



# Prairie Ponderings

For the enjoyment and edification of model railroad operators

## The (prototype) bug strikes again

Five years after giving myself permission to stray into the world of combination model railroading (real stations but liberty to deviate in naming industries on the layout) the urge to model a prototype returned this spring. Call it spring fever, call it a bug—whatever it was, it's back. Inspired by Twin Cities train author Steve Glischinski's 2007 book entitled "Regional Railroads of the Midwest" the regional railroad featured in that book (just ahead of my beloved and previously modeled Wisconsin Central) showed a handsome paint scheme and a familiar route west of the Twin Cities, where we lived from 2000 to 2005.

The Twin Cities and Western locomotives carry the University of Minnesota (my grad school alma mater—though I always cheer for the home state Wisconsin Badgers) athletic colors—gold and maroon. Just four years ago, our Thousand Lakes Region convention in Hutchinson included a tour of the TCWR engine house. Who knew that I'd be hooked on the TCWR? After the TLR convention in Sioux Falls, I began the arduous process of converting the layout to the new theme, beginning by relettering and renumbering about 20 freight cars for the TCWR and sister road MPLI.

Many of you know me are asking "why change (again)? What was wrong with the DM & E and Wisconsin and Southern featured on the Wisdak layout?"

Good and fair questions. There are several reasons why. So here goes with the explanation:

First, to be honest, when the regionals I enjoy modeling exist no longer, such as the Canadian Pacific's purchase of the DM & E four years ago, I lose interest. On top of that, I learned that in January this year, the Wisconsin and Southern also was purchased by another railroad.

Second, as mentioned, the TCWR has a flashy look—those U of M colors look sharp on their variety of locomotives. The mix of CF7s, GP10s, GP20Cs (Caterpillar engines) and GP30Cs, plus a couple neat looking GP39-2s—well, just think about it. Not only the TCWR reporting marks either, since the sister railroads Minnesota Prairie Line (MPLI) as well as the Red River Valley and Western (headquartered in North Dakota) exchange motive power. Thus, the new railroad will have plenty of variety among the eight locomotives. There will be DAIR trains hauling granite (see page three) to the Twin Cities, Burlington Northern and Sante Fe unit trains hauling coal to the sugar beet plant in Reubel, and CPR (represented by ICE and DME power) getting in the act with trains serving the ethanol traffic to the plant in Granite Falls. Granted, a couple of these are a stretch, but still plausible in my modeler's license mind.

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Glencoe, Minnesota welcomes visitors as they enter the "train room" and take in the recently (and still in progress) revamped Twin Cities and Western layout theme in Harrisburg.  
*Rich Dahl photo*

## Seventh annual open house layout tour earns mixed reviews

Eight layout hosts and co-hosts entertained an estimated sixty people during the seventh annual DSED model train open house layout tour and annual fundraiser last weekend. A record five layouts in Harrisburg, including the division modular layout set up at the fire station, as well as four others, participated. Three Sioux Falls sites rounded out this year's roster, including SVMES at the Fairgrounds and two home layouts.

The turnout was a bit better than 2011, when an estimated 50 people visited, but nowhere near the record set in 2010. Despite efforts to ensure local television and radio stations posted the event on their community events calendars (many did) no guests from the informal survey said that's how they heard about it. The most common responses (as usual) included the front page, inside section of the Saturday Argus Leader newspaper, local hobby shops, and by word of mouth (\$100 in rail-passes were sold by five division members, especially Richard Dahl and Jim Krekelberg—thank you).



**Gary's Johnson's home again included a flurry of activity. No only did his N scale layout delight visitors, his granddaughter Erin kept Thomas the Train (in HO scale) charging around that layout's tracks too. A portion of Gary's N excellent N gauge equipment and portable layout will again be featured during Trains at Christmas at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds next month.**  
*Rich Dahl photo*

### Ronning library clinics a big hit—again

Okay—it wasn't as good as last year's record 351 guests, but DSED again entertained a large crowd (nearly 300) on Saturday, September 15. Scenery making clinics, the modular layout, portable switching, and outstanding N gauge scenery again provided the winning formula. Next March, the division debuts across town—see adjacent article.

