

1. Pennsy GG1 N° 4913 passes Welchville Depot with its passenger train. The townspeople are enjoying the beautiful spring evening. The street around the buildings is made of concrete paving stones. Among many street trees, variegated Sander's Hinoki cypress shades the gray-and-red drug store. At the lower right, three boxwoods have been pruned to show multiple trunks.

An eastern line serves SMALL MOUNTAIN



From the age of four I can remember Lionel trains, but they were mainly for my older brother and, later, my two younger brothers. I always watched my father when he was building anything. Today, none of my brothers have any interest in trains. I subsequently lost interest for years, but decided to build my first HO layout in 1985, when I was living in Hawaii. I also worked at a local hobby store in Honolulu until 1989.

We moved to Chesapeake, Virginia, in 1993. I was a member of the NMRA by then, so I joined the local division, which had a small large-scale group. I joined this group to learn more about that segment of the hobby, then joined the Tidewater Big Train Operators (TBTO G-scale club) in 1995. At the first meeting I attended I saw my first outdoor railway, and I was truly hooked.

My mother suffered a massive stroke in 1996, so I had to move her into our home. That marked the end of my third HO layout; the only other space available for a model railroad was the backyard. By that time I owned several LGB engines and as well as a few pieces of rolling stock.

The planning stage

After lengthy discussions with fellow club members, and especially Buddy Starks (who drew up several trackplans based on our conversations), I borrowed some gauge-1 track and switches from the club to get a better idea of what I might want for the railroad's mainline and branch line. I later ordered a good amount of track, which fortunately was a lot less expensive than it is now.

The railroad name is my last name (Caple) and my father's nickname (Sugkat), which is entirely fitting, as he got me started in the hobby. I love the 1940-60s era, so I chose that to model. My world, my railroad, and my way!

The Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad by Teya Caple-Woods | Chesapeake, Virginia | PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

TRAIN TOWNS



2. Overview of the Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad after 19 years of construction and maintenance.

I began working on the railroad April 1997. Buddy had no idea how much dirt it was going to take to build my railroad. Based on his calculations, I made major changes to both phases of construction. The dirt would be four-feet high in Phase 1, for laying track or creating mountains. The railroad was built in two phases with three later expansions.

Construction

A neighbor installed a pool, so I was able to get four truckloads of free dirt, but it wasn't enough to complete both phases. I also purchased three construction-truckloads of dirt when a nearby road was widened. My husband Roger built the basic framework with

landscaping timbers. I wanted to put a train on the track without having to kneel, so its lowest area is 18"-36" off the ground. The retaining wall for the back of the railroad is treated plywood, wrapped in heavy, black plastic. Roger also moved all the dirt from the side yard into the railroad area by wheelbarrow. When he was finished, he proclaimed in no uncertain terms, "I am done working on your railroad." Of course, that turned out to not be true! The trackplan was changed several times because I had Roger remove a tree here or there or I discovered ways to improve the trackplan.

Phase-I construction provided opportunities to explore ideas I'd read about, and I gained valuable

