

## Lacuna Mines Pty Ltd

After scouring the internet for plans, I came across a plan which tickled my fancy on Mike's Small Trackplans site:

[www.cke1st.com/m\\_train2.htm](http://www.cke1st.com/m_train2.htm).

I have redrawn it for On30 trains.

**Note that this isn't your regular model railway.**

Real little people live on the island and actually do work. They have a conscience. And they are conscious of us big people. And yes I have a fertile imagination.

The Lacuna Mines Pty Ltd is a company formed to exploit the mineral resources on Mt Lacuna. Mt Lacuna is the worlds richest, and most pure, source of ball bearings. Mt Lacuna is a rugged mountain rising above the depths of the Great Inland Ocean, a few miles offshore from Lithgow.

The mountain was formed by volcanic activity many million years ago, so is composed of dense igneous rock. This makes mining very difficult, but since the ball bearings are found in seams, it was not going to be cost effective to simply quarry the island.

To get the ball bearings from the mineshaft, which is near the peak of the mountain, to the wharf, was always going to be difficult. Several ideas were put forth, a self acting

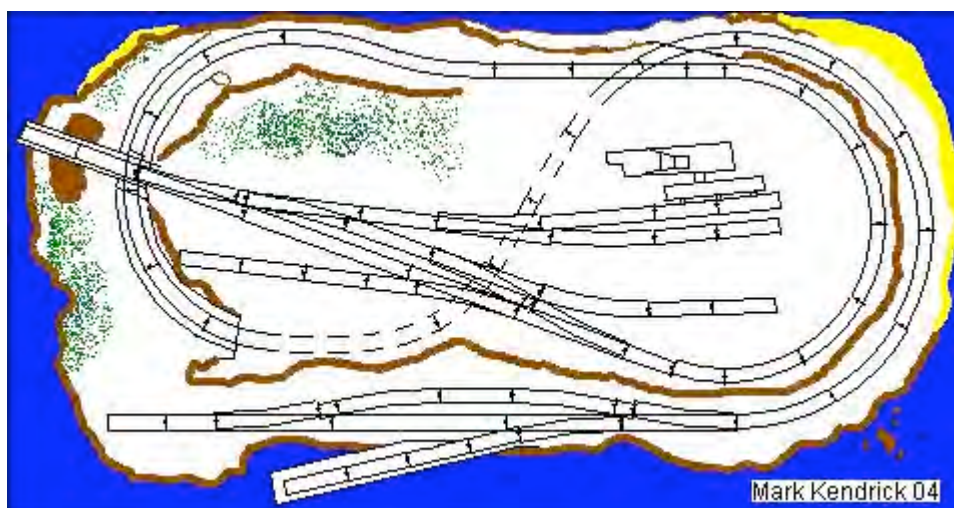
incline, an aerial ropeway, chutes, and a tramway were among the most likely.

The Aerial ropeway was going to be too hard to control on the steep slope, the self acting incline would have to have been too steep , the chutes were going to be too uncontrollable and require high maintenance due to damage from the high speed ball bearings, so that left the tramway.

The only feasible route required enlarging the original horizontal mine shaft through the island for a tunnel, building several viaducts, and some small retaining walls had to be built to keep the rails out of the ocean.

It is often said the reason none of the other methods triumphed over the tramway was because the company director had a secret but deep interest in trains. Luckily, the viaducts were cheap as the stone came straight out of the mine, and after facing the slabs, straight into the viaducts' construction.

The route the tramway took was certainly not direct, circling the island one and a half times and passing through the island in a tunnel. The tramway is on a constant grade (fortunately with the load) from the summit down to the beach just before the wharf, and the grade is thought to be about 1 in 20.



### Particulars

Gauge: 16.5mm

Scale: O (On30)

Minimum Radius: 12"

All Points: #4

Layout Size: 1800x1000mm

Maximum Grade: 1 in 20 (5%)

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The following quotes are extracted from A Chat with an Old Timer, published 1934.

"Lucky the island is kept indoors, or else we would be in danger of flooding, severe storms and cyclones, and the ravages of hungry birds.

"It's a battle between man and machine, our machines digging the ball bearings out of the hill and carrying them to the wharf, and the big man who keeps on putting them back into our mine. Luckily due to the scarcity of our product, the prices are so high the few ball bearings we do get to market cover the immense costs of the mining venture.

"The ocean used to be quite palatable, unlike the other oceans of the world. It was only a few years ago that someone discovered the water wasn't really water, and the boat was stuck fast. But that gave us a way to get around the big man and allowing us to get the ball bearings to our customers. We accidentally-on-purposely spill a few balls when we are loading into the ship, the spills just sit on the water surface. As long as we keep filling the hold of the ship we are okay, the big man never suspects anything. After nightfall, someone gathers the spills and using our surface craft takes them to the mainland to sell.

"The old fisherman by the rock shelf reads too much. He is often told that there are no fish in our ocean, yet he keeps on fishing. It seems he read a book once that said that there were plenty more fish in the sea. He even found an old book on how to fish, but no matter how patient he is he just never has any luck. Someone visits him once a week and leaves him with a weeks supply of food to keep him alive.

"Since the ship is stuck fast, it is fortunate that we never have to refuel our locomotive. While there is an ample supply of coal in the bunker, the loco is actually powered through the rails! It means one man control is easy, as no-one needs to fill the boiler on the difficult uphill run.

