



Narrow gauge along the Eastern Shore

Waterfront industry highlights the On2½ Deep Run RR

By Stephen Fisher • Photos by Paul Dolkos



1. A vertical-boilered Shay, made from a Bachmann model, switches a factory complex in the town of Deep Run. Scratchbuilt structures and cars populate Stephen Fisher's layout.

My On2½ Deep Run RR is a free-lanced short line modeled as it would have been in the post-Korean War era. Set along the Eastern Shore of Maryland, a region that boasts fertile agricultural land and scenic shorelines, the layout is designed to represent the state's "land of pleasant living" nickname.

I began building the 16 x 42½-foot basement layout in 2001. The Deep Run RR soon became a venue for displaying



2. Engine no. 52 pulls empty flats off Pier 2 at Allison Mill. Boats from nearby Henderson's Wharf bring in fishermen's catches from Chesapeake Bay.



my scratchbuilding efforts and hosting operating sessions with my friends.

Ninety percent of the motive power, rolling stock, and structures on my layout are scratchbuilt. However, over the last couple of years, I've purchased some On2½ offerings from Bachmann, Boulder Valley Models, and Stoney Creek Designs. In addition, GC Design Group castings and Grandt Line and Hamm River products grace the layout and help bring scenes to life.

Seven years ago, I left behind direct current for an Atlas Digital Command Control (DCC) system. I've tried to keep things simple, not just because of cost, but so it's easier to learn and repair.

3. A modified Japanese 2-6-0 steam locomotive, no. 63, switches the sawmill at Deep Run. The board stacks will be transported by rail to the Allison Mill terminal.

The land of pleasant living

My interest in On2½ started at the first National Narrow Gauge Convention in Valley Forge, Pa., where I met the late Jim Hughes, a modeler of the then-little-known scale and gauge combination. Later I met Garry Cerrone, who designs O scale and On2½ models for GC Design Group (www.gcdesign-group.com). Garry and Dave Renard, another friend and modeler, built much of the motive power for my railroad.

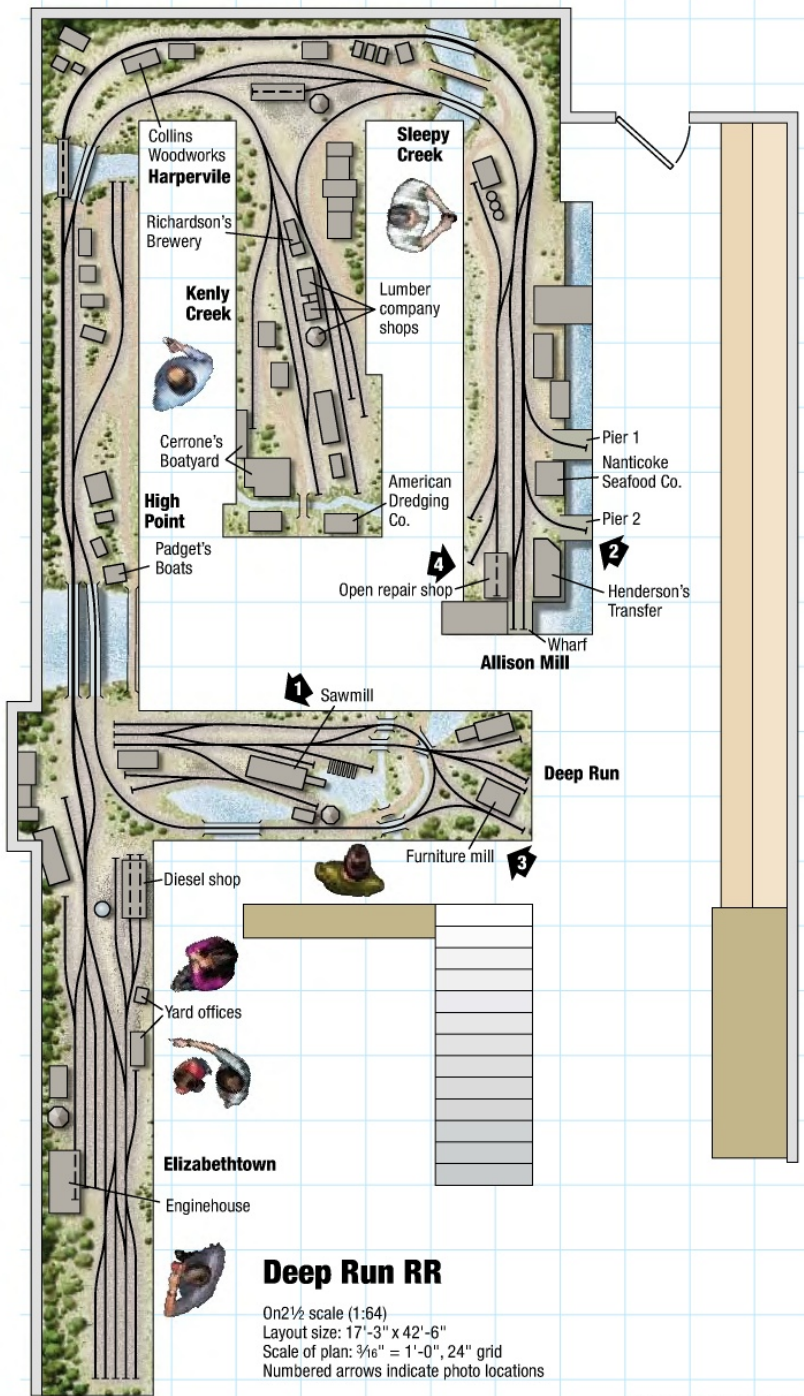


Illustration by Rick Johnson

Layout at a glance

Name: Deep Run RR
Scale: On2½
Size: 17'-3" x 42'-6"
Prototype: freelanced
Locale: Eastern Shore of Maryland
Era: mid-1950s
Style: walk-in
Mainline run: 77 feet
Minimum radius: 18"
Maximum grade: 1 percent
Benchwork: freestanding tabletop
Height: 46"
Roadbed: foam board
Track: Peco flextrack
Scenery: foam insulation board
Backdrop: Masonite
Control: Atlas Digital Command Control

are loaded with lumber before they head back to High Point.

