

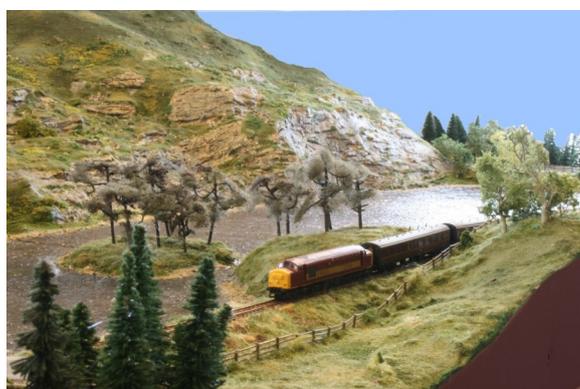
Loch Oran

A Scottish inspired N Gauge layout constructed by David Harrison a member of BARMATES

The construction of Loch Oran is my first serious attempt at building an N gauge layout. I had previously worked in the “much larger” OO scale.

I had it in mind to build a Scottish based layout in the modern era and I really fancied the West Highland Line, a real opportunity to build a landscape. I did have reservations about the availability of stock and my own ability to make buildings to N gauge standards. Having read Ian Futers’ book *Modelling Scotland’s Railways* with its features, detailed articles and plans of West Highland station building in 2mm scale I was set to go. All I needed was a location on which to base the layout.

I had driven the route from Glasgow northwards past Loch Lomond a few times on the way to holiday destinations like Oban, Mull, Fort William and Skye. A more recent trip and a lingering look at Crianlarich and my mind was made. I decided that this was an inspirational location with the junction on the railway itself, for operational interest, the viaducts, station, mountains and wooded backdrops. I made sketches and plans, took loads of photographs and the started to consider stock and operational potential. I made two further visits to Crainlarich with in a year each time taking more photographs and revising plans.



Trains running from Glasgow to Fort William and the occasional; sprinter traversing the curve to Oban would be the only working trains. But, wait a minute, there once was line that ran from Callander to Oban via Crainlarich. It was the original line through the village and the West Highland line was constructed on a viaduct over it. The original line was scheduled to be closed in 1965 under the Beeching axe but was actually closed a few months earlier than planned due to a landslip blocking the line.

My idea was to build the layout with the West Highland line and also operate the original line as if it had never been closed and utilise typical Scottish stock, including excursion trains, freight trains as well as normal sprinter traffic.

The landscape itself has been based on that around Crianlarich but a loch has been added to provide scenic interest. Hence the name Loch Oran. Some of the buildings in the village scene are based on those in Crianlarich although the upper station is based on the plans for Ardlui as the original station at Crianlarich was destroyed by fire in 1962 and replaced by a not quite so typical West Highland structure. (The original station at Ardlui was demolished in 1971 due to subsidence.)



Loch Oran the Track Plan

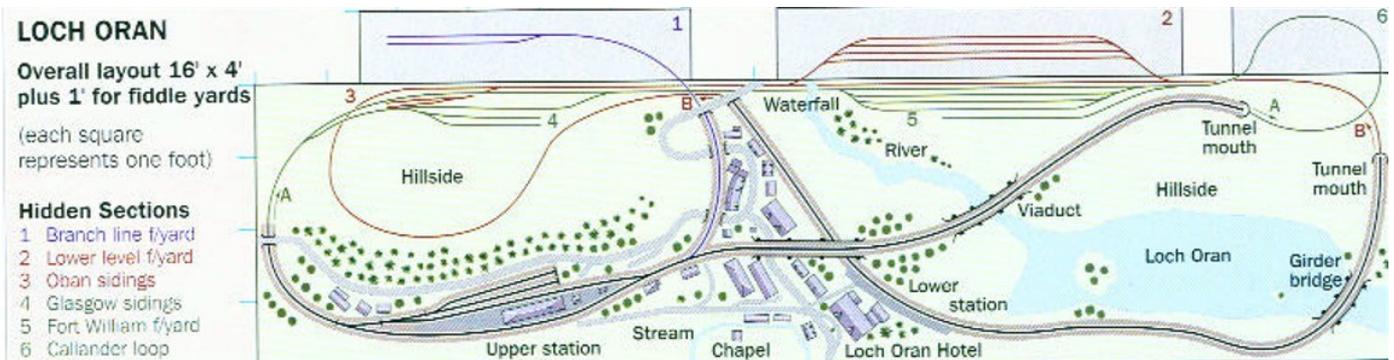
Once I had decided to construct a Scottish based layout I was taken aback to see how much interest there was in Scottish railways. Suddenly many articles appeared in the model railway press referring to Scottish layouts.

