

## CHAPTER 6

# THE DENVER, SOUTH PARK & PACIFIC

BY ANDREW DODGE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSS REINBERG

I SUPPOSE WE should credit my father for introducing me to scale model railroading. As early as the 1940s, he was attempting to model the Southern Railway in HO scale standard gauge as accurately as possible. But, if my parents wanted me to follow in my father's footsteps, they never should have taken me with them on vacations to Colorado in the 1950s. And, when

I was thirteen years old, they never should have allowed me to read a copy of *A Pictorial Supplement to the Denver, South Park & Pacific* by Mac Poor, Richard Kindig, and Ed Haley. That book is responsible for my lifelong love affair with the narrow gauge South Park line.

Beginning in the 1960s and through most of 1980s, I flirted with the Denver & Rio Grande Western and built

**Previous page.** Pausing for water at Deer Creek.

**Below.** Como.





Breckenridge.

large HO standard and narrow gauge layouts. Then I discovered Overland Models' imported brass On3 Mason Bogie, bought a couple, and completely abandoned HO scale. I researched the availability of commercial 1:48 scale models of Denver, South Park & Pacific locomotives, rolling stock, structures, and detail parts. As it turned out, it was necessary to scratchbuild most of what I would need. And my research turned up a group of fellow Colorado On3 enthusiasts whose assistance and information have been very helpful.

By 1992, my wife and I had finished a massive rebuilding project of our home and I was able to start construction of a new On3 layout. I completed an accurate model of the pin truss bridge over the river in the Platte Canyon by studying photos in the *Pictorial Supplement* and scaling the bridge from known freight car dimensions.

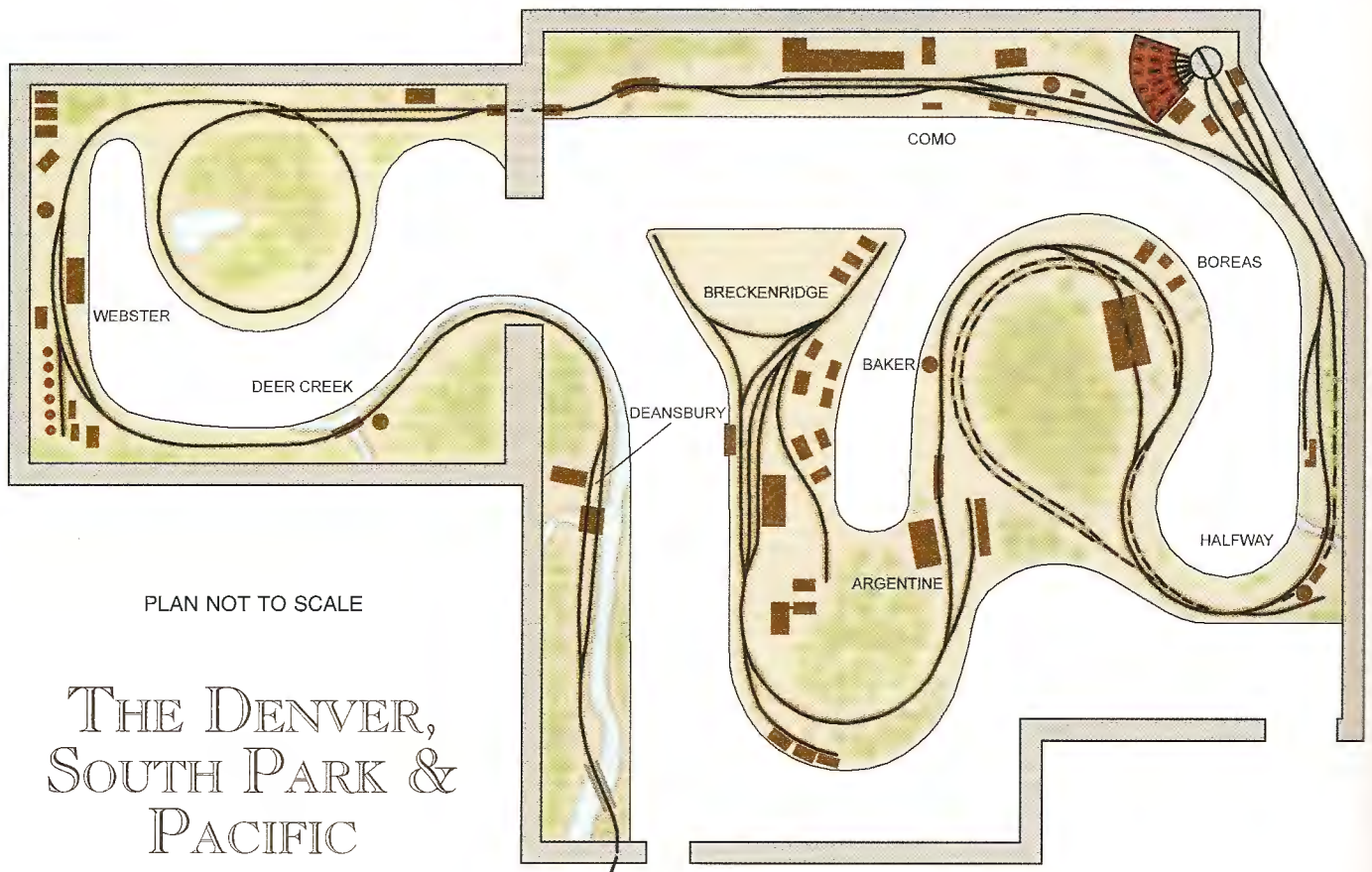
The rail for the new railroad was code 70 nickel silver from the dismantled HOn3 layout. Since the South Park had stub turnouts, it was necessary to fabricate them myself from lengths of rail and a few Grandt Line parts. Each required about eight hours to complete.