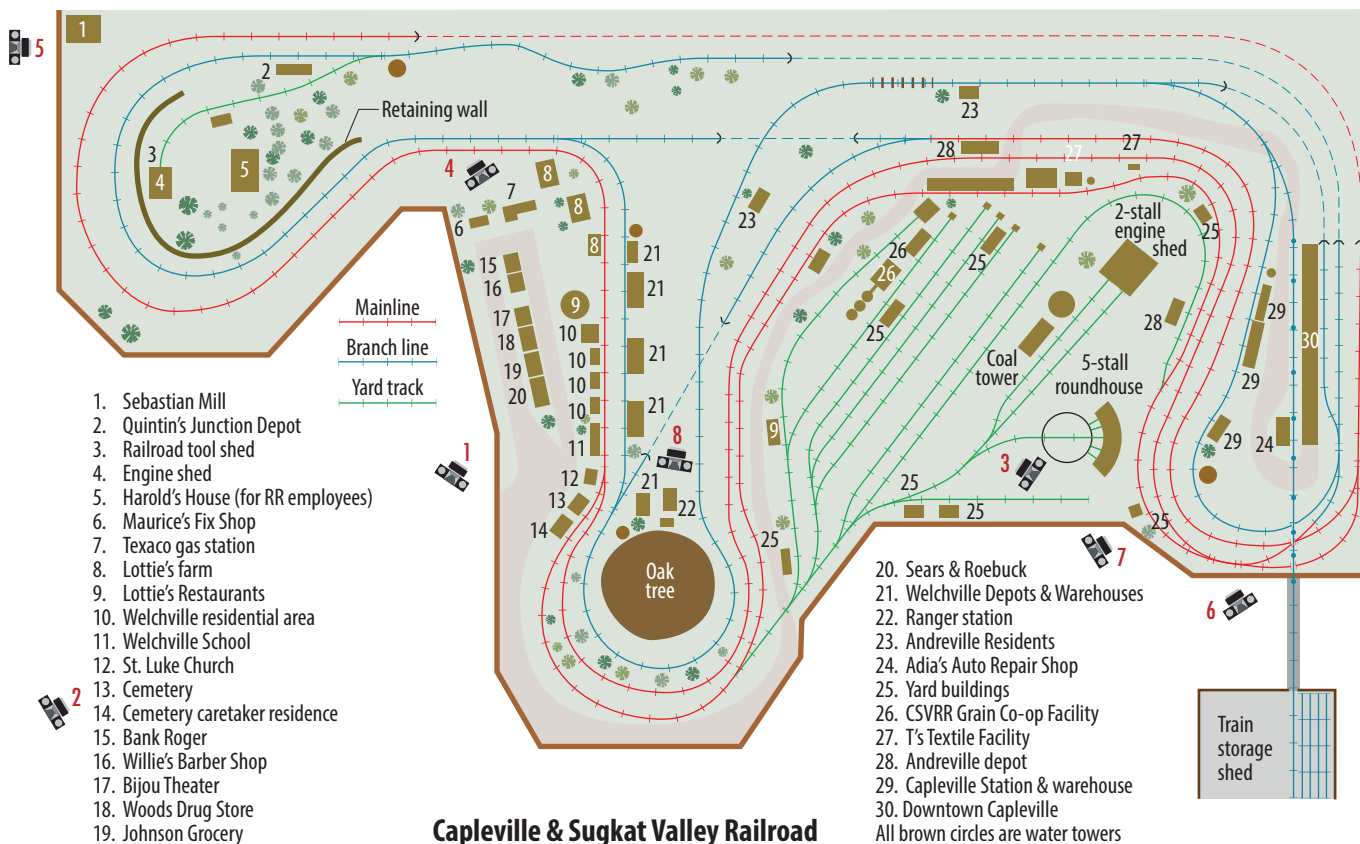
experience trying to find less expensive or better ways of doing things. I used a lot of blue foam-insulation board for constructing the mountains, viaducts, and retaining walls. The mountains in Phase 1 are shaped sections of blue board that were screwed to the backside of the retaining wall, with a narrow trench dug to hold forward sections in place at the front. Newspaper was stuffed between the foam layers and screening draped over this structure to form the depth and hold the Portland-cement mixture that formed to the outer surface.

I scribed the front sections of the blue board with a wire brush to provide a texture that would help retain the wet cement, then applied several layers of a mixture of Portland cement, mortar, and sand. I then used a small broom and my fingers to texture the mountains.

The mountains in Phase 2 were built over a wood framework, with strips of blue board for support, chicken wire to form the shapes, and screening to hold the Portland-cement mixture. There are two tracks behind this section, with pedestrian access behind the railroad when necessary to get to the trains.

3. There's not much action on this quiet morning at the Sugkat Valley Yard. The tall coaling tower dominates the scene.





Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad

Soldering the track

I used Chem-Wik rosin braid for jumper wires across rail joints. I soldered large sections of track with a resistance-soldering unit in my garage, then carried them outside. If a joint braid comes loose now, I replace it with a Split-Jaw rail clamp. Joints are supported with a 3" x 5" (or longer) piece of Plexiglas, if needed, plus brass screws, and plastic tent stakes. A stake is pounded into the ground between the joined tracks. Then the track, Plexiglas, and stake are screwed together with 3/4" brass screws in pre-drilled holes.

The rest of the track floats on rock screening poured into trenchwork. I used Split-Jaw clamps on all my switches so I could easily remove them. Every switch is screwed to a piece of Plexiglas in the shape of the switch so that the entire switch rests on a flat surface.

