A Santa Fe branch line

# The San Jacinto District

An HO switching railroad for a 9 x 12-foot room

BY ANDY SPERANDEO

ONE way to model a big railroad in a small space is to represent only a piece of the large system. A section of busy main line would be nice if you want to sit back and watch trains roll, but if you like challenging switching, a branch line serving a number of industries is a better choice. This track plan takes the branch line approach and applies it to the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Ry. in Southern California.

The prototype San Jacinto District is a branch which leaves the Santa Fe's Los Angeles Division (Third District) main line at Highgrove, about 6½ miles south of San Bernardino, and heads south, east, and finally north up the San Jacinto River valley. The line as far as Perris was built as part of the old California Southern's main to San Diego, but the same landslides in Temecula Canyon which led to the Santa Fe's takeover of the CS cut this line back to a branch extending to a terminal in the small town of San Jacinto.

The track plan does not attempt to represent the San Jacinto District precisely, but it does use certain features of the prototype to develop the Santa Fe theme. One of these is the ornate brick combination station at Perris, a well-known building now used by the Orange Empire Trolley Museum. Drawings of the Perris station appeared in the November 1969 MODEL RAILROADER and are reprinted in Kalmbach's RAILROAD STATION PLANBOOK; the book's cover features a Gil Reid painting of the Perris station. The track plan is designed to incorporate a model of this station as one of its focal points; besides being interesting in itself, this model would help identify and authenticate the layout's prototype.

Another important prototype feature is citrus fruit traffic. The San Jacinto District is at the eastern edge of a large Southern California orange-growing area, and the track plan includes three fruit packing houses, a refrigerator car icing plant, and a packing crate factory among its industries. As well as being characteristic of the plan's locale, this kind of traffic is closely identified with the Santa Fe. The model San Jacinto District's main business will be getting empty reefers iced and spotted for loading, then carrying the loads up to the main line to be forwarded east. (Pre-icing of empties was really concentrated at San Bernardino, but spreading some of it out increases the operating interest of this layout.)

The track plan is designed to fill a 9 x 12-foot room with HO railroad. Its point-to-point line runs from a three-track fiddle yard representing Highgrove, around the walls through Perris, and into the small yard at San Jacinto. A spur line reaches the Hemet industrial district on a peninsula into the center of the room. (See the illustration for an idea on making this peninsula stable.)

I started out trying to fit 22″-radius curves but decided to settle for 18″-minimum radius to provide more switching opportunities. The large arcs of minimum radius are located so that they can be seen only from inside the curve, and this will make their sharpness less apparent, particularly if the layout is built near eye level. Where a curve of some length is seen from the outside, at Hemet, I used a 26″ radius.

The turnouts are mostly no. 4s for the same reason that the curves are sharp, but I did use no. 6s at certain points. The 6s at the ends of the Perris passing track are meant to enhance one of the railroad's nicer scenes. The others on the San Jacinto icehouse spur and in crossovers at Perris and Hemet are there to ease S curves: no. 4 crossovers have too much of an S curve even for small engines and 40-foot cars. The crossover in front of the packing crate factory is not really necessary, but it does offer some useful and interesting ways to shuffle cars between the two tracks.


The structures are very important on this kind of railroad, because they are both a large part of the modeled scenery and the justification of the operating scheme. The plan is scaled to provide space for the particular buildings listed, which include plastic kits, craftsman kits, and two scratchbuilt models. If you aren't fully confident as a modelbuilder, the range of kits shown will allow you to start simply and develop skills as you go along. Everything on this railroad is close to the front edge — a major advantage of walk-in track plans — so there is plenty of opportunity to work up a high state of detail.

At Perris, the stores, gas station, and stockyard are to be used as the manufacturers intended. The Campbell Seebold & Sons Mfg. Co. will make a creditable packing shed with appropriate signs and details. The station is admittedly a big project, but it will give you something to look forward to. I'd advise building a cardboard or styrene mock-up of the station model to act as a placeholder in the scene until the model itself is ready.

At Hemet there is no station, only a signboard. The operating interest here is on the spur, where I envision two parallel tracks reaching into the middle of a city block. Most of the industries along these tracks are oriented to face the cross streets, an arrangement which is common in the prototype but not often seen on model railroads.

