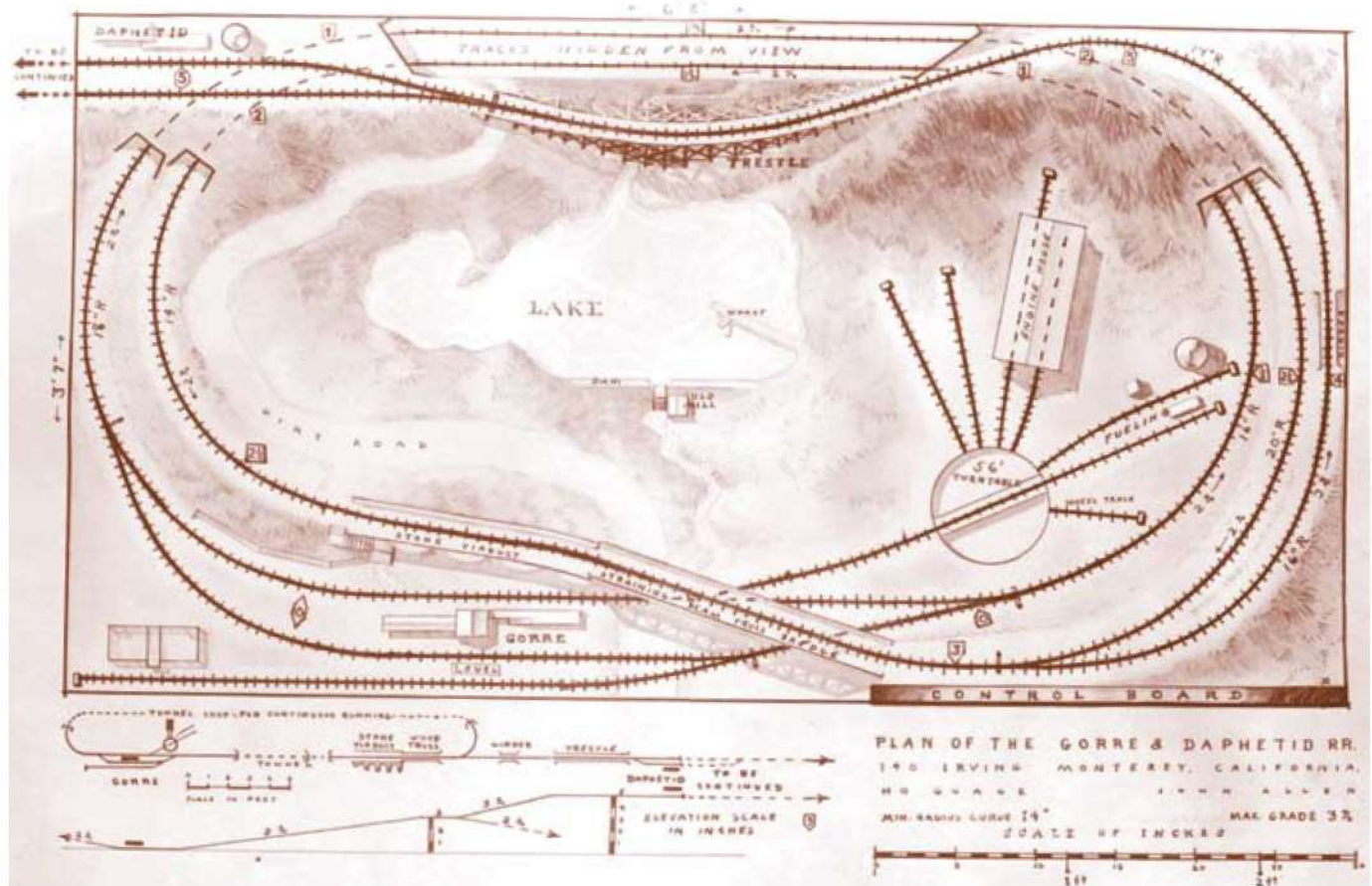


# Learning from John Allen's original Gorre & Daphetid

How to get the most out of a small layout

By Don Mitchell



This track plan of the original Gorre & Daphetid reveals many of the features John Allen considered essential for a small model railroad. Don Mitchell describes the lessons that modelers can learn from this 3'-7" x 6'-8" layout. John Allen illustration

John Allen appeared on the model railroading scene in 1946. His original layout, the 3'-7" x 6'-8" Gorre & Daphetid, appeared shortly thereafter and forever changed the hobby. In a masterful fashion that captured the attention of model railroaders everywhere, his first layout combined precise modeling, weathering, careful attention to detail, and realistic operations.