I had built the house with a basement model railroad in mind. I analyzed the floor plan to determine what elements I credibly could include. Among the criteria were:

- No duck-unders.
- Grades no greater than three-percent to ensure reliable operation.
- No visible tunnels, since the South Park had only one (the Alpine Tunnel) on a different part of the railroad than I would model. (Where it was necessary for the tracks to pass through a wall, I built a snowshed instead.)
- A representation of the Platte Canyon.
- The right-of-way should run along a river.
- Include the division point at Como.
- Include a mountain pass. (I chose Boreas Pass.)

The creative challenge was to incorporate everything realistically and esthetically within the dimensional constraints of the basement. If you think about it, that kind of creativity is equal to, but very different than, designing a freelance layout in the same area.

From the standpoint of operation, I modeled Como



## THE DENVER, SOUTH PARK & PACIFIC

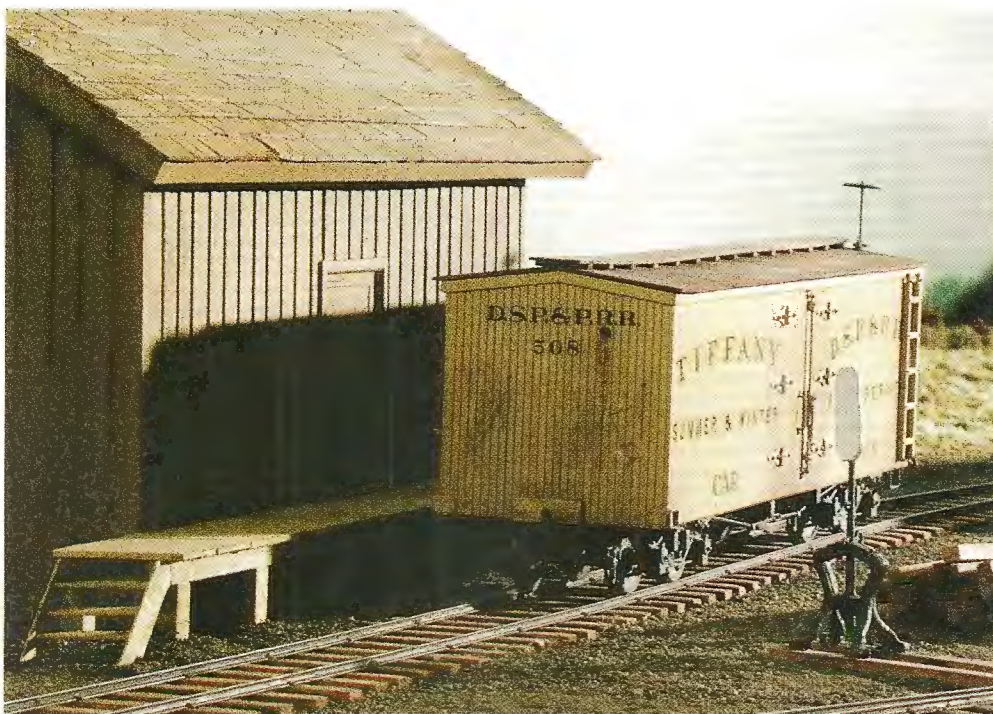
because it requires a lot of problem solving and because few narrow gauge layouts seem to include division points. On the South Park, three lines converged at Como. Engineers and dispatchers must consider locomotive

service, car sorting, arrivals, and departures. Como was the focal point of a lot of activity in the 1880s and similar activity continues there today in miniature.

Operation also dictated the selection of Boreas Pass over the alternatives. In 1882, the nominal era of my layout, the line over Boreas terminated just beyond Breckenridge. The wye and end-of-track there create the illusion of ongoing construction. Trains bringing in supplies have equal priority with passenger consists.

The layout's scenery emphasizes the operational aspects. The enginehouse at Breckenridge is unfinished and the water tank at Baker is brand new. In Como the Pacific Hotel is still under construction, just as it was in 1882. Even the color of the ties represents freshly cut or lightly aged wood.

The new layout's scenery construction was a deliberate attempt to avoid my negative experiences in building the HO



scale railroad. That one had a scenic foundation of hardshell with newspapers and paper towels I soaked in a stone and plaster mix. Construction was messy and later I discovered dust, dirt, insects, and mildew under the layout—creating a common basement aroma.

