

The Jefferson, Memphis & Northern

A simple, scenic 5 x 9-foot table layout with a Deep South setting

BY ANDY SPERANDEO

THE JEFFERSON, Memphis & Northern is an HO scale railroad which uses a simple track plan to allow as much scenic realism as possible in a 5 x 9-foot space. The idea is to use John Armstrong's principle of "scenic vignettes" and build one simple, railroadlike scene on each side of a central scenic divider. Using sectional track and plastic kit structures, the basic railroad could quickly be brought to apparent completion, so the JM&N would be a good project for someone's first railroad.

However, because it is planned to be scenically satisfying, it can also be a source of lasting enjoyment as scenic effects, structures, details, and rolling stock are refined along with the builder's growth in the hobby. Also, despite the simplicity of the track plan, the Jefferson Yard area can be operated in an interesting and quite realistic manner.

In concept the JM&N represents a portion of a small north-south class-one railroad connecting the Mississippi Gulf Coast with Memphis, Tenn., and perhaps points farther north as well. It is trying to compete with the giant Illinois Central in much the same way as the old Gulf, Mobile & Northern (later merged with the Mobile & Ohio to form the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio, itself later absorbed into Illinois Central Gulf). The particular locale is in northern Mississippi, where there are hills sufficiently rugged to provide justification for the high ridge which divides the layout into two distinct scenes.

Jefferson is a small but important town, perhaps a county seat, where the JM&N connects with the St. Louis-San Francisco (Frisco) line's main line from Memphis to Birmingham, Ala. Jefferson also boasts a small textile mill, which is the major non-agricultural employer in the county, and a few other small industries.

Frenchman's Bend is little more than a hamlet grown up around a general store and a country schoolhouse. The JM&N, which even in the diesel era is a timetable-and-train-order operation, has a small train-order office at the south end of its passenger siding here. There are no living quarters for the operators, so presumably they board with nearby families.

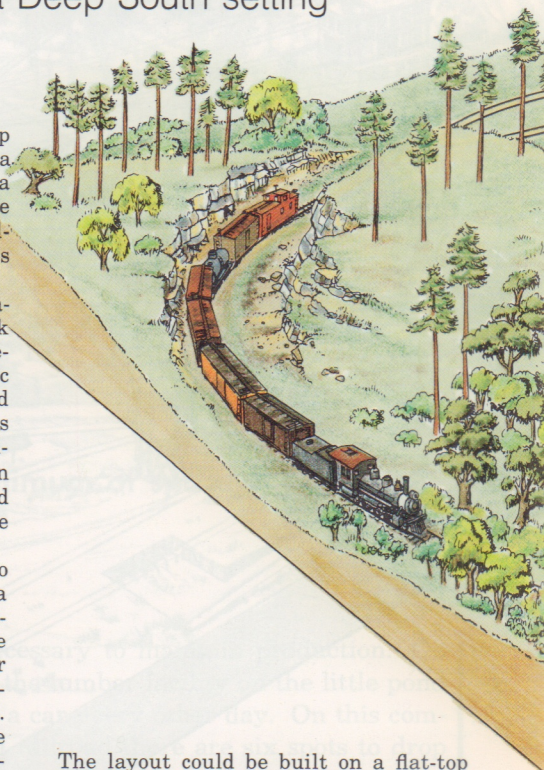
The structures shown are all readily available plastic kits, and most of them are used as their designers intended. A little simple kitbashing is indicated, however, in order to have buildings which fit the theme of the JM&N. The Jefferson feed store, for example, is a Tycos freight station, and the Frenchman's Bend train-order office is an Atlas trackside shanty, both fitted out with new signs and details to serve their new purposes. The Southern Oil Company's bulk depot is a combination of three of the

same Life-Like kits, in order to come up with a facility a bit more imposing than a single tank. The mill is represented by a Heljan warehouse and a Vollmer machine shop painted in matching dusty brick colors and joined on the layout, perhaps adding a moderately tall smokestack.