Through the years, John's modeling techniques and ground-breaking layouts were described in a multitude of articles, photo spreads, color transparencies, a book, and a video. Yet it's important to remember he started model railroading with a rather small layout, even smaller than the 4 x 8-foot sheet-of-plywood size that's the usual starter layout for many modelers.

## Advantages of a small layout

John originally built railroad models as props for realistic photography. By studying the resulting photos and applying his training in art, John rapidly improved his model building to the point where his models looked more realistic than most of those seen in contemporary hobby publications. Having only a small layout allowed him to focus

on details as well as to weave together the overall theme of the G-D Line.

By 1948, John's prize-winning engine-house model, with such innovative features as weathering, a broken window pane, and birds on the roof peak, literally changed the hobby from building pristine models to depicting the world as it really existed. Yet even as late as 1950, John considered himself a newcomer to model railroading.

John wrote "Some Advantages of a Small Layout" in the August 1950 issue of *The HO Monthly*. "The builder with a limited amount of time to spend on the hobby can put far more time per square foot on the small layout than he could hope to achieve on a large one."

He further opined that "... one of the principal advantages of the small layout ... (is) placing it at a high elevation, even eye level." Less depth is needed in scenes, and the sky can come down to the horizon level. This makes the backdrop easier to paint, since many problems of perspective are avoided.

One of John's notebooks reflects his continued interest in small layouts. The notebook contains sketches of several small- and medium-size track plans, each reflecting some ideas on how to incorporate operation into a small area. A page from that notebook is shown on page 45.

### The plan evolves

The original track plan, as shown at left, had the engine terminal inside the loop. John didn't build the enginehouse and turntable in that location; instead, he changed the design, moving the engine terminal outside the twice-around loop and placed industries where the turntable had been planned.

At about the same time, John also changed the branch line, which originally cut diagonally across one side of the layout and continued into a reverse loop, passing through a city. He moved the branch line so that it crossed a trestle over a lake in the center of the layout, curving back to Daphetid.

John always planned the Daphetid line as one that would continue to a larger layout and, in fact, it served that purpose on the second Gorre & Daphetid. The track plan most often published for the first G-D Line reflects these changes – the engine terminal outside the loops and the curved trestle up to Daphetid. These changes were in good part motivated by John's shifting interest from building models and photography to realistic operation.

