



“Tools & Tips”

By Dennis Ivison

Making Rocks and Mountains

I've been asked on numerous occasions on how I make the mountains and rock formations on my layout. So, I thought I'd pen a quick article on the techniques I use. This method works equally well for small "scene divider" formations like I'm building here, or for very large mountains on your layout, and should work equally well for any scale.



In the first photograph you can see how the foam is stacked and glued together. For this project I used some leftover pink foam, but blue foam, or beaded Styrofoam will work equally well. Cut some basic shapes close to what you want your finished mountains to look like and glue them together. I've found that Liquid Nails for Foam Paneling glue works the best for this purpose. Keep the glue close to the center of the pieces, if you get it too close to the edges you'll have to cut through the glue when you start carving. The hot wire will cut the dried glue, but you have to use a lot more pressure and you risk breaking the wire. Let this dry for a day or more.

In photo two we have used a hot wire to form the shape of the mountain and the rock formations. Instead of trying to plan every crack and crevice, let the right side of your brain take over, and your creativity flow. At least this works for me,

whenever I try to over plan my cuts the whole thing ends up looking like an ice cube tray. A little warning here, although the foam pieces are glued together, the entire structure is NOT glued to the bench work. I take the structure outside to carve it with the hot wire. The melting foam off-gasses and I'm sure that breathing the smoke is hazardous to your health. The foam is very light weight, and even the largest mountain on my layout measuring 5'w x 4'd x 3'h was easily taken out side to carve. Once you have finished carving your rocks, and are happy with them, you can glue them to your bench work before you move on.

After carving you will have gaps between the pieces, as well as some crevices that you carved



a little too deep that need to be hidden. Plus, we want to add some texture to the rock faces and give the washes we'll use in the next step something to bite into. In photo three the rock formation has been prepared in order to add the final colors. The first thing we'll do is to "paint" the entire formation with a thin coat of Plaster of Paris, this hides unwanted gaps and any over enthusiastic carving. A good coat of plaster is critical wherever beaded Styrofoam is used, for obvious reasons. As the plaster starts to dry use strokes of the paint brush to create texture in the rock faces. The texture that you add, no matter how slight, will really show up later when you begin to do the color washes. Next add splotches of Gesso (available at any art supply store) to the rock faces, vary the sizes of the areas you paint, give some a lot of cover and, some a little less.



Don't paint the entire mountain with the Gesso. The Gesso and plaster take the washes we'll do later quite differently. By varying the coverage and using multiple color washes, you won't end up with rock faces that are a monotone color.

I use Joel Bragdon's (*Bragdon Enterprises*) technique, with a slight modification for adding color to the rocks. The first thing I do is to give the rocks a good coat of black wash and quickly wipe the surfaces clean using a sponge dipped into a bucket of clean water. Work in small batches and get as much black off of the outersurfaces as you can, but leave as much in the crevasses and cracks as possible. Cautionary note, this step can get very messy, but I always have a lot of fun doing it, I guess the inner kindergartener in me comes out! On past layouts, I always painted the colors first, then did the black wash afterward, and I always felt that my rock faces came out too dark. With Joel's method the black is wiped away, leaving a very light gray palate to add the color to, but the dark shadowy areas are still nice and black; as you can see in photo four. Let this dry thoroughly before moving on!

Now we've come to the fun part, slopping on paint... well washes actually. In this step we'll talk about adding color to the rocks using successive layers of washes. Photo five shows the results; maybe I'll add one more coat! I use cheap acrylic paints purchased from Hobby Lobby (Michael's or JoAnn's if you prefer). Thin these paints with water plus a drop of detergent



Work with very thin washes, overlapping the colors in each successive layer, slowly building up the colors as you go. Let each successive layer dry first before adding the next, the rocks will look completely different after the washes have dried. By letting everything dry you can better evaluate what color you may need to add next... if any. Some areas look right after just a few layers, others will take several layers before I'm happy. Don't be shy, just dive in, if you don't like the way an area looks just repeat steps three and four. If you're picky like I am, this will happen, trust me. I use six basic colors for the washes, umber, burnt umber, sienna, burnt sienna, seal gray and, light tan with an occasional splash of olive drab here and there.



After everything is dry and you are thrilled with the finished project thus far, it's time to get out the dry brush and dust off your technique. Apply this step very sparingly, you are just trying to highlight the tips and points not change the color, or lighten everything. The color I like to use for dry brushing is called vanilla bean, white is too