



The Baker & Grand Ronde



nde Railroad

A 1:24-scale line based on an HOn3 trackplan

by Gary Lee | Corbett, Oregon

Photos by the author except as noted

Our Baker & Grande Ronde Railroad is a reincarnation of an HOn3 railroad I was building in the 1970s. I put away my hobby then to pursue a career and raise a family. Our daughter is now married and raising a family of her own, which left my wife and me as empty nesters with time to pursue our own hobbies.

One day, while channel surfing, we came across a show promoting large-scale model trains that were durable enough to use outdoors. How intriguing! I ordered a Bachmann starter set and I was back in the model-railroad hobby. It didn't take long before I began planning a railroad to build in our backyard.

Creating the vision

I wanted to recreate my former HOn3 railroad in 1/2" scale outdoors. I found my original trackplan in the attic and started to dream about my 1880s era, narrow-gauge railroad, which would traverse the blue mountains of eastern Oregon. I wanted to incorporate specific features that I had always admired from old, historic railroad photographs—things like trains traveling along the course of a mountain stream, the high trestle at Ophir on the Rio Grande Southern, and the general vastness of the American west. I am an amateur historian and a big fan of Western lore and am especially fascinated by the role the iron horse played in the development of the West. I like the little locomotives and equipment of the D&RG, Silverton railroads, Rio Grande Southern, and the Sumpter Valley of eastern Oregon.

I began to envision a railroad stretching

1. Freezeout trestle is more than 20' long and 6' above the stream. The trestle was inspired by the high, spindly trestles of Rio Grande Southern. A few pathways are visible from this vantage, but the plant list identifies groundcovers that tolerate foot traffic for maintenance.



2. Overview of the busy LaGrande Depot and adjoining yard facilities. LaGrande is the lowest point on the line and often requires helper service to reach Odell Summit. Various copious patches of stonecrop hold down embankments between the dwarf Alberta spruce trees.



3. Passengers gather on the LaGrande Depot platform as the daily passenger train arrives. Oregon stonecrop approaches the tracks in the foreground.

from my studio across our backyard. I wanted to create a railroad that would flow from scene to scene without being cluttered with background distractions; it also needed the illusion of distance. My original HO_{n3} line was to be a point-to-point railroad, with its terminus in Baker City, Oregon. It would cross the Blue Mountains to reach Ukiah on the western slope, and beyond, possibly connecting with the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company on

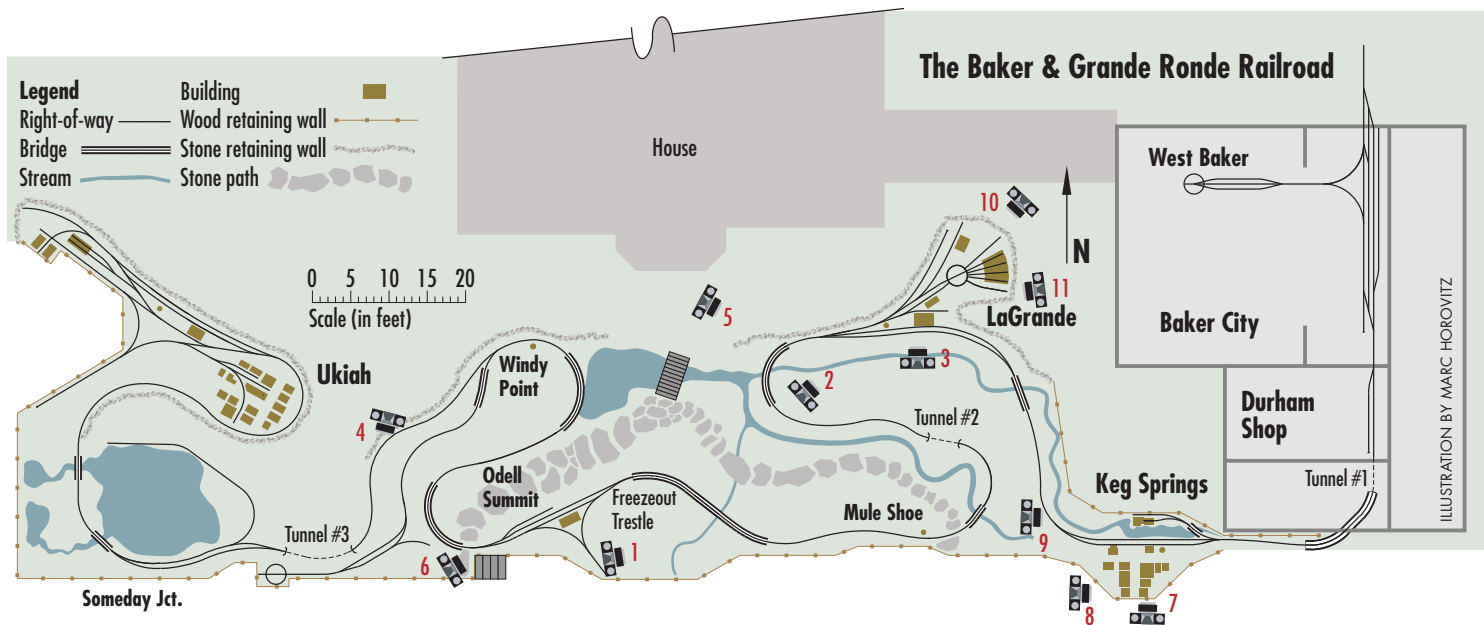
the Columbia River. The railway's purpose would be to reap the spoils of the vast stands of timber and the newly discovered gold of the region. The Baker & Grande Ronde would interchange with the Sumpter Valley Railroad as well as the Oregon Short Line at Baker City.