I was determined to avoid all that with the new On3 layout. I used a staple gun to fasten aluminum screen to Masonite formers. Over that went a layer of moderately thick plaster to fill the holes in the screen and a second layer to complete the basic shell. I created rock molds by pouring rubber over quartzite and applied them where appropriate. My neighbor is a geologist and pointed out our local quartzite, a metamorphic rock in Maryland, has an appearance very similar to that of granite. The scenery along the South Park includes a lot of granite. I colored the plaster with very thin washes of artist's oil paints.

The ground cover consists of sifted dirt from specific locations along the actual right-of-way in Colorado. We made two trips there to collect what I wanted so the colors really do represent those along the South Park line. The miniature tailings below the layout's mines have actual material from full size mines. I secure the dirt with

dilute white glue and build up layers as necessary. Sage brush clippings represent bushes; commercial ground foam represents foliage.

Underneath the scenery, the benchwork is a combination of 1x4 and 1x6 open grid and L-girder construction. All the basic boxes are the same distance from the floor. Risers determine track elevation. The sub-roadbed is half-inch thick plywood; the roadbed itself is half-inch thick Homasote®. I handlaid all the track with code 70 rail and commercially available Kappler ties. Where appropriate, I scratchbuilt three-way stub turnouts.

Four individual cabs control the layout. They include Pacific Fast Mail Mini-Sound power packs and block control. Operators may unplug handheld ITTC throttles to walk with their trains. Hidden remote control motors throw the turnouts.

The layout's most distinctive operational feature is communication by telegraph key. Each operating console has one and the engineers and dispatchers signal one another between stations with a simple code. (No, it is unnecessary to learn Morse Code before running a train.)

**Opposite page and below.** Two views of Como. The large brick structure is the Pacific Hotel.



A timetable and train orders dictate train movements. When orders assign an engineer a locomotive, they include information about the train weight and the engine's tonnage capacity, tonnage limitations of a given section of track, maximum grades, and the priority rank of each car in the train. The engineer must base his decisions about train operation upon those constraints. It can be challenging.

My rather arcane choice of the D,SP&P required scratchbuilding a lot of models and heavily modifying a few others.

The layout has eight locomotives. Three are reworked Overland Mason Bogies. I also rebuilt an imported brass LMB 2-8-6T Mason Bogie from the inside out to conform to the actual locomotive's appearance in 1882. I turned new domes and machined a stack, turned down the driver flanges, and made numerous other modifications.

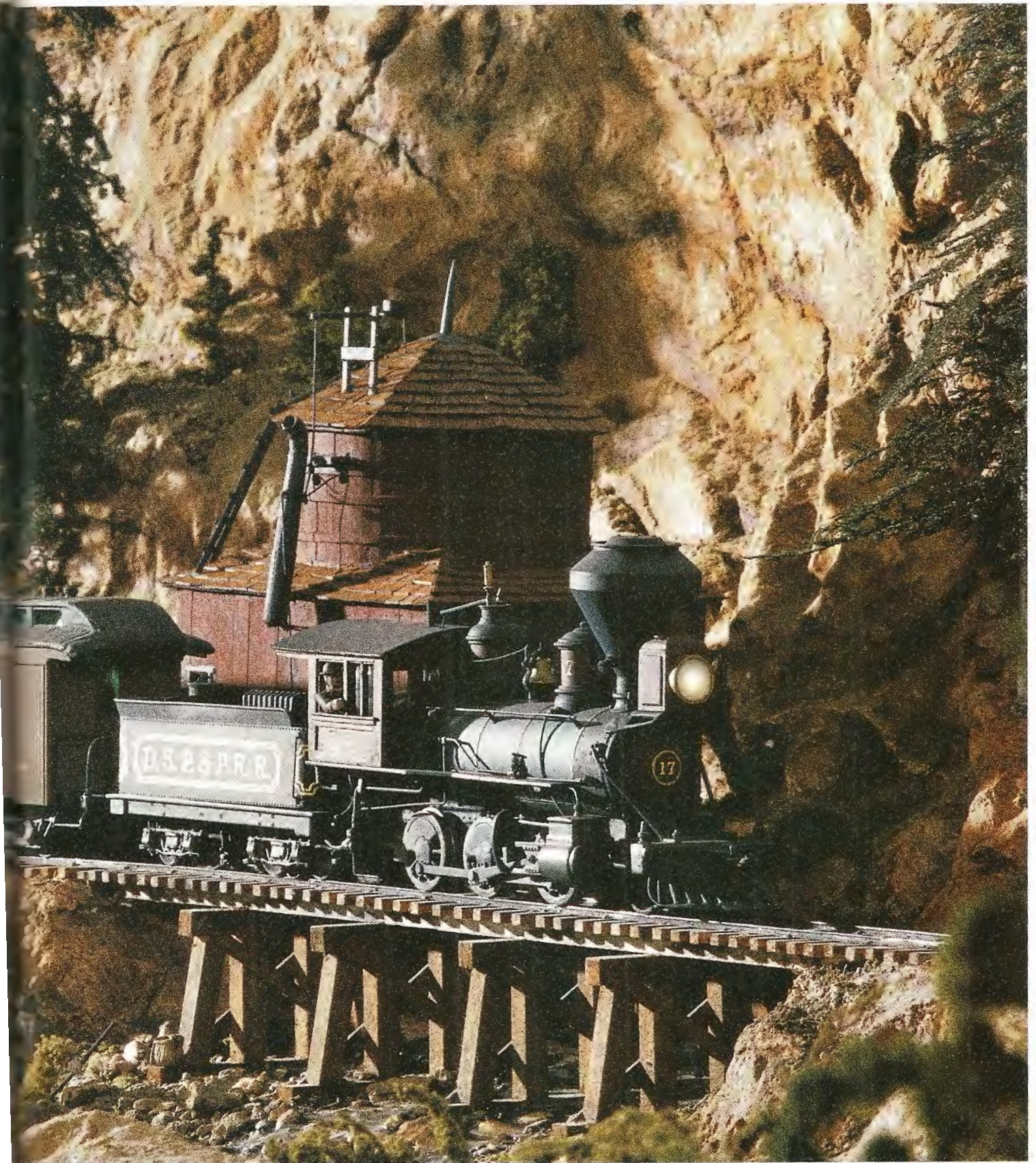
That experience led to more extensive work on brass locomotives. For example, I rebuilt an old Balboa Imports Cooke Mogul into an 1882 Brooks Mogul with a new wagon top boiler, built up smokebox door, new cab, domes, stack, and machined drivers and side rods. I turned and pressed on new driver tires and rebuilt the frame and boiler to accept a new motor. (The original motor had been in the tender.) I modified the tender frame into a higher riding Brooks design. That project took several months and culminated in a model representing an almost new passenger engine complete down to its custom decals.

