

N-Circle Railroad Update – January 30, 2022

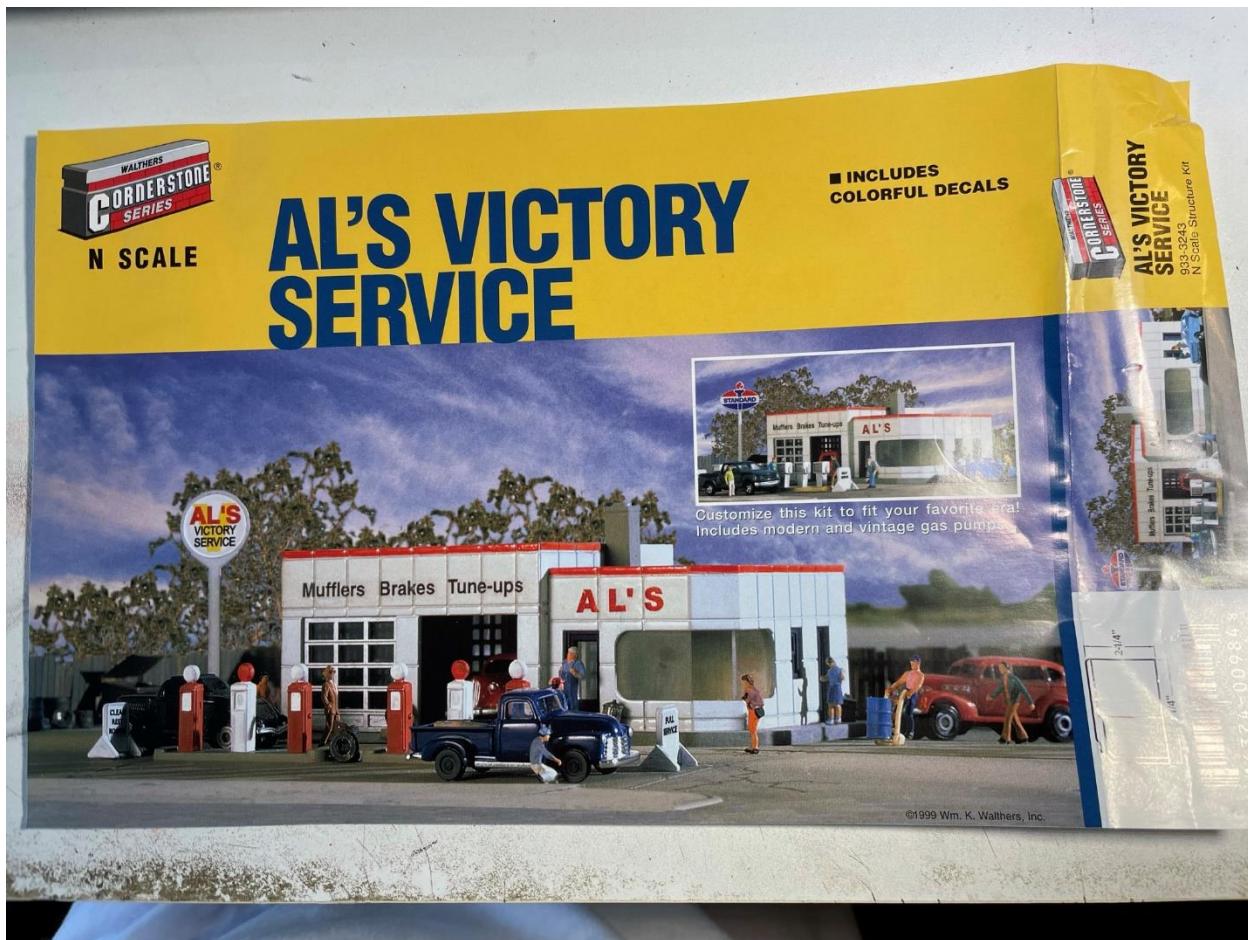
This update discusses building two plastic gas station kits to depict Shell gas stations for the 1950s and 1980s periods. The two scenes fit in the same footprint, and thus can be interchanged when switching the layout between periods. They could appear in either Vermont or Louisiana, so we only had to build two, not four to cover all of the operating scenarios of the N-Circle Railroad!

These scenes include a lot of interior and exterior details, using parts from many sources. Much more than scenes described in previous updates. We also built and detailed vehicle kits from multiple manufacturers to accompany these structures.