The bulk oil dealership and the cement supply yard are composed of plastic kits with little or no modification, although fences, trucks, and other small details would help them look more complete. The lumberyard and the San Jacinto St. packing shed are plastic kits with a little kitbashing: the Heljan Edison Laboratory would need loading doors, signs, and a simplified front to become a packing shed; and one of the two Atlas kits used for the lumberyard should be cut down to eliminate its loading door and platform, making its right-angle position to the track appear more logical.

The Campbell Richmond Barrel Works would be built as designed but detailed to represent a maker of orange crates rather than barrels. (Its location at a turnout is intended to create complications when a car is left there.) The Sunkist packing plant would use the Suydam no. 83 kit for its street end and the corrugated-metal kit no. 1 as a packing shed extension. The freight station would be a scratchbuilt model of the Santa Fe freight station in Hermosa Beach, Calif., as described in Kalmbach's SCRATCHBUILDING & KITBASHING MODEL RAILROAD STATIONS. Such a model would be worthwhile to gain a bit more Santa Fe atmosphere, and it fits the street frontage situation perfectly.

I've shown the Campbell Skull Valley Station and wood water tank at San Jacinto because both are models of Santa Fe prototypes, and the Classic Miniatures branch line oil tank is similar enough to Santa Fe structures to be useful. Engines were actually turned on a wye at San Jacinto, but a Diamond Scale Models 75-foot turntable will do the job in a lot less space. The icing plant uses a Suydam kit no. 566 as its starting point: the building would be cut down to fit between the backdrop and the track, the platform extended with

stripwood, and signs installed labeling it as a railroad facility.

The scenery would be mostly gentle, grassy hills with a few scrubby trees and occasional orange groves. I've worked in a bit of the San Jacinto River between Hemet and San Jacinto, with the tracks crossing on Campbell curved pile trestles. A well-done backdrop would go far toward making this small railroad look a lot larger. The backdrop could enlarge the towns and show more of the hills and orange groves, and it would be highlighted by 10,805-foot San Jacinto Peak rising above the town of San Jacinto.

The fiddle yard would be best kept out of sight but readily accessible. One easy way to do this is shown in the illustration: mount another shelf above the yard shelf and hang lift-up doors from it. It's worth keeping the offstage trains hidden to help maintain the fiction that they are running another 18 or so miles to reach the Third District at Highgrove.

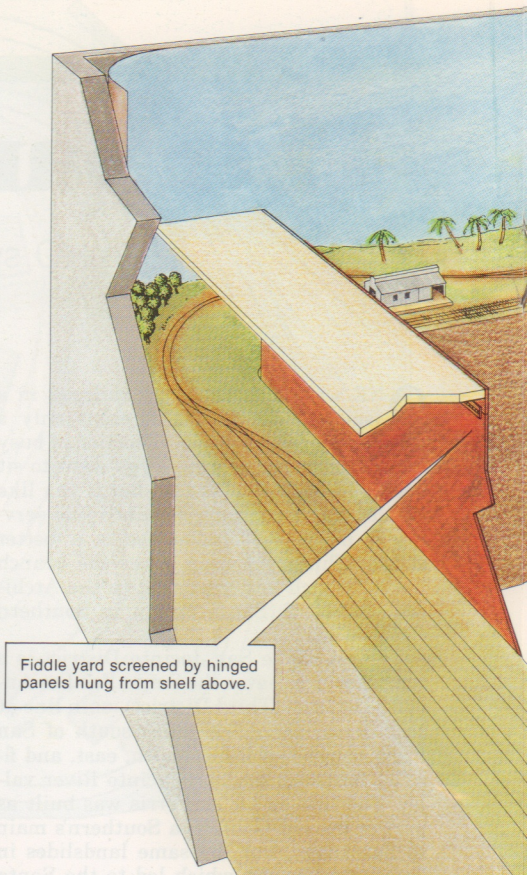
If I were building the San Jacinto District, I'd set the period in the late 1940s, for three reasons. Until the 2650 class GP7s began arriving in 1949 the Santa Fe didn't have much diesel power available for low-mileage branchline work, so the railroad could use 2-8-0 steam engines. In fact, even a light 4-6-2 would be appropriate, and the Key Imports 1226-class Pacific can take 18″-radius curves with ease.

