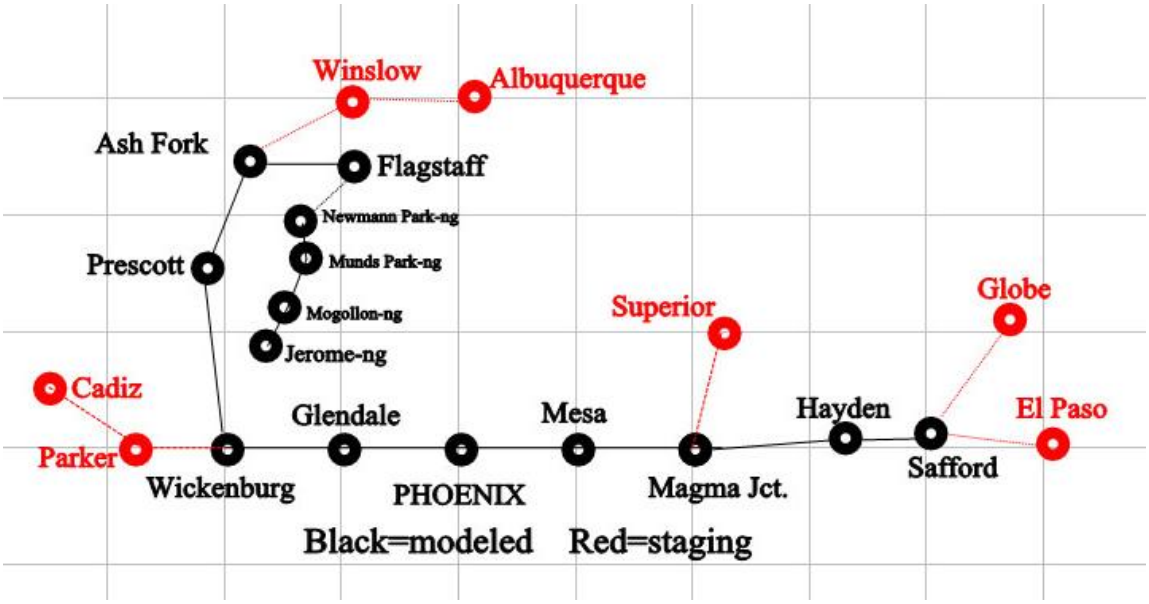
Scottsdale Model Railroad Historical Society

The Story of Our Railroad

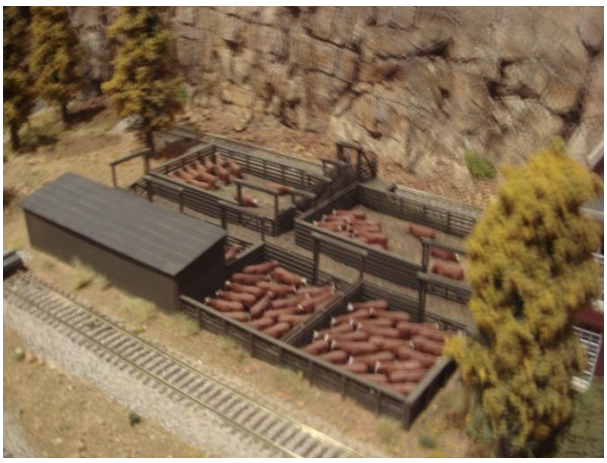
It was late in the 19th century and the citizens of Phoenix were chafing under the cloud of being the new territorial capital but without mainline railroad service. The Santa Fe arrived on a branch line from its northern Arizona mainline as did the Southern Pacific from its southern Arizona mainline. Both lines ended in Phoenix. The movers and shakers in Phoenix got together with the Santa Fe to build a line up the Gila River canyon through Hayden and Safford. This line would crest the continental divide east of Safford at 3,500 feet, making it the lowest crossing of the divide in the US. The line would then proceed into New Mexico and Texas to join the Santa Fe lines there. This would give the Santa Fe a second transcontinental with a low level grade that would avoid the long steep climbs required to cross northern Arizona. It also placed Santa Fe squarely in competition with Southern Pacific who fought Santa Fe in and out of court for decades. Eventually the Corps of Engineers built the Coolidge Dam creating San Carlos Lake, thus ending all thoughts of running a rail line through the Gila River canyon.