Gas Station Kits

We personalized a City Classics Crafton Avenue Service Station kit for the 1950s, using 1950s Shell logos, gas pumps, etc. We used a Walthers Cornerstone Al's Victory Service Station kit for the 1980s, personalized using 1980s Shell logos, gas pumps, etc. With its curved office window and two sections, the Walthers kit looked better for the more modern scene.

[N-Circle_21-10-16_Walthers_AlsVictoryService-1](#)



N SCALE
1/160

CITY CLASSICS

INCLUDES DECALS!

CLASSIC AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE IN MINIATURE



401 CRAFTON AVE. SERVICE STATION
3¹/₄ " L x 2¹/₈ " W x 1¹/₄ " H

INCLUDES:

- TWO GAS ISLANDS WITH PUMPS, OIL RACKS AND LAMPS
- TWO STYLES OF SIGNPOSTS
- SODA AND ICE MACHINES
- FULL COLOR DECALS
- EASY-TO-FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS

FOR AGES 13 AND OVER
FIGURES, VEHICLES, GLUE AND PAINT NOT INCLUDED
SOME PRIOR MODELING EXPERIENCE IS RECOMMENDED

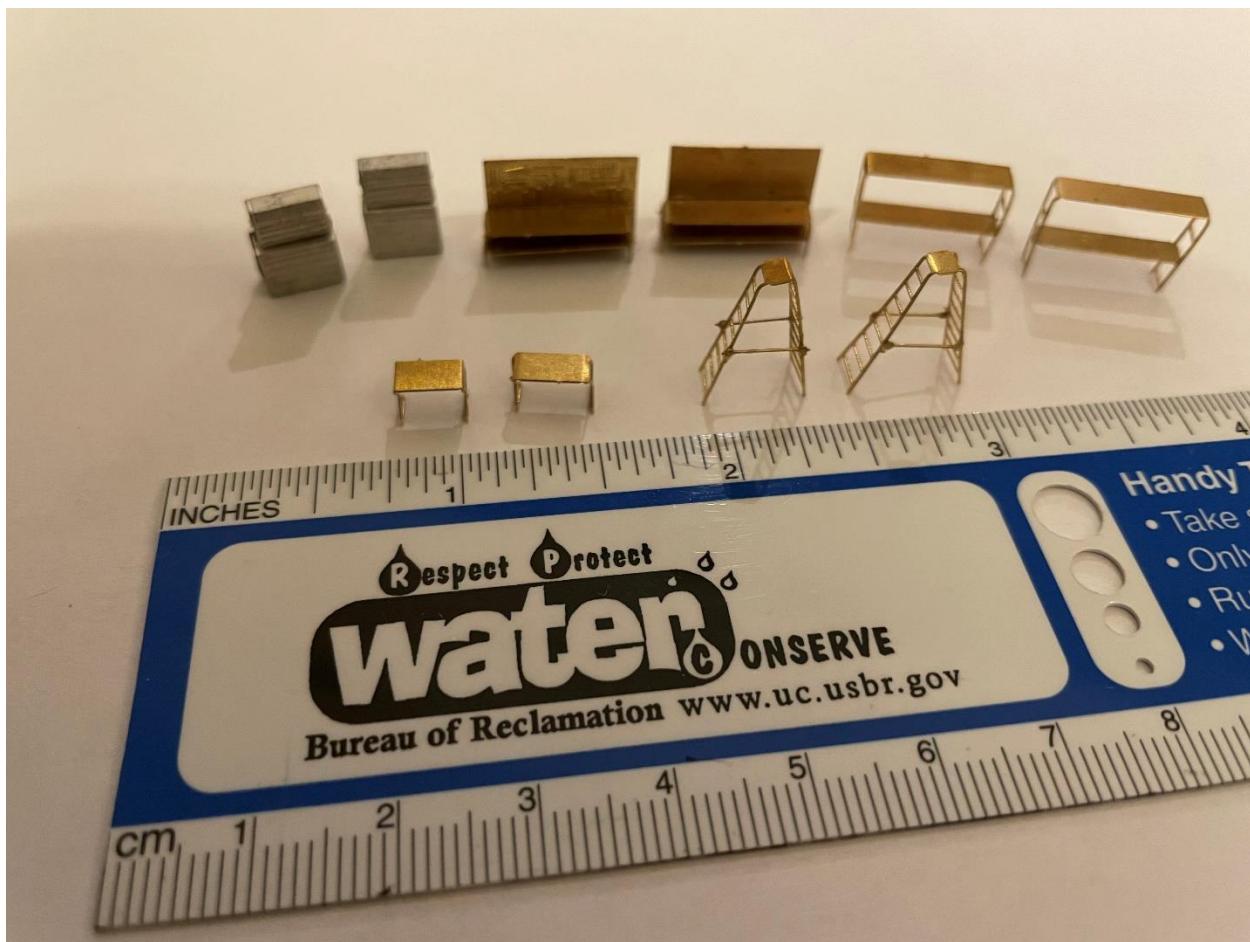
MADE IN USA

The two kits are very similar and have nearly identical footprints. Both structures were simple to build, but we added many detail parts accumulated from many sources over the years in anticipation of building these stations. The painting and attaching of detail parts, vehicles, etc. added many hours to the project. We built both kits in parallel, to optimize the time required for the many steps of painting and decaling.

Interior Detail Parts

Prior to building the stations, I built two sets of the Showcase Minatures Service Station Accessories kit – it is a very nice kit, but it tested the limits of my N-scale modeling skills and patience. The workbenches are made from etched metal and assembled with super-glue – incredibly tiny pieces that must be carefully bent and aligned, but they do work correctly if one is patient. I realized after the glue had set that in the struggle to attach the workbench and shelf, I had the nicely etched rack of tools on the backside of the first tool bench! The second went better. And the four-shelf storage racks became two-shelf racks after struggling to insert just one lower shelf!

[N-Circle_21-11-02_ShowcaseMinatures-GasStationAccessories_2](#)



Like the trucks in the previous N-Circle update, Showcase Miniature kits have the potential to produce very nicely detailed models, in the hands of a skilled modeler...

Structures Build

For the 1980s Walthers kit, I used thinner window glaze than the panels provided in the kit, so interior details will be more visible. I also did not use one garage door insert, to create an open bay through which interior details can be seen.

[N-Circle_21-12-30_1980sShellStation_2](#)



