Bob Lawson - 12/2/12

## SCENERY IDEAS UTILIZING A FOAM BASE TO CREATE INTEREST WITH GROUND SHAPES FOR NARROW LAYOUTS

We have two narrow scenes here to demonstrate how to add some interest to narrow areas of your layout that would normally be flat only. A flat benchwork top with a close by vertical wall is very difficult to create any creditable look, but it is very important.

Even though great emphasis is on operations today, I believe that trains operating in realistic surroundings are more enjoyable than those operating in blank, uninteresting, lackluster scenes.

To utilize the advantages foam offers today requires a little preplanning prior to completing all of the benchwork. Exhibit "A" shows this.

Scene "A".... The purpose in this display is to show you how you can add a few elevations to your "flat" scene utilizing foam. To start, you must level the top of the foam with the track base of a layout section with any normal bench work to meet the foam. Foam can be used entirely on top of your base bench work, if you choose. Many modelers do this today. Track work will operate well if simply laid directly on the foam, or using cork roadbed, "Homabed", or other. Ideally, these should be attached with clear adhesive caulking.

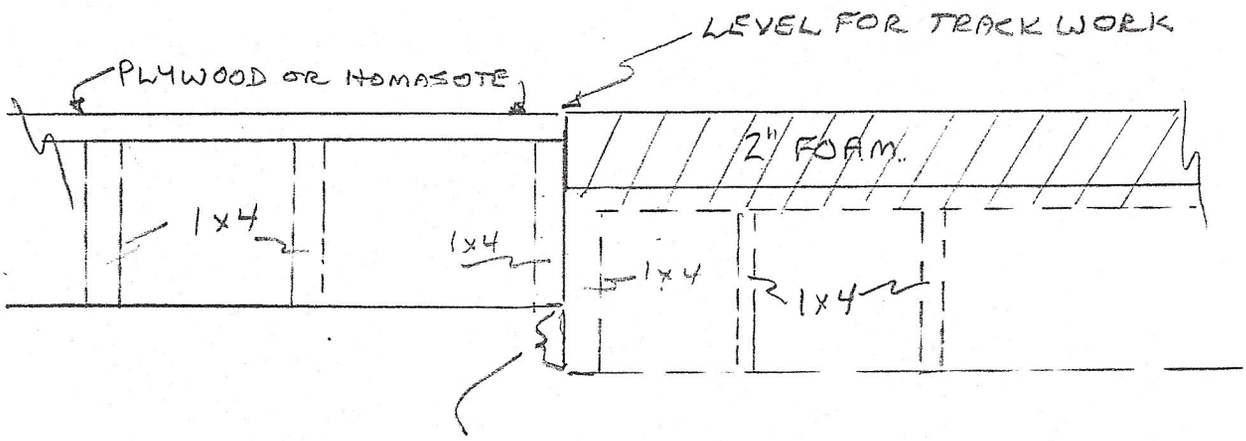
"Soften" your layout edges by tapering rather than always a having a 90 edge.

Scene "B"... This display shows how to place shallow buildings in an industrial scene. The buildings are very narrow. Typically, I cut off the rear of kits to make two buildings from one kit. You can have your main lines, and side tracks for switching.

Layout idea "C"... This shows how to continue adding scenes by matching the new to the old, with simple methods.

