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Page 24: Layout

English translation provided by VOIE LIBRE, LR-Pressé, France.

A few comments and minor amendments have been added to this translation by Werner Knopf (WEK) and are printed in blue colour.

[There is a supplement to this French magazine with the whole text translated into English language. This excellent magazine can therefore be strongly recommended to all English speaking narrow gauge enthusiasts! WEK]

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Hereunder is an official statement by the "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit" François Fontana from the WEK – WILHELMSTAHL-ELISABETHEN-KNOPFBACH - RAILWAY, a German layout in H0e scale, observed and admired in October 2005 in Swanley, near London.

Text and photos: FRANÇOIS FONTANA

When I introduced myself (in English if you please) to the German designer of this layout, Werner Knopf, he promptly vanished behind his stand, asking me to bear with him for a few minutes. He then reappeared with a badge in his company's colours and, writing my name on it, pinned it to my chest. This is how I officially became, for the day, "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit" - his communications manager, as it were. It is therefore up to me to write the eulogy of the WILHELMSTAHL-ELISABETHEN-KNOPFBACH.

Brief description

The layout is long and narrow, and represents a small countryside station with an engine depot and a few sidings. The action is contemporary, or rather of 1980 vintage, judging by the road vehicles and railway rolling stock. The very mountainous scenery of this part of the world posed a challenge to builders of the previous century who had to squeeze the line in between hills and valleys. While WILHELMSTAHL station proper managed to find a sufficiently large flat area to accommodate its trackplan, it is located right next to an impressive viaduct and framed by two tunnels! Such geological complications are a real bonus to railfans and those keen on exceptional sites. Just think of it: a tunnel portal alongside a hill, immediately followed by a stone viaduct, a private siding glued to the gradient and a curvaceous station ending with two tunnel portals! A train lover's dream come true!

Technicalities

The layout measures 4.80m x 0.40m and is 1.20m above floor-level. It has a plywood armature covered with fine wire mesh coated in plaster. On this very rigid shell, the soils are painted and then flocked. The layout has two fiddle yards: to the left, a large 0.60m *[0.70m, WEK]* diameter circular turntable can accommodate five complete trains and no fewer than 14 locomotives. To the right, hidden under the mountain and connected to an 0.55m diameter balloon loop, a multi-tracked underground station. This arrangement offers operators the scope for varied services and an operational sequence seldom sees the same train return twice. In Swanley, I admired the layout in its most extensive configuration. But actually, it is designed in a fully modular manner and can on request be

displayed with or without the open line section that features the viaduct and the factory [*in fact the layout is "segmental", no part can be left out; WEK*], or alternatively with an additional junction that fits onto the left hand side of the layout in lieu of the circular turntable, making the layout compatible with another one meeting the FREMO Standard. [*the latter is true; WEK*]

Rolling stock inventory

Werner Knopf is an H0 scale narrow gauge fan, therefore he has opted not to pay undue attention to history or realism. He does what he enjoys, placing a variety of rolling stock on the layout, plus a few of his own touches, and giving all these vehicles the company's numbering and livery. The acronym WEK calls upon the first two letters of Werner's first name and the first letter of his surname [*and – of course – represents the initials of the main stations of the line; WEK*]. Motive power is predominantly diesel, with four-wheeler units by Bemo and ÖBB bogie engines by Panier and Lilliput very much in evidence. H0e enthusiasts will also recognize Co-Co Mariazell engines by Roco, dieselised by the removal of their pantograph. Steam has not completely vanished, as shown by the frenzied activity taking place inside the engine shed and around the turntable. A K1 Garrat and a Ffestiniog Fairlie by Backwoods Miniatures [*the Fairlie in fact is entirely scratch-built; WEK*] are visible, together with a series of Liliput 0-6-0 T engines from the Liestal-Waldenburg line, not forgetting a few British whitemetal kits fitted to German chassis. On this type of secondary railway, passenger services are often assigned to railcars, and there are plenty of those around. Some trams even run the fast services. On the carriage and wagon side, all German and Austrian makes are represented, Bemo, Dolischo, Roco, Liliput, etc. WILHELMSTAL is not immune to the latest fashions! Nor does the railway escape vandalism, one of the company's finest carriages having been covered with graffiti, done by something of an artist though! During a show, Werner asked an artist to paint graffiti on a railway carriage. The man promptly complained, until Werner pulled a 1/87 scale carriage from a box, clearing up any misunderstanding!

A few specific features

Werner Knopf is fond of animating layouts. A careful observer will therefore note that: when the small Liliput 0-6-0 T from the Liestal-Waldenburg reverses, its driver turns his head. A man is busy operating the handle of the turntable. Another, perched on the steps of a closed wagon, is waving his arm up and down to direct the shunting. The most amazing item is the dog that wags its tail at the level crossing whenever a train goes by. According to Werner, this four-legged creature is a true railfan!

To conclude

WILHELMSTAL station, as you can see, is by no means prototypical, yet everything here smacks of reality! The layout is based on a few well chosen and carefully blended rules: a respect for geography and the related buildings. A respect for the trackplan, as the layout's appearance really seems to be dictated by local topography, and the relief re-created by Werner really looks as if it was in place before the railway. Respect for historical realism, through the creation of a fictitious company and, despite the great variety of rolling stock, through certain common criteria: powerful engines suited to the traffic and to the line's steep gradients, a homogeneous roster of carriages and wagons, perfectly suited to the facilities modelled on the layout. The factory, in the process of being wrapped by the contemporary artist Christo, the express tram service, a few ordinary-looking cameo scenes or the discreet presence of a graffiti-covered carriage immediately steep the viewer in the atmosphere of WILHELMSTAHL and make it larger than life. This is modelling at its best and I am very proud indeed to be among the "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit" of this splendid layout!

Captions

1 - A train hauled by a Ffestiniog Fairlie crosses the bridge over the river Knopfbach. A few bold photographers are creeping along the deck to photograph the wrapping of the factory.

2 - A diesel-powered interurban tram, as shown by the silencer on the roof, crossing the viaduct. In the background, the factory is becoming a work of art.

3 - The factory and its private siding. On the viaduct, a passenger train hauled by a Russian [*Czech; WEK*] diesel locomotive.

4 - Having crossed the viaduct and passed under the road, the line enters WILHELMSTAL station. The engine is a Roco Co-Co converted to diesel.

5 - Peco track and turnouts are used on the layout. A fine building and two platforms connected by a footbridge form the passenger area of the station.

6 - This shot taken from the top of the hill shows the extent of the facilities. In the foreground, the junction.

7 - The left-hand fiddle yard, a large turntable, operated by wooden handles. The electrical contacts are activated when one of the turntable tracks is aligned with the track leading to the layout.

8 - Seen from the back of the layout through an inspection hatch, the balloon loop and the gradient leading to the lower-level hidden station. Note the train parapets!

9 - The level crossing and its tail-wagging dog.

10 - The turntable is manually operated and a handle must be used to turn an engine, an exhausting job for this wretched man! [*He never complained! WEK*]

11 - An impressive loading gauge for this K1 Garrat.

12 - The PW gang is having a break while the railcar passes by. This area is the balloon loop exit.

13 - Werner and his friends next to the layout during the 2005 edition of Expo Narrow Gauge in Swanley.

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