

Layout Tours

Our layouts are a fantastic resource. If you own one, you are an inspiration to others. If you go to visit, you are the one being inspired. Sometimes I think we lose track of the fact that other people enjoy what we do. One group that builds on it is a group of Garden Railroad enthusiasts in the area south of San Francisco (I think they are mostly members of the NMRA, but there doesn't seem to be any actual structure). They recognize that they have something that people would like to see, so, in the summer, they organize a layout tour that they advertise to the general public. It seems to be five to ten layouts. What is different about it is what they charge. The price of admission is a donation to the local food bank. They usually fill up a number of barrels and the bed of a pickup with canned and non perishable goods for their one-day open house effort. I know another group back east that does something similar to benefit a church.

We all know the power of this so how do we do them?

Bill Kaufman

Division 6 of the North Central Region

By Glenn Joppich, Superintendent

We have a layout chairman and he

arranges layout tours. We try to have two layouts available each month and have been doing pretty well. The gentleman who is chairman works pretty hard and has done a great job for us. In fact he is also in charge of layout tours for our regional convention this year and we have over 30 layouts open for people to visit.

NMRA MER Susquehanna Division 11

By Jeff Warner, Superintendent

The home/club layout tours are always our most popular and best attended events. While I "coordinate" all of them, I try to involve our local members as much as I can. We cover a fairly large geographic area, and I'm simply not familiar with all the modelers in other places...and whose layout may be worth a visit (or even who has a layout). So, when I meet or talk to a member from an area of the division we haven't been to (lately), I ask them about it and three times, one of them has stepped up and either organized a tour or got me in contact with enough locals to organize a tour. In turn, when they provide a contact, I ask them about more layouts in the area to add to the tour. I also mention on our website and periodically in my column in the newsletter that if a member knows of a

good layout to visit, to contact me.

Prairie Lakes Division of the TLR

By Doug Harding

We try to offer a layout tour at our spring/fall meets, when a layout is available in the area. Tours are typically arranged by the person/group who is hosting the meet. Tours are conducted after the meet concludes, i.e. 3pm - 5pm. Sometimes the owner or club will provide a map, other times someone stands up at the meeting and gives directions. (In a town of 2000 it is difficult to get lost) As meet locations move, not always do we have a layout to tour. And note the singular use of layout, because in most PLD communities it is indeed one layout, if any. In my years with the PLD I can only recall 2 or 3 meets where we had multiple layouts to tour. And only one meet where I did not get to all the layouts open in the time allotted.

The PLD does have a module layout owned by the Division which is normally set up at the meet, if space permits. It is not a large layout, contains about a dozen modules.

4th Division, Pacific Northwest Region.

By Walt Huston, VP, PNR, NMRA

Each year there are at least three layout tours, geographically separated within the Division. Each of these is coordinated by a small group of people and is generally put together as follows:

Contact is made by the leadership group with all of the people known to have a layout in their geographic area. These layout owners are asked if they would like to display their layout for a layout tour. Those who say yes are put on a list with a short description of their layout.

A specific date is selected and the layout owners are polled as to their availability on that specific date. The layout list is then set to those who can/will participate on that date. One of the lead group then puts together a map of the area and the specific locations of the layouts on tour. The list is made available to members who wish to take the tour, with a precautionary note that the list/map is not for general distribution to the public. Members have always been very good about keeping the list safe.

On the day of the tour layout hosts place a specific sign in front of their home for assisting people in getting to the correct location. Visitors are asked to sign the layout owner's guest book when one is made available. The layout tour hours are posted on the list/map and may not be exactly the same one layout to another. In the Olympia area they often open the layouts that are furthest north early, say 9 or 9:30 and have them go to 3, while those in the south open at 11 and go to 5. Most of the visitors to this tour come from north of Olympia so that makes sense. The Tacoma Area layout tours usually open at 9:30 or 10 and run to 4. Lastly, but not least, the Whidby Island layout tour runs approximately the same hours as the Tacoma tour. There are

other layout tours set up within the Division, such as a Seattle area tour and others, but I am not personally aware of just how they work theirs.

The Olympia tour is normally in March or early April. Tacoma usually is in late November to mid December and Whidby Island is held in between.

In Tacoma we usually have a separate tour of N scale layouts which is sponsored by a local hobby shop, Online Trains & Hobbies. It is set up in the same way, with only N layouts on that tour. This tour is usually in early December, with dates coordinated with the Tacoma Layout Tour (all scales).

