

Modelling Cane Railways

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16

Modelling
Sugar Cane
Part 2

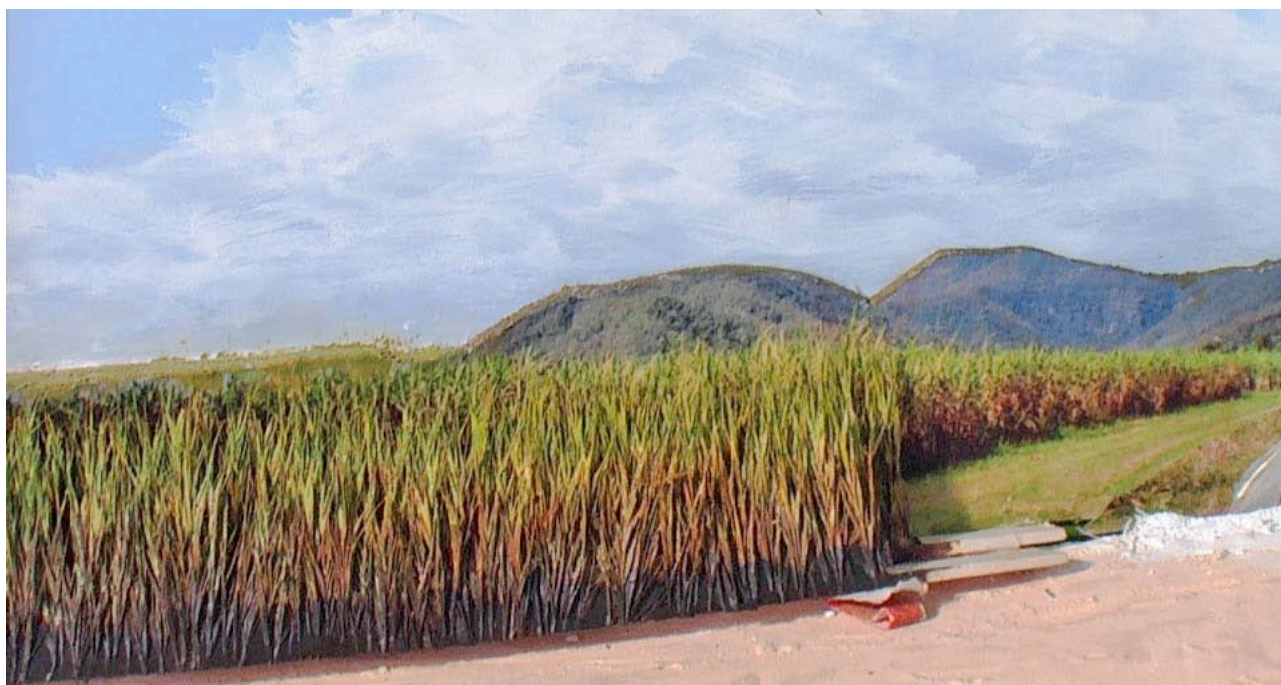
CaneSIG: <http://www.zelmeroz.com/canesig>

Modelling Sugar Cane

Number 6 in this Handbook series, *Modelling Sugar Cane*, describes a method of modelling cane fields using the fine straw from high quality brooms and Asian whisks. It looks reasonable in HO scale (1:87, 3.5mm = 1'), but the technique is probably better used in O scale (1:48, 1/4" = 1' or 1:43: 7mm = 1'),

Yarra Grass

especially if fine dried grasses or flowers are added. This article describes several other techniques, primarily Don Fraser's use of Yarra Grass, Ron Aubrey's suggestion for using She Oak needles, and modelling cane fields on the backdrop.



Don Fraser has here combined his Yarra Grass sugar cane models with the cane fields on a photograph background. Don mixed paint colours to match the cane growing in his background photos. Further details of how he created the cane fields follow, the clouds have been hand painted on the sky backdrop. All photos in this section provided by Don Fraser, © 2005.