In addition to the Showcase Minatures shelving and ladders, we had various other pewter detail parts for jacks, air compressors, toolboxes and V8 engines which we painted and glued into the garage bays.

We also added many details to the office interiors. We built a counter with a cash register from multi-colored pieces of styrene sprues, then added oil can racks and signage on the back wall, some chairs from the detail parts box, and people figures. As can be seen in these overhead photos of the two during construction, we used basically the same detail parts for both the 1950s and 1980s garages.

We used more decals from the Micro Scale Shell Oil Service Station Signs sets and from Dave's Art for the exterior walls of both stations.

N-Circle_21-12-30_1980sShellStation_1



In the City Classics kit, the garage doors are molded into the wall, not separate inserts like the Walthers kit, so I had to cut out one door with a sharp hobby knife to create an open bay. I then cut off the bottom of the door and cemented it back into the top of the opening, to make the "partially open" doorway more interesting. I also added interior walls from sheets of styrene to create a front office and a back room for the restroom, like the Walthers kit. The City Classics kit only provides a printed sheet of paper to insert as a wall between the garage bays and the office.

Given there are no large windows into the restroom sections of the buildings, I didn't have to find and detail N-scale toilets and sinks!

[N-Circle_21-12-30_1950sShellStation_2](#)



N-Circle_21-12-30_1950sShellStation_1



Gas Pump Islands

The Walthers kit includes gas pumps for multiple time periods, so we used old ball-top pumps for the 1950s, and more modern pumps for the 1980s. Micro Scale produces a nice set of Shell Oil Service Station Signs decals with logos which span both the 1950s and 1980s time periods. Multiple sets of this decal sheet were needed to complete all of the gas pumps and the signs on

the buildings. The decals worked well, however, the logos for the ball top of a 1950s gas pump and the meter face are only about a millimeter across, so very challenging to apply. I used a sharp wooden toothpick to maneuver them into position – I quickly learned that a hobby knife blade is too hard and will easily shred these tiny pieces! As can be seen here, the pumps are only about 10 mm tall, so those decals on them are tiny!

[N-Circle_21-12-06_ShellStations_4](#)



The decals of the oil cans in the rack shredded some and would not stay on, even with a coat of primer paint over the shiny plastic, so I put a thin coat of Krystal Klear over them to keep them in place. A later spray coat of Testor's Dull Cote further stabilized them.