Midwest Region

By Bert Lattan, Midwest Region Secretary

In recent years, the host Division for the Midwest Region's Spring Convention has typically scheduled operating sessions Friday evening and layout tours Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Members attending the convention usually must sign up in advance for an operating session. The layouts on tour are described in the Convention program booklet or a supplementary document. The booklet/document includes maps to the layouts. Members car pool or drive themselves to the layouts.

Many of our Divisions offer layout tours after their meets.

Division One, NCR

By Fred E. Lux, Superintendent, Division One, NCR, NMRA

For years in Division One, NCR, we would hold tours of member's layouts in May. Tours were on the first three weekends of the month, with layout owners dictating the time and day (s). Some layouts were swamped with visitors, others had very few, and many times the layout owners couldn't see the layouts they wanted to because they were open at the same time(s).

This year we did something totally different. Rather than having a marathon of layout tours over a matter of a few weekends, we decided to have a featured layout of the month. A couple of photos of the layout, plus an informational blurb written by the layout owner (or for him) are included in the monthly Newsletter. Division One meets on Friday nights, September through May. At the Division meeting, the featured layout owner is given a few minutes to talk about his layout. He then holds his layout open on the weekend of the Division meeting. Day (Saturday or Sunday or both) and times are the owners choice. He is not competing against any other layout for visitors. This has gone over so well, that the membership has asked to continue this procedure next year.

Following this section we have an article on the Piedmont Pilgrimage, the first of our layout tour schemes, is an outreach effort by the Piedmont Division of the South Eastern Region. Every year, during November, they celebrate Model

Railroad Month by conducting tours open to the public of quality layouts in the Atlanta Georgia area. This last year they had held open houses on the Saturday and the Sunday of six different weekends, with five to ten different layouts open each day. They do confess to being in a layout rich area, but this is still impressive

It is followed by an article on the Coast Division Tours. The Coast Division of the Pacific Coast Region takes quite an optimistic view of the boundaries of the division. Their tours cover most of Northern California, but they are so well organized that nobody cares. I am a good ten miles from the nearest arm of Coast, but I have been on their tours a number of times and there are another couple of guys a good thirty miles north who are on their tours too. Their tours are basically for the entertainment of modelers and they control access to the locations of the layouts.

Finally, there is a Layout Evaluation form that we have used for the last ten years both to evaluate and explain layouts. There is one caution to using it. Even though there are 1-5 numbers associated with some of the items they are not to be seen as value judgments. A "2" in size just says that it is roughly 10' by 10'. A "5" is not better, just bigger. We publish the form and use the categories and numbers to explain what you will see. To apply it to my own State Belt layout which I like just fine, it is somewhere between a 2 and a 3 for size. It's definitely a 3 for scenery, a 4 for prototype, and a 4 for Rigorousness. I have played a bit fast and loose with San Francisco geography and only sort of

understand how the old State Belt operated. It's a fair description and people who come to see it won't be disappointed.

Anyway, good luck with your tours and I hope this helps.

Bill Kaufman

Build a Pilgrimage

The Piedmont Pilgrimage is not a unique concept by any means. It was brought to us by our then Division Superintendent, Bob Mc Intyre, who had been visiting up north and found out about a group of layout tours being presented which encompassed three states. There were simple hand drawn maps and schedules and was done by one or two people who put this together every year during November.

Taking this basic concept, Bob and I discussed the possibility of doing something like that on a local basis for Model Railroad month. We started in 2003 and as the Director of Operations then, I arranged with a number of folks to have their layouts open on the weekends of the month. We started with 12 layouts. We came up with a name for the event, the Piedmont Pilgrimage, which although many considered “corny”, it really fit what we were trying to do and was most appropriate. One of our members came up with a logo, a caricature of a Pilgrim with a horn of plenty and a train coming out of it. It has since stuck and has been cleaned up a bit to what you see now on the website. Each year since 2003 we have included more and more layouts in practically ALL the scales. We even had the live steamers group for a couple of years, but insurance and other liability issues prevented further participation. We hope to be able to include them again sometime in the future. There are details to be worked out, but meanwhile

we have all the other “smaller” scales included but lack any Z layouts, but they are in the works. There are a few folks here who have Z modules, so we are trying to find a place for them to set up and display their layouts for the Pilgrimage. It will happen, probably next year.

