

## **The Midland, Rockies and Western**

Bob Wirthlin, MMR

Photos by the author

The Midland, Rockies & Western (MR&W) was started by my Dad when he visited the World's Fair in 1939 and saw the Gilbert-American Flyer "Tru-Model" train set (Fig.1,#HO-100 Of 1938). This was a screwdriver-assembly kit with paint and decals for cast-metal Hudson locomotive, gondola, reefer, tank car, and caboose. He got these for "me", though I was only six years old at the time. He also got a cast-metal New Haven coach.

Dad was in the U S Navy, and built a number of layouts trying to find one that would survive the many household moves occasioned by naval service. Some had frame construction and plaster-covered wire screen scenery, and one even was made of balsa wood scavenged from a surplus life raft. None took the beating of the movers.

Nevertheless, locomotives, cars, and structures were added. Most were built in the evenings at his stateroom on board during many days at sea. The Hudson was converted from AC to DC with a Pitman motor; and a Mantua Pacific, Varney's "Little Joe" dockside switcher, a Penn Line Mikado, and a number of Silver Streak cars were constructed. I began to build cars and structures when I was 12, first simple kits and then some from scratch.

My first layout was made when I was in the Navy at Great Lakes, Illinois. It was made of 1" by 4" lumber as five frames that bolted together to form a rectangle about 80" by 100", anticipating that I would retire in California where few houses have basements, and would probably have to use a spare bedroom. Well, that happened; but it meant taking the door off its hinges and having to crawl under the layout to get to the center of the rectangle where the controls were located. There was little room for

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guests, so I took it apart and ripped the 1" by 4" lumber into 1" by 2", and made "L-girder" frames into a G-shaped layout like Malcon Furlow's San Juan Central. Now I could walk through the door into the aisle in the center, and accomodate a few guests (Fig.2, my layout plan).

The design of the mainline is a folded figure-8, with small yards at each end, passing sidings, two engine facilities with turntables, and hidden tracks to store extra trains. The roadbed is Tru-Scale, and bears code 83 nickle silver flex track. Trains are dispatched from a twin-cab through block controls. Hard shell scenery blends into Walther's Instant Horizons back drops.

To the right as you enter the layout is the Prairie Division and the town of Midland. Trains roughly follow U S 30, the Lincoln Highway, West to the town of Lake Bluff in the Fox Valley Division in the Rockies, then through the high desert and Moccasin (please see "Building the Station at Moccasin" in the *Bulletin*, March, 1994) of the Green River Division, to the town of Dunsmuir in the Shasta Division. My Dunsmuir has scratch built models of a number of structures present in 1939. (Please see "Modeling Dunsmuir" in *Mainline Modeler*, May and June, 1995) Nearby is the resort Shasta Springs. (Please see "Modeling Shasta Springs" in the *Bulletin*, September, 1994). Although the MR&W is a registered private pike and has its own locomotives and cars, you might see New York Central, Penn'sy, or B&O near Midland in the Prairie Division, UP or Rio Grande in the Fox Valley or Green River Divisions, and WP or SP in the Shasta Division. The layout features lots of scenery detail, and mechanical and light

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animation with sound effects.

Bob's layout was open for modelers attending the 2000 National Model Railroad Convention in San Jose, and the 2011 convention in Sacramento.



Fig. 1. An assembled version of Gilbert American Flyer train set HO-100 of 1938.

