

The Laural Valley Lines – Route of the Dinosaurs

This is my second garden railway. The first was started on Father's Day 2000 in Colorado Springs. It had about 100 feet of mainline in a rock garden. The track plan was an oval with an hourglass shape and featured a trestle bridge with 32 bents. I swore I would never build another trestle bridge! I also didn't want to ever spend money on more track! Well, read on to see how these goals fared.

I must have done something right as it was on the 2009 National Narrow Gauge Convention Layout tour. Of course, having a spectacular view of Pikes Peak helped.

We moved to Longmont nine years ago to a ranch home and no view. Just lots of white fencing and a big L shaped lawn. But now I had grandchildren to play with. The oldest grandson, Zachary, helped salvage the old garden railway. I didn't know I was going to have three more grandkids but with four to run trains I knew I had a mission.

I planned a dog bone by the back fence to use mostly my old track, but fate stepped in to allow a considerable expansion. A friend was ordered by his wife to "get rid of all railroading". This meant his successful modeling company, Hon3 layout, On3 layout and of course his 140-foot-long garden railroad. So, I went to his yard and harvested the track with bolt cutters because he used resistance soldering on the rail joiners. And then I planned an around the lawn layout.

We started in 2014 with lawn removal and grade changes to lay about 40 feet of track. Successive years led to some frustration as the drainage for the backyard went down toward the street, but the railroad had to have a positive grade to be able to cross the lawn toward the house. Yuck! Well, the solution had to be a trestle bridge so the runoff could run underneath. That was only 11 trestle bents. Which took about one summer of fun! Well, I started having knee and back troubles, plus blurry vision when squatting after cataract surgery. So, the golden spike was in doubt! I got help with more lawn removal and two friends to help lay track and ballast. The golden spike was stuck on the day before Labor Day 2018. Whew!

The good news is that I can work on the railway with much greater ease due to acquiring a couple of "gardener's benches". The heavy duty one is from Gardeners Supply and the light duty one is from Lowes. I also dropped 35 pounds and had a knee replacement. Well back to railroading.

The four grand kids love running the trains! I have both track power and radio control so they can run at the same time. The youngest grandson had a problem with a Railboss controller. I trained him and he seemed to be okay, but I decided to ask his mom if he could read and she said, "Yes, but I don't know if he knows what they mean". Only one accident has occurred and that was when the oldest grandson rear ended the train ahead.

The photos show some of the various train sets I have put together plus some cool rolling stock. I have three convention cars in the pics as well as two wooden hand-built cars. A track brushing loco with Critter Control by G-Scale Graphics is featured in front of the mailbox turned into an engine house. The American Model Supply varnish is really fine. Please note that we feature scale plants along the right of way. My wife is an avid gardener and has worked with me to create a varied texture of mini shrubs.

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Well, Laural is my wife's first name, but why "Route of the Dinosaurs"? Our 10-year-old grandson, Brian, is a budding paleontologist. Normally we have some foot tall dinos prowling the layout, but they were pulled for the photos. However, we do have various dinos plaguing the Birdhouse Village.

Plans for the future include a 40-foot refrigerator car (number 163 which I worked on in the Chama Yard). A stock car train with a Drover's Caboose and more radio control (cleaning 230 feet of track is no fun!). This was the first summer of radio control – only. I didn't miss track cleaning!