

Burnt Hills and Big Flats (model) Railroad

Modeling and Operating Philosophy / The “Why?”

Goals for the BH&BF are to

1. Replicate the railroad as a SYSTEM. Rather than a focus on individual train crews, a focus on the interactions between the train crews and the various departments of a railroad. Cooperation between crews was growing in the 1970's as communications improved, and as union rules relaxed and the railroads eventually deregulated. A major influence on me has been Allen McClelland and the Virginian and Ohio concepts. The focus there was the interplay between the through trains and locals rather than a view that the way freight was all-important. The V&O even has a wikipedia page at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginian_and_Ohio.

2. Generally I am after what might be called a Class 1.5 railroad - single track, verge of bankruptcy, lots of local switching and coal. In the 1970's most folks free-lanced, thus the BH&BF name (which was actually encouraged by my father). If I were to start anew, I'd probably do the NYOW, D&H, or EL, most likely the D&H. I stumbled upon a NYOW book in 1986 and chose the route as the basis for the BH&BF primarily due to opportunity to interchange with EL and D&H. The layout moved its focus from strictly north of the NY state line to Scranton with the expansion in 1993 after leaving the Navy and moving to Pasco WA (for work at Hanford). I do like the operational difference in flavor between south of Mayfield and north of Mayfield. John Armstrong designed such a difference into his Canandaigua Southern - water level one side of the classification yard, and mountain climbing on the other.

3. A "good enough" philosophy, again from Allen McClelland. I really am not interested in scratch building or exact replicas of a prototype. Kit bashing and use of commonly available D&H and EL models keep things practical in N scale. Scenery has become important to me, and the slow but steady expansion of the railroad from 1986 (when the 3 by 6 was completed and fully scenicked) to 2018 with the new central peninsula. The layout appears (based upon comments around the country) to resonate as being 1970ish and in NY and PA. 1970 does allow me to have many of the "modern" mergers, but not have to deal with Conrail. Though modeling early days of Conrail could be interesting. I am also willing to "stretch" history to offer higher traffic than the region modeled had in 1970 (or 1957 for that matter when the NYOW was abandoned). The choice of 1970 (originally I was shooting for 1960) turned out to be advantageous once I did research the prototypical DEREKO arrangement between the N&W, EL, and D&H.

“Prototype” Historical Context: The BH&BF was formed in 1959 to operate remnants of the New York, Ontario and Western Railway. The segment from Cadosia NY to Weehawken NY was fully abandoned in the mid 1960's with the formation of the Penn Central and difficulties with the rural nature of the area and connections with the Poughkeepsie Bridge on the Hudson River. The Penn Central merger also pushed the BH&BF to join the Norfolk and Western plan for “DEREKO” which operated the Erie-Lackawanna and the Delaware & Hudson. The developing Energy Crisis in the US was forcing a re-opening of Anthracite production, especially reclamation of culm piles and recovery from the Knox Mine disaster flooding of 1958.

Some Delaware and Hudson traffic has been re-routed over the Sidney to Mayfield route due to lower ruling grades.

See [Map Link](#) for the Mayfield to Oneonta mileage, and this [Map Link](#) approximates the Mayfield to Scranton (CNJ) and the Capouse Branch to Coxtion (LV).

Model Railroading Influences: I've been fortunate to have met many model railroaders around the country and visit their railroads. Much credit goes to a teacher at my Jr High School, Ken Nelson. See <http://www.hudson-berkshire.org/Form19/Oct2015F19.pdf>

He gave me information both when I was in school, and I've been able to go to his more recent version of the Poco Valley on a few occasions as an adult. He did host an after-school model railroad club and we were able to operate on his railroad a few times a year. He related details from his summer job as a D&H fireman, and included tidbits like the NE-84 and 87 changed directions so often at railroad connections it had two cabooses. Also, that New York required a firemen but Pennsylvania did not (perhaps it was the other way around) so he got to cool his heels at the state line in a small shack waiting for the train in the opposite direction as to what dropped him off.

It appears the that NYOW connection from Mayfield to Lehigh Valley's Coxtion yard included either locomotives at each end, or at least the two caboose trick. The connection was made via a breaker at Jct that both the LV and NYOW had built trackage to, but to connect from the LV to NYOW and vice versa required a switchback. There was another change of direction coming off the LV trackage from Sibley and going into Coxtion Yard. <https://www.nepaview.com/lv-ow-old-forge.html>

By the way, the NE-84 and 87 did not start until about 1973 from references I have found. <https://www.trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?11,2562628>. This is one of several historical "inaccuracies", such as anthracite traffic still in 1970. The Knox Mine Disaster pretty well wiped out anthracite mining https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knox_Mine_disaster, however several culm (waste piles) had sufficient coal in them that they came up with a way to feed the waste through to fire boilers of electrical generating plants (<https://www3.epa.gov/ttn/chief/ap42/ch01/final/c01s02.pdf>)

From <https://www.smarttinc.com/the-delaware-and-hudson-railway-the-bridge-line/>

Allentown would become a major terminal for the D&H in expanding its bridge line traffic. Trains NE-87 and NE-84 would arrive or depart with either D&H, LV, or pooled power everyday. The trains ran between Pot Yard in Alexandria VA and Portland, Maine, involving the cooperation of the B&O, Reading, LV, D&H, and the Boston and Maine. The Reading would power the trains between Allentown and Philadelphia, and the B&O would handle the Philly to Pot Yard run. On the New England side, the B&M would run the trains between Albany, NY and Portland, Maine. One advantage of this multiple railroad route was to avoid the New York terminals and their expensive and slow car floats, since there was no direct freight trackage to connect with the New Haven. This became even more of an advantage after the New Haven Railroad's Poughkeepsie Bridge caught fire and eliminated that railroad's New York Harbor bypass from the railroad map.

Modeling Philosophy: There is only one scratch-built structure on the layout – the Ontario Breaker in Big Flats. All the others are kit built or kit-bashed. I did not choose to model specific structures and the locales are relatively generic. I have driven the route modeled and have photos taken in 1989 of the region. Town names from the original 3 by 6 were kept, but most of the other town names reflect actual NY and PA locations. Mason is Olyphant PA, Big Flats is in West Scranton, within a mile of the Anthracite Museum, and Burnt Hills is Walton NY. A significant effort was taken to clean up “clutter” before Paul Dolkos would photograph the layout. “I don’t photograph abandoned railroads” was his quote. There are considerable differences between Paul’s rather sparse philosophy and say Malcom Furlow as an example. I have found that clustering details together with relatively bland scenes in between heightens the illusion of distance and draws your eyes to the more detailed areas. Scenery methods have included hardshell, pink Styrofoam insulation, and plaster cloth. Most of the scenery materials are from Woodland Scenics.