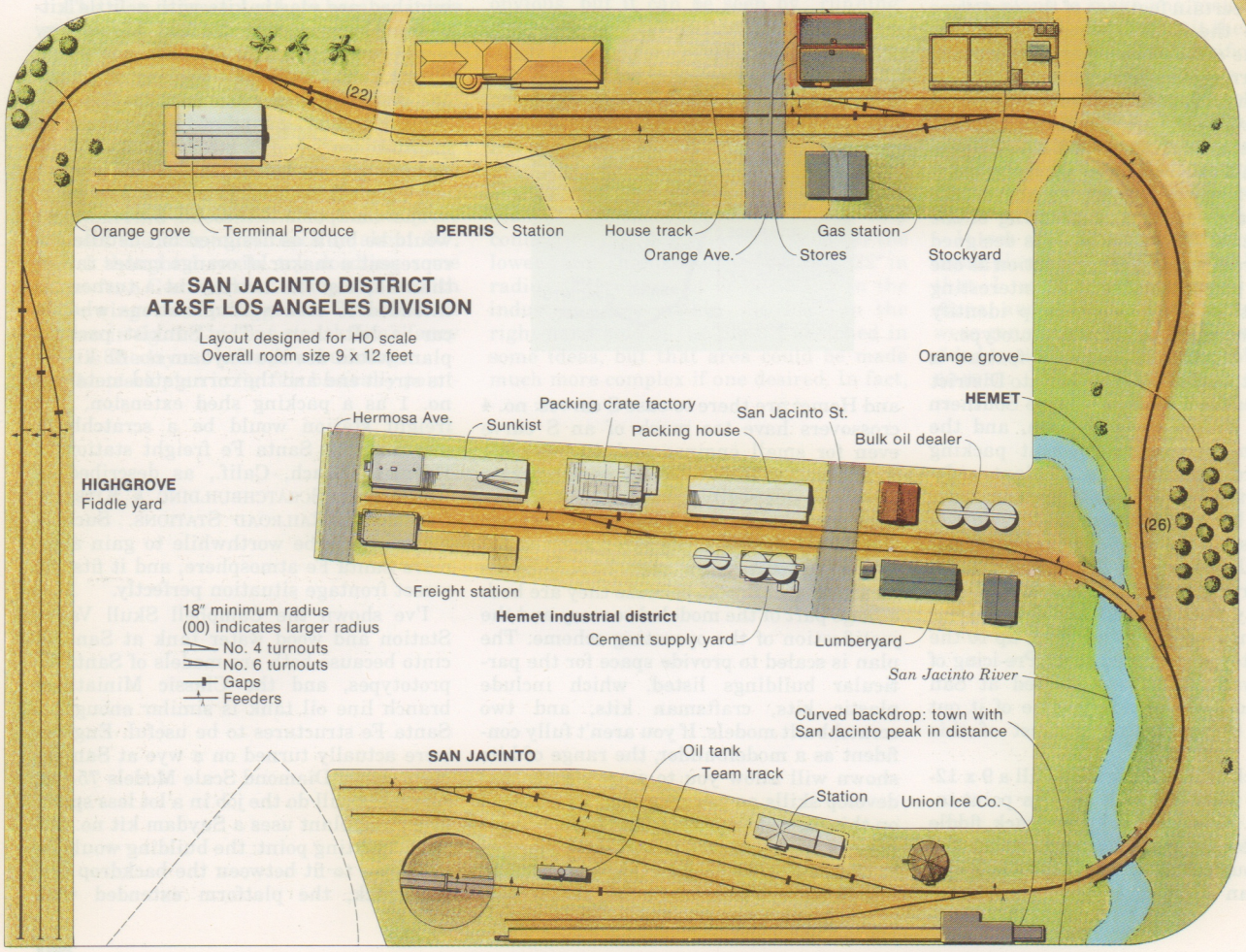
Also, this period predates mechanical refrigerator cars on the Santa Fe, and the need to precool reefers at the icing plant before switching them out to the packing sheds adds an enjoyable complication to the railroad's operation.