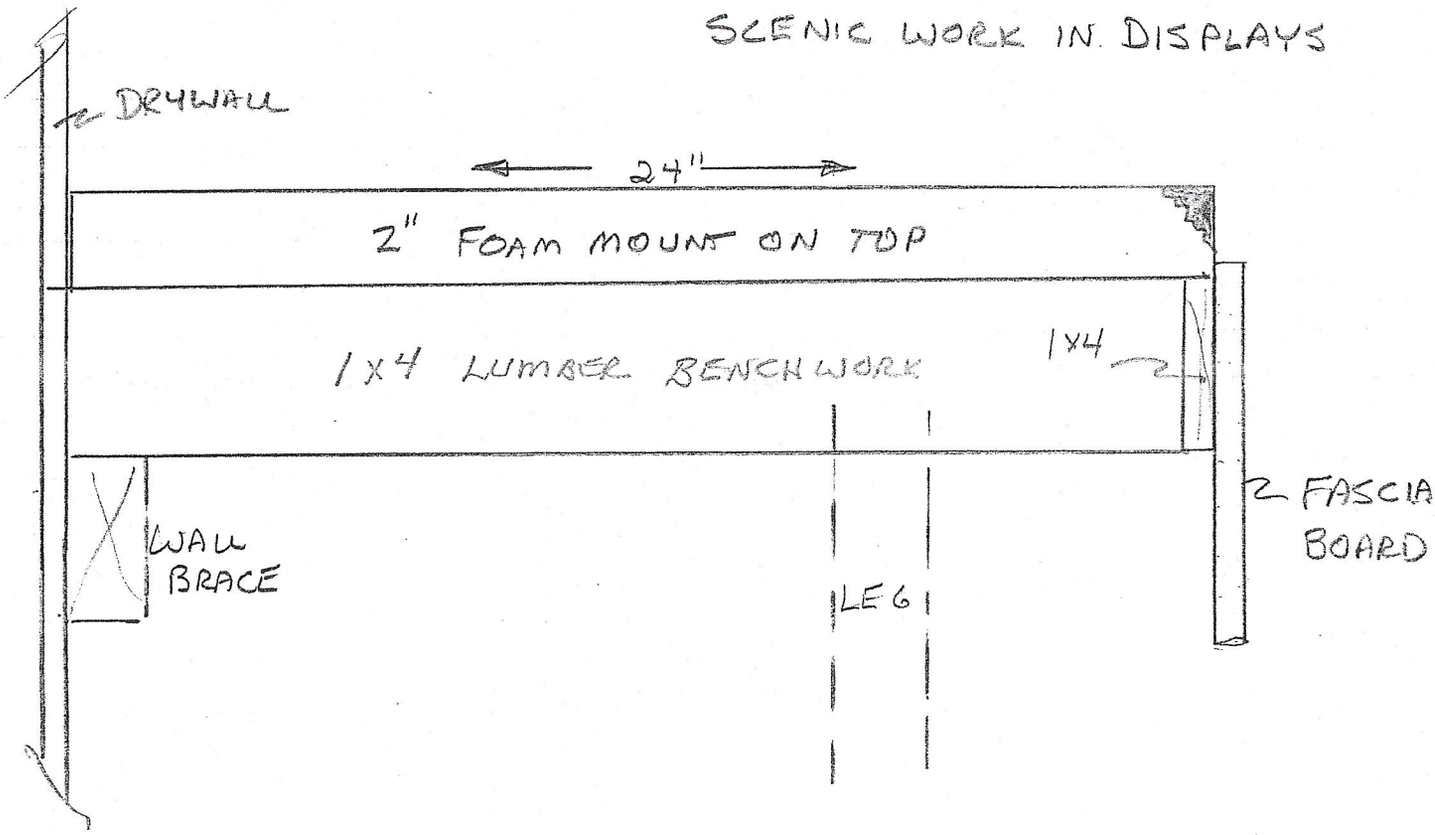
My belief is creating scenes for your trains will lead to far more interesting "Operations", whether deep or narrow, industrial or rural.

# ONE METHOD OF POSITIONING FOAM WITH NORMAL BENCH WORK




- THESE SECTIONS ARE LOWERED FOR TRACK LEVELING.

- THIS METHOD ALLOWS FOR SCENIC WORK IN DISPLAYS



# METHODS OF UTILIZING FOAM PRODUCTS IN MODELING

There are several methods of using foam today in our hobby. We will talk about some of the available foam products and their uses.

## A. TYPES OF FOAM PRODUCT AND SOURCES:

1. The foam used is essentially of 2#, 1½ #, and 1# density. They are available in various thicknesses and sizes.

2. The most familiar to most modelers is the Pink and Blue DOW foam sold at Lowe's and Home Depot. This is the 2# density, and generally comes in 4' x 8', 2" thickness. There is more "structural" support in this type of foam.

