

The HO Scale Milwaukee Road Everett Branch

By Ron Hart

The Milwaukee Everett Branch is a prototypically based HO scale switching layout that I have tirelessly researched and built over the last few years.

How it All Started

Like many other model train enthusiasts, my introduction to trains started at about age eleven when I received a Lionel HO scale train set from a local department store (some may recall JAFCO) for Christmas. I distinctly recall setting it up in the living room and inadvertently attaching the wires to the AC wire terminals and almost bursting into tears when it didn't run. My watchful father corrected me and the passion began. He helped me setup shop in the basement on two halves of a ping-pong table and my excitement has remained constant for over three decades.

Over the years I attempted half a dozen layouts but never really achieved anything worthy of operations let alone viewing. But what I did learn was built upon those years of trial-and-error and the premise that "practice makes (near) perfect".

I Almost Quit!

After moving into a new house I built a small 4'x6' layout for me and my son, based on a layout that appeared on the Gateway NMRA website. I never really finished it, though, and my wife was unimpressed with the appearance it gave in our new house. She and I struck a deal -- if she allotted me the space again, I would build a functional layout that was aesthetically pleasing.

At this point I disciplined my research and construction to an operationally based prototype. If I couldn't achieve this I would quit! I was accumulating locos and rolling stock with no real focus except for watching them run around the proverbial oval, waiting for the big day when I would have the basement empire we all dream about.

Dreaming is a wonderful pastime. However, now I dream on a scale that is both manageable and functional because what I model truly existed. This has given me focus and direction and I no longer make trips to the hobby shop to buy stuff I don't really need.

A Bit of History

When the Milwaukee Road reached tidewater in Tacoma, WA, via the Pacific Coast Extension, they were a bit late. The NP and GN had already arrived, securing much of the business the newly developed Puget Sound had to offer. Everett boasted numerous timber mills along Port Gardner Bay and the Snohomish River earning the title "Milltown". Eastern financiers had also dubbed the town the "Pittsburgh of the West" when they first

settled in 1891. A deep water harbor handled ocean-going vessels and Weyerhaeuser, Simpson Lee and Walton Lumber moved timber in record numbers.

In an effort to gain customers and move traffic, the Milwaukee built branch-lines extending in many directions throughout Washington State. The Everett Branch begins in Cedar Falls (South and slightly East of North Bend) before terminating in Everett near Pacific Avenue. The line was completed in 1911 with the intention of cashing-in on Puget Sound's new found stature. They struggled along for many years even sharing a 3-way switching agreement with the NP and GN to switch Weyerhaeuser along the Riverside Line.

Research and Planning

While surfing the web I stumbled across an image of the CMStP&P (Milwaukee Road) depot located at 3201 McDougal in Everett. This discovery "opened the door" for me to research, design and build my next layout. It saved me from giving up the hobby.

For days on end I searched the Internet, coming across tidbits of information, nothing really answering my questions. Then I met Allen Miller, an expert in Everett's railroad history.

Allen not only had a passion for the line but he worked for the line in the mid-seventies. His information and insight has proven invaluable. Over the years, he has answered numerous email inquiries and provided feedback on the line's overall operation from Cedar Falls to Everett.

I contacted the Everett public library's Northwest Room and scoured their online digital collection. Margaret Riddle was able to scan Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the right-of-way. I started a file on both the computer and in hard copy format allowing me to chronicle my progress. Coupled with some rare photographs and Allen's emails, the Everett Branch was starting to take shape.

Construction

I developed a track plan based on a hand-sketched drawing from Allen, a simple mainline with spurs and a passing siding (the prototype wasn't very complex). This configuration would fit into a corner of the room along two walls with an overall dimension of 10'x6'x2'. The line was small but my modeling space was smaller so I compromised on a few of the track arrangements and structures. I did manage to squeeze in a three track staging yard representing Milwaukee's Belt Yard along the Snohomish River near Lowell.

My firefighting friend and fellow model railroader Scott Wheat built two modules in exchange for some work on his layout. I cantilevered the bench work from the wall using sturdy triangular brackets from Home Depot. The bench work is 1"x4" pine topped with Homasote. Walther's Shinohara Code 83 track was secured with pins and ballasted with

fine brown ballast. The line has been operational for a couple of years and I have not had any problems with warping (make sure you seal the Homaboard with latex paint).

Operations

Every industry on the layout is labeled on the fascia. I generate the labels on my computer and print them on photo quality paper.

DCC from NCE allows for two operators: one in the Belt Yard and one running the local. I use a car card and waybill system along with real switching lists from the late 1960s. I literally try to duplicate the rolling stock and its destination which has led to many hours of research and operating fun.

All layout traffic begins and ends in the Belt Yard with two arrival and one departure track. The Belt Yard switcher makes a train and runs it up to Everett or "Uptown" (as it was called). Uptown was Everett's commercial area with warehouses and various other shippers.

In today's modeling arena there has been a shift to model "layout design elements" (LDEs) as a means of capturing the essence of a region or time. This is a great concept and the EB follows that approach. The portion of the branch that I have chosen to model is from Sumner Iron Works to the Everett Depot, a distance of approximately 1-2 miles; not very long but packed with switching possibilities.

Ron Hart Bio: Ron is a firefighter/paramedic serving with the Glendale, AZ Fire Department. He was born and raised in Everett, WA and has fond memories of chasing trains all over town from Riverside to Bayside. After a 10 year hitch in the Army he took up residence in Arizona and currently resides with his family in the Phoenix suburb of Surprise.