

V-Scale Logging



Making Layout Space in Cyberspace

Logging railroads have always captured my interest. The unique equipment, the rough and tumble methods, the steep grades and interesting operations are all great reasons for being a logging enthusiast. Logging modelers are now living in one of the best of times with all the manufacturers providing plenty of detailed models and locomotives. All you need is time and space.

By Rich Blake

(All photos by the author)

Well, what if you are one of those people who are challenged by time and space—always on the go and never having the opportunity to build anything, except on paper? It can be difficult to enjoy what the hobby has to offer. I myself am constantly traveling, and having even a portable layout or building a kit is a challenge to accomplish.

A few years ago I discovered what is now being called "V-Scale," or model railroading on your computer. I found it very interesting and it quickly became what I used to satisfy my creative need and extend my armchair railroading abilities. Since I always have my laptop wherever I go, V-Scale has provided me with the

Above left: This log dump on the Clear Lake layout unloads logs into the pond as the cars are positioned under the A-frame. Nearly everything in the scene other than the terrain texture and foliage was created by the author and imported into the simulator.

Above center: Loading logs with the McGiffert style loader on the Clear Lake layout with the Mich-Cal #10 Class B Shay. The logs and skeletons are "interactive," meaning that the skeletons are brought in empty and the loader loads the logs onto the cars. The weight of the logs is applied to the total train and affects the performance of the locomotive.

Above right: This 24" gauge Forney represents the Sandy River #1, built by the Hinkley Locomotive Works. I made this loco off of plans from an old Crittenden diagram. Although not as popular among logging modelers, the Maine 2 footers are interesting subjects to model and operate nonetheless.

opportunity to plan, create and operate logging railroads whenever I want. It is definitely convenient, but will never completely replace hands-on model railroading. What it does do however is keep my interest level and historical knowledge up for the time when I do settle down and start building in the real world.

My chosen software for V-Scale is Auran's Trainz Railroad Simulator. This program was released after the more prominent Microsoft Trains Simulator and is similar, in that you can operate a variety of trains on a multitude of routes. Trainz, however, has many benefits over MSTs. It is much easier to create layouts and import more complex models. MSTs has recently been discontinued by Microsoft. On the other hand, Auran has just released Trainz Railroad Simulator 2006, which includes a good selection of logging items made by yours truly, and various other narrow gauge equipment and structures which will be of interest to the logging and short line enthusiasts.

One of the things I noticed when I first started V-Scale using earlier versions of Trainz, is that there were very few logging items available. I began to search for and collect all the logging items I could find on the Internet. I used the items I found on a freelanced layout, and started learning how to create models in 3D to be imported into Trainz so I could "scratchbuild" more of my own logging models. About this time I also met another V-Scale logging modeler, Peter Pardoe-Matthews, who resides in Australia. He was one of the pioneer logging modelers for Trainz, and had made some great 3-foot narrow gauge items, including a nicely weathered 25T Climax. Peter helped me a lot learning the ropes of 3D modeling, and I was soon on my way to creating more detailed models.

Building models for the simulator is what really attracted me further into this small niche of the hobby.

Using 3D CAD type programs, I can take a scale drawing of an item and build it in 3D on the computer. Once the model shapes are built, I can animate things like wheels and driver rods as needed to create more realism. The model is then "painted," using a photo editor like Adobe Photoshop to create textures to be applied to the model. Weathering effects and details can all be added using these textures to create very realistic looking models. When the model is completed, it is exported into a form useable by Trainz. Then you can use the model in the simulator. It seems complicated, but if you think of this in the same terms as building a model railroad item from scratch, the work flow is much the same—research, plan, build, paint, place on a layout.

As I gained experience at building computer models, my logging equipment roster began to grow. I made a small route within Trainz to place these models on. It became so much fun to place and test small scenes that the route grew in detail, to the point where it really



An early version of the Michigan-California Lumber Co. #10 Class B Shay during testing. This model was created using a 3D CAD/animation program by Discreet Software, called "Gmax". Gmax is a less powerful version of Discreet's 3dsMAX, which is the same program that is used to make movie characters like "Shrek." It has unlimited scratch-building potential.



WSLC #12, pausing near the River Bridge watch shack to let the brakes cool after the long down grade run from Camp 8.