We created a booklet listing all the layouts and the schedule. We have been selling advertising to help offset the cost of the booklet printing. While this event was not intended to be a money making venture, we have found ways to subsidize it in a way that is not a drain on the treasury. The booklet printing and mailing is the biggest thing. We have a staff that seeks out advertisers throughout the community, not just model railroad entities. We also distribute the booklets to hobby retailers, where they are picked up by the store’s customers. We also offer what is known as “pike ads” where the layout owners can have a business card size ad in the booklet for a nominal cost of 10 bucks and they also get some business cards as part of the deal. Advertisers also are put on the web site, so they really get some bang for the buck. Prices range from 1/4 page ad to a full page ad, with the premium being the inside covers. We have no problem selling ads.

We work on this program all year, seeking returning layouts and new ones, plus the extensive planning and scheduling of this event. We have, as a

result, gotten a lot of new members as more and more folks are finding out about the Division and what we have to offer. It sells itself. Because we are blessed to have so many members who have home layouts, our program is very successful. We feel like we will have quite a bit to show the rest of the NMRA when they come to our convention in 2013. The Pilgrimage was conceived well before we ever thought about seeking to host a National Convention. It will no doubt be one of the plums of the convention. I suspect that by Convention time, we will have some outstanding layouts to offer, more than any other convention in a long time.

Can other groups and Divisions do this? Probably, but it will take some effort. Believe me, the layouts don't come looking for you (in the beginning) like they do now after 6 successful years. We've had folks in Macon and Chattanooga come to us wanting to be on the Pilgrimage. Word is getting out. It's a matter of finding out who has home layouts, or club layouts, or modular group layouts and tapping into that. We have all three on the tour, so it can be done. We started small and grew but WE STARTED. It is all paying big dividends now and will make it much easier when considering a National convention and having to build a program for home layout tours. Ours is already in place and expanding each year.

The Pilgrimage has become our premier outreach program as a result. Are we the only Division doing this? I don't know. I do know this however; what we are doing we are doing very

well and works for us. If I had to break it down into components, it would probably look something like this:

- Decide to do something like this for Model Railroad Month
- Come up with a name/title for it
- Locate as many home layouts/club layouts/modular group layouts as you can
- Discuss your plan with them, invite them to participate
- Have some form of documentation outlining your activities (a booklet or such)
- Create and maintain a web site with the tour schedule, layout descriptions, and directions
- Contact local hobby shops and seek support (advertising) and sell booklet ads
- Include maps and descriptions of all the layout participants
- Constantly double check your information for accuracy
- Talk it up among your own people, recruit help for planning and scheduling
- Start planning early, a year out is not too soon. It's what we do.
- Advertise at local events and in the Model RR press if you can

There are a good many details to consider, but if you start small and work your way up, you can build a credible program in a few years. It IS worth it. If someone were interested in doing something similar in their community/ Division we are more than willing to share all the knowledge we have accumulated over the years. We do have some unique advantages to be sure; being in a “hotbed” of model railroad activity really helps as the geography of the area is most conducive to having home layouts with basements a plenty. Having a Division with over 400 members is a plus too, with all the resulting resources at our disposal. There is no shortage of volunteers as a side benefit.

Yes, it takes some work, but if you are willing and can enlist the help of few people to get it started, you can do it, even on a smaller scale. If some other group or Division is doing something similar, we'd sure like to hear from them to see if there is anything we could be doing different or better. If WE are the benchmark, we have NO secrets. My favorite expression is “many hands make light the work”. It's a good concept. Go out and create your own version of the Pilgrimage and see for yourself how much more fun you can have and how many more new people you will get in your group as a result. Model Railroading is Fun!

Coast Division Layout Tours

The Coast Division of the Pacific Coast Region (PCR) of the NRMA has a layout tour program called Coast Tours. Coast Tours is organized geographically into six tour areas of Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Northwest, Monterey/Salinas, and North Bay & Beyond. These areas correspond to four quadrants of the southern portion of the San Francisco Bay region, Monterey County to the South and parts of the Redwood Empire Division in the San Francisco Bay region. The Coast Division is roughly half of the PCR membership so it made sense to offer the Coast Tour resources to any other interested PCR divisions.

Coordinated Geographically

Each Coast Tour area has a coordinator who is responsible for the layouts in his area. Some assistant coordinators have been recruited to assure continuity. There is an overall non-geographical coordinator. Each coordinator recruits, inspects, assists and documents the information necessary for participation in a layout tour. Tours are organized by area, but open to all members of the PCR. Layouts are recruited from non-NMRA members and non-members may be tourists, but must be accompanied by an NMRA member to secure the list of layout locations and download the maps.

