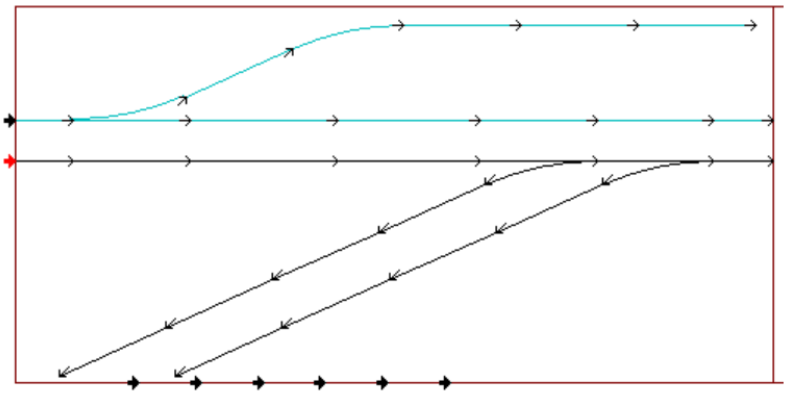
Andrew's Musings Part 4

So bringing you up to the timing of Model X 2009, we had Steve's 3 modules down one side, Garry's and Warwick's down another, balanced by my viaduct on the opposite side and my recently built 3 module terminus completing the oval. I had my home layout in the form of the valley branch line below the viaduct, so you would think that this should be the end of my contribution to the exhibition scene. These 5 modules to work on and finish off. Problem is, now I had a neat terminus station that would be fun to also run at home. I needed one more module to balance it up, but instead of thinking 3 long looping around to the other 3, I hatched a plan to instead have a triangular layout, with the viaduct on one side, two other modules at right angles to it and the terminus making up the long edge at a 45 degree angle. This neatly fitted around the steel poles in my basement.

At the same time, I also bought some dump cars (article 4631) which I like the look of with all the angles and shutes. Little did I realise that these are more than just slightly intricate bulk carriers to see on the back of a loco, but they have the additional functionality that by going over an uncoupler, they can unload their contents into something below, by pushing up the pole in the centre of the wagon which opens the gates on the shutes. Given I love adding extra features to my modules (especially if the audience can get involved), this gave me the idea for the first of the two new modules – a quarry. The rear part of the module has an old coal mine building, through which imitation coal can be feed through into the wagons on two sidings, the front having another siding / platform with a small workshop. Once loaded up though, these wagons then need to unload somewhere. That will eventually be at a port, which will go across the front of the terminus station, expanding the whole scene to be a truly busy city landscape.

The quarry is probably the start of me venturing into what I call "controlled interaction". What this means is the audience can touch things on the front of the module to operate various features, but behind it all I have the control (for instance, the button on the front is just on / off for controlling a train. The speed is set by me at the back). However, nowadays a lot of things just involve pressing a button. Instead I want to try being a little more mechanical and have the person help move whatever it is. So on the quarry there are two "wheels" out the front, one which moves a digger arm back and forth, the second which spins some coal carts in and out of the mine. A third button does light up the inside of the workshop. Apart from the light, the rest of it is mechanical, made up from coathanger wire, so basically fairly cheap.