3. The most workable for modeling use is the 1½# density, white in color. This product is recently showing up in some Lowe's and Home Depots in various thicknesses. It is also available at most drywall suppliers. I purchase my supply at NEXGEN stores in Lexington, KY or in Cincinnati. Search in Google at NEXGEN.com. I use 2", 4" and 6" thicknesses. The sheets are sold in packs of 2' x 4'.

4. The least used, but should be discussed in order to avoid, is the 1# density sold in 1" thicknesses at Lowe's and Home Depot. This type foam breaks apart and pebbles "fly". Some modelers think this is what all foam does.

5. There is an New product available at Lowe's. It is ½' thick. This product can be used as a filler.

## B. CHARACTERISTCS AND EASE IN WORKING:

1. Either the 2# or 1½# can be used over basic bench work as a "layout base." Some modelers place the large sheets glued or screwed to their open table work. On top, they may then glue either foam roadbed, or Homasote roadbed for the track.

2. 2# is the toughest with which to form shapes. Most modelers try to cut this foam with "hot wire" tools. I believe this process is far too cumbersome, and breaks many wires.

3. 1½# works easier for scenery. It cuts easier and can be formed easier.

## C. TOOLS FOR FOAM SHAPING AND CUTTING:

1. Tools that are helpful are:

   Hot Knife…Commercially sold by NEXGEN and Micromark.
   Serrated knives of various types.
   Electric sanders with #60 paper, hand rasps, others.

D. PRODUCTS FOR ASSEMBLING:

1. Caulking: Some modelers use "Foam Adhesive." I have found the best is "Acrylic Adhesive Clear Caulk." All of the adhesives can be found at Lowe's and Home Depot.

2. Skewers: These can be found at any store. They are long, very sharp pointed thin hard sticks. Do not forget the one left in your pocket! OOOWWW!!

3. Long coarse thread drywall screws.

4. "Non drip" caulking guns.

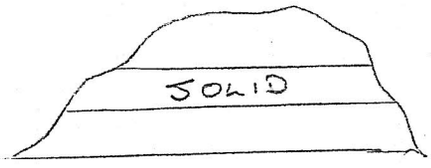
E. PLANNING WHERE AND HOW TO USE THE FOAM:

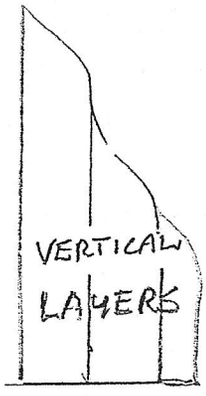
1. For any hill, mountain or earth shape – Typically, we have all used screen wire over frames, plaster on paper towels, and other methods. They do work, but using foam is faster, easier and likely, cheaper.

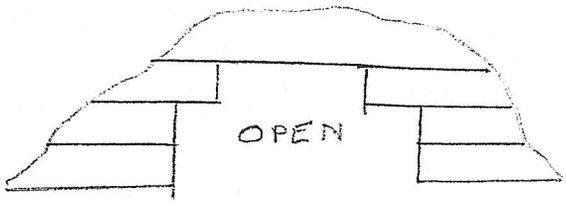
2. For the diorama base for any scene – The light weight makes for easy movement.

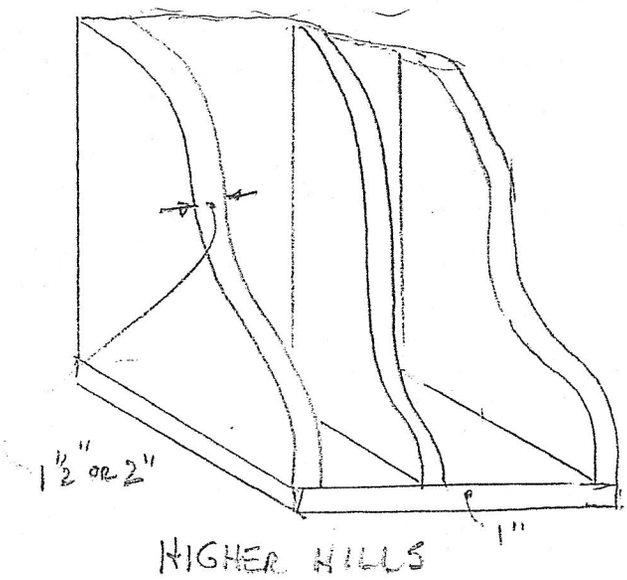
3. Foam can be the base for entire areas, including track main lines. An entire system for riser, elevation changes, etc. can be found at Woodland Scenics.