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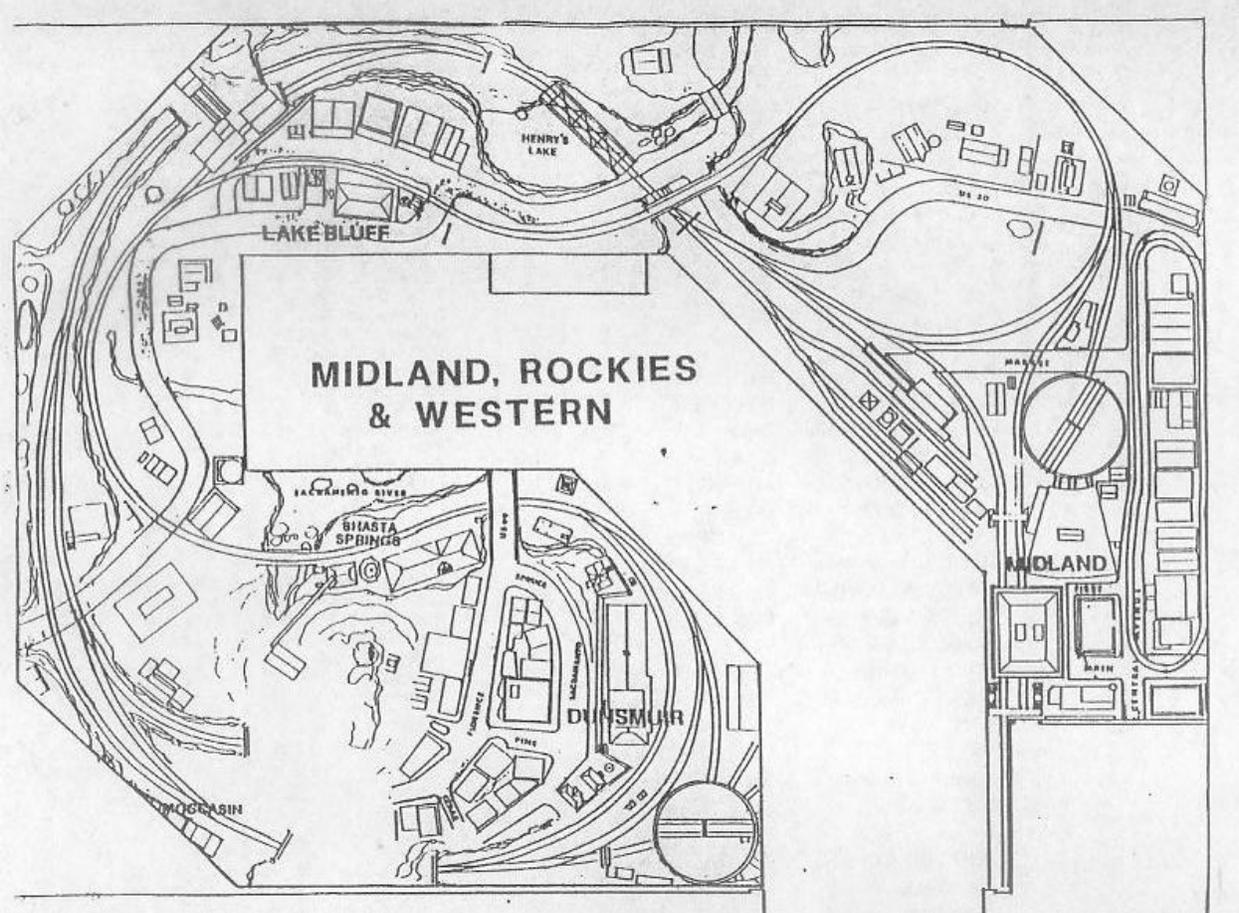


Fig. 2. The layout plan of my Midland, Rockies & Western model railroad.

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Fig. 3. A view of the city of Midland as seen from in front of Main St. Station. The Gayety Theater is an Ayres kit with full interior. In the center is an AHM kit with full interior detail: the Palace Dance Hall above, and a pool hall below. Across the street is Model Power's 'IRS on fire'. On the edge of its roof stands 'the man of steel', who will save persons in distress. In the center foreground is a park with scratch-built Japanese garden; and to the right is Wabash Valley drug store kit with full interior including a dentist's office upstairs.

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Fig. 4. A view of the intersection of Main St. and Central Ave. in front of Main St. Station in Midland. The 4-wheeled trolley was scratch built from brass as part of the Motive Power requirements for the Achievement Program.

