

by Dick Andrews
Photos by the author

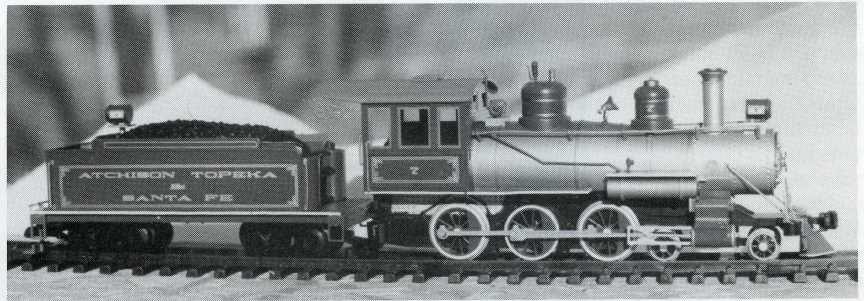
What nicer Christmas present could a narrow gauge modeler want than a model of a handsome narrow gauge locomotive and train of cars at a low price? Bachmann's G scale train set called "The Big Hauler"

came out just in time for Christmas. True, the 4-6-0's tender and the caboose are lettered for the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe, but that is just part of the "packaging" to market the set. Actually, Bachman's Big

Hauler locomotive is quite a good model of one of the 4-6-0 Baldwins operated by the 3-foot gauge East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad. Compare the photo of my new Bachmann engine and the photo of the prototype Tweetsie locomotive that I took in Johnson City, Tennessee, in 1938. If the photos were in color, you could see that the elegant green and gold color scheme (with touches of scarlet and silver) of the prototype is nicely reproduced on the model.

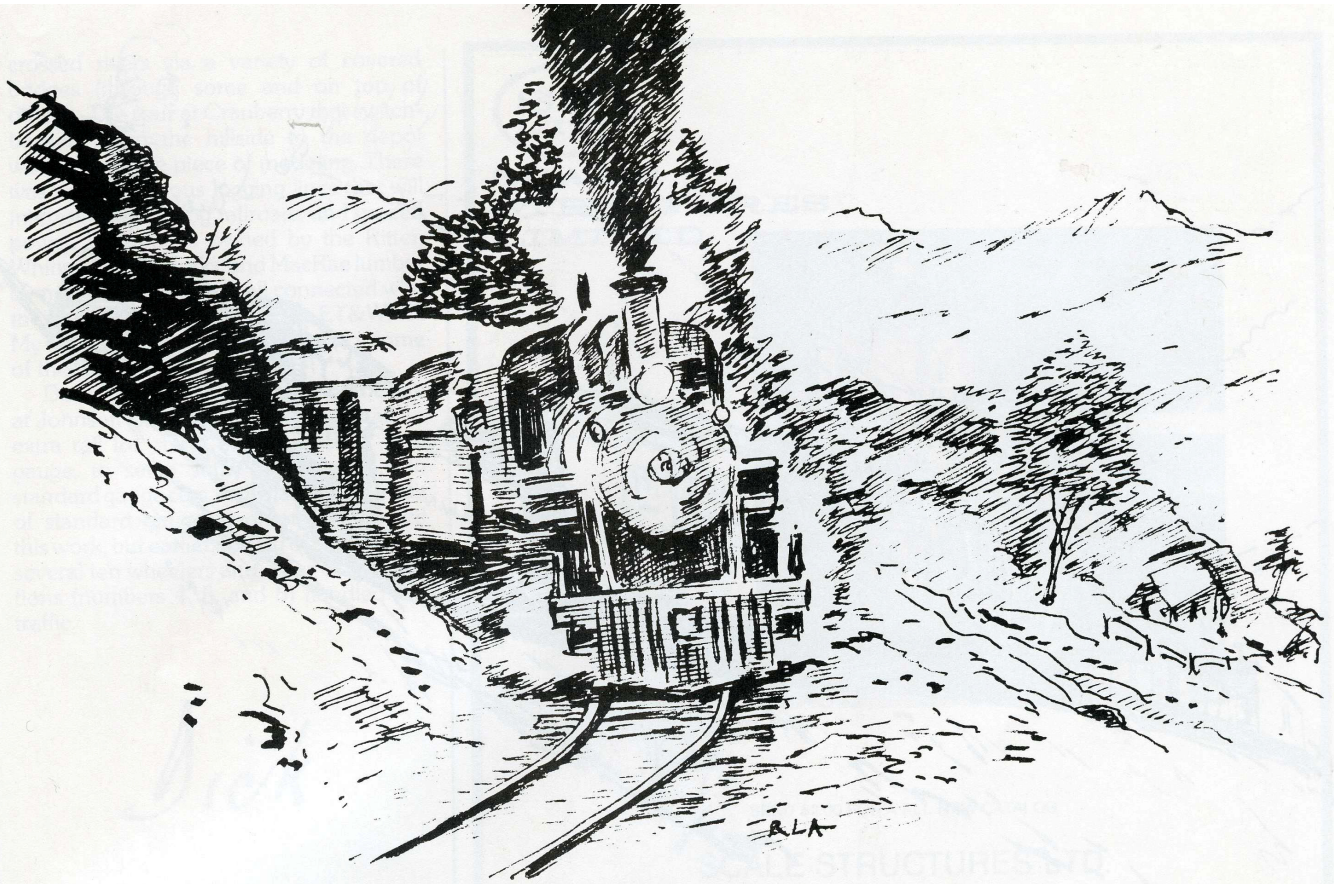
In 1938 few, if any, railroads were painting their locomotives like that - so why was this mountain narrow gauge all dolled up in green and gold? On the ET&WNC, each little ten-wheeler worked on any job that came along - passenger, freight, or mixed train - so all the engines received an elegant paint job. This included numbers 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14. There was no #13, and a ride over the line would quickly show you why. Even #7, a huge, Brooks narrow gauge 0-8-0 yard switcher