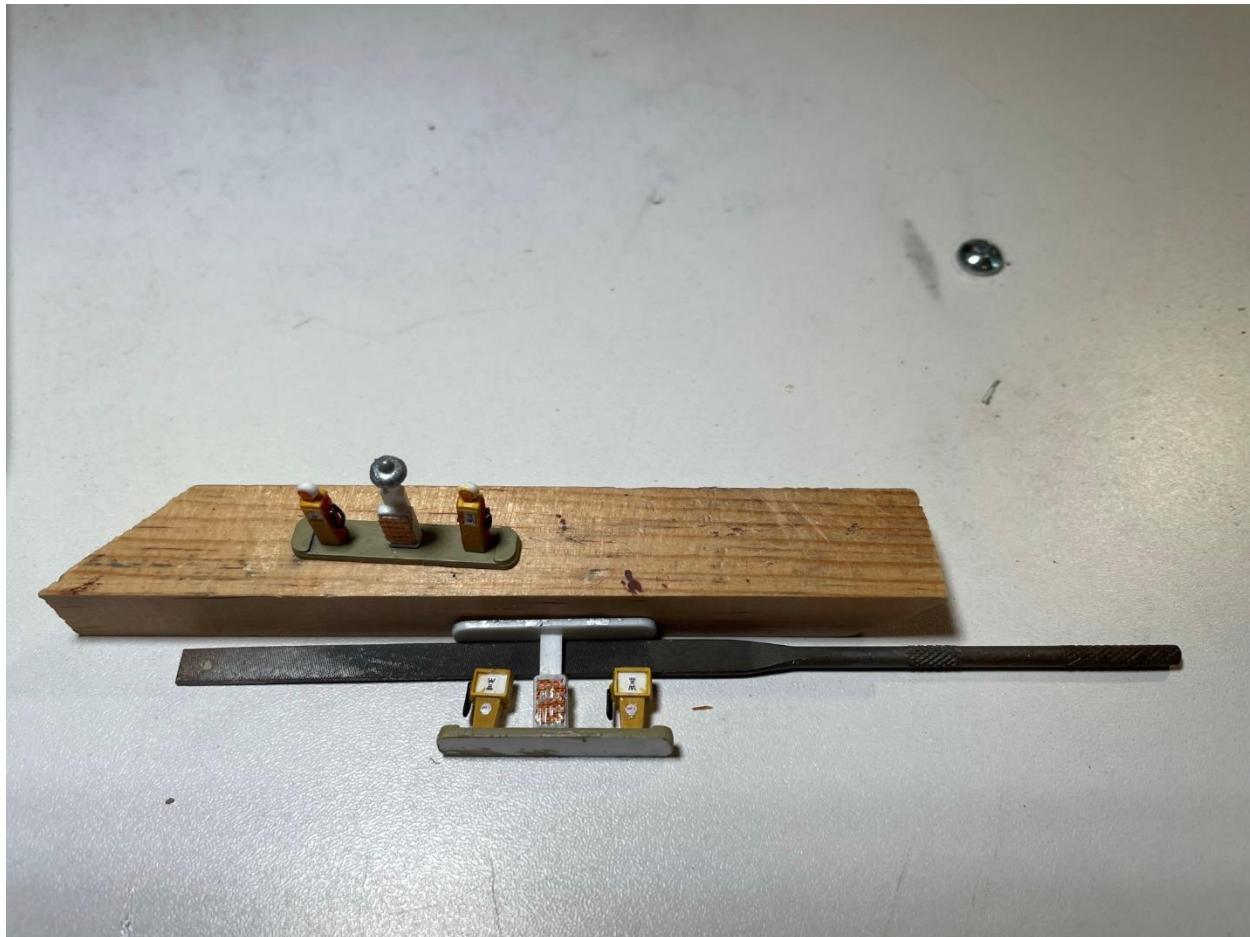
Thin black insulated wire is provided to form the gas hoses, attached to the pumps using super glue.

For the 1950s island, the kit included an extremely small diameter styrene post to support the round lamp – no way that would remain straight and stand up to any handling over time! So I used a rectangular support and notched the top with a sharp hobby knife to taper it to fit the lamp shade.

The 1980s island places a fluorescent lights panel over the pumps. I laid the island unit on its side over a thin file to support the post to align it centered to the underside of the lights panel.