Creating a realistic model sugar cane field is somewhat of a 'holy grail' for sugar cane railway modellers. Materials used include fake 'fur', coir mats (either in mat form or teased out into individual 'plants'), unbraided natural rope and similar craft materials, various straws, and commercial grass products. Most of these methods are time-consuming and all have some disadvantages, but none are as expensive as using individual etched brass 'plants' as is sometimes done by American modellers for their corn fields.

Don Fraser has developed the most realistic low-cost method for making cane fields to date.

1. He first harvests Yarra grass when in flower and selects the most life-like grass, such as those on the left side of the photo at right.



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2. While the grass is still fresh and green cut each piece to roughly 10 cm long for HO scale.



5. ...and fold the ends over to fix the tape, sticky side up, along the bottom of a sheet of A4 paper.



3. Cut a length of sticky tape to about 290mm (length of long side of sheet of A4 paper).



6. Avoiding the tape, mark 4cm. (about 10ft. in HO scale) from the sticky edge on the A4 paper...



4. With sticky side up, add short lengths of tape (sticky side down) to each end...



7. ...and rule a line 4 cm from the edge across the paper as a height guide.

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8. Place pieces of grass on sticky tape, maintaining a slightly random height above and below the 4 cm guide mark.



11. Prop the sheet of taped grass up and place balsa strip under the grass.



9. Complete this along the full length of tape with a random thicknesses as well as height.



12. Use white glue and press through the grass to secure to the balsa strip.



10. Cut 2mm thick balsa into 300mm x 12mm strips.



13. When completely dry carefully remove the grass strip from the sticky tape and roughly trim off excess grass.

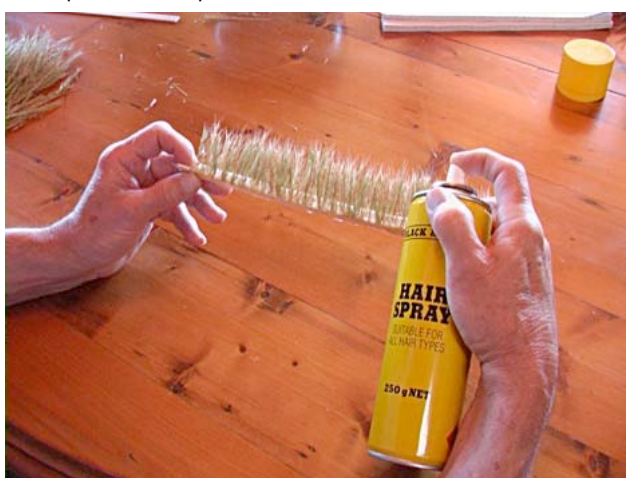
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14. Turn over and trim grass down to bottom of balsa with a sharp knife or scalpel.



17. Note how the painted cane strips match the colours of the cane in the photographic backdrop.



15. Thoroughly spray front and back of grass with hair spray.



18. Some finished rows of grass painted to resemble a field of cane. Note how the balsa strip holds them upright. The balsa strips would have to be cut or broken and the rows bent to fit irregular shaped fields.



16. When hair spray is completely dry, paint in appropriate colours with water based paint. See page 1 photo to see how Don matched colours in his photographic backdrop.



