

DISPATCH

February 2001

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AT LAST, THE FIRST

By David Stewart

December the 18th was a special day in the life of the O Scale **Appalachian and Ohio**, the slice of West Virginia that is taking shape in my basement. After more than 7 years of planning and construction the first actual operating session was held. Certainly trains have been running for a long time, but a variety of projects, a change of control systems, and non-availability of necessary electronics have prevented actually "playing trains." We still await a few items and the completion of the main yard controls, but it was decided to have a go at it nevertheless for the Christmas Monday night "work session."

So how does one design an initial operating session, especially one that has only four available engines (due to an O Scale decoder shortage) and the inability to follow the train over the mainline (we're still awaiting the cordless modules for the throttles)? Creativity, that's how. A schedule that resembled a sliding-block puzzle, moving engines/trains in such a way



1. A&O President David Stewart watches coal drag CX-4 in the river gorge. The beautifully painted brass Alco C430 has DCC controlled sound, headlights, number boards, and walkway lights.

that enabled the next desired train movement. Yes, sometimes we had the Willow Creek switcher doubling as power for the helper grade on coal drags and later as power for the Ridge Turn, but it worked. And what

a delight to actually watch the years of planning and construction come to life. Model railroaders have always been long on delayed gratification, but we were overdue.

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TIMETABLE 16

Timetable 16 has just been printed, and it **supersedes Timetable 15**. A few errors crept into Timetable 15, which went out with last month's **DISPATCH**. The February and March contests were mixed-up, and it should have been Timetable 16, not 15 (evidently Timetable 14 ran 2 sections over the years...) The mini-timetable on the last page of the **DISPATCH** was correct.

Your editor apologizes for any confusion this may have caused. **I**

THANKS JACK!

Big thanks to **Jack Rice** for opening the Columbia & Western for the January layout tour. His amazing layout was featured in the October issue of the **DISPATCH**.

LAYOUT TOUR CHANGED

Due to an overlap with the GATS show in Denver, February's layout tour of **Vern Brock's Mountain Valley** has been moved to **June**. This month will be a "pass." **I**

NCMR DISPLAY TABLE

It was agreed at the January planning meeting to put together a small table that the club can quickly erect at shows and other public events. The purpose is to inform the public about the NCMR and solicit new members.

David Stewart, Chuck Hagemester and **Bob Sobol** have been working on the project, which will first appear at the February GATS show, next to the DG&T (space courtesy of **Dave Trussel**.) **I**

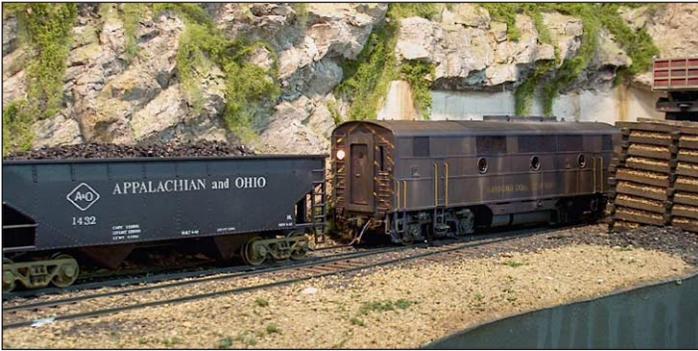


Photo by Bob Sobol

2. The Kayford switcher, a "headless horseman" F3B.

Since the dispatcher panel, the fast-clock, and the phone communications are yet to become fully operational, all train movements were initiated and supervised by the roving, Grand Poobah of the schedule, myself. What power! ("Ownership has its privileges.") We began this first session with a Pow-Wow over Christmas goodies to talk through just how we were going to do this. I quickly learned that a significant part of developing a successful operating experience is careful communication to the crew of just what is envisioned for the session. Even so, it takes actual experience to develop the sense of bringing a schedule to life.

With train assignments selected we left our round-table orientation and descended into West Virginia. The Kayford coal branch switcher, an F3 B-unit (in the tradition of the Haysi RR on the former Clinchfield) immediately began working the branch tipples (structure imagination required.) This headless-horseman with an operator window cut in one end moved loaded hoppers up the grade, through the Willow Creek yard and up the Morrison Branch to the large coal preparation plant (see "imagination" above.) It brought loaded hoppers from the plant to the coal-marshaling yard in Willow Creek, and moved emp-

ties to the tipples down the Kayford branch. The slow, silky-smooth performance of a back-EMF decoder and coordinated Soundtraxx sound decoder made for a realistic operation and kept Rick Bacon and Jay Barnaby amply occupied.

Meanwhile a local, the Logan turn "arrived back" (from staging) at Willow creek. Its engine now became the yard power (the "sliding-block puzzle" mentioned previously.) Vince Griesemer and Bob Sobol ably handled everything in this region. Then second class freight #262 (north is even) entered Willow Creek from the south (staging), picked up cars brought in by the Logan Turn, and continued northbound over the Coal ridge Subdivision tracks to staging on the north end (son Joel and I handled most of the road crew duties.)

This was where things got interesting as the engineer could not follow his train due to the lack of throttle plug-in locations (we're just gonna wait for those radio modules.)