Otherwise, I have no idea how one would get the panel to remain centered and level on the top of the post while waiting for one drop of styrene cement to set...

[N-Circle_21-12-06_ShellStations_1](#)



[Vehicles](#)

The previous N-Circle update discussed building the Showcase Minatures 1950s wrecker truck for these scenes. For the 1980s, I started to build a Road Apples plastic resin 1972 GMC wrecker kit. However, the boom pieces were molded into a thick back plate which broke into

unrecoverable pieces when trying to carefully separate them with a sharp hobby knife. Therefore, this became a general Shell service truck, I added a small tank and fire extinguisher left over from the Con-Cor fuel terminal kits to make an interesting load and disguise the base in the bed where the wrecker boom was to attach.

To replace the Road Apples wrecker, I bought a GHQ Ford F-350 wrecker kit, another manufacturer using pewter metal. This kit is similar in detail and quality to the Showcase Minatures trucks but comes with a good diagram showing how the pieces go together, and some basic instructions. With these, the build was less challenging than with the Showcase Minatures kits. While GHQ showed the placement of the wrecker boom pieces, they nonetheless did not provide any guidance on how to align and glue the boom and the strap at the same time, which would have been very helpful.

The C&C Minatures 1982 Chevy C65 Fuel Delivery Truck is yet another pewter metal kit. It does not come with any instructions, but the pieces for this truck were so simple that no instructions were necessary.

Both the GHQ and C&C Minatures trucks were easier to assemble than the Showcase Minatures, as both designed their pieces with a more pin-in-hole approach, so their placement and alignment was easier. Though neither is an “easy” build, these are still tiny pieces to work with! But if built carefully, they produce nice models.

Finally, I built two plastic tank trucks which appear to have been made by Con-Cor. They were a simple build. I did not use their clear plastic window insert, as it did not fit well, but rather used Krystal Klear in cab windows instead. They will be used in the 1980s fuel terminal and refinery scenes.

N-Circle_22-01-14_ShellTrucks_1



Note the handrails on the sides of the wrecker bed of the 1980s truck in front – they are unimaginably tiny to work with! The kit also came with side mirrors, but I left them off, as the chances of them remaining attached with any subsequent handling are slim. Very, very few N-scale vehicles have side view mirrors, so it will not be a noticeable loss.

When attaching tiny pieces to pewter metal or resin kits using CA cement, the challenge is getting the part in place on the first attempt. If you miss, and the part goes off at an angle and smears the CA on more surfaces of the part and your pliers or tweezers, the piece will then have a much higher desire to stay attached to the implement you are using to guide it into place than to its intended mounting point. Despite having wrestled with this predicament many times in this project, I don't have a ready solution, other than make sure the piece fits exactly before applying glue and have a very sharp eye and steady hand!

During this project, I also built a set of low-quality resin car kits made by NuComp, as some had open hoods which would be useful for placing around the gas stations. These are simple kits: a single molded car body, and the wheels must be cut from a thin sheet of resin with a sharp blade. I used a small conical grinding wheel on a Dremel tool to clean out the wheel wells and level the side of the frame to glue the wheel to. The Dremel worked well for this, I don't know how one would do this manually. Trimming the flash off the tiny wheels was a challenge, I have since thought of a way to clamp the wheels to do this with a Dremel next time.

I used Valejo primer paint to prepare the surfaces, then acrylic paints applied with a brush as with the trucks described previously. Brush painting doesn't come out as smooth as air-brushing, but they came out pretty good, by the ten-foot rule or a fuzzy iPhone photo...

[N-Circle_22-01-14_NuCompCars_1](#)



When painting details on N-scale vehicles, I find there isn't a micro-brush made that's small enough. I resort to a sharp wood toothpick, and to work paint into the corners of windows, etc., I use a sewing pin. The sharp point and stiff shaft of a steel sewing pin provide placement control of tiny drops of paint to match the limits of hand steadiness.

[Assembled Gas Station Scenes](#)

To enable attaching the gas pump island and various signs around the stations, I had to progress beyond the paper and foam-board underlays used in most previous scenes. Therefore, I mounted everything on identical sized 200 x 145 mm sheets of styrene for both stations, painted dark grey for pavement, with sidewalks painted in on the street sides. I beveled the thickness of the styrene where the pavement of the lot meets the surrounding

streets. For the tall sign poles cemented to the lot, I used Dave's Art Decals for both 1950s and 1980s.