Scale, proportion, and operation

I chose to model in 1/2" scale, mainly because modeling structures in this scale

is convenient using an architect's scale, and because I had already built a number of models in 1/2" scale. Also, Aristo-Craft offered my favorite locomotive, a faithfully reproduced model of a C-16, in 1:24 scale. I have found the smaller scale of 1:24 to be more pleasing than the large 1:20.3. As a "rivet counter," it is easier for me to accept a 42"-gauge railroad than to have models of mixed scales, as is now common. I have no regrets in choosing 1/2" scale and have found that it challenges my modeling skills.

My main interest is scratchbuilding, followed by operations. I like to generate plans and build virtually everything from scratch, from handlaid track, to rolling stock, to buildings and bridges, and, most recently, motive power. I also prefer to see a railway that has a purpose, traveling from point A to point B, picking up and setting out goods along the way. As a member of the Rose City Garden Railway Society, I have become fast friends with fellow large-scale enthusiasts who enjoy operating their railways in a prototypical manner. We gather at predetermined rail-



4. The daily passenger train climbs the grade, headed to the high line above the Grande Ronde River. Red creeping thyme blooms in the foreground amid an assortment of groundcovers.

Railway at a glance

Name: Baker & Grande Ronde Railroad

Size: 60' x 185'

Theme: 1880s narrow gauge, mining, and logging

Age: 9 years

Scale: 1:24

Gauge: N^o 1 (45mm)

Type of track: Code-250 brass rail handlaid on redwood ties

Turnouts: #4 stub, #6 stub, and #4 three-way stub, all scratchbuilt

Length of mainline: 560'

Maximum grade: 6%

Minimum radius: 60"

Control system: Battery power; Revolution, LocoLinc, Airwire R/C control; Phoenix sound

Motive power: Aristo-Craft C-16s, scratchbuilt Mogul

Structures: Scratchbuilt

ways on a bi-weekly basis for operating sessions during the spring, summer, and fall seasons.

The discovery of another hobby

Our railway was begun in the winter of 2003. I began laying track in the yard of Baker City, which is inside my “man cave” studio, formerly the shop. By springtime I was pushing the mainline out of doors, westbound toward Keg Springs, the first

town planned along the way.

Once I was outdoors, I had a whole new challenge. Instead of benchwork with plaster-based scenery, as I used on my small-scale layout, I now was working with real rock and dirt. I was sculpting and creating a real landscape. Though it was hard work, it was fun to create mountains and streams with real water running. The landscape has now matured into a beautiful rock garden. Seeing the rock garden being

created spurred my wife Jonette’s interest and we now share this rewarding hobby. We spend many summer evenings leisurely manicuring our garden and enjoying the railway.

The Baker & Grande Ronde is a work in progress, alternating between gardenscaping and model construction, depending on the season.

Each year I have progressed steadily forward (westbound). I build sections of



5. A partial view taken from the author's upper deck. The railway was designed to follow Whiskey Creek and the Grande Ronde River to cross the rugged mountains. The natural placement of rocks in irregular groups along the stream adds to the realism. In the hills, the pink creeping phlox stands out among several greens.



6. A string of log cars from a nearby Oregon Lumber Company feeder line wait on a siding for the downhill ride to the mill. Meanwhile, N° 4 spots a baggage combine on the wye at Odell Summit.

track in the studio over winter months, then install them in the garden in the spring. I turn to gardenscaping and operation in the warm months of summer.

Flora and fauna

When it came time to plant our garden railway, we were fortunate to be able to follow the lead of my mother. She had planted their garden railway several years earlier and it was maturing into a beautiful landscape. She gave us cuttings of all types of groundcovers. I wanted to create a forest of virgin, old-growth timber, so we planted dwarf Alberta spruce trees.