The railroad also needed freight locomotives so I turned a pair of Sunset C-16 Consolidations into 1880 South Park Baldwin 2-8-0s. The wheelbase was almost perfect but it was necessary to draw scale plans of the prototype locomotive before I could build a new cab (including proper windows), domes, and stack. I fabricated everything myself. The stack began as 1½ inch round brass stock I turned on a lathe and bored out to weigh only 2½ ounces.



A rebuilt and regauged On30 Bachmann Mogul with a passenger consist at Deer Creek.

The model required such other modifications as a new smokebox front, new pilot, and reworking the lead truck



Nest page. Argentine.

to negotiate forty-two inch diameter curves. The finished models represent South Park Numbers 52 and 57. You

can see them in the accompanying photos.

More recently, I converted an inexpensive plastic









The Pacific Hotel at Como.

Bachmann On30 Mogul into a three foot gauge Dawson-Bailey locomotive Number 17. I also visited the Smithsonian Institution to study late nineteenth century locomotive colors and derived what I think are my models'

authentic shades of Russia iron from that research.

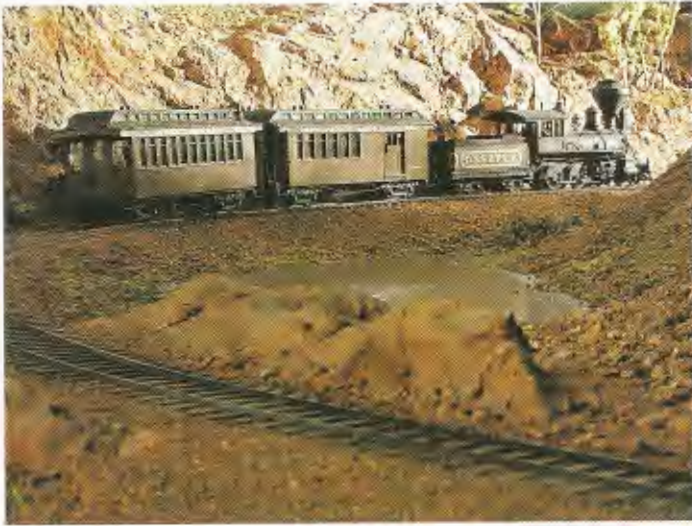
My layout currently has about thirty pieces of rolling stock, all scratchbuilt or extensively modified. The roster includes four boxcar classes, two flatcar classes, and a pair

The coke ovens at Webster.

