BANTRAK News

A Bimonthly Newsletter for BANTRAK Members • Volume 39 • Issue 02 • March 2026

The Engineer's Cab: John Hale

At the end of a year, I tend to look back and do retrospectives. As I assumed the duties of the president of the club after the B&O show, I did a little more than a retrospective over the last year but rather took a long look at my Model Railroad history.

Like most, I got a three rail Lionel set when I was a child in the 70's. I grew up in Decatur, Alabama, which was a railroad town. It was one of the few spots where they could build railroad bridges over the Tennessee River in the 1830's. So, Decatur was the home of the yards for several railroads, in my youth I watched the Southern Railway and Louisville and Nashville, the mergers into Norfolk Southern, and Seaboard Coast Line, and all the traffic through on a daily basis. Early diesels ruled the rails with little to no passenger traffic.

As a teenager, I switched to HO scale and plunged 100% into the Southern Railway. I would kitbash cars and locomotives to match the prototypes that were rolling by every day as I visited the yards daily on my bicycle. I didn't have a layout but did have a shelf with track on it and two switches to play with.

When I joined the Air Force, everything got boxed up. After a couple of years overseas and living in dorms, I ended up here in the Washington, D.C., area. In the early 1990's. I got married and bought a townhouse, and as my attention turned back to model railroading, and after discussions with the wife over right of way options, I again switched scales, this time to N Scale. I was in New York on a business trip looking for my first Southern Railway N-scale locomotive, I went to Brooklyn Locomotive Works (yes, they had a brick-and-mortar store) and fell in love with a GP9 painted in New Haven colors. I switched from the Southern Railway to New Haven on the spot.

I spent the next two years learning everything I could about the New Haven railroad, joined the historical society and went overboard. When it came time to build my layout, I had the research, pictures, and everything laid out for a prototypical depiction of South Boston harbor in 1965. I loved building and running trains on the layout. I built it with PECO code 55 track, which I thought was state-of-the-art. After seeing Atlas and ME code 55 years later, I couldn't unsee how bad the PECO track looked. I tore it down a few years ago, but I still miss it today.

I really enjoy the hobby, but more than that, I enjoy all of you. I look forward to the meetings, talking, and helping each other. I hope all of you enjoy the hobby in your own way and I hope that a little bit of that kid comes out from time to time in all of us. I really want all of us to have fun in our hobby!

John

Train Ride North of the Arctic Circle: Dennis Wallick

Last month I took advantage of my retirement to join an organized tour to ride passenger trains in Norway and Sweden above the Arctic Circle. The trip was organized by a UK tour group called Great Railway Adventures (in the US it is Vacations by Rail) and includes interesting excursions and side trips. In this case, the highlight was to see the Northern Lights, which, despite several overcast evenings, we succeeded in doing on a few of our ten days, as shown in the photos I took and reproduced here.

I started the trip in Oslo, Norway, where no sooner was I off the plane than I was able to ride the commuter train into the downtown central train station.

The train from the airport was a modern, electrified train reminiscent of many trains that you find in other parts of Europe. I spent the night at the hotel and could see a local LRV

right outside my window. The next day I joined the largely British tour group at the Oslo airport where we flew to Trondheim.

For a rail fan, of course, an important part of the trip was being able to ride long-distance passenger trains. The excursion said there

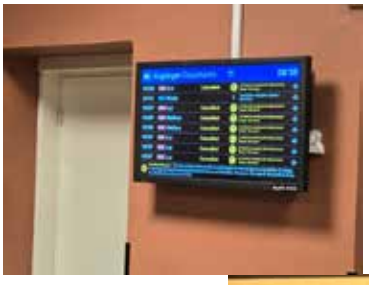
Train Ride North of the Arctic Circle Dennis Wallick

would be two of them, the Norland Railway along Norway's coast, 440 miles from Trondheim to Bodo, and the much shorter Ofoten Railway, 27 miles from Narvik, Norway to Kiruna, Sweden. Unfortunately, the Ofoten Railway was cancelled, "electrical problems" being the stated reason, so we had to take that portion of the trip by bus (as was much of our trip). But we did ride the Norland Railway, provided we board not in Trondheim as planned but in nearby Steinkjer because of a landslide south of there.

This train was diesel and just as comfortable as the commuter train in Oslo, although due to the landslide the dining car was not attached (presumably it was trapped on the other side of the landslide).

After a comfortable, scenic (until the sun set around 2PM), and uneventful ride of about eight hours our train crossed the Arctic Circle (no photos because it was dark and there's nothing to see), before arriving in Bodo, Norway, the most northerly station on our journey.

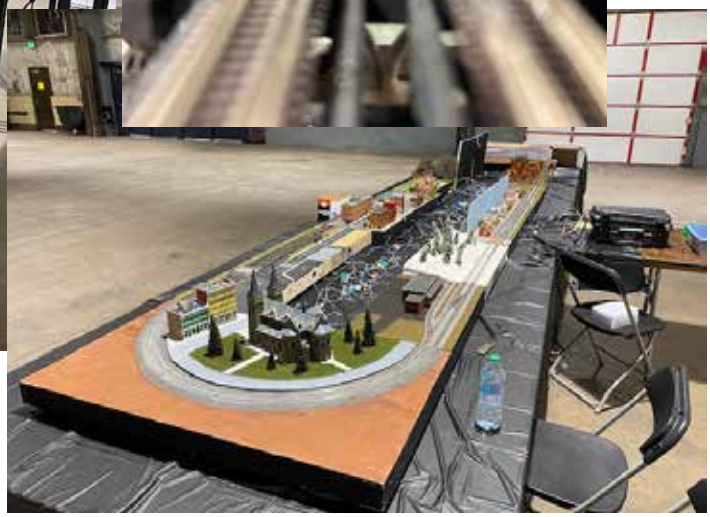
As I mentioned, that was unfortunately the last of our train rides, and it seems that operating passenger trains in Norway in the winter is problematic, as all the cancellations shown on the two message board show.