Cinder blocks and black drainage tubing make up the tunnels. Each has a rerailer track in the middle to help minimize derail-

ments. Portals were cast in a wooden form using concrete and chicken wire, then scribed with a nail. Clyde's Gorge trestle was built by Buddy Starks. I bought a couple of cedar fence boards, planed them, and gave them to Buddy so he could take care of the hard part.

The original landscaping timbers for the border started to deteriorate, so I began replacing them with retaining-wall blocks several years ago. Completing the

first phase of the railroad allowed me to run trains while I worked on the second phase.

Expansion

The original Phase 2 was expanded several years ago so I could have a larger train yard with a better turntable. A fellow club member, Bob Maisey, and I built two turntables out of 4' x 8' PVC plastic sheets. The circle was easy to cut but the turntable-pit wall had to be heated, then placed in a

The railway at a glance

Railroad name: Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad
Size: 90' x 35' x 30'
Scale: 1:22.5-1:32
Era: 1940-1960s
Theme: Small mountain towns and big railroads
Age: 20 years
Motive power: Track and battery
Length of mainline: 350'

Maximum gradient: 3%
Type of track: Aristo-Craft and LGB; LGB switches
Minimum radius: 10'
Structures: Piko, Pola, Korber with modifications, Colorado Structures, Stoneworks
Control system: Aristo-Craft Train Engineer, Revolution, and MTH



4. Just another busy day on Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad, as the Pennsy GG1 hurries its passengers past the freight on the upper track, hauled by a New York Central Hudson. Between the two engines, Silver Mound artemisia breaks up the green landscape with a patch of silvery blue.



5. N° 138 passes Sebastian Mill, which is a Stoneworks structure purchased built-up at the 2015 National Garden Railway Convention. This is the only water feature on the railroad.

curved frame to form the wall pieces. The turntable is 38" in diameter and is not motor driven—that's a future project.

The trackplan allows me to run two trains and to reverse direction on either line. Phase 2 was completed by May 10, 2000, when I connected the last piece of track. A full-size railroad spike marks the spot.

On June 10 of that year I had a

Golden Spike ceremony and another club member, Jon Miller, named my railroad The Sink Holes & Money Pit Railroad. A reporter from the local newspaper, *The Virginia Pilot*, attended the celebration and wrote a lengthy article about the "Whys and Hows of the Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad." That's when Roger found out how much I had spent.

The railroad is electrified

except for my last expansion, the rail yard. Wires were pulled through conduit attached to the back of the railroad and run under a walkway into the electrical panel in the garage. A separate 20-amp circuit breaker was installed just for the railroad. There are also electrical outlets located at each end of the railroad. The railroad is powered by 20-amp modified Navy regulated power supply located in my garage, and by two Aristo-Craft receivers in a plastic box attached to the retaining wall outside. A 20-amp ground-fault-circuit interrupter (GFCI) electrical outlet was installed for AC current to the transformer.

Roads and structures

I tried several methods of making roads, but I now use painted concrete patio blocks. I have also replaced all the blue-board



Plants on the Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad

Chesapeake, Virginia, USDA Hardiness Zone 8

DWARF CONIFERS

Variegated Sander's Hinoki cypress

Chameacyparis obtusa
'Saffron Spray'

Dwarf twisted Hinoki cypress

Chameacyparis obtusa
'Tsatsumi'

Dwarf Golden threadbranch cypress

Chameacyparis pisifera
'Filifera Aurea Nana'

Dwarf Alberta spruce

Picea glauca 'Conica'

Jean's Dilly spruce

Picea glauca 'Jean's Dilly'

Paul's Dwarf mugo pine

Pinus mugo 'Paul's Dwarf'

Berckman's golden arborvitae

Platycladus orientalis
'Aurea Nana'

Peve Minaret bald cypress

Taxodium distichum
'Peve Minaret'

SHRUBS AND TREES

Dwarf English boxwood

Buxus sempervirens
'Suffruticosa'

Emerald Gaiety euonymus

Euonymus fortunei
'Emerald Gaiety'

Schillings dwarf Yaupon holly

Ilex vomitoria
'Schillings Dwarf'