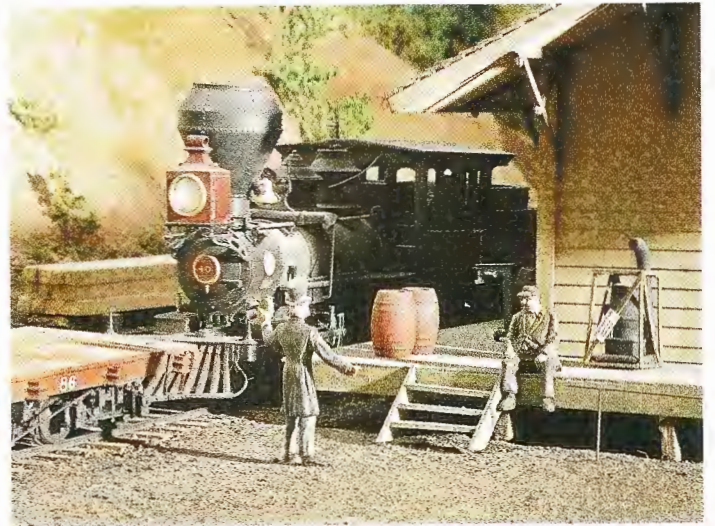


On the outskirts of Breckenridge.





**Above left.** The loop east of Webster.

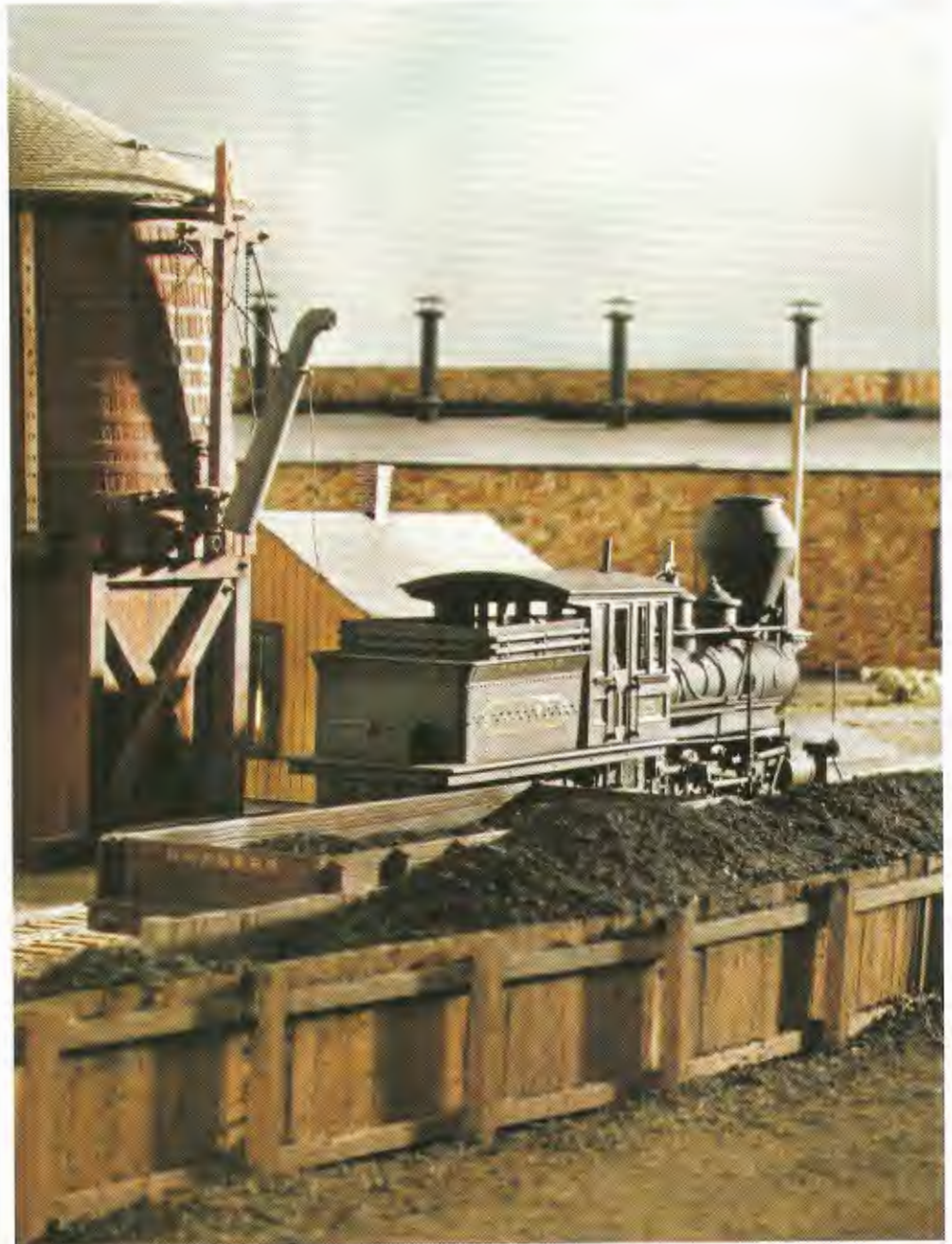


**Above right.** The Webster depot.

**Right.** A Mason Bogie on the service track at Como.

of Tiffany reefers. I made the way cars by backdating Grandt Line Colorado & Southern caboose kits. I created an 1880s era Union Pacific pile driver from a San Juan D&RGW kit after discarding almost half the original parts and scratchbuilding correct assemblies. A few cars reflect those on the Colorado Central. Two passenger cars are scratchbuilt, three others are heavily modified and regauged Bachmann On30 models. Their overall length is accurate but I had to build new roofs and end platforms. The result is a trio of models representing thirty-five foot Bowers & Dure prototypes.