This new G scale Bachmann model, while lettered for the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe, is really a model of an ET&WNC 4-6-0.



Engineer Sherman Pippin steps down from the cab of East Tennessee & Western North Carolina ten wheeler, #12, to oil her at Johnson City, Tennessee, one March day in 1938.





"She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes!"

had an elegant paint job. That was the way things were done on the Tweetsie. They were proud folks.

The ET&WNC engines sometimes seemed frightened by the big Pacific and Mountain locomotives that hauled the freight, passengers, and mail on the mighty standard gauge Southern Railway. The little drivers on the narrow gauge peddler freights would thrash and spin as they worked to get the mills switched and the mainline cleared. The panic level would climb as the chime whistle of the mail train sounded in the distance, coming on fast.

The big, mainline mail-express-baggage-small lot freight, and passenger train would sweep to a brief halt at a station on the Tweetsie where the activity needed to drop off mail, freight, and passengers, so they could continue along their way on the narrow gauge was almost as frenetic as a pit stop at the Indy 500! Very quickly the great train would whistle off and its mighty exhaust would thunder around the mountain sides. It was a great show.

When the ET&WNC began operating over the Linville River Railroad extension to Boone, North Carolina, it was one of the few (if not the only) American narrow gauge passenger train with vestibule cars, and it was certainly the only one with a parlor car named AZALEA. Freight trains

moved as extras avoiding the times of the scheduled passenger trains. By 1938, though, after some years of the Great Depression, the road was operating its daily mail train as a mixed train. Drag freights still went as extras, but the mixed train was now the regularly scheduled passenger train merged with a peddler freight. Shippers didn't have to wait for drag tonnage; the mixed train would spot a carload of coal for Shulls Mills or a tank car of gasoline for Boone, and so on as needed.

This mixed train moved along with the same zip as ever, for the schedule had to be kept. The peddler freight activity could not be allowed to delay the daily schedule. Keeping on schedule really was not much of a problem because the 4-6-0's, on the peddler, usually only handled five or six cars.

Many railroads in those days used a railbus and trailer to haul mail and passengers. Such lines generally had a contract to handle a closed mail pouch that could also be handled by the local bus line. However, if the railroad had a Railway Post Office contract, it was another story - often steam power and a peddler freight would be required for the mail sorting run.