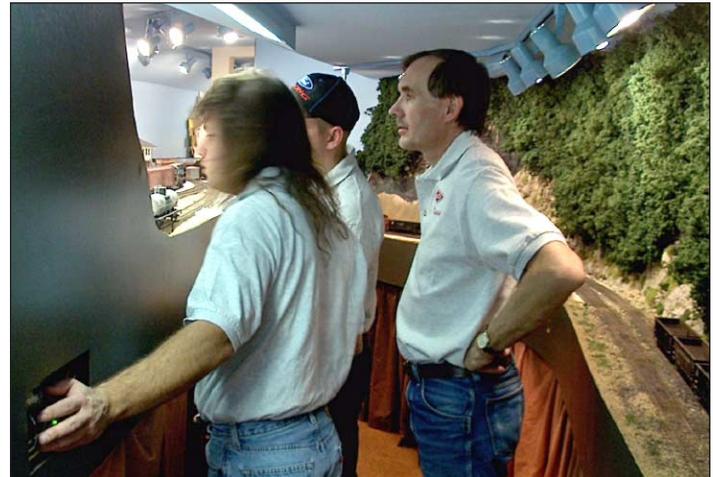


Photo by Bob Sobol

3. Jay and Rick switch at Ridge while the Grand Poobah supervises.

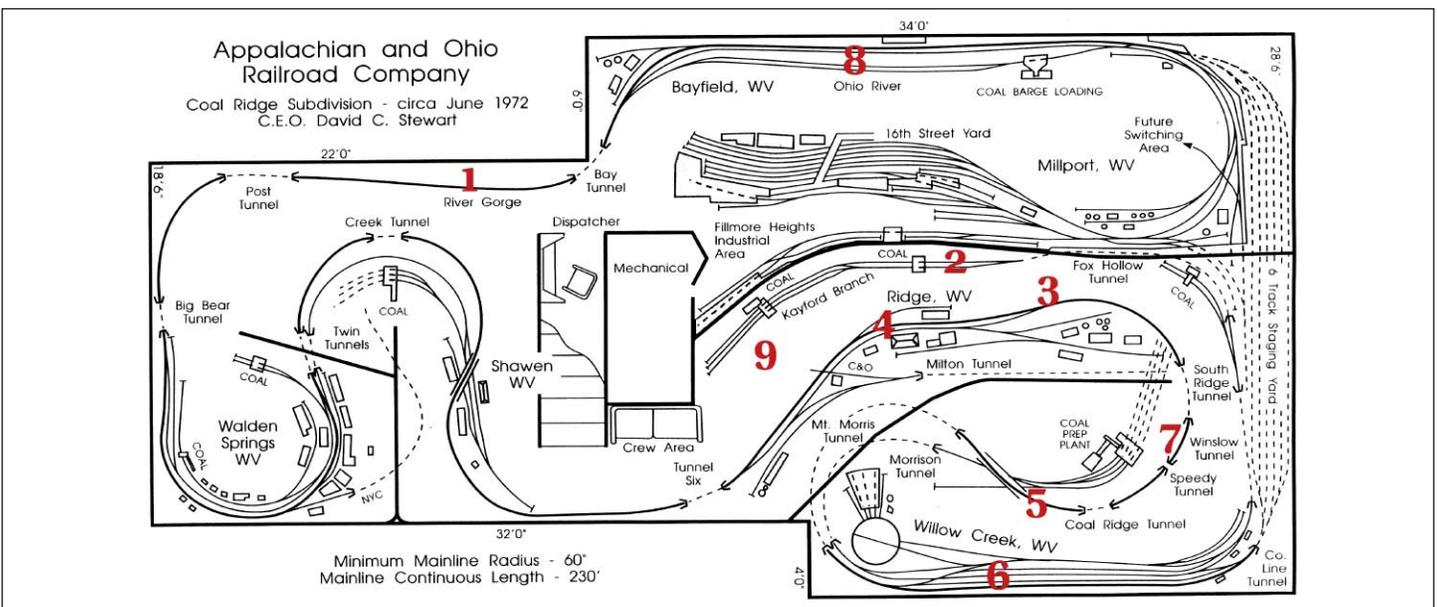




Photo by Bob Sobol

4. Jay switches with the NYC Fairbanks Morse at Ridge.



Photo by Bob Sobol

8. Joel runs through Bayfield WV.

But, with a two-man crew and some occasional **loud** verbal prompts, all trains made the trip without incident, *we think...*

And so it went. The same engines



Photo by David Stewart

5. Rick switches the Morrison coal prep plant.

shuttled trains back and forth through the river gorges and up and down grades. Coal drags were made-up at Willow Creek and pulled-pushed up the Morrison grade to Ridge and beyond. With “live” loads and each hopper weighing in at 2-3 pounds it was a study in cooperation as the two engineers moved the tonnage without spillage. (No *vacuum-age* was needed.) Not counting the Kayford switcher, a rather miniscule total of 8 trains managed to give the six of us a fun-filled 3+ hours.

And what did we learn from our fledgling session?



Photo by Bob Sobol

7. Pushing live coal loads up the hill.

1. Years of minimal operation makes for a lot of hidden gunk on rails and wheels that only becomes evident after a couple hours of running. It will just take time to get things really clean and reliable.
2. The learning curve of how to handle the required train movements is steep at first, but knowledge of the trackage, equipment, and time involved will greatly reduce operator confusion with each session.
3. Making up trains, switching cars, turning engines, organizing trackage rights through the yard by competing engineers, etc., etc. all takes lots of time. That’s okay, just plan for it. I’d thought we’d be done in an hour!
4. We only operated about 1/4th of the layout’s potential. Either we’re going to be really busy, or we’ll need a bigger crew!
5. It appears that the A&O will live up to its promise. It was worth the wait.



Photo by David Stewart

6. Bob brings in second class freight #261 into Willow Creek yard.



Photo by Katy Stewart

9. “And a good time was had by all.”