As we continue around the railroad, we pass through Harperville, which is pronounced "Harperville." The town's residents like to say that the town is so small they could only afford one "L."

You can either keep going until you reach Allison Mill or stop at Kenly Creek, an up-and-coming town located on a branch line that serves a brewery, a dredging company, and a boatyard.

Allison Mill terminal

Allison Mill is home to crabbing and oystering fleets on Chesapeake Bay. The Eastern Shore supplies much of the seafood for the region. Boats unload shipments at Henderson's Wharf for transport to Baltimore, Annapolis, and western Maryland. The tracks end on the wharf, and cheap manpower keeps shipments moving along.

To add further interest and action to the Allison Mill scene, I scratchbuilt a repair shed. Inspired by Maryland's hot and humid summers, I left the sides of the shed open. This way visitors can see the workers, tools, and benches.

I used HO scale girders from Central Valley Model Works to make the shed's metal frame and Builders in Scale strip material for the corrugated metal roof. Though my layout is set in the warmer summer months, I could easily attach canvas sides to the shed to adapt it for a winter scene.

The maintenance-of-way work train in the Elizabethtown yards is mostly scratchbuilt. The boom was made from a Fleischmann 150-ton crane boom. Although it's non-operational, the work train adds interest to the yard. Near the train, a track gang works on a

Over the years, I've built several On2½ layouts, all of which have been learning tools for developing new skills. My modeling efforts have concentrated on logging railroads and point-to-point layouts designed for operation.

The Deep Run RR begins in Elizabethtown, home to the line's main yard and diesel shop. The railroad travels down the spine of the Eastern Shore

until it reaches Allison Mill, which is its connection to the outside world.

The railroad passes through several small towns during this journey. The town of Deep Run has a sawmill, a box factory, and a furniture mill. There is an interchange at the town of High Point where trains switch between the main line and a spur track leading to the sawmill in Deep Run. There, cars



4. A Bachmann Climax pulling a passenger train stops beside an open-air repair shed at Allison Mill. The shed was scratchbuilt using HO girders and corrugated strip material for the roof.

crossover. The figures are permanently positioned so that there is clearance for trains working in the yard.

Scratchbuilt to fit

While I now simply prefer to scratch-build cars, locomotives, and structures, it was a necessity when I first started modeling in On2½ more than 30 years ago. I was modeling O scale 2'-6" gauge before the Internet, DCC, laser-cut kits, and the proliferation of ready-to-run On2½ equipment.

In the old days, there were very few On2½ offerings. Grandt Line had some locomotives on the market, but most of the ones we used were kitbashed HO equipment. We used HO scale wheels, trucks, and Kadee couplers. We then availed ourselves of Athearn diesels, MDC, Tyco, and Rivarossi locomotives, kitbashing them into halfway credible On2½ scale locomotives.

I find scratchbuilding to be the best way to make structures for my layout as well. A scratchbuilt structure can be built to fit the space; I don't have to make the space fit the structure. Scratchbuilding also allows for greater creativity because I'm not constrained

by the manufacturer's design like I am with kitbuilding or kitbashing.

The sawmill proved to be my most challenging scratchbuild. It was my second version of the scene. (The first won the Best Module prize at the 1988 National Narrow Gauge Convention.)

I began by obtaining sawmill plans from the Underground Railway Press (P.O. Box 814QS, Brevard, NC 28712). Because the mill had to fit into a compact area, I test fit the parts and checked the measurements to make sure the structure would fit between the sidings. Though I made a few modifications to compress the industry to fit the space, I ended up following the Underground plans pretty closely.

Once the structure was complete, I had to learn how mills operate and how equipment should be arranged in the scene. The books *Tall Pines and Winding Rivers: The Logging Railroads of Maryland* by Benjamin F.G. Kline, Jr. (1976) and *West Side Pictorial* by Malory Hope Ferrell (Heimbürger House, 2001) were especially helpful.

The completed sawmill scene shows logs arriving by rail, then being cut into boards, trimmed, planed, and then stacked at the other end for shipping.

The new Deep Run RR

In 2006 I moved. Though I now live in the Eastern Shore area that inspired

my railroad, the move required that I dismantle the layout. I'm working with my operating buddies to build a much larger incarnation of the On2½ Deep Run RR.

After 30 years of operating my railroad point-to-point, I've opted for a loop configuration. I've also gone back to handlaying track, scratchbuilding cars, and kitbashing locomotives. **MR**



▶▶ Meet Stephen Fisher

Stephen Fisher is a retired project manager who has been modeling railroads since age 7. Stephen is married with three grown children and five grandchildren. He lives in Kennedyville, Md.