Dwarf crape myrtle Pocomoke

Lagerstromia indica
'Pocomoke'

Creeping rosemary

Rosmarinus officinalis
'Prostratus'

Seiju dwarf lacebark elm

Ulmus parvifolia 'Seiju'

Golden globe arborvitae

Thuja occidentalis
'Globosa Aurea'

GROUNDCOVER

Silver Mound artemisia

Artemisia schmidtiana
'Silver Mound'

Miniature wintercreeper

Euonymus fortunei
'Kewensis'

Ivy, Spetchley

Hedera helix 'Spetchley'

Grace Ward lithodora

Lithodora diffusa
'Grace Ward'

Dwarf mondo grass

Ophiopogon japonicas

Two-row stonecrop

Sedum kamtschaticum
'Variegatum'

John Creech sedum

Sedum spurium
'John Creech'

foundations under my structures with the same blocks so I don't have to repaint them.

Structures are from Piko, Pola, Korber, Eaglewings Iron Craft, and Colorado Model Structures (some with appropriate modifications). The wall and flats creating the downtown Capleville in Phase 2 are made from blue foamboard. I used a pencil soldering iron to carve in the brick pattern. Included are a number of half buildings to add depth to the flats. This area was rebuilt in 2010 in preparation for a new raised track to run to a shed for train storage.

Storage

I was truly tired of carrying trains out to the track, so in 2010, Roger and I built a five-track transfer table in my shed. The table is 13' long and is built like a ladder of 2 x 4s with 1/4" plywood on top. The table has four drawer



slides, so it pulls out sideways, like a cabinet drawer, and pushes back to the wall when you are done. This addition has made train operation easier and a lot more enjoyable.

The railroad's past

This is my railroad, but Buddy Starks was a major player in building it (and spending my money). Buddy had an obsession

with switches, which is why I used to have 13 of them between the mainline and branchline. Some have been removed but more were added to enlarge the rail yard.

Buddy boarded the train to Jordan in 2009, before I had completed the rail yard. In our last conversation, he said he had figured out a better way to enter the yard, but I had already made the changes and all he could say was,

6. Central of Georgia No 138 with a string of freight cars in tow starts its climb to the mountains at Capleville. The rail yard is visible in the background.



7. N° 138 starts up the hill at Capleville. Downtown Capleville is in the background. Mountains are made of a concrete shell over mesh forms.

RIGHT: 8. N° 673 Big Boy winds through the mountains with its train, heading down Buddy's Hill. The trestle in the background provides passage across Clyde's Gorge. At the bottom of Buddy's Hill, a row of dwarf mondo grass helps prevent erosion.

BELOW: Good friend Buddy Starks was instrumental in helping to plan and construct the author's railroad.



"did you use a larger-radius switch?" His family had his memorial service with full military honors at the Capleville & Sugkat Valley Railroad, because he was most at home here.

The railroad was also featured in the book *Getting Started in Garden Railroading* by Allan W. Miller in 2001, and on local WAVY TV-10 in December, 2010.

The future

In 2015 my railroad was starting to show its age, so Roger and I did a lot of repair that will, I hope, last another 18 years. Once we were done, he asked me "How long do you plan to continue doing this?" My answer was, "Until I die!"

After returning from the National Garden Railway Conventions I have suggested to "Bank Roger" that I should tear the railroad down and start over because I love the construction part of this hobby. That didn't go over very well, so I will focus on adding new buildings, repairing Clyde's Gorge trestle, converting engines to battery power, taking care of train repairs, and having fun running trains. 🚂



About the author



After completing her education, Teya Caple-Woods worked in Connecticut, moved to California, then back to Connecticut, then to Honolulu, Hawaii, where she met her husband Roger Woods, to whom she's been married for 37 years. They have one daughter, Adia. Teya worked with the Honolulu Police Department and at the Honolulu Trains & Hobbies store. Teya and Roger moved to Virginia in 1993. Roger retired

from the Navy in 2001 and now is a planner at Northrop Grumman. Teya managed a Hancock Fabric store for 13 years, until 2012. She now devotes full-time effort to the railroad and related projects, while Bank Roger provides the funds for her hobby. She says, "Yes, it's great to be a woman in this hobby!" Her other love is traveling and spending time with their first grandson, Sebastian, whom she is teaching about trains.