No effort has been made to fill the available space with structures, just as the track has been kept to a minimum. When something more impressive than the plastic buildings is desired, they can be replaced with kits or with scratchbuilt substitutes rather than filling more space with additional buildings. This approach allows an uncommonly large area for scenery and avoids the overcrowding which is the bane of small layout design.

The scenic treatment shown is meant to be interesting in itself and not merely a collection of tricks to hide an excessive concentration of track. The layout should be built for near-eye-level viewing, either for a standing operator (good) or for an operator seated in a comfortable chair (best). This will allow a central ridge of no more than 8 or 9 inches high to effectively separate the scenes.

Cuts are used to carry the end curves across the ridge, partly because the hills represented aren't big enough to justify tunnels, and partly because tunnels are far too common on small model railroads. The location of the cuts and the road overpass will be more than enough for the needed separation.



The layout could be built on a flat-top table initially, but in that case an early improvement should be to either lower the tabletop, or cut it away (except for the area directly below the tracks) and use open framing under the Frenchman's Bend area. This would allow the creek to run in a steep little valley and would also allow the railroad to be supported on a fill above the creek's floodplain and the hamlet.

Fills, embankments built with material removed from cuts, are a common feature in real railroad construction but are too rarely modeled. A fill is an excellent display setting for watching and photograph-

JEFFERSON, MEMPHIS & NORTHERN RR.

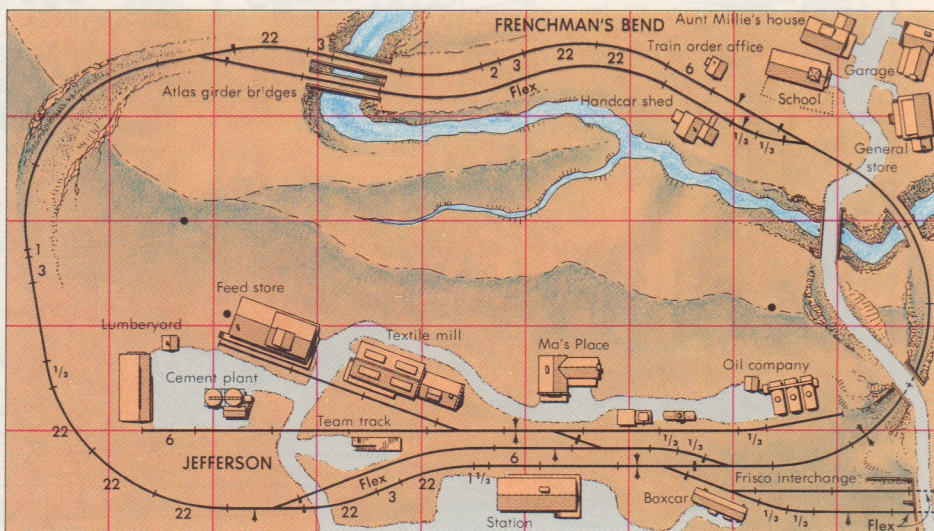
Grid lines are 12" apart

Unnoted track sections are either 9"-straight or 18"-radius curved

Gap in one rail

Gap in both rails

Track feeders



RR.



ing trains, and is perfectly logical in this location between two cuts.

The ridge spur shown would break up the outline of the main ridge and keep it from being so obviously a scenic divider. It also gives the opportunity to model a small branch flowing into the main creek. The hills would be covered with trees; the locale dictates pines, for which there are several commercial kits.

Locomotives and rolling stock, whether of the steam or diesel eras, should be small and conservative. Ten-Wheelers and Consolidations would be appropriate steam types, and GP7s or RS-2s would serve in more recent times. Although 22"-radius curves are used where possible, the main line has several 18" curves. It would be best to operate freight service only and to limit even modern cars to a 50-foot maximum length.