I did not cement the roofs to either station, in case any of the interior parts come loose during handling and need to be re-attached, or I want to place cars in the service bays. The roof sections are a snug fit inside the building walls, so they do not have to be cemented to stay in place. I also used double-stick tape to attach the stations to the panels for now, rather than permanent cement.

We added fences along the back of the lots, with some old-style product sign decals on the fences (note Cocoa-Cola for an NWV charter member...). Getting these fences to stay upright when glued to the sheet styrene base would be difficult, so we placed fuel tanks, barrels, etc along the fences, super-glued to both the base and the fence, to provide stability points along their lengths.

Before the final placements, I applied Testor's spray Dull Cote to the stations to protect their decals and paint, and the same to the fences to protect their decals as well. As seen in this photo, I used blue painter's tape to mask the windows first, so I wouldn't frost them and obscure the interior details like I inadvertently did with the Dew Drop Inn discussed in N-Circle Update 10. Once bitten, twice shy!

[N-Circle_22-01-14_ShellStations_1](#)



Here we finally see the two completed scenes. The Woodland Scenics woody wagon with its hood up in the bay obscures the garage interior details in these photos, but you can see the office interior nicely! We have more people figures working on cars to add later in more permanent versions of the scenes. We also will add some vegetation along the fences and use some of the NuComp cars with their hoods up and the Shell fuel delivery trucks, but I did not want to clutter the scene and further block the view of the structures in these photos.

[N-Circle_22-01-14_1950sShellStation_1](#)



N-Circle_22-01-14_1980sShellStation_1



The entire project with the two gas stations, base panels, detail parts and vehicles together took almost 40 hours to complete. Most of that time was in the decaling, detail parts and vehicles, the gas station kits themselves were straightforward to build.

A concluding thought after building these various N-scale plastic kits in the past year: I understand now why there are so many for sale unopened on eBay...building an N-scale kit requires a lot of care and patience! It's one thing to buy and run an N-scale train around a track, it's another to align 1 mm decals to scenery details! But with perseverance, basic kits can be modified to create interesting and unique structures for your layout.

Updated School Scene

We wanted the Shell gas station with all of its details to be the focus scene on Main Street on the north side of the layout, which is the primary viewing side in the room. Therefore, we moved the school scene for the third time, this time to the south side of town, between the freight yard and the new fuel terminal, but still near the residential neighborhoods. But we had to add a fence across the back, to keep the kids from wandering off the playground onto the railroad

tracks! We used a few sections of basic Model Power plastic fence. To keep it upright on foam board without adding pins or some other support into holes in the scenery, we glued it to pieces of green foliage for bushes, similar to the technique used for the fences behind the gas stations. However, here we used white Elmer's glue, so if we want to redo the scene, the fence can be removed and reused by soaking the joints with water.

[N-Circle_22-01-17_SchoolScene_4](#)



To wrap up this part of the story, we see the gas station in place on the corner of Main Street and Home Avenue, with the school in the distance on the south side of town. A Classic Metal Works truck is servicing the ICE box, while a CMW Shell fuel truck is just pulling in. (The two Showcase Minatures 1950s fuel trucks from the previous update are still over at the fuel depot.) The gap between the gas station base and the existing placement of the fire station creates a nice alley to park the Fire Chief's car next to the side door!

[N-Circle_22-01-18_HomeAve_GasStation&School_1](#)



[N-Circle Progress](#)

In the following two concluding overview photos of the N-Circle Railroad from the Northeast and Northwest corners, we see all of the projects described over the past year in place. At this point, approximately 20 of the 24 square feet now have temporary scenery panels, most with structures on them, though limited detail scenery around them. Church and park scenes for the east end cap and a farm scene for the west end cap will complete the first-pass scenery in the coming months.