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Fig. 5. Part of the engine service facilities at Midland is a turntable and 3-stall roundhouse. On the turntable is an original Varney "Little Joe" 0-4-0 switcher.

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Fig. 6. One of many mini-scenes on the MR&W is a hobo camp with flickering fire, and old Charlie plucking the banjo.

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Fig. 7. In the Prairie Division, just past the 'Illinois Railroad Museum' is a farm, which becomes a site for the Big Top when the circus comes to town.

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Fig. 8. Patterned after the Pioneer Zephyr, this kit-bashed Zephyr 'Silver Arrow' of the MR&W speeds across a trestle as it leaves the Prairie Division and enters the Fox Valley Division on the Midland, Rockies & Western.

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Fig. 9. Lake Bluff railroad station was one of the structures that Bob's Dad scratchbuilt while at sea. Across the road are his scratchbuilt Railroad Hotel and Sears mail-order outlet. To their right and left are Ayers kits for the Plugged Nickel Saloon and General Mdse., all with full interior details.

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Fig. 10. At the edge of Lake Bluff, a deputy marshall oversees a prisoner chain gang doing roadwork; while behind a 0-4-0T steam engine moves a string of ore cars under the tipple at Buckhorn Mining Co.

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Fig. 11. Crossing the high desert in the Green River Division is the 'Yerington' of the Nevada Copper Belt. Scratchbuilt from brass the model won First in Passenger at the NMRA Convention at Long Beach.

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Fig. 12. On a passing siding in the Green River Division is a cattle holding pen and water tank. Under the desert are hidden storage tracks. This grade crossing in the high desert which the natives call 'Four Corners' contains an Ayers kit "Old El Paso" truck stop cafe, a scratchbuilt 'Giant Orange', Woodland Scenics' 'Tucker Bros Welding', and across the highway a SS Ltd 'Richfield Gas Station', all with full interior detail.

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Fig. 13. Entering the Shasta Division the tracks cross the upper Sacramento River at the Shasta Springs Resort. The kiosk covering the fountain of natural soda water was adapted from a Campbell bandstand kit. The tram station was scratch-built. In the foreground beautiful Mossbrae Falls drops into the Sacramento. The scratchbuilt working tram climbs the hill to the Shasta Springs resort hotel, cabins, and spring baths above Shasta Falls. The SP-10 'pocket streamliner', a scratch-built Budd RDC-1, pauses at Shasta Springs rustic log cabin depot, scratch-built from the plans of Paul Moon in the *Bulletin*, December, 1978, and with full interior detail.

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Fig. 14. On Florence Avenue, the main drag in Dunsmuir, near Spruce St. a Woodland Scenics' dump truck and backhoe are doing repairs to water lines. The backhoe is animated to dig the ditch and spout smoke from its stack. Blinking mini-diodes are on the barriers.

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Fig. 15. In front of Dunsmuir Station an animated bulldozer endlessly pushes up a pile of dirt.

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Fig. 16. Going under a scratchbuilt footbridge from Sacramento Avenue to the SP shops at Dunsmuir depot is a SP 2-6-0 mogul which Bob Scratch-built from brass as part of his Motive Power requirement for the NMRA Achievement Program. Beautiful Mt. Shasta gleams in the background.

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Fig. 17. Pine Street connects Sacramento Avenue with Florence

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Avenue behind Dunsmuir Station. The Weed Hotel is on one side of Pine, and the bank and Palm Cafe on the other. In this mini-scene a farmer has a predicament as his tomatoes are rolling out of the back of his pick-up and down toward Sacramento Ave. There is a small, quaint railroad museum in the hotel building.



Fig. 18. The turntable at Dunsmuir was modified from a Con-Cor kit, but the SP Station, SP Hospital, Palm Cafe, Weed Hotel and Annex, and all the other visible buildings were scratch-built. Bob moved Castle Craggs about 10 miles up the road to be a scene divider behind his Dunsmuir. Under the Craggs are hidden storage tracks.