I have learned to trim the trees to represent the old trees I imagined. Pruning the trees is an annual event but is well worth the effort. They have now grown thick in the trunk and look like old timber ready for harvest.

With the streams and pond in place, our backyard has turned into a magnet for all types of wildlife. Birds visit daily and

Plants in the Baker & Grande Ronde Garden Railroad

USDA Hardiness Zone 8

GROUNDCOVER

Alpine calamint, rock thyme (tolerates foot traffic, light-purple flowers in summer)

Acinos alpinus

Golden alyssum, basket of gold

Aurinia saxatilis

White alpine creeper (tolerates foot traffic)

Pratia puberula 'Alba'

Dwarf Kerilworth ivy (light-purple flowers, tolerates foot traffic)

Cymbalaria aequitriloba

Ice plant (bright yellow, 1" daisy-like flowers, June through September, sun)

Delosperma congestum

Ice plant (vivid magenta, daisy-like flowers

June to September, sun)

Delosperma cooperi

Ice plant (bright yellow, daisy-like flowers

May-June, sun, drought tolerant)

Delosperma nubigenum

Pink (looks like a miniature carnation)

Dianthus myrtinervius

Pink

Dianthus 'Rose Joy' or *D. pavonius* (red)

White heronsbill (white flowers May to September)

Erodium x variabile 'Album'

Dwarf heronsbill (pink flowers May to September)

Erodium x variabile 'Flore Pleno'

Creeping baby's breath (light-pink flowers spring and summer)

Gypsophila repens 'Rosea'

Green carpet, rupturewort (tiny green leaves, tolerates foot traffic, sun or shade)

Herniaria glabra

Mountain bluets (green foliage, tiny blue flowers, full sun to part shade)

Houstonia caerulea 'Millard's Variety'

Corsican mint

Mentha requienii

Creeping phlox

Phlox subulata 'Emerald Blue'

Moss phlox, creeping phlox

Phlox subulata 'Emerald Pink'

Moss rose (succulent leaves)

Portulaca grandiflora 'Sundial Fuchsia'

County Park (takes foot traffic, creeper with violet-blue flowers in spring through fall)

Pratia pendunculata 'County Park'

Irish moss

Sagina subulata

Scottish moss

Sagina subulata 'Aurea'

Goldenmoss sedum (yellow flowers in summer, tolerates foot traffic, sun)

Sedum acre 'Aureum'

Baby Tears stonecrop (green leaves, small white flowers, drought tolerant, sun to part shade)

Sedum album chloroticum 'Baby Tears'

Blue Spanish stonecrop (gray foliage, pink flowers, bloom in summer, tolerates foot traffic, sun)

Sedum hispanicum 'Minus'

Mossy stonecrop (brilliant green, turns red in drought or cold, white blooms, sun to part shade)

Sedum lydium

Oregon stonecrop (yellow flowers in summer, sun, drought tolerant)

Sedum oregonum

Dragon's Blood stonecrop

Sedum spurium 'Dragon's Blood'

Tri-Color stonecrop (starry, pink summer flowers, foliage green w/cream-and-pink edges, sun)

Sedum spurium 'Tri-Color'

Golden spike moss

Selaginella kraussiana 'Aurea'

Baby tears (tiny green leaves & white flowers, shade to part shade, blooms summer)

Soleirolia soleirolii

Elfin thyme (tolerates foot traffic, light-pink flowers in summer)

Thymus serpyllum 'Elfin'

Woolly creeping thyme (pinkish flowers)

Thymus pseudolanuginosus

Red creeping thyme (small, red flowers, tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus serpyllum var. *coccineus*

White creeping thyme (tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus praecox

Pink Chintz creeping thyme (tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus serpyllum 'Pink Chintz'

Lemon Frost thyme (blooms June and July, smells like lemon, tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus citriodorus 'Lemon Frost'

Archer's Gold thyme (bright, golden leaves, citrus aroma, pink flowers in summer, tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus citriodorus 'Archer's Gold'

Spicy Orange thyme (dark leaves, aroma of oranges, pink flowers spring to summer, tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus citriodorus 'Spicy Orange'

Silver variegated lemon thyme (white flowers spring to summer, tolerates foot traffic)

Thymus citriodorus 'Argentea'

Creeping speedwell (dark-green foliage, dainty, pale-blue flowers in spring, sun to part shade)

Veronica repens

CONIFERS

Dwarf blue cypress (gray juvenile foliage, columnar habit, grows 1" per year)

Chamaecyparis lawsoniana 'Nymph'

Treasure Island cypress (year round brilliant-yellow foliage, dwarf, compact habit to 18")

Chamaecyparis lawsoniana 'Treasure Island'

Dwarf Alberta spruce

Picea glauca 'Conica'

scour the ground for bugs and bathe in the streams, singing and chirping.