## DSED Division Doings

### Upcoming events and activities involving the Dakota Southeastern Division

**November 3—DSED monthly business meeting.** Held at Superintendent Alan Saatkamp's, beginning at 1:00 p.m. Here's a chance to preview the revamped TCWR. The business meeting includes plans to staff the division modular layout during Trains at Christmas. Those interested in operating on the TCWR next year are invited for an overview and introductory training session on how the layout will operate and what to expect, following the business meeting and refreshments. NMRA members interested in earning the Achievement Program dispatcher's certificate can learn more about that process too. Many of our members are well on their way to earn that certificate based on their experience and qualifications on the Wisdak.

**November 17 and 18—Trains at Christmas** at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds. See [www.svmes.net](http://www.svmes.net) for details. This marks our fourth or fifth year at the Fairgrounds for this event, and each year the layout shows more development and detail (plus longer coal trains, thanks to Joe Grimshaw).

**December 15—annual banquet after the December business meeting** at 4:30 at the Royal Fork at the Empire Mall. Dinner at 5:00 following election of a new superintendent for 2013-2014. The chief clerk/paymaster position is filled in alternate, odd numbered years.

**February 2-3, 2013 The Great Train Expo** in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The DSED modular layout will make its second appearance at this event, which was a big success earlier this year.

**March 23, 2013 Siouxland library Caille Branch** on west 49th street and Carriage Circle. DSED adds to its success with clinics and displaying the club layout. This time we're going to the west side of Sioux Falls for the first time, adding another site and following five successful years at the Ronning Branch on east 49th and Southeastern Blvd. Expected times are the same as prior years, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The library will also allow us to display model train items in its two (locked) glass showcases which lead to the children's section of this railroad-themed branch. A total of over 600 guests have enjoyed our library event during just the past two years at Ronning.

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Third and very importantly, I have a “partner in crime.” DAIR Trainmaster Tim Smith is totally on board with the project. He’s willingly taken the responsibility to custom detail the locomotive fleet, adding numerous details to ensure all eight locomotives contain the “right stuff” in addition to reporting marks. Tim and I spent a day in June railfanning to get a better feel for the route between Hopkins and Montevideo, as well as visiting the MPLI which will interchange with the TCWR at Bongards (see route map on page four).



**A DAIR train begins its climb toward Granite Falls, traveling past a prosperous farm.** *Rich Dahl photo*

Finally, the new scheme will breath some life into the next 100 operating sessions. We celebrated 100 back in August (see prior issue of Prairie Ponderings on the Dakota Southeastern website—[www.dakotasoutheastern.org](http://www.dakotasoutheastern.org)). I thought it was time for a new challenge. As nearby Harrisburg neighbor and co-host Dan Horner was overheard remarking to TLR guests on the open house layout tour last May,



**Montevideo includes five industries, including a successful scrap dealer, Birkey’s Scrap and the Farmers Co-op Elevator.** *Rich Dahl photo*

“Just when I figured out where most things were located, he’s changing the whole thing around!”

TCWR will not only look different, but it will operate differently too. There will be about ten trains, not 19 as was the case on the Wisdak. The track plan is more linear (see page four schematic) which should reduce some of the dispatcher’s frustration and near cornfield meets caused by the WSOR and DME trains vying for the same helix track simultaneously. The bottom line is fewer industries (each has its own car card box), more switching, longer trains, two person crews—all of these items give hope that starting around January, we’ll have a new operating layout to learn and enjoy. In other words, a more prototypical railroad than the previous one(s). And hopefully even more fun to operate.

I’ve already relettered and renumbered those 20 plus freight cars (none of the manufacturers produce anything in TCWR, RRVW, or MPLI reporting marks) and have the one commercial locomotive, the CF7 which is a slug (must be paired with another locomotive). Somehow I found one of these locomotives on EBay—it came from a seller in Hong Kong at a very fair price and no shipping expense to me!



**What has become the classic view of the layout, looking east from Appleton staging on the top deck and from the headquarters of the TCWR in Glen-coe, you get a good idea of the amount of detail and scope of the revamped layout.** *Rich Dahl photo*

Crew members will have the opportunity for on the job training sessions within the next few months, to become familiar with the scheme. They will be paired with a more experienced operator until they feel more comfortable and can assume the conductor duties also. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it. Hope you can come to see (and operate) the TCWR next year.

# Twin Cities and Western Railroad System Map

