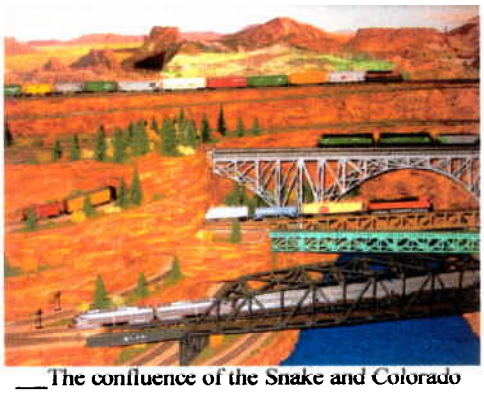
History of Bridge Canyon by Bob Pawlak



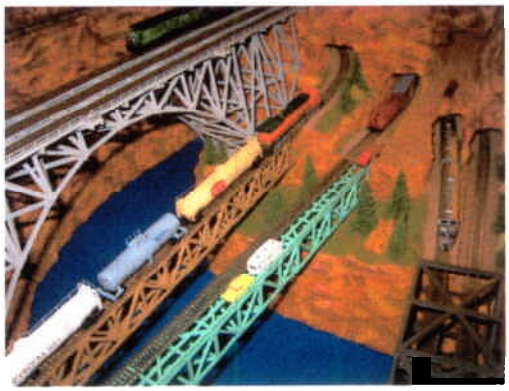
The confluence of the Snake and Colorado rivers near the base of Mount McPeak formed a potential, but challenging, low altitude railroad route through the Rocky Mountains. Surveyor and civil engineer, Colonel Seymour Bridges, first mapped and then selfishly named the area "Bridges Canyon" in 1904. Colonel Bridges then designed and successfully built several natural rock tunnels and a pair of two-track through-truss bridges across the very deep water of the two rivers to give the Northern Pacific Railroad a northern passage through the Rockies.

In 1932, the expanding Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad built four, single-track deck-truss bridges and associated tunnels higher in the canyon to compete with the NP. After merger of these railroads to form the Burlington Northern Railroad in 1970, the BN promised pestering environmentalists that they would beautify the Bridges Canyon area by: building two, three-track mainline arch bridges to replace all other lower bridges; minimizing "sight blight" by removing all the lower bridges; and then turning over the resulting abandoned track right-of-ways to the newly formed Bridges Canyon State Park (BCSP) Commission.

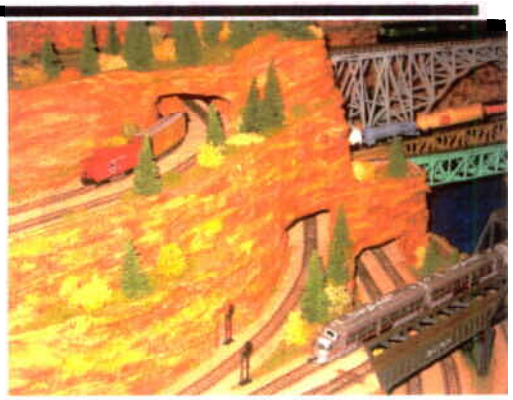
However, after completing the two new arch bridges and during preliminary discussions with potential contractors for the expensive process of removing the lower bridges, devious Dan Villain, son-in-law of the governor of the state, offered to buy the older bridges and the right-of-ways of the various connecting rail lines from the BN. Much to the chagrin of the environmentalists, a deal was struck and Mr. Villain quickly transformed his acquisition into the Bridges Canyon Scenic Railroad (BCSR). He added Heart-in-Mouth Bridge (a scary, 535' long steel trestle bridge 120' above the Colorado River), two crossovers and other transition track and associated tunnels to link all lower levels of track, and the higher Black Hole Mountain Division track, to the BN 3-track mainline.

A station, parking lot, observation platform, and camp ground were allowed to be built by the BCSR just inside the eastern entrance to the state park in exchange for giving the state park a 100 year lease on use of a single lane road across two of its railroad bridges. This roadway, with its hairpin turns and steep grades, is the only connection (other than rail) between the east and west ends of the park.

Currently, the BCSR offers: scenic rail tours of the canyon leaving from the Bridges Canyon train station at the eastern end of the state park; a rail connection to scenic boating tours starting from the Snake River siding at the bottom of the canyon; a means of getting coal trains from the Black Hole Mining Company Mountain Division track to the BN mainline; and a means for connecting the resurgence of lower level short line rail traffic up to the BN mainline. The resulting proliferation of bridges, tunnels, passing and crossing meets on six levels of intense railroad traffic makes the Bridges Canyon area a rail fan's paradise! Colonel Seymour Bridges must have also been a profit because at present you can see more than 9 bridges in the now apparently and appropriately named Bridges Canyon area.



To commemorate the centennial of the development of Bridges Canyon, Bob Pawlak has modeled most of the important features of Bridges Canyon State Park and the Bridges Canyon Scenic Railroad (although somewhat foreshortened) on a 12' x 3' Ntrak module (two 6' sections with and extra 6" on the front and back). The module has an 8' long passing siding on the Mountain Division level, 9 scratch built bridges, 3 independent "spaghetti" loops of track on 4 levels below the 3-track mainline and above the rivers at the bottom of the canyon, and transition tracks to connect all 6 levels of track. The main objective of the module is to allow youngsters to see plenty of trains moving in and out of tunnels and across all sorts of bridges and to be able to operate "their own" train without standing on a box. All private track has DCC



with track occupancy detection so that 3-light wayside signals and control panel lights can be controlled and automatic train protection can eventually be developed to automatically run as many as 2 trains on each of the 3 lower loops.

The 2-piece module has extensive rockwork, is 18" thick, and looks very heavy. But a variety of lightweight construction techniques have been used to minimize the weight to make it possible for one person to move and load each module piece for transport. These techniques include the use of: resin rock castings, code 55 Micro Engineering track and switches, 1/8" plywood roadbed glued to foam insulation (without cork), and "zero" thickness rivers. If all goes well, the module will make its debut at the Museum of Our National Heritage Train Show on December 27-28, 2003.

Register Now for Capitol Limited 2004

The next majoy Ntrak convention will be held in Chantilly, VA, at the Dulles Expo Center on August 5-8, 2004. You can register now by going to the Northern Virginia Ntrak web page:

www.nvntrak.org

As with our Edison 2000 convention Capitol Limited 2004 has been tied into a Greenberg Show and will feature a layout space the size of a football field. Both DC and DCC running will be available.

The convention hotel room will set you back about $90 a night, and the convention registration fee is $65 if you stay at the convention hitel and $75 if you choose another place to stay. The manufacturer's breakfast will cost you $19.

There will be prototype and home layout tours, clinics, special run cars, lots of dealers, and other goodies at this convention.