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## LAYOUTS

### Build a Railroad in Seven Days

By Noel Widdifield  
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This is a tale of how a cowboy built a railroad in less than a week.

The cowboy, my brother David, and his wife, Diane had watched the progression of my indoor railroad during family visits to our home in Maryland. They were always an appreciative, interested audience until they saw my outdoor railroad run for the first time. Seeing the trains, buildings and people, David's imagination was lassoed.

David's hobbies include: woodworking, gun collecting and cowboy action shooting.



He builds wheelchair ramps for the handicapped and houses for the Habitat for Humanity. Twice a year he goes to Idaho as a cowboy on a working cattle ranch.



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Noting his new interest in Large Scale trains, I thought: Christmas present. The two of us shared the same early childhood, Christmas morning memory of a new train set. So I ordered David a Bachmann White Pass & Yukon Ten-Wheeler and four Bachmann White Pass & Yukon Jackson Sharp passenger cars. I also purchased an ARISTO/Crest 10 amp Ultima power supply, an ARISTO/Crest Train engineer and a circle of ARISTO brass track and sent them to him. Needless to say, David was incredulous when he opened the presents. Calling from Indiana, he profusely thanked me and asked, "When can you come to my house to help me set this up in the backyard?"

We agreed to work in the three days before the start of the U.S. Grand Prix activities scheduled for June 16 -19 at Indianapolis. The Motor Speedway is near his home in Noblesville, Indiana. I was already booked for our traditional race gathering with my son David, from Virginia, and his buddies. (I join son David for his racing hobby and he goes with me to York for the TCA meets.)

To make my assistance most productive, I told brother David that he should clear the area for the railroad, construct a frame or border for the railroad and put down the black plastic weed control sheets within the area for the railroad. I sent him a couple of books on Large Scale railroad construction and asked him to design his track plan. We had several conversations over the next few months about what he wanted in his railroad.

His desire for a Large Scale railroad fit into his overriding interest in all things cowboy. He explained that he would like a railroad set in the old West, and it would carry passengers between old western towns and would transport horses and cows to market.

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He said that he was primarily interested in sitting and watching the trains run rather than doing much switching. After much discussion, he decided on a dog bone main line with a passing siding or two.

About a week before I arrived, David cleared the area for the railroad, purchased and placed small limestone boulders as a border around the railroad area, and spread the black plastic within the border. He located a source for the crusher fine rock that we would use for the roadbed for the railroad.

When I arrived, all was in readiness for us to be productive.



We began by laying out the track on the black plastic to determine if we had all of the track and switches needed to complete the track plan David had envisioned. He really liked this part of the activity since he had spent about four months imagining how the track would look in the area for the railroad.





Of course, we did not have enough track and other things we needed, so we drove to Watt's Train Shop in nearby Zionsville to make the necessary purchases. Oops, a second trip quickly followed because we forgot that we would need a tap and die set and additional track screws to complete the project. After the second trip to Watt's, the track went down quickly with only a couple of cuts required to make everything fit.









At the end of the first day, we had laid out the track and made sure that the engine could negotiate the curves and switches. We ran the trains for a few minutes that evening, had a couple of beers to enjoy the trains and then took up all of the track so we would be ready the next morning to take delivery of the crusher fine rock that David had ordered.

After one of Diane's good chuck wagon dinners and a great night's sleep, we rolled out of our bunks ready for the arrival of the stone. About 9:00 we heard the sound of a large truck coming down the street and went outside to find a cement mixer arriving to pour a neighbor's new patio. As we watched the patio being poured, our truck arrived with the stone. The driver backed the truck up to the railroad area and dumped his load into the center. He then jumped down and helped us spread the stone in a 6-inch layer over the railroad area. The whole operation only took about a half an hour to complete.

As soon as the driver left, we laid track on the top of the crusher fine rock.



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We quickly discovered that the crusher fine was very hard on our knees so we cut large sections from a cardboard box to kneel on as we assembled the track and switches.





It took us about two hours to get the track in place.



All of the track was ARISTOCRAFT brass American track, and we used the ARISTO rail fasteners and screws to put it together.



David was surprised at the ease of assembly.





Once the track and switches were in place, we hooked up the ARISTO power supply and Train Engineer and fastened the wires to the track.





We decided to connect the power pack and Train Engineer in a temporary fashion so David could later construct a portable cart to transport the engines and cars from his garage to the railroad.



He planned to fasten the power pack and Train Engineer to the cart so that it could also be connected and disconnected to keep it inside the garage and out of the weather between uses. He has since done this.

We checked all of the connections and put the engine on the track. I handed the Train Engineer to David and explained how it worked.



As David started the engine, I captured the joy on his face that shows why Large Scale trains are so much fun.



He watched the engine run around the track and the cowboy had a payday grin to celebrate the result as he saw the culmination of his efforts.





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Watching the train make a few circuits around the dog bone, it became clear that we needed to make some minor adjustments to the level of some of the track and switches. Dave solved the problem by moving the rock under the lower areas under the track.



After about 30 minutes of track leveling, we added the passenger cars to the engine and ran the trains for about an hour. Occasionally we adjusted some minor leveling problem.



With those additional adjustments the train ran smoothly.



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During the time we had been constructing the railroad, several of David's neighbors had stopped over to see what we were doing. Once the train began running, they returned to see it and commented on how much fun a working railroad was. One friend sat down with us, and he and David toasted the new railroad.



A few minutes later my son and his friends arrived from the U.S Grand Prix practice day and joined us as we watched the trains run for the next two hours.





Although it took several weeks to acquire the engines, cars, track, power and switches and a couple of months to plan out the railroad, the actual building of this railroad took less than a week to complete. It is a very simple railroad but has already given David several months of pleasure.

He plans to build some buildings and to add a caboose and some cattle cars, so he can ship his steers to market. Before too long he will be calling to talk about additional locos and cars, how to extend the track and when to add some plants.

Frequently we hear from people at Large Scale events and on LSOL.com that they have the trains and track but just haven't had the time to actually build their railroad. I hope this article shows that a railroad can be constructed in a very short period of time. Even with a simple track plan, the owner can have a place to see his or her trains running and giving many days, weeks and months of pleasure. Even if the railroad never progresses beyond the size and complexity of David's railroad, it will provide much satisfaction to the builder.

It is easy to put off getting started, but it is possible to put a railroad in your yard or garden with only a week of time invested. Hopefully, those of you who have been holding your horses will get out in the yard or garden and put down some track to start running your trains like this cowboy hero did.

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