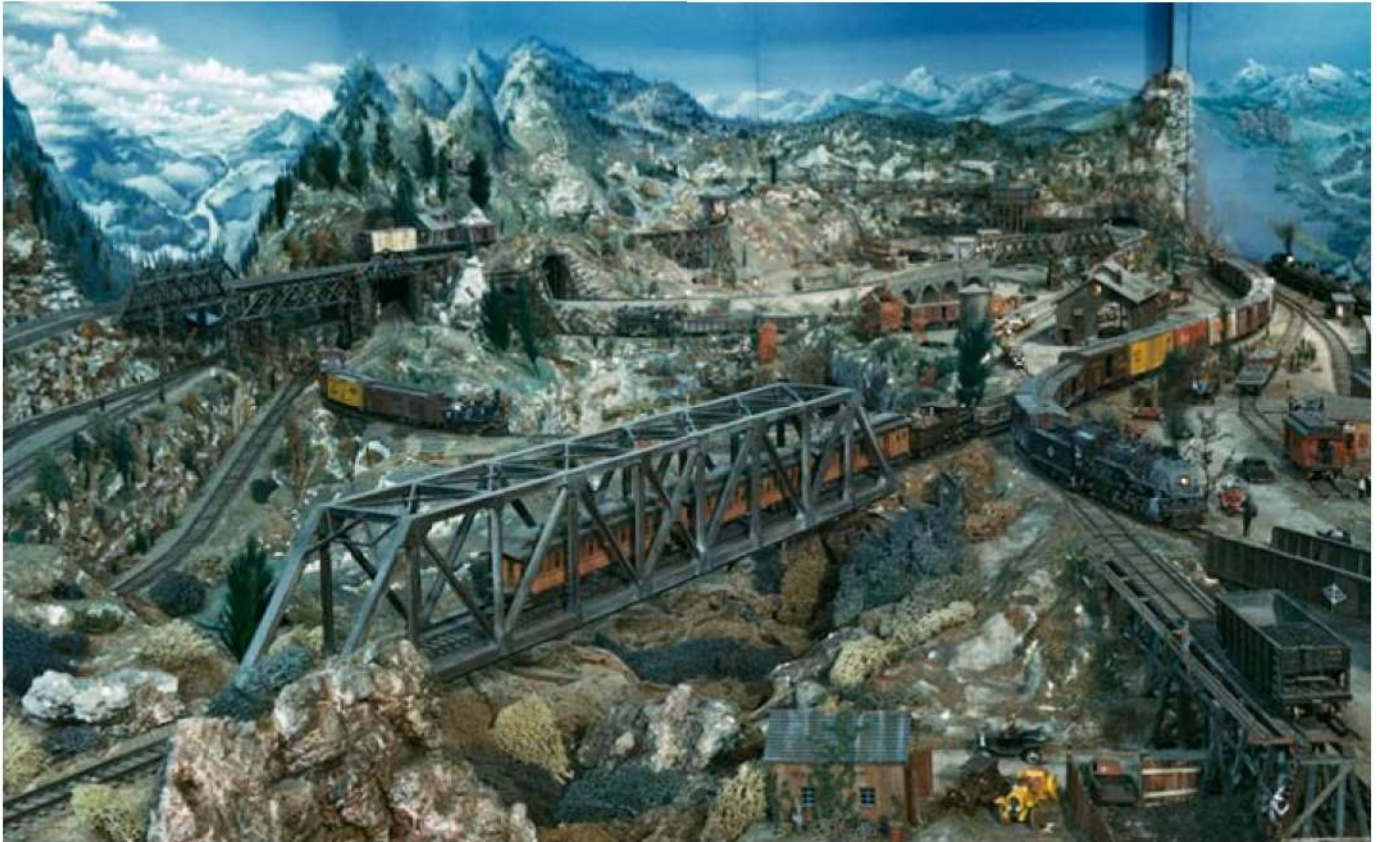
The layout's 14" radius curves and 3 percent grades didn't hamper operations. Such small radii and steep grades



In 1947 John permanently installed the layout in his home on Cannery Row. In this photo he's painting the recently installed linoleum backdrop. John Allen photo



This scale model of one version of the original Gorre & Daphetid survived the fire that consumed John's third layout in 1973. Don Mitchell photo



John Allen incorporated his original layout, visible in the background, into the second Gorre & Daphetid begun in 1948. He altered the original track plan by moving the engine terminal outside the loop. John Allen photo



You can still see the first Gorre & Daphetid in this photo of John's third, and final, layout. John Allen photo

## // Learning points

- A well-designed small layout can become part of a much larger model railroad.
- Equipment must be selected to match curve radii and grades.
- Studying photos of finished models can help you improve your modeling skills.
- Models that reflect the wear and tear of the everyday world are inherently more realistic.
- Small layouts can support realistic operation.

were unusual at the time (and still are!), but John carefully chose the equipment for the G-D Line. He used small four- and six-drivered engines, ran no cars more than 50 scale feet long, and kept his train lengths short too.