The weekend following the Coast Division quarterly meetings is normally the Coast Tours schedule. Each area is open for one weekend a year. It may be on Saturday or Sunday or both. The calendar for each area is rotated each year so that those with a particular calendar restriction will not be permanently excluded either as a hosting layout or as a tourist. We have also assisted with organizing prototype operating sessions and in-house clinics using the area coordinators as contact points.

Integrated With Other Activities

There is a growing interest in the PCR for prototype operations. The annual three day Layout Design and Operations Special Interest Groups Meet (LD/Op Sig) is jointly sponsored by the PCR and the SIG's. The Sig meet Tours and Operating Sessions are organized in part by the Coast Tours coordinators insuring that all of these functions have a synergistic approach to the common resources of modelers and their layouts. Coast Tours also handles the PCR annual convention Tours and Operating Sessions when the PCR meet is located in the Coast Division. Some tours are hosted while a prototype operating session is in progress. The tourists have been uniformly enthusiastic about seeing live op sessions, but some hosts

find this too distracting, often because of constricted aisle ways.

Coast Tours also liaisons with other non-NMRA model railroad groups including O-Scale West, Bay Area Garden Railway Association and various modular groups.

upcoming tour events is the most effective promotional tool. A maintained web site is the second most important tool. Hardcopy media and announcements at meetings are also vital contact methods.

PCR Resources For Publicity

The Coast Dispatcher and PCR Branch Line periodicals are the primary means of Coast Tours publicity. About every 18 months the entire PCR membership is contacted via email regarding Coast Tour activities. This channel would be used more except that the PCR email list is not complete and up to date.

Online Maps

Each Tour or Operating Session program has a map set with driving directions prepared for each layout. The layout maps are supplemented with regional maps to assist in individual self-guided tour planning. These maps are available on-line and linked to the Coast Division web site about one week prior to each tour. Access to the maps requires a prior registration of the person's email address and NMRA membership number. The maps are removed from the web site at the conclusion of the tour.

The maintenance of a model railroader data base with accurate name, address, telephone number and most important of all – email address – is the key resource to managing Coast Tours. Targeted email reminders of

Layout Evaluation

Size	5 500 sq ft. plus Large home or club sized	4 400 sq ft. 20' by 20' Garage or base- ment	3 200 sq ft. 10' by 20' Half a garage	2 100 sq ft. 10' by 10' Small bedroom	1 50 sq ft. 5' by 10' Half a bedroom
Scenery	5 Full scenery, exceptional de- tail	4 Full scenery	3 2/3rd Scenery	2 1/3rd scenery	1 Plywood Central
Prototype /theme	5 Full fidelity to prototype	4 Some compro- mises with proto- type or freelance.	3 Attempts to evoke specific era/time	2 Generic era/ RR	1 Mix of eras, rail- roads and locations
Rigorousness	5 Tightly struc- tured per proto- type.	4 Closely adheres to prototype practice	3 Purposeful operations	2 Attempts at prototype op- erations	1 "Holler and Hope" operations
Theme, prototype, and location of the layout:		Documentation, Orientation and Signage: <input type="checkbox"/> Fascia mounted track diagrams <input type="checkbox"/> Station names / MPs on fascia <input type="checkbox"/> Handout describing layout and op session purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Timetable if appropriate		Pace of operating session <input type="checkbox"/> Fast Clock <input type="checkbox"/> Sequence	
Purpose of the railroad and/or operating session		Car Forwarding Scheme <input type="checkbox"/> Car Cards <input type="checkbox"/> Switch list <input type="checkbox"/> Computer generated <input type="checkbox"/> Tacks or markers on cars <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		Tone and Atmosphere of operating session <input type="checkbox"/> No extraneous conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly disciplined <input type="checkbox"/> Casual <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Operating scheme: <input type="checkbox"/> TT&TO <input type="checkbox"/> CTC <input type="checkbox"/> Track Warrant/DTC <input type="checkbox"/> ABS/Rule 251 <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ Control system: <input type="checkbox"/> DC / Block Control <input type="checkbox"/> DCC / System: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____ Communication system: <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Channel radio <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> None Other important features of operations:					
Layout Name			Owner name		
Address:			City	State	
Phone:		Email:		Zip	