Every structure is scratchbuilt except the enginehouse at Como, a commercial cast plaster kit. I derived the dimensions of trackside structures in part from C&S valuation sheets listing floor plan dimensions. I found them in Mac Poor's *Denver South Park and Pacific*. I worked out the other dimensions and door and window placement from photographs.



THE EASTBOUND 3:10 ARRIVES WITH A MIXED TRAIN.

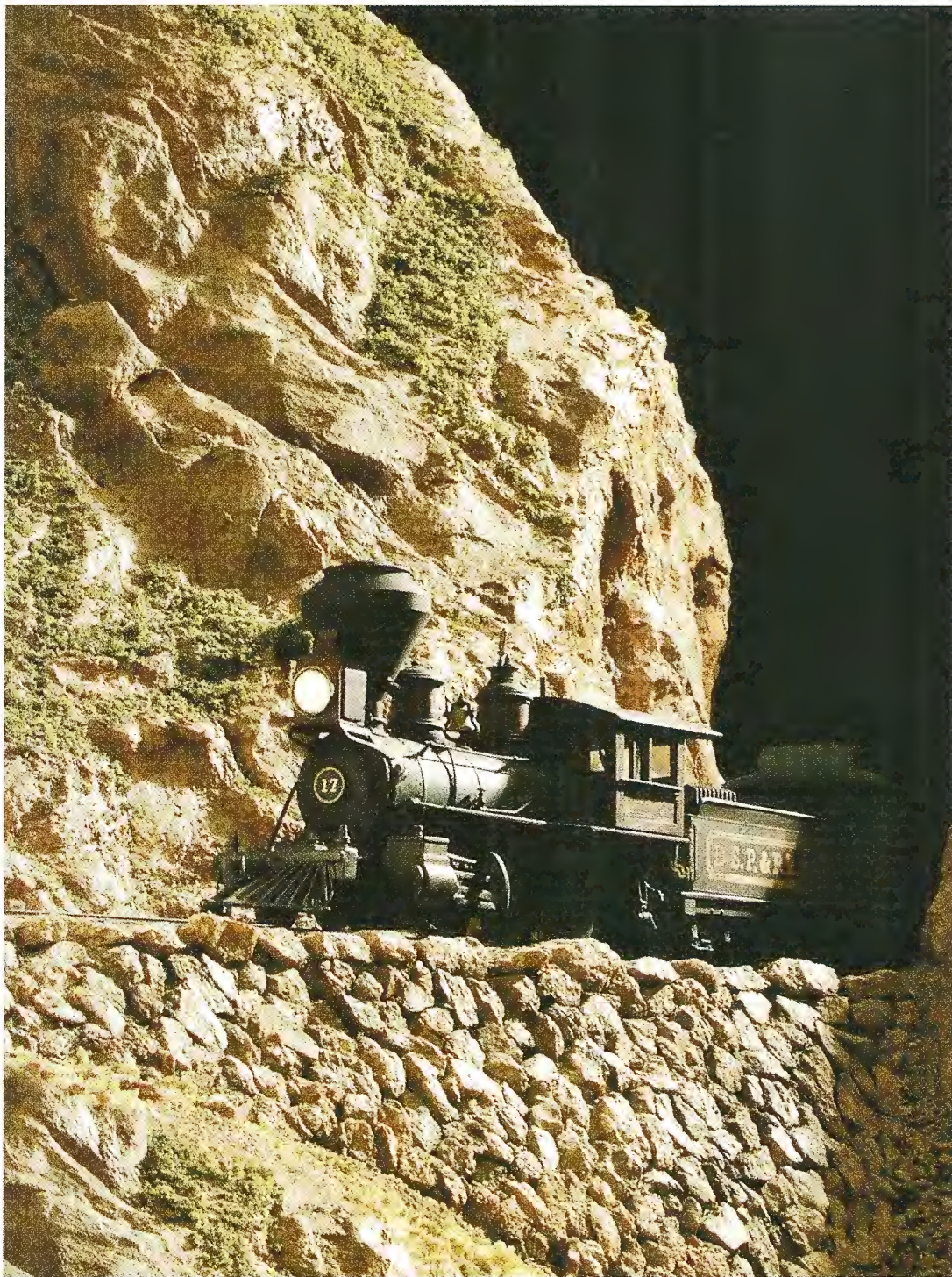


== WEBSTER ==

The most challenging structure was the Pacific Hotel in Como. It is huge: two and one-half stories tall, one hundred thirty-three feet long, and forty-five feet deep! The model is finished on all four sides. I also wanted the layout to show at least part of a town and chose Breckenridge. I researched each structure from photographs, drew plans, and built up each model from stripwood and styrene.

I spent a lot of time deciding what shades most accurately would represent the colors along the D,SP&P in the early 1880s. I was able closely to examine the original depot at Como to arrive at an authentic paint mixture for the depots. But I also paid close attention to the colors of rolling stock, locomotives, ancillary structures, and even switchstands. It involved learning something about Victorian era paint schemes.