We did take one other mode of transportation: a cold yet fun 40 minute dog sled ride on our last day in Kiruna, Sweden, before flying to Stockholm and the end of the tour.

I'd try these trains again, but probably in the summer when the sun never sets, service is probably more reliable, and it's not -20 degrees! But this trip is a great way to see the Northern Lights, provided you don't mind last-minute changes.

GSMTS Highlights



Long-Span Bridge: Mark Bandy

For years I've toyed with the idea of building an N-scale long span bridge. Technology has advanced to the point where this could finally be accomplished without mass hand cutting of materials. Also, the Laser cutting and 3-D printing devices needed to accomplish this have become more mainstream and affordable.

After seeing Bantrak's Free-moN layout, I thought now was the time to put dreams into reality.

Back in 2007 I researched several bridge designs that would lend themselves well to replication. I came across a great historical bridge website, HistoricBridges.org, that provided background information, bridge details etc., that provided the level of detail needed to draft realistic bridge components. I chose the Sciotoville Bridge, whose mammoth bridge truss spans 1550 ft. comprising two tracks across the Ohio river. No need to repeat what is already detailed on the website. For those interested in historical aspects and details, give the site a look.
Once drafted, I needed to decide material and methods for all the components.

The bridge columns, beams and lateral support were 3-D printed, the stringers below the rails were reinforced with brass strips laid continuously across the bridge and that also provided electrical connections at each pier.

The rails were connected by soldering copper foil tape (the kind used for stained glass work), to laser cut wood ties. For added stability I used plexiglass strips around the outer edges of the bridge beams.

That really lame toilet paper broadly available during the pandemic when the good stuff couldn't be found, finally found its use! These thin layers of paper were glued to the module base. A large paint brush was used to give it an irregular texture. After it dried, different paints were used to give the river a dark murky look. My wife always complains that these scenes are too sterile and lack life, so a little eye candy was added, i.e., a riverboat, inner tubes, and lights.
I needed John Hale and Eric Payne's help and guidance to get this module Free-Mo ready. With their instruction, I was able to get it ready for the Timonium show in January, marking one year from concept to reality.

I started taping 11" x 17" sheets of the Bridge truss elevation sections together to make up one half span. This helped me to line up and keep straight the beams and supports.

I numbered the beams and supports on the drawings as well as on the printed parts to keep track and in the right location when I installed them to the truss span.

Long-Span Bridge: Mark Bandy

I placed brass strips along the both trusses to strenghen the base and to provide good electrical continuity throughout the spans.

Copper foil tape was cut to the size of the track width on laser cut tie sections,I soldiered the code 55 track to the copper foil tape.

The base modules are cut by 1 x 12” primed painted and Berch plywood ends.
The legs are 2” x 2” clear pine.

Foam applied to base after I painted the base module black.Close measurements for the 3D printed pier were aligned with the top of the end plates.

Details were applied to the beams and supports by using “Evergreen plastics” sheets and strips. Covered track before painting the truss. The white part is plexi-glass for cord support.

Long-Span Bridge: Mark Bandy

I glued the 3D printed short span bridges together. Clothes pins make for temporary holders as the glue dries.

The triangle center piece between the two spans is designed to be removed. It is used as a keystone to lock the two spans together while in use.

Electrical drops were applied to the ends as well as electrical devises used to opporate the MSS system.

BANTRAK 2026 Calendar

April 06, 2026
Newsletter content deadline
We need content, please submit your articles by the deadline.

March 15, 2026
Club Meeting
David Betz's house

April 11, 2026 -April 12, 2026
Great Scale Show
Timonium Fair Grounds
Coordinator: Paul Diley

May 17, 2026
Club Meeting / Picnic (tentitive)
Location: TBD

BANTRAK Membership: Eric Payne

BANTRAK does a significant amount of charitable activity, although we rarely think of it that way because we get pleasure out of it. When you think about it, that is as it should be with all giving from the heart.

What is our charitable activity? Our major participation is in the B&O Museum's (which is a charitable organization) Annual Festival of Trains. Our display has been a major draw for people to come to the Museum for many years, both recent and in the past. There are plenty more examples, this is just one.

Please contact Treasurer Tim Nixon for more information regarding your membership status and roster questions or contact Eric Payne with general questions.

Member Benefits:

- Sharing of your knowledge (railroading and modeling) with others of similar interests
- Access to railroading and modeling knowledge of other members
- National exposure and recognition of your endeavors in modeling
- Hands-on activities: Club modules - track, wiring and scenery. Raffle layout - track and scenery Members' layouts
- Recognition as being part of a Nationally known club.

Train Spotting: Ed Kapucinski

I have a bad habit of going railfanning on either the hottest or coldest day of the year. You can guess which one it was here when I caught the eastbound Amtrak Pennsyvlanian at Cove PA. Spoiler alert: the car said it was 9 degrees when I got back in. I think I'm going to take up stamp collecting.

BANTRAK was founded in 1983 as the Greater Baltimore N-Scale Associates. Begun as a "round robin" group to share skills and experiences, we have expanded our focus to include participation in many diverse activities to promote model railroading in general and N-Scale model railroading in particular. Activities include participation in local, regional and national shows, meets and conventions. BANTRAK membership includes membership in the national NTRAK organization.

The BANTRAK Newsletter is the official publication of Baltimore Area N-TRAK (BANTRAK), Inc. This is ***your*** newsletter! Please send articles, photos, and suggestions to newsletter@bantrak.net
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