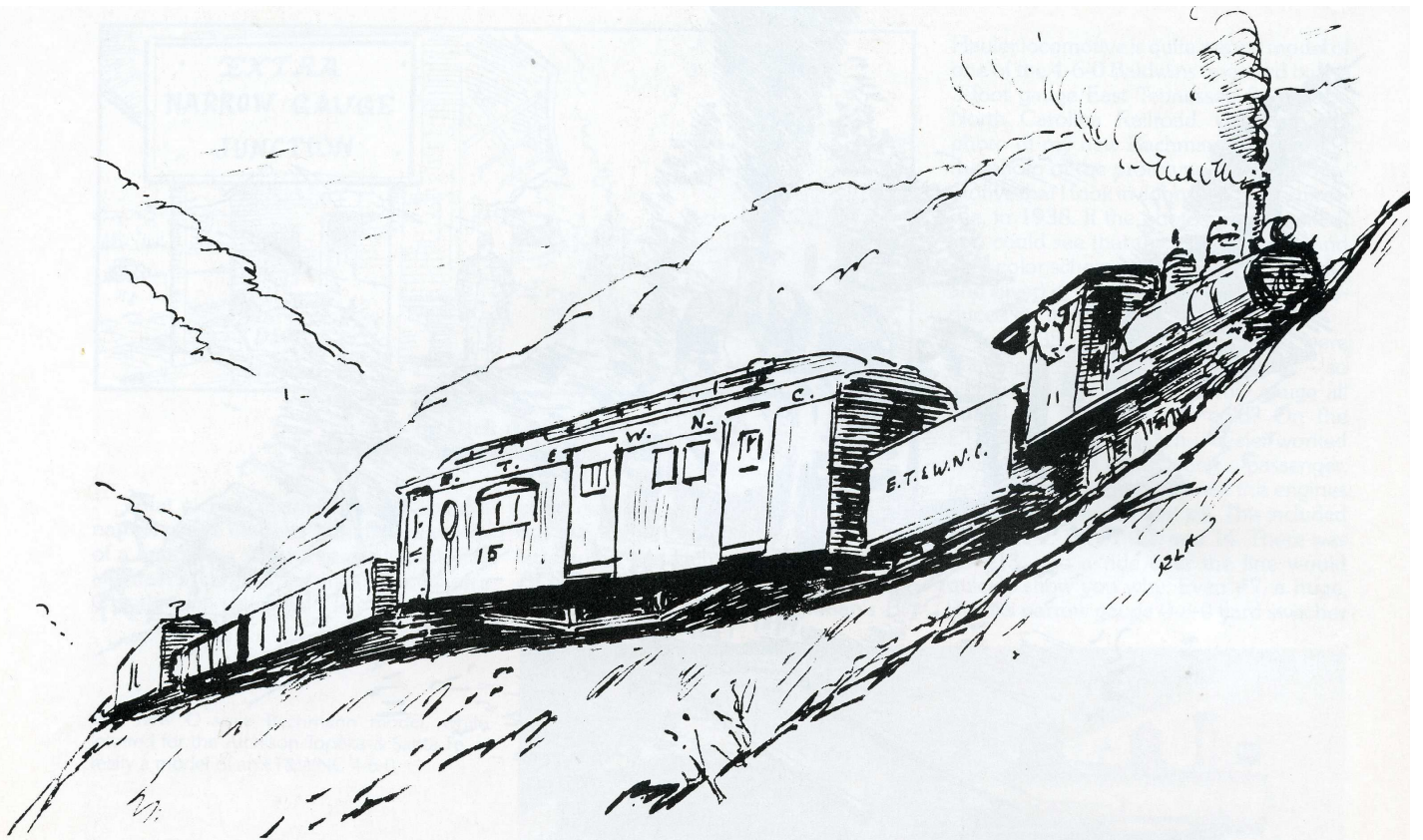
The ET&WNC's Combine #15 was a three-way car. At the front end was the RPO compartment with its own sliding

doors. Following that was the baggage compartment with another set of doors. The passenger compartment had a few seats with an offset center aisle. Combine #15 was unique because it was essentially a whole train in itself. It could do it all - mail, freight, and passengers.