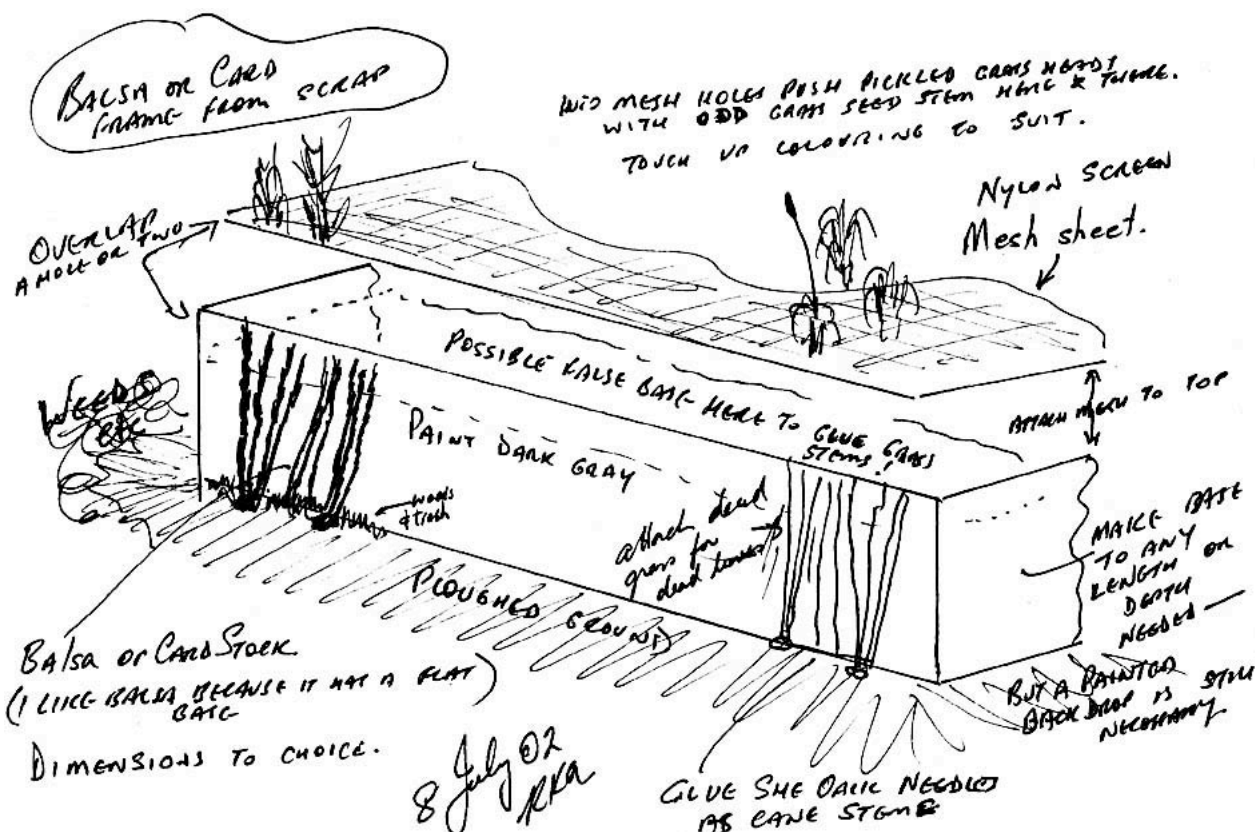
19. Don's cane roughly positioned before completing the plaster scenery.

Adapting to Other Scales

Don's technique was developed for HO scale modelling, however it should also work quite well for the various O scales by increasing the height of the plants. A less mature field would be shorter and

wouldn't have the same feathery flowers on top. A recently harvested field could be modelled in the same way with short stems, rather than tops. In any event, match your colours and textures to photos.

Will She Oak Needles Work?



Ron Aubrey has experimented with a variety of techniques for making cane fields. This box method potentially eliminates the tedium of making a large number of rows of cane. Unfortunately, he couldn't provide any photos of his experiment as his glycol soaked sample and prepared, but unused, materials were all eaten by vermin. It would be interesting to see what could be done combining the two techniques above.

Cane Fields at The Workshops Rail Museum, Ipswich



The QR layout at *The Workshops Rail Museum* includes a cane train running to a sugar mill and a train of sugar bins to deliver the sugar to the port. The cane fields are representative, rather than fully realistic and appear to be a coir or similar mat with coloured flock on the top surface. Realism would be greatly enhanced by some attempt at defining the typical row structure of a field.



Most exhibition layouts seen at the *Brisbane Miniature Train Show* also use similar techniques for their cane fields, at least partly as a result of the time required to more accurately model rows of cane.