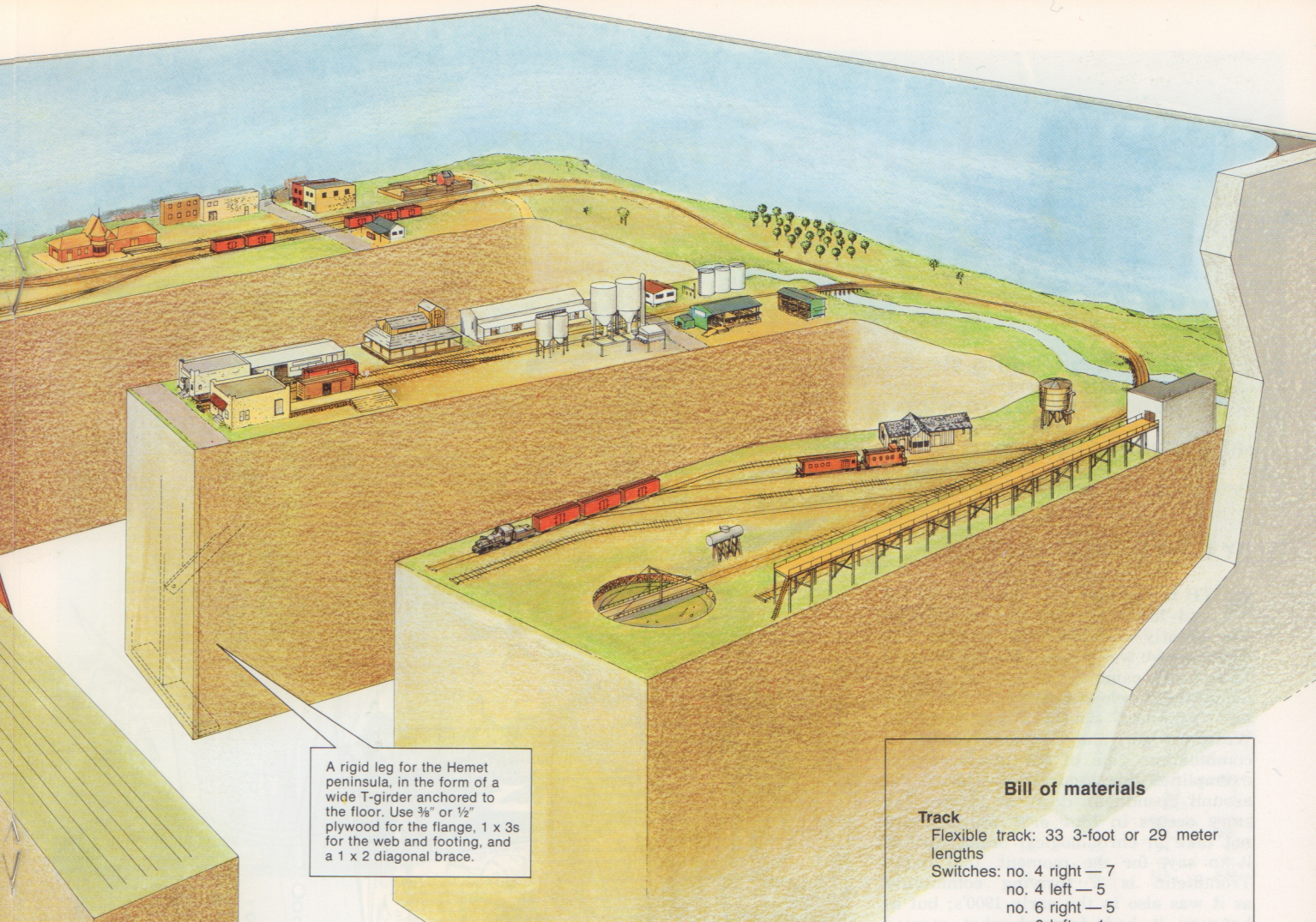
Finally, the sharp curves will work best for an era when there were few freight cars longer than 50 feet. If you prefer diesels, stick to the early 1950s and use zebra-striped Geeps for power.

The Santa Fe's 1947 Los Angeles Division employees' timetable shows the San Jacinto District being served by daily-except-Sunday mixed trains nos. 505 and 506, second-class trains between San Bernardino and San Jacinto which ran via the Third District between Highgrove and San Berdoo. The 505 was scheduled to arrive in San Jacinto at 11:40 a.m. (San Jacinto is *west* of San Bernardino by timetable direction), and the 506 was to depart at 12:01 p.m. These runs could be the basis for the model San Jacinto District operations and would provide both freight and passenger service.