4. An important part of planning is how to assemble hills or mountains to most effectively and efficiently use the foam sheets. Simply layer the foam by staking, gluing, and shaping. This is the most costly, In some cases for higher background mountains, either "layer with hollow middles," use a "vertical structure" with horizontal fillers, or "vertical layers."



F. ASSEMBLY OF FOAM SHEETS:

1. First, cut the main sheets to the approximate size required, using the most efficient thicknesses.

2. Apply the adhesive caulking spread over the surface to be joined. Spread it solidly around for complete coverage. Hold together with the skewers. Let dry for several hours. This process is for whichever sheet assembly as shown on the previous page.

G. FORMING THE FOAM TO DESIRED SHAPES:

1. With a heavy black marker, mark out the cuts to be made, roadbeds, river banks, creeks, etc.

2. Using the "hot knife", cut the completed shape. Practice will make virtually all shaping easier. Small detailed shaped areas will not be as critical once scenery materials are applied.

3. If desired, you can use rasps, knives or other instruments at this point.

4. If you cut too much in an area, simply trim away a section around the affected area, cut a new "fill-in" piece, glue it in place and rework the surrounding area.

5. You can mark a road, diorama or structure locations. I will show you some short cuts for this using paper towels and a marker. Roads can be drawn on patterns, and then cut into the foam.

H. SCENIC DIORAMA BASES:

1. These can be pure scenery without any structures or they can be detailed scenes with buildings, roads, scenery and more.

2. Dioramas can be inserted into your layout, and all edges covered with scenic materials. In my opinion, the best is to have irregular base shapes.

I. COATING FOAM FOR SCENIC WORK:

1. There are instances where you can use plaster cloth to easily join foam areas where mating foam surfaces are too tedious to carve. After applying some plaster cloth, I usually apply a thin "brushed on" coat of molding plaster or "Structolite" for stability.

2. For coating the foam, I find the inexpensive craft paints sold are all stores are the simplest. Use cheap brushes, cup of water and the paint. The main objective is to

cover every inch of the foam surface with paint. Remember, do not use spray enamels or any lacquers. ONLY USE A WATER BASED PAINT PRODUCT.

3. For me the best is to use colors that reasonably match your end scenery objectives. Where trees, grass, foliage, etc. will be in the finished project, use greens, umbers, tans, other colors in that color range. For rocky areas, use grays; use black where asphalt roads will be finished. This coloring technique will help you visualize the finished scenes. Let all the paint applications dry thoroughly.

J. SCENIC APPLICATIONS:

1. This is a good time to apply larger rocks to your mountains, hills or grounds. Whether you use plaster castings, real rocks, resin rocks or rubber rocks (as I do), attach your rocks with acrylic adhesive caulk. After a few seconds, the rock material will adhere to the surface. If you have to carve out a little more space or shape for your rocks, use whichever of the tools to cut or shape the needed surface, recoat with paint, let dry thoroughly and then continue with your work.

2. Streets and roads through hilly areas are easy to do using foam carving after making patterns of your roads. One product that works well for roads is "chipboard". This heavier, multilayered cardboard is available at Hobby Lobby. It comes in 30" x 40" sheets for about $6.00. Once your road area is carved and your roadway cut from the chipboard, simply use the adhesive caulk and pin it in place with strong scenery pins.

3. Completed scenery can then take place over your entire foam areas. Installing trees is a real pleasure making small size holes with small Phillips screwdrivers, and putting white glue on the tree bases.

4. Other scenic items like telephone poles, fence poles, etc. are easily inserted on foam when applied as in Item #3 above.

5. Buildings can also be "planted" into the ground, as they should be, on flat surfaces or sloping ground, using the same tools as previously described.

6. Scenic foam areas can also hold the track base, as described, to install your tracks.

**FOAM: THE ANSWER TO AN EASIER LIFE WITH SCENERY**