A passenger train climbs the grade on the loop east of Webster.



After you spend forty or more years building layouts and models, you learn some lessons. I found I prefer modeling an actual railroad to freelancing. Maybe that is because I enjoy history and research. Maybe it is because I really like to *use* my books. Maybe I just prefer the discipline such an approach requires.

But my most important lesson involves a model railroad's presentation and setting. When you build a layout in any kind of closed room, many factors can create an adverse effect. So I devoted considerable thought and effort to make my layout's environment comfortable and pleasant. Proper illumination and a completely finished room are crucial.

My layout room has a painted concrete floor to minimize dust. Its lighting is bright and imparts a cheerful ambience and comfort. The area beneath the benchwork is open, with neither storage cabinets nor drapes, to eliminate the impression of clutter and the chance of odor from mildew. The trackplan is simple and straightforward; I wanted to avoid any sense of a "bowl of spaghetti". And you can

see all the way across the room; scenic features from one region of the railroad are visible from another just as in Colorado itself. It was important to impart some impres-

sion of the expanse of the South Park specifically and Colorado in general.

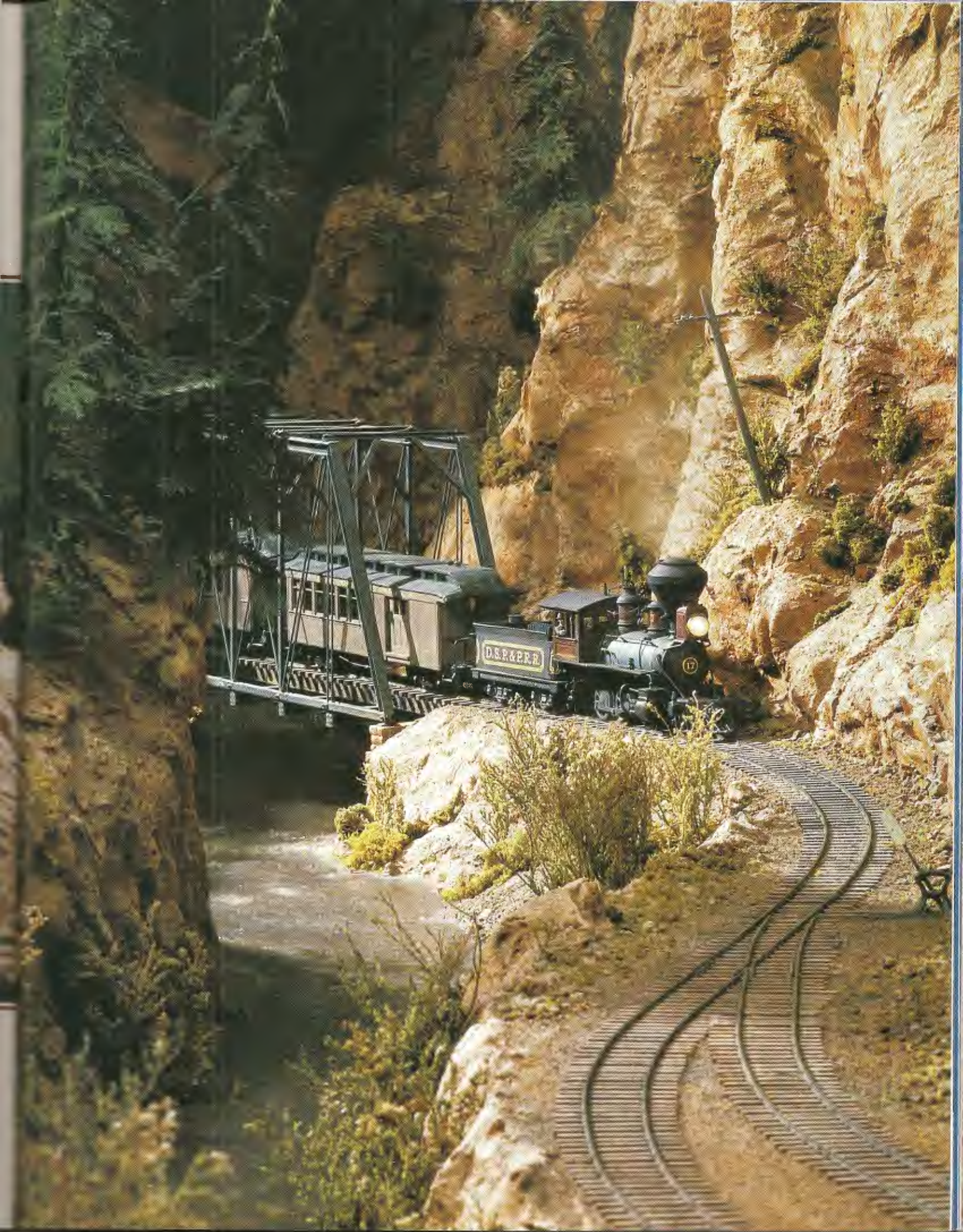
You might say, "Sure, it's easy for Andy to talk. He has

