

In the spirit of sharing, Master Model Railroader Chuck Ricketts is creating a series of emails to describe how Jim Elder and he are constructing a sectional layout in the garage. This layout, while a pure fantasy model railroad, is operations oriented. The first email described Chuck's model railroad background with a brief look at some of his previous layouts and why, in his mid-eighties, he is starting a new layout. In this article, Chuck describes the concept and fictional history of the Baja Siena Railroad and Navigation Company.

Fantasy Island Layout - Article 2

A Little Baja History (or Chuck's version anyway)

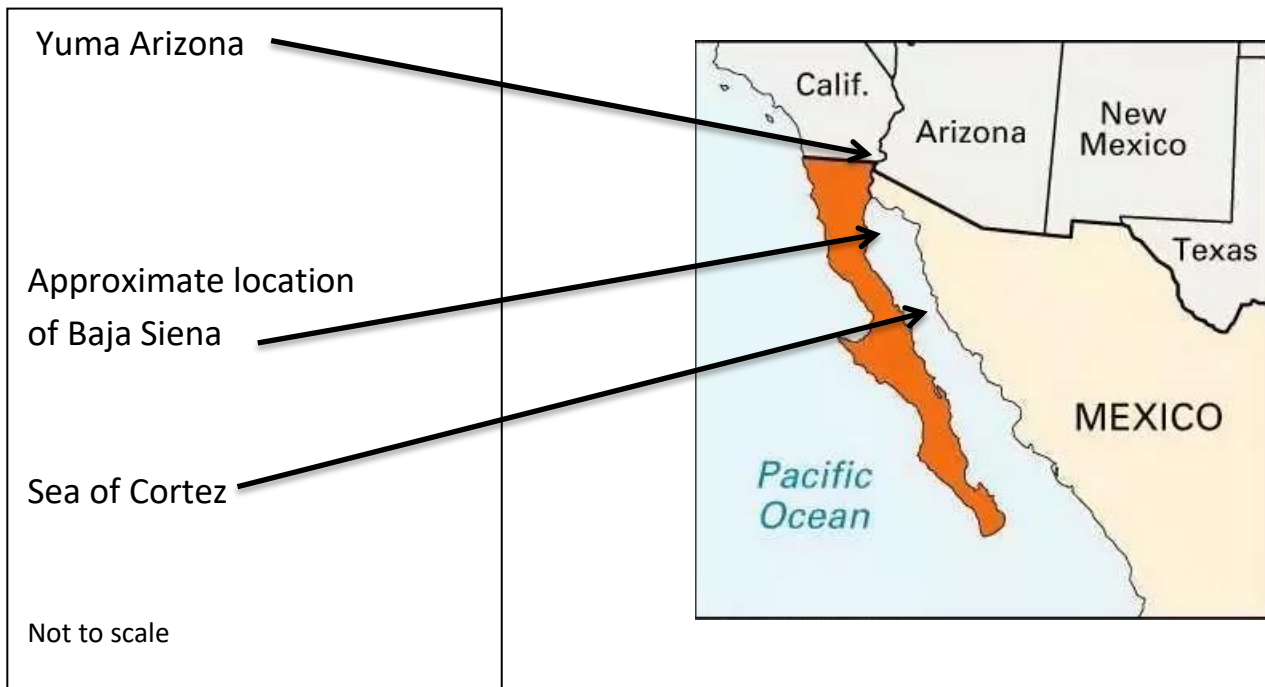
In the 1500's, as the Spanish were exploring Mexico, some of them landed on an island in what is now the Sea of Cortez. They spent a few weeks there, but unfortunately, much of their equipment was stored on the rocks, too close to the water and was swept out to sea by the rising tide. Even the equipment that survived deteriorated quickly after being pummeled by the salt water waves. Dejected, out of critical supplies and equipment, the explorers left the island. The island remained relatively unexplored and basically unknown for many years.

Flash ahead to the 1920's, when an obscure archaeologist and amateur mineralogist, Dr. Henry Jones, found a reference to this incident in an old Spanish diary. He traveled to the island, Baja Siena, and discovered a new mineral which he named "decadium". He confided this finding to some industrial giants. When manufacturers in the United States realized that adding the correct proportions of decadium to any product would cause the product to fail as soon as the warranty expired, the rush to cash in began. They soon realized that there was only one "hole" in the enterprise. It would require considerable machinery replacement to keep production on schedule considering the nature of the ore. After considerable "backroom" economics, they realized it was a balancing act warranty length and the amount of decadium in the merchandise. With this variable determined, this new type of "secret gold rush", a rush to separate the consumer from their gold, called for large quantities of decadium.

New Railroad, the Baja Siena Railroad and Navigation Company

A consortium of manufacturers quickly planned to develop a mine and crusher on Baja Siena to tap into this business opportunity. A railroad to transport the raw material from the mine to the crusher and a new port was desperately needed to make the project viable. A railroad scrapper in California was contacted and an assortment of surplus thirty inch gauge equipment was secured. This small equipment would only require minimal roadbed and other supporting infrastructure. Shipping the small equipment to the island would be cheap. The equipment was immediately on the way.

Construction of the wharf, railroad, mine and crusher proceeded at a rapid pace until a worker shortage created the first challenge for the fledgling enterprise. Unfortunately, there were not enough workers on the island. To solve this problem, the first barge from the mainland each morning brings a passenger car loaded with workers from the mainland. Those workers are immediately distributed to the different jobs on the island, supporting the ultimate goal of bringing decadium to the United States. With the mine open, the crusher completed, the railroad running and the wharf ready, loaded narrow gauge cars containing the precious material are placed on a barge to go up the Colorado River to Yuma, Arizona, and the Southern Pacific Railroad. (Prior to the construction of Hoover Dam, barges could travel up the Colorado River to Yuma and beyond). After arriving in Yuma, the ore is and transferred to into standard gauge cars for transport to manufacturing locations in the United States. Dr. Jones and the rest of the un-named investors are living comfortably on their earnings, another example of how a railroad ventures produced great wealth to the lucky few in the early 20th century.



Baja Siena Develops Into a Town

While there was a goat ranch on the island that provided goat cheese and occasional goat meat to the mainland most other business needed for the new settlement was sorely lacking. Typical of any rapidly expanding mining community, some enterprising locals and a number of financially backed entrepreneurs, built a tequila distillery, pottery factory, cannery and the co-op building maintenance facility to support the growing enterprise. Others added lodging, grocery and eating establishments. Since prohibition was still in force in the United States, much of the tequila that is produced is smuggled north, either in boxcars of pottery or by rum runners/fishing boats docking at the cannery.

Why Does a Model Railroad Need a Story?

I wrote this story so the Baja Siena layout could function as a real railroad. Just as in the prototype, a model railroad needs a reason to exist.

- Why was money expended by the railroad company?
- What did they intend to transport?
- What need was being met by the transportation company?
- What other services were needed to support the railroad?

Without a reason to exist or a function to perform, it can be very hard to model a true transportation system. Model railroads without a purpose are hard to develop into a life-like rendering that can sustain interest and support model railroad operations. Since my goal is to operate and share this model railroad with others, I need to be able to explain why it exists and what function the transportation system is addressing. This story fills that requirement and helps direct my efforts.

What's Next?

In Fantasy Island - Article 3, Chuck will describe construction of the Baja Siena Railroad and Navigation Company layout. The BS will occupy a portion of a 10' x 16' space in the garage. As a teaser, a track plan for the Baja Siena RR (BSRR) is attached.

