

Railroading American style...



NOT!

Rogier Donker

Foreword

In the fall of 2005 the author, a naturalized citizen of the United States of America found himself in the Netherlands. Forty-seven years earlier at the tender age of seventeen, he had visited the U.S.A. and subsequently immigrated to the States where he, for all practical purposes “grew up” “American”. The reason for visiting the country of his birth was primarily to say farewell to a sibling whose days on this earth were numbered.

Over the past twenty-five years the author had become quite involved in the hobby of model railroading. Indeed, his “Elliana and Heritage Rail Road” grew into an empire that is housed in a fourteen by twenty-eight foot room. Always being worked on, the “E&H” is not even close to being completed, if indeed it will ever be finished! Generally speaking most railroad hobbyists in the United States have a tendency to have ever-larger layouts and the E&H is nothing special in that regard. By contrast most private European layouts tend to be a lot smaller than Americans are used to.

As a member of an Internet chat room, Worldrailfans.com, friends were made all over the world including one Frits Osterthun, a friend I met in Holland. It was only logical that while in Holland contact would be sought with Frits and indeed a visit was scheduled to see Frits’ HO scale layout named the “Cochemer Bahn”. The following pages detail the history of the “Cochemer Bahn” and offer a view of one of the finest layouts the author has been privileged to visit.

Riverview, November 2007

The Attic Empire

The Legacy

Frits' interest in model railroading started at an early age. His father enjoyed the hobby as well and had built a huge (to Dutch standards anyway) model railroad that occupied most of the approximate twelve by sixteen square foot attic in the parental house. The layout was on three levels, sported almost 360 lineal feet of track and it would take a train almost five minutes to cover all that high iron to return to the point of origin...



The models that young Frits and his brothers played with were rather crude to today's standards, but none-the-less provided the youngsters with tons of pleasure. Old enough to realize the value of a nice model Frits purchased his very own locomotive in 1980. The model, a Märklin 3029, is still in use today on the Cochemer Bahn. The railroad had simple block control and sported a multitude of tracks that



went “everywhere”. The father’s layout was quite operational but had no real “program” or theme. As the Osterthun brothers became older, they were allowed to paint backdrops on the walls of the attic. The ceiling too received a paint job: the northern half was graced with the Orion constellation, the southern half showed off the Big Dipper or Ursa Major. Both the moon and the constellations could be lit up and since most of the models were illuminated, nighttime running of trains, under a moonlit sky with stars twinkling, was indeed a sight to see!

To make the layout appear larger than it really was, the brothers crumpled up painted paper, which became hilltops and mountain ranges, complete with crude tunnels. The boys created some scenery, erected a few buildings and there were even



some complete towns on the layout. One of the first models Frits built was a maintenance shed which served the multitude of locomotives that ran on the attic layout. A truly father and sons affair, the railroad over the years filled the attic to its capacity.



In 1982, when he graduated from High School, Frits received a Märklin Class 50 steam locomotive (#3084) and ten “Fals” cars (#4624). On that day he decided



to start his very own locomotive and rolling stock collection. While attending the Rijks Universiteit at Utrecht, Frits spent relatively little time playing with trains, but during the summers he and his brother would still visit the attic empire and run a few trains. Recently Frits’ father passed away and Frits and his brothers found themselves having to take apart the layout as the parental home was about to be sold. Nothing is more nostalgic than to have to tear down and break up a layout, especially one that had given so much enjoyment and carried with it so many wonderful memories of one’s youth. Fortunately Frits did not have to carry the responsibility of tearing down



the layout alone; his brothers assisted him. His friends on the Worldrailfans.com web site also eased the burden somewhat. Frits shared his “tear down” experience with his cyberspace comrades in words and pictures and they in turn supported Frits in the sad endeavor. Few pieces of the old railroad were salvaged, but the original maintenance shed that Frits had built as a youngster would be saved and would find a home on his soon-to-be layout. Among the items that were carefully removed from the old layout



was “Falkenstein”, a commercial castle kit that Frits had purchased in the early eighties. It had been a focal point of the towering mountain range in the attic. Together with some other buildings and pieces of the old layout, “Falkenstein” would later be incorporated in Frits’ layout, although today one would be hard pressed to recognize the original kit.



The Cochemer Bahn

In 1992 after graduating from “R.U.U.” with a Master Degree

Frits started building his Rail Road Empire.

The next few years Frits worked on and off on his railroad project. “Mundane” things like family, children and general “life” interruptions halted progress on the railroad here and there, but by 2004, twelve years after its conception, the Cochemer Bahn can be called “completed”. Set in the period from 1885 to 1920 and erected in the Bavarian style, the layout measures roughly five by twelve feet and occupies most of one of the spare bedrooms in Frits’ house.