The mixed trains will need a passenger car which can take the layout's sharp curves, and the Santa Fe had the perfect prototype in its 46-foot, open platform combines, nos. 2309 and 2314-2320. The cars were built as steel drovers' cars in the 1930s and during World War II were rebuilt as baggage-coach combinations (nos. 2593-2599) for service as rider cars on mail trains. After the war they were repainted mineral brown — the Santa Fe's version of boxcar red — and renumbered as above for mixed-train service. The combine would normally run as the next-to-last car in the train, with a regular caboose behind for the train crew. Since the original drovers' cars had many parts in common with Santa Fe's standard steel caboose, a reasonable model of the mixed-train combine could be built from Athearn caboose kits. Drawings and photos of these cars appear in *Caboose Cars of the Santa Fe Railway* by Frank Elling-





A rigid leg for the Hemet peninsula, in the form of a wide T-girder anchored to the floor. Use 3/8" or 1/2" plywood for the flange, 1 x 3s for the web and footing, and a 1 x 2 diagonal brace.

ton and published by Railroad Car Press.

The mixed-train operation would make for a leisurely evening of switching for one man, using either a simple switchlist or card order system of car distribution. I wouldn't pay too much attention to the short scheduled turnaround time at San Jacinto, as second-class branchline schedules were used mainly to provide trains with running authority without the need for train orders. If you wanted to share the operation with a friend, a switcher could be stationed at San Jacinto and given the task of having outbound cars ready from that town and Hemet so that 505 could quickly become 506. The mixed trains would switch only Perris under this scheme.

For more intense operations, the San Jacinto District can stage a pretty fair fruit rush to simulate orange-harvesting season. The three tracks in the fiddle yard would allow setting up two extra trains of empty refrigerator cars, in addition to the regular mixed, to be iced at San Jacinto, spotted for loading, and dispatched east with fresh citrus.

Such a rush might be spread over several operating sessions. To start, the mixed train would begin bringing more empties onto the San Jacinto District than are needed immediately, stashing the excess reefers in the pass at Perris and the storage track at San Jacinto. Then you could have a very busy session or two with extras bringing more empty reefers in and hauling loaded ones out, with all tracks crowded to capacity. Finally, the end of the rush would be signaled by a session in which only the mixed train brings any cars in, with perhaps an extra coming in as a caboose hop to take out the last cars of the harvest. After this the San Jacinto District would settle back to its quiet mixed-train running until the next crop comes in.

The fiddle yard is the key to this operating flexibility, since by rearranging trains there between operating sessions, you can vary the intensity of the traffic and control the number of cars actually on the railroad. Storage shelves above or below the staging tracks would be handy for holding extra reefers and other freight cars.

I have shown gaps and feeders on the track plan for conventional block control, but if more than one operator is to work the San Jacinto District, a command control system would be worth considering. Command control allows completely independent control of locomotives on electrically continuous tracks, and while it requires that each locomotive carry a receiver, either the CTC-16's or any commercial system's receiver will easily fit inside an HO Santa Fe steam engine tender. This kind of control would make it easy to invite someone else to share the fun, since there would be no complex controls or block limits to learn. When the railroad is really busy, command control will allow interesting cooperative switching, which would be almost impossible with conventional wiring.

### Bill of materials

**Track**

Flexible track: 33 3-foot or 29 meter lengths
Switches: no. 4 right — 7
no. 4 left — 5
no. 6 right — 5
no. 6 left — 1
Cork roadbed: 42 3-foot lengths

**Structures**

*Perris:* station, scratchbuild from drawings in RAILROAD STATION PLANBOOK; Terminal Produce Co., Campbell no. 377; stores, Con Cor/Heljan no. 902; gas station, Evergreen Hill Designs no. 206; stockyard, Campbell no. 400.

*Hemet:* lumberyard, two Atlas no. 750 with modification; bulk oil dealership, Williams Brothers no. 500 and no. 501; cement supply yard, Kibri no. 9950 and no. 9952; packing house, Con Cor/Heljan no. 915 modified; crate factory, Campbell no. 422; Sunkist packing plant, Suydam no. 83 with no. 1 as extension; freight station, scratchbuild from Hermosa Beach freight station construction story in SCRATCHBUILDING & KITBASHING MODEL RAILROAD STATIONS; San Jacinto River trestles, two Campbell no. 303.

*San Jacinto:* station, Campbell no. 367; water tank, Campbell no. 356; icing plant, Suydam no. 566 modified; oil tank, Classic Miniatures no. 31; turntable, Diamond Scale Models 75-foot single-span model.

If the San Jacinto District could be built in a slightly larger room, I would nevertheless advise keeping it simple. The first priority for using additional space would be enlarging the aisles, followed by increasing the minimum radius and allowing more space for scenery. Good operating railroads don't have to be crowded, and this one is meant to be comfortable.