Thanks to a generous donation from



Even though the Club is still laying track, its locos already have a color scheme, based on the U's familiar maroon and gold.

Digitrax, that company's DCC control systems will be used. In addition to the layout, the club enjoys a good quantity of storage and workspace.

The entire mainline will have permanent trackage, but one of the unusual features of the layout will be its module docking points. Club modules will follow "free-mo" specifications — a set of standards derived from the European FREMO standards and brought to popularity by clubs on the U.S. West Coast. Free-mo uses a single-track main and places strict standards on the ends of the modules, while allowing what happens between the two ends to be largely, well, free.



Club moderator Bob Sterner stands in front of a prototype Free-mo module, built by TCD Super Lynn McCall and Chief Clerk Al Dowd.

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Modules themselves may twist and turn or be long or short. But because the single track main provides extra space, some stunningly beautiful scened examples have been produced.

These specs aren’t intended to merely generate modules that are eye-candy, however. Using Digitrax DCC, large setups on the West Coast have often involved point-to-point or point-to-loop configurations. U of M free-mo modules connected to the permanent layout will represent two separate branch lines and will emphasize switching and industrial



The benchwork for the permanent section of the Upper Mississippi Transportation Corporation began last August.

aspects. A TCD clinic on free-mo is planned for a future date.

For the U of M club, the combination of permanent and modular trackage has many benefits. Members will be able to construct an entire “layout” in the confines of a single module, practicing or learning all the basic hobby skills. It will also let us take part of our efforts on the road to public or school shows.

Within a few guidelines, members may use their own discretion on what to do with their own little piece of the world. Over the long term some modules will be replaced, so even if the last bush is planted on the main layout, there will always be something fresh and different for visitors to see.

University and college railroad clubs – especially a mixed-age club such as ours – give this next generation of railroad fans a much better opportunity to pursue their interests, and bridge the “intermediate years”

between childhood layout and adult hobby. That’s why we welcome new members, as well (of course) as any donations such as railroad items. It’s still very much the ground floor, so if you’re interested in being a part of the future of this group, let us hear from you.

In addition, we hope to see you at Gopher Rail 2004. Our first multimedia event was held on the U campus in August and will continue to be held annually.

For more information:

Website for The RR Club at the U:
<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rrclubum>

Yahoo discussion group (registration is free and open to anyone)
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uofm_rr_club/

FREMO (European progenitor of free-mo):
<http://www.fremo.org/>

Free-mo: <http://www.free-mo.org>, or see articles in the April and May 2003 *Railroad Model Journal*

Bob Sterner is Professor and Faculty Advisor to The Railroad Club at the University of Minnesota

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25’x52’ modular “M-shaped” layout on which operating sessions were held every three hours. Group members used it as a training device to introduce Timetable and Train Order operation to convention attendees. It was a very popular event and far surpassed the expectations of the builders.

My stint in the Roundhouse kept me from going on any of the tours or attending many clinics. However, I was able to see a few, including those by Bill Darnaby and Allen McClelland. Modelers like Bruce Chubb, Tony Koester, David Barrow, and clinicians from the model railroad magazines weren’t in attendance. But to me it was no loss – I’ve been to so many conventions that I’ve seen most of their clinics anyway.

Although some clinicians had canceled, their places had been filled, so there was still a full slate to see. Clinics ran continuously from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. in eight rooms from Sunday evening through Saturday morning. There were plenty to choose from.

Thursday afternoon and evening, we in the Layout Design Special Interest Group had our own tour of nine layouts. Since we use carpools for tours, we have more time at each layout. It also means we can visit layouts that are anywhere from the planning stages to completely finished. The layouts were in the Hamilton, Ontario area and Eastward back to the hotel. At the midpoint of the tour, we had a catered picnic at a conservation area. On Sunday afternoon, we had a smaller three-layout tour where all the layouts were in the main Toronto area. So I did see twelve very interesting layouts.

On Friday evening members of the LDSIG had our own banquet and had a great time.

Saturday, Pam and I spent a couple of hours at the train show. While there were several layouts and some vendors, there were no manufacturers so we soon left.

Pam and I both agreed that, in spite of the NMRA pulling out of the silent auction, Company Store, and the Train Show, the Toronto convention was one of the better ones we’ve attended. All of the Toronto crew went out of their way to make sure that it was. We didn’t hear of any major problems so apparently everything went smoothly.

After two days of sightseeing (including Niagara Falls and downtown Toronto) Pam and I returned home on Tuesday, ending a great convention and vacation.