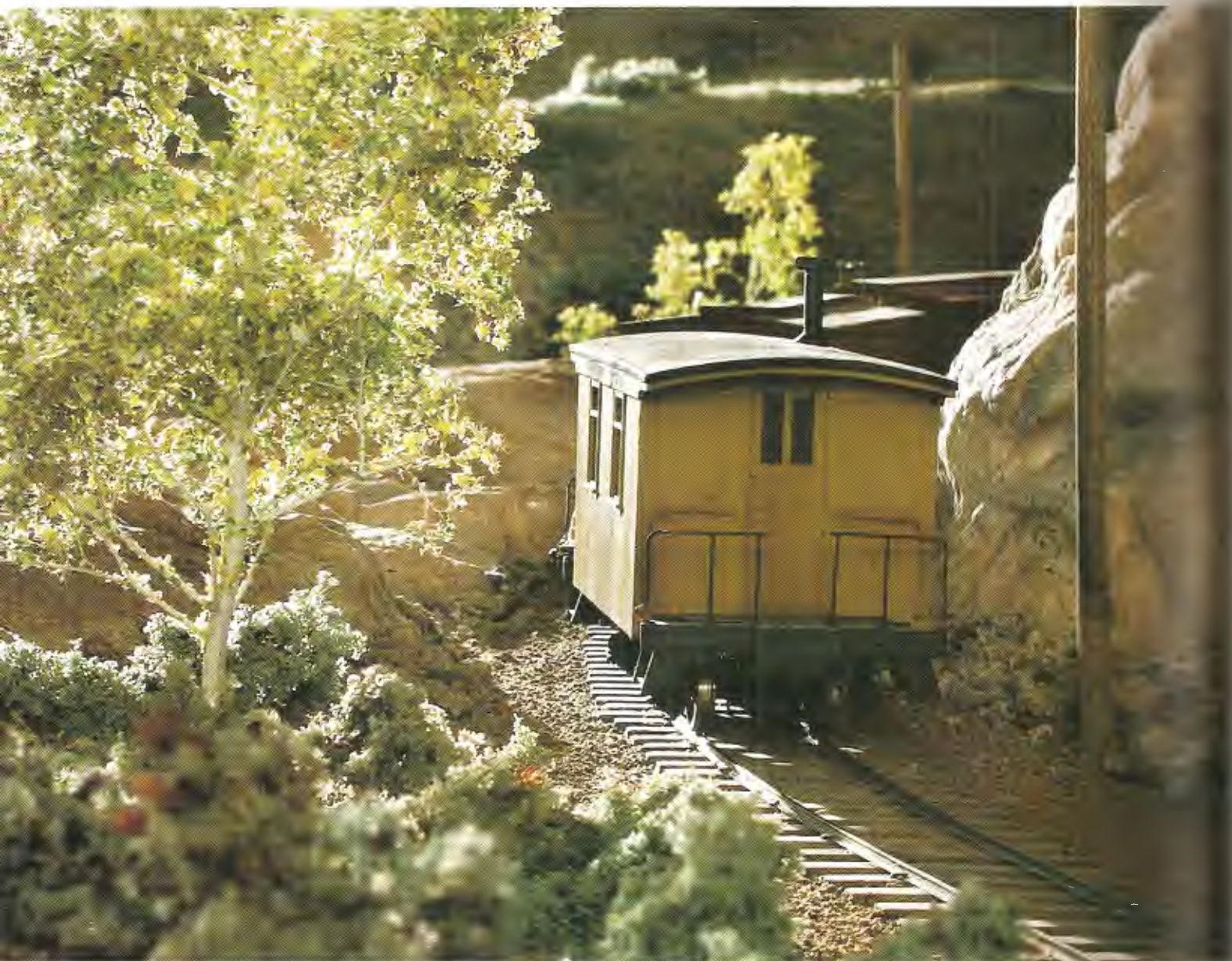
## == DEANSBURY ==



BETWEEN TRAINS AT THE PLATTE CANYON RESORT.

Opposite page. Crossing the pin truss bridge in the Platte Ca





**Above and below.** A supply train rounds the curve into Breckenridge.

an entire basement to work with.” Well, I often have thought about what I might do if I lived in an apartment. I certainly would build a layout and limit its scope and size. I would model a section along the east side of the Alpine Tunnel, such as Hancock. The layout would be point-to-point. But the size and location are really inconsequential to the point I want to make:

No matter what kind of railroad you prefer, whether prototype or freelance, it





**Above.** The end-of-track at Breckenridge.

**Below.** A freight train departs Webster.

**Next page.** Pausing for water at Halfway.



should follow a consistent theme, adhere to prototype practice, and have a logical justification for existence. Its environment should be pleasant, uncluttered, bright, and cheerful. Its plan and scenery should be simple And the layout should leave a visitor wishing to see more.

I have found the old adage really is true: Less really is more.