The main considerations in planning the track were realism and entertainment for any viewing public. I also wanted the operating of the trains to be straight forward.

I eventually hit upon the idea of having two separate circuits, a lower level – the Callander to Oban line and an upper level- the Glasgow to Fort William line. Both circuits were to be independently controlled with the spur from the upper station running through to storage sidings. Each circuit was to be made so that it could be operated as a continuous loop or end to end.

Having settled on the plan the lower level track was pinned down and tested. Perfect. The upper level track was pinned down and tested. Perfect.

The passing loops for each circuit are behind the backscene and the dumbbells and storage sidings are beneath the hills.



The track plan is reproduced from Railway Modeller Dec 2009

Operation is simple. Control is by Gaugemaster handheld controllers and points are operated by motors and switches. I did seriously consider “going digital” before building the layout but as both circuits are single track and operate on the one loco in steam principle, going digital did seem to be an unnecessary expense, although I haven’t ruled out “going digital” at some point in the future.



Multiple units run from end to end, while locomotive hauled trains run continuously, when nobody is looking and when somebody is looking they are stopped in the passing loop the loco is lifted off, placed on the other end of the train and run back in the opposite direction. Although on the upper level some trains are paused in the storage sidings and then sent round again in the same direction after a respectful interval.

The loco's and stock are typical of that found on the lines in the period 1999-2008, although I have yet to model the “aluminium train”. Anyone know which tanks are the most appropriate?

The Scenery

I was surprised by how many people recognised the location as being Crianlarich. I think I was even more surprised by how many people attending the show had actually been to Crianlarich.

The most frequently asked questions were about the scenery. The hills were made using plywood formers and then stapling chicken wire to the formers. Extra supports were put in where the chicken wire sagged a bit. The chicken wire was covered in Modroc and left to set. Once the Modroc had set it was given a coat of plaster so that the tiny holes were filled in. When the plaster was dry it was painted with green gloss paint and handfuls of fine scatter material were spread onto the wet paint and then it was left to dry. Once dry this was washed over, small areas at a time, with diluted PVA. Different shades of static grass were scattered over the PVA and just before it was finally dry courser Woodland Scenics scatter material was glued in places to the static grass so that the appearance of the grassed areas was not uniform. When the glue had dried it was all sprayed with hair spray to fix it in place.



Photo Railway Modeller

The rock faces were made from slithers of polystyrene glued onto the Modroc in the appropriate places. The slithers were laid in order to create the effect of strata. The polystyrene was then given a wash of thin plaster, which was allowed to run into all the cracks and more or less find its own level. Once the plaster was dry it was painted with appropriate shades of emulsion paint. The strata lines were emphasised with darker paint. When the emulsion paint was dry, the rocks were washed over with a very thinly diluted black wash, which again was allowed to run into all the nooks and crannies.

The loch, of course, is a flat surface and was one of the last features to be made. The scenics around the area of the loch had been completed, the loch bed was tidied up i.e. the lumps of plaster spilt during the course of constructing other features were scraped up; the loose scatter material was vacuumed away. When the loch bed was clean and free from obstacles small areas were covered with a thin layer of Artex. The Artex was then stippled with a small stiff and flat paint brush so as to create the effect of ripples on the water. The ripples are not even. Some areas are calm and other areas are a little rougher. Once the Artex had dried it was painted with poster paints in various shades of brown with some light touches of grey. When the poster paint was dry it was given a coat of clear gloss varnish. It was given a coat of gloss varnish every day for a week. When the varnish had dried a sandy shore and a few reeds were added.

There over 800 trees on the layout. The conifers are commercially products mainly from the Heki range. There are one or two other makes mingled in and some have been customised with scatter materials. Deciduous trees are a mixture of sea moss covered in scatter materials and trunks manufactured by Woodland Scenics and the same manufactures foliage net stretched over the branches. The scots pines have been made from Woodland Scenics conifer trunks which had holes drilled into the trunks then thin wire glued into the holes and then twisted in to the shape of branches. Heki flor was then stretched thinly over the branches. All the trees were given a squirt of hair spray to fix the foliage.

Some of the buildings in the village scene are scratch built and are based on buildings actually in Crianlarich. Although the Loch Oran Hotel near to the front of the layout is based on the Tarbert Hotel which is a few miles back down the real line on the shores of Loch Lomond. Some of the smaller buildings are from the Lyddle End range and there is even a Metclafe kit on there somewhere.



Loch Oran on view