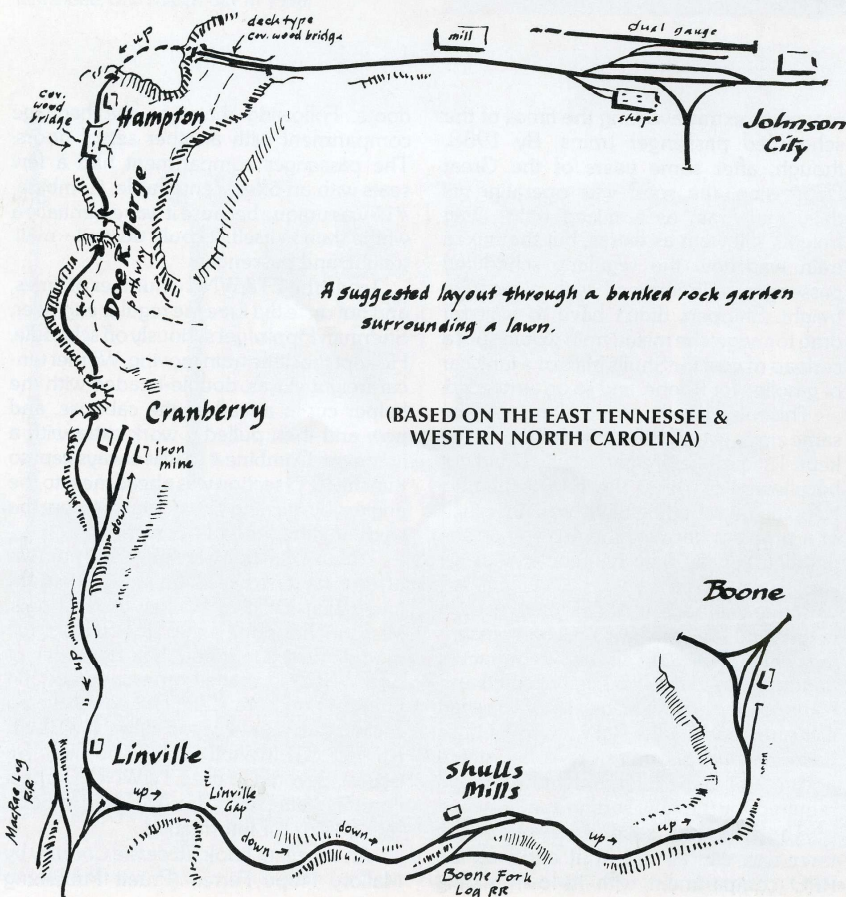
I rode the ET&WNC a number of times, and not once did I see the regular engineer, Sherman Pippin, get seriously off schedule. He kept that little train moving. We met ten-car freight extras, double-headed with the helper cut-in ahead of the caboose, and now and then pulled a work extra with a crane car. Combine #15 was always kept so that the RPO section was ahead, next to the engine by turning them together on the wyes at either end of the run.

I'm sure that there are already a number of fine models based on the Tweetsie. I know that Dr. Les Walker of St. Louis, Missouri, has done a fine Doe River gorge module in HOn3 and has a model of ET&WNC #11 made from a reworked Rio Grande Southern #22. There is even a society with a publication called the BLUE RIDGE STEMWINDER (\$7.50 for five issues), devoted to the ET&WNC. Contact John R. Waite, Rt. 1, Box 486-A1, De Soto, MO 63020 for information.

An excellent book, *Tweetsie Country* by Mallory Hope Ferrell (Pruett Publishing



Combine 15 in the daily mixed climbing to Boone in 1938.



A suggested layout through a banked rock garden surrounding a lawn.

(BASED ON THE EAST TENNESSEE & WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA)

Company, Boulder, Colorado, 1976), is full of photos and plans of the railroad and its equipment. And a four part series by Julian Cavalier (on building an ET&WNC caboosie, hopper car, boxcar, and gondola) appeared in the September/October 1984 through March/April 1985 **GAZETTE**s. (September/October 1984 and January/February 1985 are out of print.) I have even heard that ET&WNC #12, a 4-6-0, still runs, in season, on a circle of track at Blowing Rock, not far from Boone, North Carolina.

Needless to say, the Tweetsie could be modeled in any scale, but the Bachmann Big Hauler set could be an excellent start for someone wanting to model it in G scale. The ET&WNC had a number of features that would be particularly interesting on a narrow gauge garden model railroad. My drawing shows a suggested layout based on the Tweetsie that could run through a rock garden surrounding a lawn. The mixed train would be an ideal gambit for such a line. The Tweetsie track ran high on the hillsides, well up a rock wall, in the spectacular Doe River gorge. Indoors or out, a model track winding along as high as your head would be appropriate. It seemed to me that the ET&WNC always hesitated to go down into a valley as it would only have to climb back up out of it again.

One can imagine an outdoor pike winding along the slope of a rock garden with the Doe River gorge as a narrow passageway as shown in my sketch. The line also

crossed rivers via a variety of covered bridges (through some and on top of others). The spur at Cranberry that switch-backed down the hillside to the depot would be a nice piece of modeling. There was more - various logging lines that will interest lovers of log railroads and geared power. Operations owned by the Ritter, Whiting, Boone Forks, and MacRae lumber companies, and others, all connected with the Linville River section of the ET&WNC. My track plan shows interchanges for some of these logging lines.

Down at the flat country end of the line at Johnson City, the narrow gauge had an extra rail for about eleven miles of dual gauge, to serve some rayon mills with standard gauge cars. In the later years a pair of standard gauge locomotives handled this work, but earlier, the big 0-8-0, #7, and several ten wheelers and older Consolidations (numbers 4, 5, and 6) handled this traffic.

Dick

USE BROWSER BACK BUTTON TO RETURN