N-Circle_22-01-17_NorthEast_View



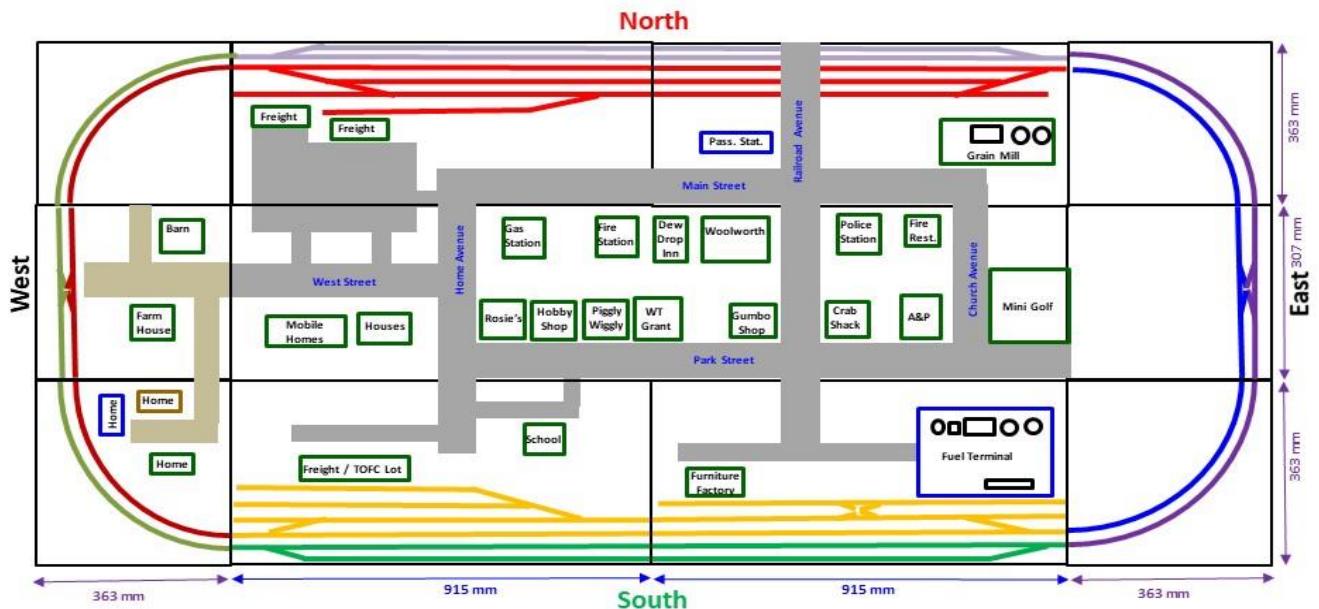
N-Circle_22-01-17_NorthWest_View_1



The following updated diagram shows the current layout of streets and structures on the ever-changing N-Circle layout.

N-Circle Scenery Plan_2022-01-27

N-Circle Railroad T-Trak Scenery Plan



1/27/2022

N-Circle Railroad

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Over the remainder of the winter, when indoor work with styrene cement is an issue, we expect to embark on building laser-cut wood kits, learning new skills for assembly and detailing. We also need to build the electrical control panel, so the yards can hold more trains at a time and we won't have to go around setting all of the turnouts manually.

Wiking Truck Kit-Bash

And a quick bonus story: Over the holidays I purchased a group of N-scale vehicles on eBay. The seller was very nice and included a “bonus” vehicle – a long three-axle Mercedes truck made by Wiking, a German manufacturer. It is a nice model, but as can be seen in the “before” photo, it had a very long nose, which made it clearly not an American truck. Being in the midst of building other vehicles, I embarked on kit-bashing it for more realistic use on the N-Circle Railroad.

I had three truck cabs left over from the Showcase Minatures wrecker and fuel truck kit builds described previously – SCM uses these pewter metal cab inserts to hold the window glaze pieces, but they are not used in the final model. Fortunately, I had saved them in my parts box for just this day...!

[N-Circle_21-12-26_WikingTruck_1](#)



The cab and cargo bed were not glued onto the frame on the Wiking model, they were just press fit, and thus were easy to remove. The nose of the new cab is wider, so the first step was to carefully file the inside of the fenders at an angle to widen the space between them. I then used sprue cutters to remove a section out of the front of the frame, then reglued the bumper onto the frame using CA superglue. The new cab did not have headlights, so in a final act of extremely tiny N-scale work, I cut the headlights off the sides of the hood of the Wiking cab and cemented them on the new cab. I don't know how long they will last, but after multiple attempts, I did get them in place and looking decent...

[N-Circle_21-12-26_WikingTruck_5](#)



After gluing the new cab in place, I painted the cab and bed in orange with red fenders and added Wayne Feeds decals on the bed to create another truck to use with the grain mill scene described previously in N-Circle Update 8.

N-Circle_22-01-02_WikingTruck_1



Voila! A distinctive truck you won't find on any other layout, and a foreign-themed model put to use that may have otherwise stayed in a storage box indefinitely!