The conventional rule says it is possible to operate two trains simultaneously in opposite directions on this layout, because there are two passing sidings on its lap of single track. In practice, however, this would be a pretty dull business of stopping at every siding to meet the other train.

It is possible for one operator to enjoy "serious" operation with a scheme which is at once more relaxed and more realistic. This would use the Frenchman's Bend side of the layout only as a staging area, with

north and southbound through freights set up ready to leave the passing siding. A switcher would be stationed in Jefferson, and the day's work would begin with this engine getting cars out of the industry tracks and the Frisco interchange for the southbound through freight.

When these cars are blocked and spotted in the clear on the Jefferson passing track, the switcher would "go on the spot" (wait) on the engine service track. This would clear the main for the southbound to roll in, pick up the waiting cars, and set out cars for Jefferson and the Frisco. Once this freight was out of town (and back in the Frenchman's Bend siding), the switcher would return to work, spotting the new arrivals and getting out the northbound cars to have them ready for the other through freight.

This sequence could be repeated as many times as desired and would effectively represent the working of a busy through station along a single-track mainline railroad. Even passenger service could be represented by adding a short combine to the through freights in the manner of the Georgia RR. When even this level of operation becomes too strenuous, the JM&N should provide some pretty places to just watch the train roll by.

The Jefferson, Memphis & Northern is a deliberately simple track plan. Because of its small area it doesn't try to do everything, but what it does try, it tries to do well, including scenic opportunities, structure settings, and even operation. A newcomer to model railroading could learn a lot about the hobby and his interests with the JM&N, have fun doing it, and come up with a layout of creditable — if not overwhelming — appearance.

Bill of Materials

Structure Kits

AHM: 5733 Diesel Oil and Sand Depot (can also serve oil-burning steamers), 5741 Ridge Pike Maintenance Group

Atlas: 702 Trackside Shanty (used as train-order office), 703 Water Tower (only if JM&N is steam-powered), 705 Telephone Shanty and Pole, 750 Lumber Yard and Office, 775 Telephone Poles (several)

Bachmann: Railroad Work Car (dethroned boxcar)

Campbell: 303 Curved Pile Trestle (optional, may be substituted for Tyco trestle set)

Con-Cor/Heljan: 361 Appliance Warehouse (main building of textile mill)

Kibri: 9950 Cement Towers

Life-Like: 01349 Southern Oil Co. (3 kits), 01351 Al's General Store

Revell: 986 Country Schoolhouse

Tyco: 907 Trestle and Bridge Set (use trestle bents only), 7761 Arlee Station, 7776 Aunt Millie's House, 7779 Ma's Place, 7785 Freight Station (used as feed store), 7793 Speedy Andrews Repair Shop (garage)

Vollmer: 5612 Workshop (boiler house for textile mill)

Atlas Track Required

- No. 21 9" straight — 20
 - No. 22 6" straight — 3
 - No. 23 3" straight — 4
 - No. 33 18"-radius curve — 9
 - No. 35 1/3 18"-radius — 8
 - No. 36 22"-radius curve — 8
 - No. 42 Terminal Joiners — 6
 - No. 47 Track Assortment — 1
 - No. 52 Remote LH Switch Machine — 1
 - No. 53 Remote RH Switch Machine — 1
 - No. 55 Plastic Rail Joiners — 1 pkg.
 - No. 56 Switch Control Box — 2
 - No. 85 Through Plate Girder Bridge — 2
 - No. 100 3-foot length cork roadbed — 16
 - No. 104 Curvable Track (Brass) 3 feet — 2
 - No. 121 #4 Custom Line LH Turnout — 3
 - No. 122 #4 Custom Line RH Turnout — 6
 - No. 215 Selector — 2
- (Control Jefferson switches manually with 3 Caboose Industries no. 204 high-level switchstands for mainline switches, 6 no. 202 ground throws for all others)