### Design tips for a small layout

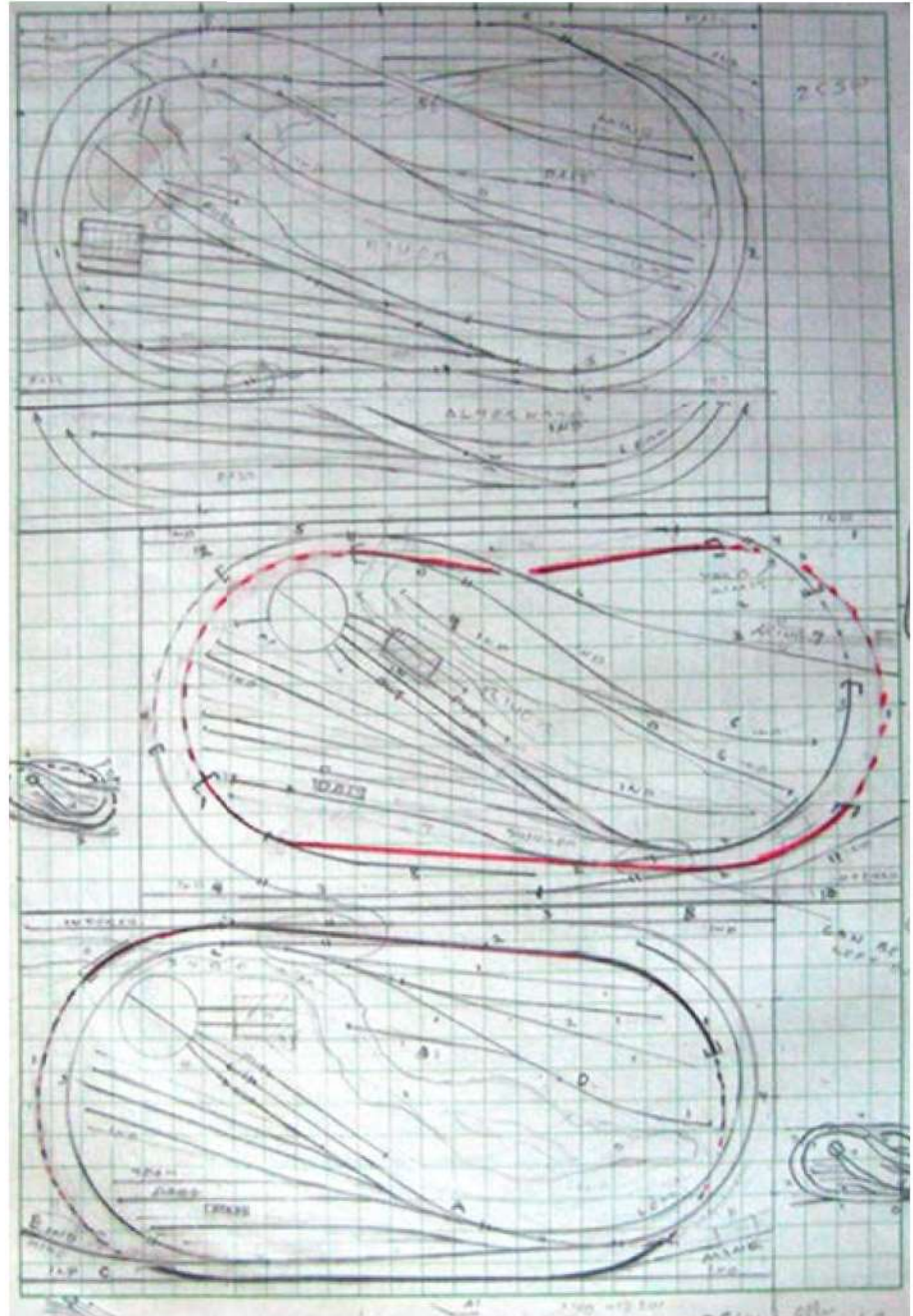
The original G-D Line incorporates the operational features John considered essential for a small layout:

- Detailed planning, with leeway for changes and provisions for expansion.
- A continuous run of some length, achieved by using grades so that one loop could pass over the other.
- Sections of hidden track that could be used to hide trains from view and hold them for a length of time (now regarded as a form of staging).
- A passing siding that could be used as a runaround to get a locomotive on the correct end of cars for switching.
- An engine terminal, including a turntable and enginehouse.
- At least one track leading to the edge of the layout for future connection to a larger layout.
- Sharp curves and relatively steep grades used as necessary.
- Locomotives and rolling stock capable of negotiating sharp curves and steep grades.

These features allowed the original, compact Gorre & Daphetid to be incorporated in John's two successive, larger layouts. Some additional modifications were required to fit the original G-D Line into these later layouts.

For the third and last layout, which is the best known, the original continuous run was chopped off by boarding up a tunnel entrance as part of an abandoned right-of-way. The remaining stub was used as a switchback to reach Daphetid, which now had a couple of industries located on dead-end spurs.

Another big advantage of a carefully planned small layout is achieving the



A page from one of John Allen's notebooks shows more small layouts planned for operation, much like the Gorre & Daphetid. Don Mitchell photo

greatest possible operation while spending the least amount of time on routine maintenance requirements. During my association with John over the last decade of his larger layout's existence, he remarked about the increasing amount of time he had to spend just keeping the layout running.

### Rediscovering the message

In a model railroading world that seems to feature one gigantic layout after another, maybe that world is rediscovering John Allen's early message: Start small and build well. In his own words, "... plan your small railroad for operation rather than as a race track,

and build it with care. You will be amazed at how much fun a small pike can be." **MRP**

*Don Mitchell is a frequent contributor to Model Railroad Planning and a long-time student of the Gorre & Daphetid. He provides insightful solutions to track-planning challenges.*

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