Rolling stock, locomotives, & structures

I have always liked the small equipment used on the narrow-gauge railroads of the 1880s. I have been able to represent the 24' to 30' flatcars and boxcars and other rolling stock of that era with Bachmann small-series stock. I repaint and re-letter them for the B&GR and they make up the backbone of my fleet. I have created log loads as well as processed-lumber

loads for most of the flatcars. These are interchangeable and they lend authenticity to operating sessions.

I recently started building additional rolling stock, such as stock cars and tank cars, using Bachmann's small-series flatcars as the basis. I have also scratchbuilt a model of West Side Lumber Company's wedge plow. I have repainted and converted several Roundhouse cabooses to meet B&GR standards, as well as re-lettered my collection of Bachmann passenger equipment. All rolling stock is equipped with

Kadee couplers, properly set at a standard height to assure trouble-free operation.

The small drivers, diamond stack, box headlight, and hunkered-down look of the Consolidations used by most western narrow-gauge railroads always appealed to me. I own four Aristo-Craft C-16s. Each has been customized, including lowering the chassis to the appropriate height, modifying the cab, adding detail parts, repainting and re-lettering, and, finally, converting to battery power with radio control and Phoenix sound.



SAMANTHA IRELAN PHOTOGRAPHY

7. Amid the clutter of his trade, a blacksmith and helper busy themselves with the task at hand.



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8. A bird's-eye view of Keg Springs. As the stage arrives, a gunfight ensues on the veranda of the recently completed Elkhorn Saloon and Hotel.



SAMANTHA IRELAN PHOTOGRAPHY

9. A dam carved from Trex creates a mill pond to power Williamson Mill. N° 4, a scratchbuilt Mogul, arrives from Baker City with the morning mail. 'Dragon's Blood' stonecrop blooms on the right.

A few years ago, I discovered a website by David Fletcher of Australia that guided me through the process of scratchbuilding a Mogul, starting with an Aristo-Craft C-16 motor block. I have since built a model of North Pacific Coast N° 13, which is now in B&GR livery as N° 4. I entered N° 4 in the model contest at the Seattle Garden Railway Convention in 2010 and it won first place in the rod-engine category. I used to worry about the demise of 1:24-scale equipment and parts. Now I'm no longer concerned. I have gained confidence and know that if I need it, I can build it by squirreling parts from unused items and using my imagination.

I design and build all my buildings and structures from scratch, referring to my library for inspiration. I also find much inspiration in model-railroad publications such as *Garden Railways*, the *Narrow Gauge & Shortline Gazette*, *Narrow Gauge Down Under*, and others.

I generate drawings, assemble a cutting list, and mill material on my table saw in preparation for assembly. Most of my models are built of wood, typically cedar, but I do dabble in plastics as well.

My obsession becomes a local attraction

When I started this project, Jonette was shocked at the change I was making to our backyard, with large boulders placed within mere feet of our patio, and truckloads of dirt and rock. I have spent countless hours with a wheelbarrow and shovel. As the years have gone by, our backyard has been transformed into a beautiful rock garden to

About the authors

Gary Lee lives in Corbett, Oregon, with his wife Jonette. He is the owner of a design-build firm. Gary has had an interest in trains since he was six years old, when saw his first model railroad.

Jonette is an executive assistant for a large retailer. Besides garden railroad-ing, she loves to travel the back roads of the west and visit small towns. She also enjoys tole painting, jewelry making, crocheting, knitting, and refurbishing model buildings.





10. In the distance, a train crosses the high bridge at Freezeout Creek. The dwarf Alberta spruce in the foreground have received their annual bonsai treatment, while the ones on the hill await their turn.

which people from afar travel to enjoy.

We are regularly asked to be on assorted garden tours and we have hosted several fundraisers for our local school athletic program by auctioning off tickets for picnic/operating sessions on the Baker & Grande Ronde.

Garden railroading has turned out to be a truly social hobby. We are active members of the Rose City Garden Railway Society. Within our family, the hobby involves my parents, who have a beautiful garden railroad of their own, as well as our grandchildren and a nephew, who love to help run the railway for public events. I love to see the expression of joy when children from 8 to 88 first lay eyes on our railway. They become spellbound. There is just something about a train that touches us all. 🚂



SAMANTHA IRELAN PHOTOGRAPHY

11. It is a cool damp morning as N° 4 waits on the ready line to assist the next train up the steep grade ahead. As in full-size meadows, sedums blend with Irish moss and other low perennials so blooming times are staggered and provide season-long color.