Above left: View of the Willamette donkey, that powers the A-frame unloader on the dry sort yard. The donkey has animated rods, bellows smoke and makes proper machinery sounds.

Above center: My dry sort yard, which stores and transfers logs. It is a free-lanced model that takes some inspiration from A-frame unloader technology and quad spar tree rigs with parallel cable crotchlines.

Above right: Skeleton cars based on typical Pacific Car and Foundry type skeletons. Log load models are programmed to be randomly created, which makes for unique loads on each car.

Above left: The WSLC #12 approaching a servicing area on the West Side layout.

Above center: Frog's eye view of the River Bridge crossing. In Trainz, cameras can be placed throughout the layout for "raillanning" at any position the user wants. It can be a good tool to use for real layout planning and viewing scenes before you commit to building them.

Above right: Crossing the infamous "River Bridge" on the West Side layout about 7 miles up from Tuolumne. The structures, loco and rolling stock were all created by the author. The terrain was modeled from geospatial topographical data available on the Internet that exactly represents the actual terrain of the WSLC.



West Side Lumber Co. #12, heading up with empties on the WSLC layout. The loco features accurate physics, animated valvegear, steam effects and sounds. All of the rolling stock items can be loaded and unloaded with appropriate products. The crummy has an interior view setting so you can ride along as the brakeman if you wish.

started to look like scenes out of a logging book or TTSL. I couldn't keep this to myself, so I eventually shared this route with other Trainz users on the Internet. I named it "Clear Lake," after the original in the Pacific Northwest near Mt. Vernon, Washington. It went on to become one of the most downloaded routes ever in Trainz, with over 20,000 people enjoying my version of Northwest logging on the computer.

I am now working on the full prototype version of the West Side Lumber Co., central California's last all steam logging railroad. I have made a few key structures, rolling stock items and the WSLC #12 Class C Shay. The

project was started during the winter of 2003 and continues to grow and develop as I have time to work on it. The completed layout will include all of the mainline from Tuolumne to Camp 45, with all the significant structures built specifically for it.

One of the things that really makes Trainz a great simulator is that a V-Scale modeler can import Digital Elevation Model (DEM) terrain maps from geospatial websites which represent the actual topography of the selected area. In my WSLC project, I have the exact terrain elevations and contours represented in my layout for the entire 70 miles of mainline. So when

you steam up the WSLC #12 and head up to Deadwood or Camp 8, it is on the same grade that the prototype operated on.

Of course, when you are modeling the prototype in 1:1 scale with virtually no pre-made kits to choose from, it takes a while to complete everything. Every unique structure, loco and piece of equipment has to be created from scratch. I have a long way to go on the WSLC, but it has proven so far to be well worth the effort.

I have also dabbled in some other subjects, like the Michigan-California Lumber Co., the Diamond and Caldor, the 2-foot gauge Sandy River, and Rangleley Lakes. I also have nearly completed a base model of a Pacific Coast Shay



The WSLC Camp 8 "Linen Car" was created from pictures and measurements of the prototype. The Yahoo group "WSLC modelers" helps provide guidance and reference for real models as well as my virtual ones.

to be painted in various liveries. It has been fun and interesting to put some of my railroad interests into something I can see and operate.

I am not sure how far the prototype train simulation genre will go, but it is definitely a popular past-time for many around the world. As we have seen at train shows, the usual train simulator booth gets a lot of attention and sometimes becomes one of the most popular attractions. It is only appropriate that some of us try to use the medium to educate budding enthusiasts and preserve our important rail-logging heritage.

So until I do get a permanent place for my real logging layout, V-Scale will have to fill the void for this traveling character. At least I get to visualize what my armchair model dreams look like, and in the end the time spent doing this will make me a better modeler in the real world.

Web resources

www.auran.com Trainz Website
www.steammachine.com Logging and Narrow Gauge V-Scale
www.trainzone.co.nz Logging and Narrow Gauge V-Scale
www.virtualrailroader.com Online E-Zine of Virtual Railroading

This article appeared in the winter 2006 issue of the Tall Timber and Short Lines Magazine.

Most of the trees pictured in this article are mine. Rich Blake has used them extensively in most of his routes.