"We very nearly lost the entire population early in the history of the mine, starvation was occurring due to slow boats in the thickening water. Some enterprising young lads started harvesting eggs from the seabirds' nests along the cliffs, but as the birds are whitemetal, the eggs contained a large amount of lead, and the whole population had to be hospitalised for lock jaw. Luckily we woke up to the cause rather quickly, and changed our diets to suit. And very luckily, the doctor doesn't like egg so he wasn't affected."

### A tour of the Island

Upon the ships arrival at the island, a magnificent spectacle is to be seen, rising proudly out of the water, the sparsely vegetated outcrop looms like an ancient monolith to millennia past.

The first sign of man's intrusion is the wharf, a robust, though none-too-large, stone and timber construction endlessly caressed by the ocean's gentle waves. Past the ore bins the little steam train quietly simmers, its deep blue paint sparkling like the ocean. The cliffs rise sheer behind the small wharf, seemingly touching the sky. To our left the tiny tram tracks snake along the waters edge.

We board our dainty train at the low stone platform. Two shrill whistles from the engine and we are on our way. Our little train gently rolls below the massive cliffs, the golden sand of a small beach between us and the ocean. The kind guard tells us the surf is rather weak, but the sand is always warm and quite suitable for sunbathing. The beach gives way to a stone retaining wall followed very closely by the tunnel. The train now has to work hard as the rest of the trip is on quite a steep grade. The tunnel is only moments in length, as soon the dark gives way to bright sunshine again as we traverse the line's viaduct.

Tall and imposing, the viaduct hugs the cliff before momentarily ducking beneath another section of rail line. The overhead section is supported on one end by an outcropping standing alone on its rock shelf. The viaduct dissolves into a low cut before our tiny barking engine pulls our train over the tunnel mouth we just entered. Here the tramway repeats itself, though at a much higher level. Looking down we can see the golden sand once again, and the shiny ribbons of steel as we circuit high above on the cliff top.

Looking to our right the mine with its tall headframe rises beside the summit, and the town of Lacuna approaches. Our diminutive engine cannot rest yet however, as it must shunt the empty wagons to the mine and collect the loaded wagons for the next trip. And for this, the engine's crew must gather their courage, for the engine and train must

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forward over the timber span to the outcrop we previously passed beneath in order to shunt the mine.

After the shunting is over, the engine then retires to its house, and after preparing the locomotive for rest, the crew wanders down to the Hotel for a meal.

The town is small, only five or six buildings, comprising the Hotel, General Store, Bank, Butcher, Baker and a tiny Post Office, smaller than our carriage we rode on the train. Several small shanties can be seen clustered further down the hill amongst the few trees, where some of the miners live.

Unlike miners on the mainland, the miners here are respectable and could be mistaken as being of a higher class than is usual for men of such trade.

The Hotel is the centre of the community, and while alcohol is not available on the island, the Hotel manages to provide excellent meals and drinks, which keep the folks very happy. A range of social activities are available at the Hotel too, such games as darts, billiards and card games allows the locals to improve their talents (rather than gamble, which is frowned upon by all islanders).

Once a week classes are held too, such as painting, dancing, sculpting and other forms of art and craft. Dancers can practise most evenings after dinner, and the whole population usually participates. The General Store stocks everything the community needs, from clothing to cookware, medicine to music, tools to timber. If someone requires something that isn't held in stock, the Store keeper will have it within a week. Prices are very reasonable too.

The Butcher and the baker are everyone's friends, the butcher receives a live animal each week, whatever doesn't sell the morning of the slaughter is preserved in the butchers smokeroom and salting equipment. The Baker has bread baked every morning, as well as many tasty treats and also stocks the islands supply preservatives, as fruit preservation is a hobby of the baker.

The Post Office is a tiny single room building,

built from thick stone from the mines, just as the rest of the buildings are. The mail is only received from the mainland once each week, so the Post Office is only open one day each week.

The Bank is very important since pay is received from the bank each week, but more so because the banker is a former policeman, so it is he who keeps peace within the community.

Not that there is ever any trouble on the island, but he oversees all competitions and anything disagreements are solved by the banker. If an art contest requires judging, the banker is the judge. If two people can't agree on whether the ocean is blue or if it is clear, the banker gives the correct answer. The Banker's word is final. The Banker really is the pillar of the community.

The miner's shanties are rather small, but comfortable. Each is provided with appropriate bedding, tables and chairs, bookshelves and cupboards, and all feature paintings by the owner. Art is very strong in this community.

The Mine itself is the tallest building on the island. Built of both stone and timber, the mine comprises the headrig, small ore bins, offices, a blacksmith, a tiny sawpit, water tower and a bunkroom.

The blacksmiths is a 3 sided timber building, with a flat stone floor covered in sand.

The Ore bins are timber, and rise to nearly the same height as the headrig. The sawpit is not used too often anymore, as most of the timber on the island has been cut-out to construct the various buildings of the town.

Recently, as the mine has expanded, whole timber logs have been imported from another nearby island, and sawn into pit props. Due to the unpleasant nature of working in a sawpit, the miners take turns, each man having a go at sawing while the others mine.

The mine is named 'Lacuna', which is loosely translated from Italian to English as 'Empty'.

Lacuna came from a band called Lacuna Coil whom I listen to repeatedly cos its great stuff.