Compared to the average American layout the “Cochemer Bahn” is in a class all by itself. Not nearly as big and spacious as his father’s attic empire of his youth the “CB” only occupies sixty square feet or so. The bench work that supports the railroad is open underneath so all wiring and switch motors are easily accessible. The controls are mounted in a large drawer underneath the bench work and when one

wants to operate the layout a “flick of the proverbial finger” puts the simple controls at one’s fingertips. To control the movement of the trains (five trains can be run



simultaneously!) Frits wired the layout in such a way that it could operate on both DCC or block control. In addition to having the best of both controlling systems, all the buildings, nay even individual ROOMS are electrified and lights throughout the layout can be turned on and off at will by pushing the appropriate button. A totally awesome way to enjoy a model railroad! The control panel consists of older Maerklin analogue transformers and newer S 88 digital modules. Then there are numerous switches to control the “Viesmann” signals on the layout as well as the street and interior lights. The room in which the “CB” is housed is large enough to not only accommodate the railroad itself, but also provides room for a small work bench, storage cabinets and wall display cabinets that house Frits’ vast collection of locomotives and rolling stock. A joy to operate, the railroad has so many things happening at once that it is hard to take it all in at one time. Detailed “to the max”, it is obvious that someone worked at this creation for a long time! And Oh! The result is fantabulous!



The track plan appears to be nothing fancy, just a basic “figure 8”. The fact that the tracks are on three different levels and that there are many, many spurs (at all those levels) with lots of tunnels and hidden inclines and declines makes for a very versatile and interesting railroad empire. At the back of the layout, hidden by the mountainous terrain is a small staging yard from which as many as five trains can be dispatched at the same time. All running and controlled by the operator who’s seated in front of the layout. Seated at the controls one observes from left to right a meticulously crafted empire indeed. On the left the town of Cochem, in front the countryside with a small “whistle stop” station and on the right the castle of King Ludwig the Magnificent, “Cochemer Burg”. Immediately it is the “Cochemer Burg”



that catches the viewer’s eye, for this elaborate structure is the very same as “Falkenstein” of another era. What had begun life on the paternal layout, back in the eighties, as “Falkenstein” (that **commercial** castle kit) became “Cochemer Burg” on

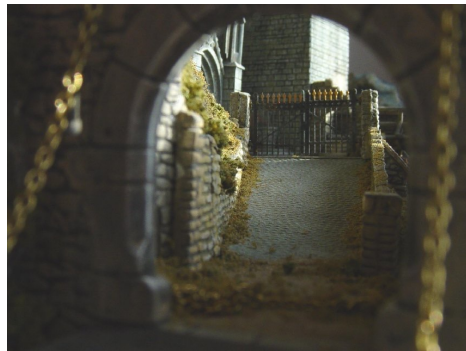
the son's lay out. Almost beyond recognition, severely "kit mashed and mingled", turned right side up and inside out, "Cochemer Burg" became an exquisite example of how one can suit a model kit to a particular setting. Totally awesome! A far cry from the original "Falkenstein" structure, the "Cochemer Burg" was enlarged with additional walls, scratch-built components and parts of other structures. The whole complex occupies almost all of the right half of the layout and demands careful



observation so the viewer will not miss any details. The structures on the layout are mostly Faller and Kibri kits, some are "kitbashed" or "kit mingled", while others are



The draw bridge



The imposing entrance



The look-out

built the way they came out the box. Both Faller and Kibri make wonderful buildings in the so-called “Fach Bau” style, befitting the period in which the railroad is set.



The superbly crafted town hall



Around the Whistle-stop

All of the bare ground on the railroad is covered with SOMETHING, be it grass, weeds and bushes or straight or knurly trees. There are people at play and people at work. There are horses and swine, cows and ducks and dogs and cats...



Activity abounds on the layout: Trains are coming and going, people are moving about and things are happening! Streetlights light up the neighborhoods, while dark footpaths lead to unknown parts of the forest. Wherever one looks the attention to detail is just amazing and speaks highly of the creator's talents. In 2005 when the author visited the layout it appeared, for all practical purposes, "finished". Like any other layout though, be it American or European, layouts are just "never" finished



and are “continuously” being worked on. Another tree there, another detail here, there is always SOMETHING that will make the lay out even more complete. The Cochemer Bahn is no different in that respect: At a recent town council meeting King Ludwig the Magnificent suggested in no uncertain terms that a new forest be grown behind the Cochemer Burg so his Majesty’s private hunting preserve could be enlarged... At the king’s behest and insistence the town fathers, under protest, passed the new ordinance and so a new forest will magically appear one of these days.



The old maintenance shed.

Frits Osterthun's HO scale "Cochemer Bahn" layout, without a doubt, is one that should be held up, as an example of model railroading at it's finest! Then to think it all started with his father's lay out in the paternal attic so many years ago! |