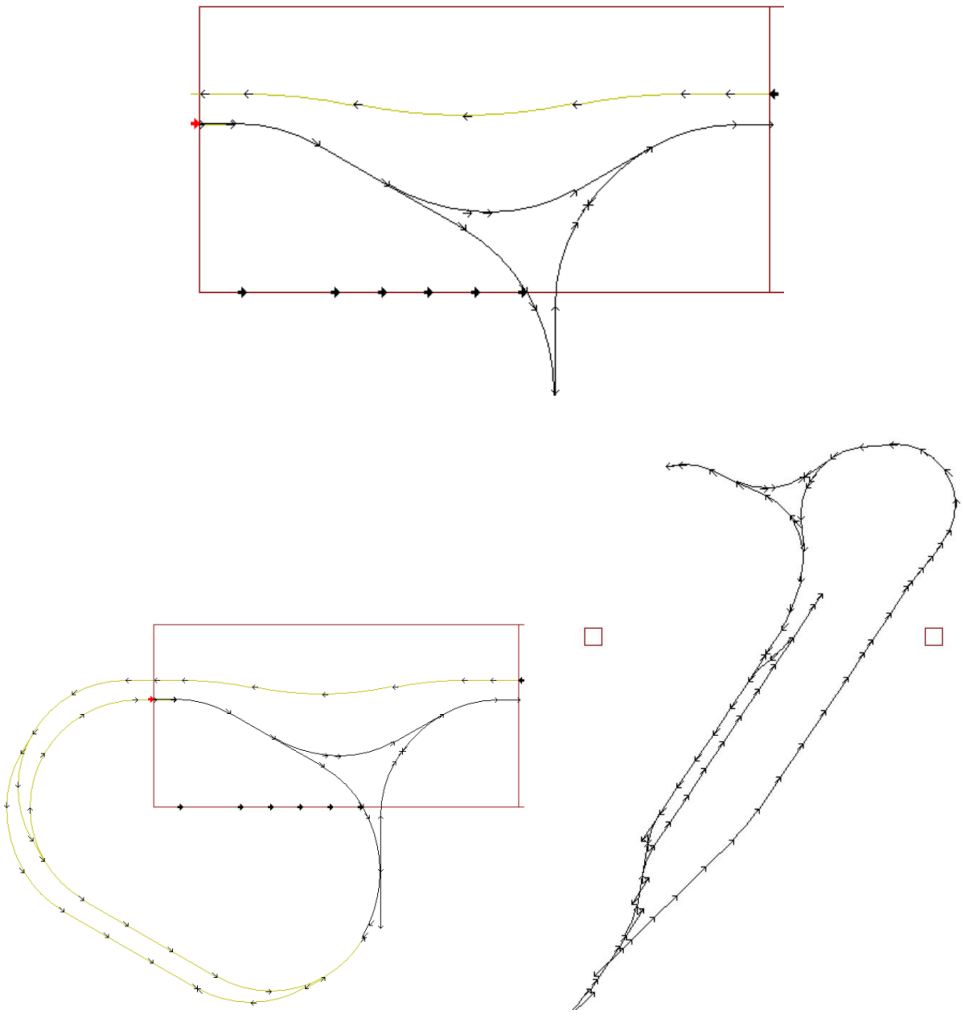


The front siding is isolated purposefully. I keep toying with the idea of having a crane loading and unloading track onto a wagon, with a separate controller and computer sequencing it. Possibly not enough room, a bit close to the younger members of the audience who may want to help it with the lifting and I never have time at exhibitions to do this extra stuff, when I need to keep an eye on 1 gauge, Z and my other HO modules. Just out of interest the crane that I mention is another little purchase (article 46715) that I made around the same time. It is really cool having so much go on in such a little frame, with hook up and down, beam up and down and rotation clockwise / anti-clockwise. Just give it some time to translate the commands or else it can get a little confused.

Scenery wise, the module has a lot of ballast all over it (funnily enough, being a quarry). This ballast wasn't cheap until now when I can get it for free for all of us from Dricon, so I tried bulking up the layout with papier mache and putting a thin layer of ballast on the top. It's rougher than later attempts at ballasting, but perhaps that is correct – when does a quarry look smooth? What distracts from this slight flaw is the fencing I managed to acquire from somewhere – proper security fencing with "electric wires" across the top and gates for the sidings. Add a few people in hi-viz gear, some

vegetation in certain places and this module is the quick, easy setup and play for any exhibition, giving a reason for having trains operating due to some industry on the layout.

I'm not sure where the inspiration for the second new module came from, and perhaps that's why I am still not 100% satisfied with it. It features a tunnel and embankment with a mountain road winding up the front of the module and what should be a vineyard on the rear stretching up the steep mountainside. Tunnels and mountains, well that does fit my bill . . . just it doesn't quite grab me with its current contouring (and this is version 2 of it). The tunnel portals are from the Loreley tunnel kit – possibly the most well-known tunnels in Germany which are next to the narrowest and most treacherous part of the Rhine River (amazing tour by the way, with all the history, castles, boats, trains and villages on the riverbanks). What the audience don't see is one of the special things about the module – the track layout inside the tunnel. One issue we were having at exhibitions was getting trains on and off the layout. I built into the dark confines of the tunnel a triangle, so that trains could pass through the module, or alternatively come off to a staging yard so that another could be brought on. Admittedly this is only for the inside line, the outside line (closer to the audience) having always been an issue until recent years with having a fiddle yard as part of the mainlines. Anyway, this triangle has now become more useful with later additions which convert the "Loreleys" into firstly a dogbone / rural station or secondly a return for the terminus station (I have included the track plans below so you get a rough idea now of what I am talking about, but I will explain the use of these in a later article).



Suffice to say, the “Loreleys” can be put to a lot of good use . . .I just need to nail the scenery. I’m possibly thinking a railway bridge and waterfall, or perhaps I should expose the triangle. Problem is the triangle is made up of R1 curves – a no no according to the modular specs and it has caught out some passenger trains with true length 30cm carriages, which clip the portal edges as they snake through what is effectively a double S bend. I also don’t want to lose the Loreley tunnels because they do look good. But if you do have tunnels I feel the landscape should be tall enough to justify there being a tunnel rather than just a cutaway. Oh the dilemma of deciding what to do?!

So there we have it, the empire has expanded to 7 modules – 2 in the form of a viaduct, 3 as a terminus station, 2 more as a quarry and tunnel and joining it all together will need to be a 90 degree corner and two 135s, and some vague idea of a port scene starting to formulate. If I only had the wisdom of ten years hence, I would have told myself to stop back then. Oh the dangers of buying a little 4631 wagon!