

Old Mills Colliery Sidings

The Location

The ex Great Western Railway's Bristol and North Somerset line ran from Bristol via Radstock to Frome. Old Mills Colliery Sidings were located on this line approximately 2 miles west of Radstock.

The line appears to pass through tranquil countryside, but in reality it passed through the heart of the once bustling Somerset coalfield, which at its height contained over 70 collieries, about a third of which were directly connected to the Bristol and North Somerset line. The line also served limestone quarries, local gas works and at Radstock a wagon repair workshop.

The History

The line was constructed in two sections, the first by the Great Western Railway (after it had taken over the Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway, which had fallen into financial difficulties) from Frome to Radstock, as a single track mineral line built to the broad gauge. The second section from Radstock northwards to Bristol was completed in 1873 to standard gauge, the southern section was converted to standard gauge in 1874, allowing through running.

The line led a generally uneventful existence, its fortunes following that of the coal mining which provided the bulk of its traffic. The decline started in the 1930s as collieries became worked out or uneconomic and closed. The passenger service was withdrawn in 1959 and the route was severed south of Radstock in 1967, but following flooding and landslips during the following winter, this section was reinstated and the line north of Radstock closed in 1968. Colliery traffic from the Radstock area continued until the closure of Writhington colliery in 1973, the wagon repair workshop closed in 1988. Today the only section that remains open is the southern 2 miles that serves the giant Whatley limestone quarry.

The Period

We've assumed that coal mining in the area remained buoyant into the 1970s, this justified the railway remaining open as a through route to handle the continuing traffic. Considerable residential development is also assumed along the line, sufficient to sustain a busy commuter service between Bristol and Frome mainly operated by DMUs, with occasional locomotive hauled cross country services.

The model depicts the 'fictitious' period between 1968 and 1972. BR was undergoing a major image modernisation, including the introduction of the 'Corporate Blue' livery. The Western Region was also in the process of replacing its non-standard, but generally well liked, Diesel Hydraulic locomotives with other regions cast-off Diesel Electric Locomotives.

The Model

The layout is based on contemporary photographs, Ordnance Survey maps and our own site photographs and observations.

The layout is 4mm scale running on 00 gauge track, C&L with hand built points, operated by home made rotary point motors on the scenic side and Peco code 100 in the fiddle yard.

We operate to a sequence using 25 plus scale-length trains from the fiddle yard. Which include locomotive hauled and DMU passenger trains, interspersed with parcels, freight, mineral and permanent way traffic, occasional 'special' traffic appears to create additional variety.

Exhibition Information

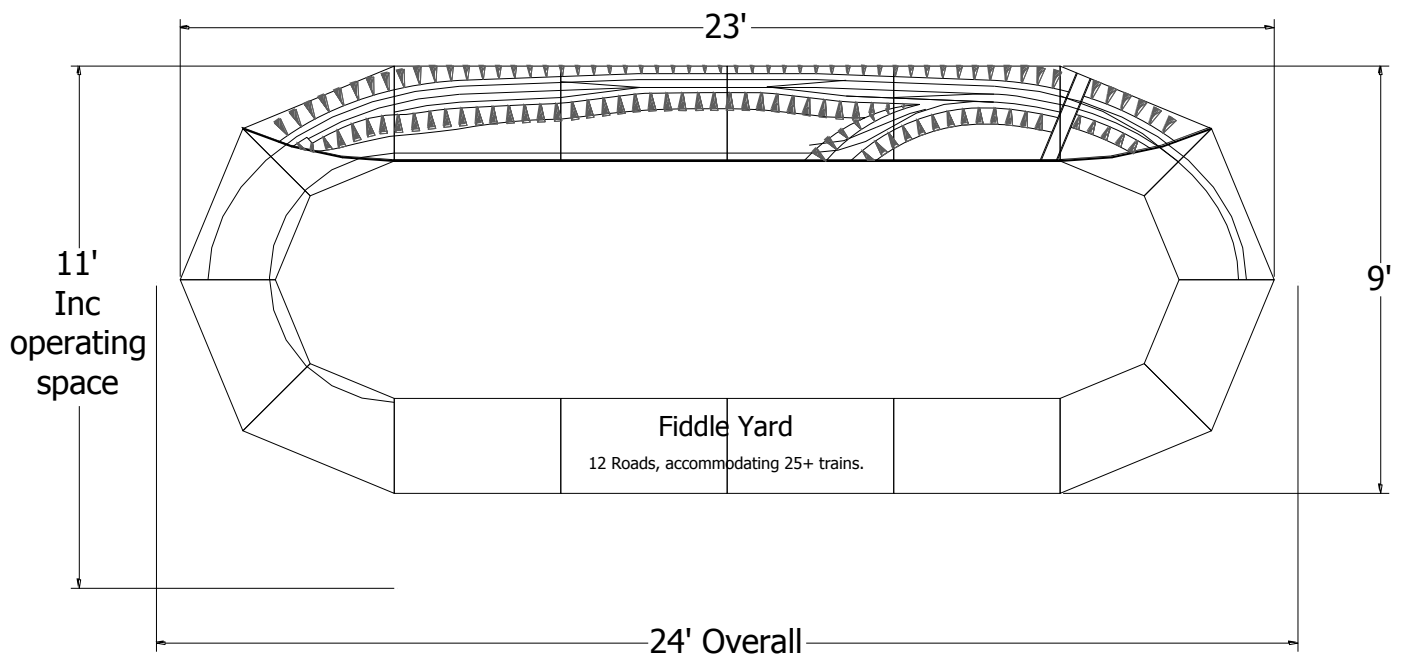
- Travel** The layout is transported by Transit van (approx £180 hire charges for a 2 day weekend), plus diesel and petrol for 1 car, cost dependent on distance.
- Operators** A team of 4 operators is usually needed, but for long exhibitions more may be required.
- Insurance** The value of the layout and stock is £25,000.
- Setting Up** Setting up time is usually 2 hours from arrival.
- Electricity** A single 13 Amp socket is required.
- Size** Overall size is 24' x 11', it comes complete with drapes and is fully illuminated.

The layout and stock has been built and is operated by members of Wolverhampton Model Railway Club.

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