Modelling Fields on the Backdrop

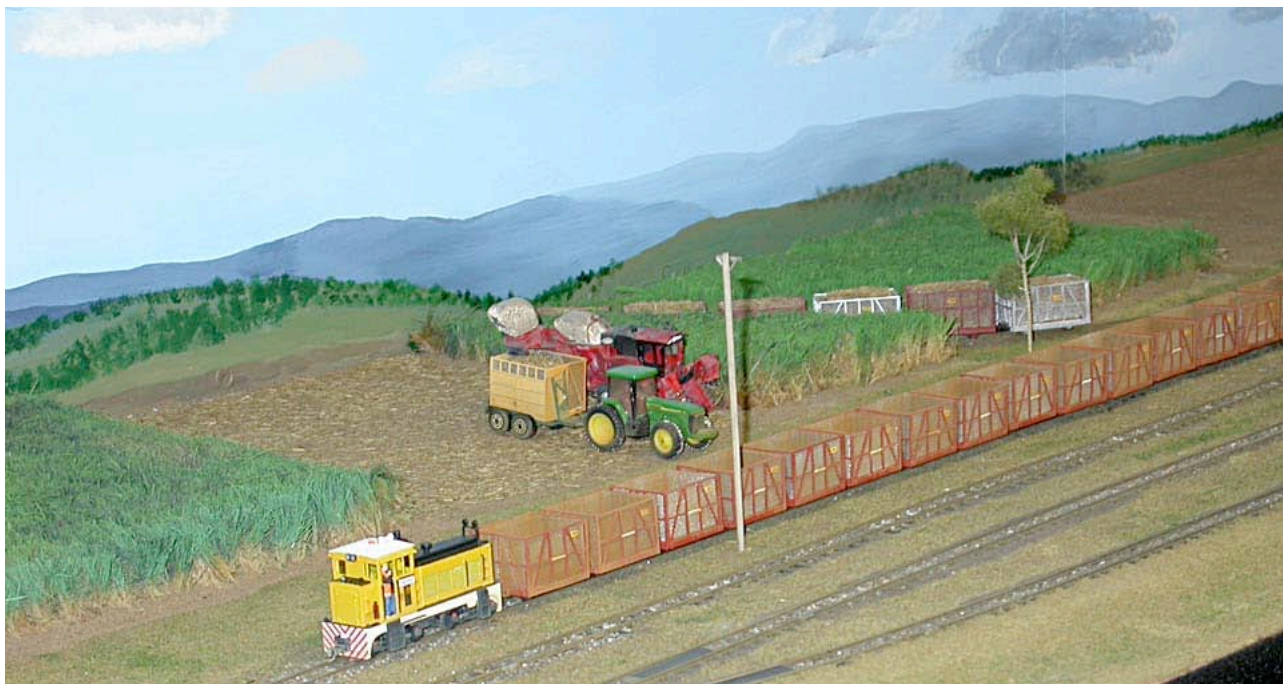
Most home and exhibition layouts will be too small to include any large sugar cane fields (or mills for that matter). Portraying them on the backdrop is a reasonable alternative.

Some modellers will have artistic skills that allow them to paint fields, mills and other features on the backdrop but photography will have to do for the rest of us. Lincoln Driver's *Wallville* on the next page combines modelled fields and painted backdrop on

an exhibition railway, while Don Fraser provides an example of a photo backdrop (above).

The Maryborough image on the next page started as a digital photograph but was then manipulated in *Photoshop* to give it a 'watercolour' appearance. It's necessary to carefully shoot such photographs to ensure that they have a consistent (and appropriate) sun angle, etc., but they can often be digitally combined to create quite long panorama images.

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Wallaville, at the 2005 Brisbane Miniature Train Show, combines painted backdrop and foreground cane fields.



This Maryborough image was used as the backdrop for a convention diorama and has both a cane field in the foreground and the mill in the background. The image was sized/printed so that the standing cane was an appropriate height for the models in front.

Many of the mills can be seen from some distance because of their distinctive stack(s). Use a tripod and overlap the images by at least 25% when shooting a series of photos for a panorama view. Commercial facilities exist in most cities and larger towns to print the resulting images on roll paper. Ensure that the printed image is protected with a matte laminate to help preserve the colours and remember to colour the resulting edges if you cut off the sky to glue the photos onto a painted sky backdrop.