But we did it. In our HO scale world, Santa Fe won in court and the Corps of Engineers never built Coolidge Dam. So our railroad consists of a line from Cadiz California to Phoenix via Parker, Wickenburg, and Glendale continuing on to El Paso via Mesa, Magma Jct., Hayden, and Safford. There is a line from Wickenburg to Ash Fork and Flagstaff via Prescott that provides access to Albuquerque and the east. A branch line runs to Superior from Magma Jct. The four lines from Wickenburg to LA, Ash Fork to Albuquerque, Magma Jct. to Superior, and Safford to Globe and El Paso are represented by staging. We added a narrow gauge line from Jerome to Flagstaff. This represents part of a line proposed by Senator W. A. Clark, owner of the copper mine and smelter in Jerome. He felt that the Santa Fe was overcharging for coal so he wanted to build a line from Jerome to Durango, Colorado to tap the coal mines in that area. This gives us a dual gauge interchange yard in Flagstaff reached via our version of a standard gauge branch line from Ash Fork.



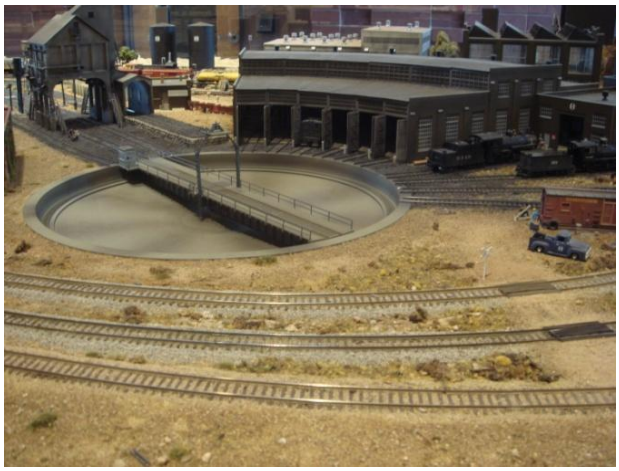
Town by town, starting in the east, we find the rural, farming town of Safford. There we see typical farm related industries in an arid valley landscape. The lines from El Paso and Globe arrive here from staging. From Safford the line travels through the Gila River canyon with steep cliffs above and below. From time to time the river is depicted far below. At the outlet of the canyon, we enter Hayden where the smelter dominates the scene. Many spurs feed the various functions of the smelter. The next town is Magma Junction, which has a small mine and a mining supply warehouse for industries. The rail line to Superior braches off here to staging. We arrive in Mesa and find many agricultural industries and a few other industries typical of small towns.

Mine facilities in Magma Junction

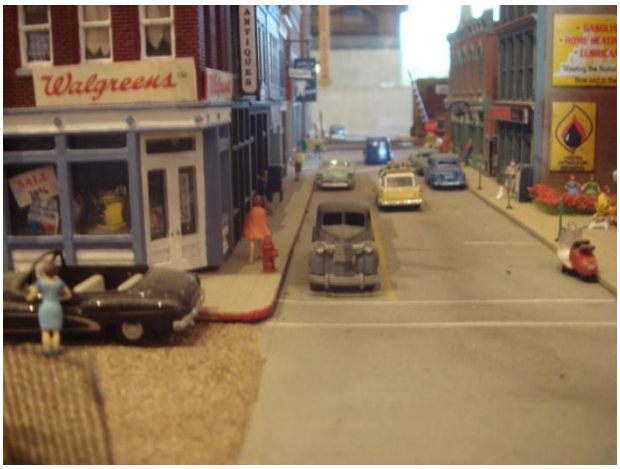


Mesa stock yards

Phoenix has a major classification yard and three industrial districts. There is a large engine service facility with ample space for steam and Diesel engines. There is an interchange yard where cars are exchanged with the Southern Pacific. At the west end of the yard is a section of downtown Phoenix which includes the Westward Ho Hotel. Alongside the tracks you can see the Arizona Brewing Company much as it looked in 1955.

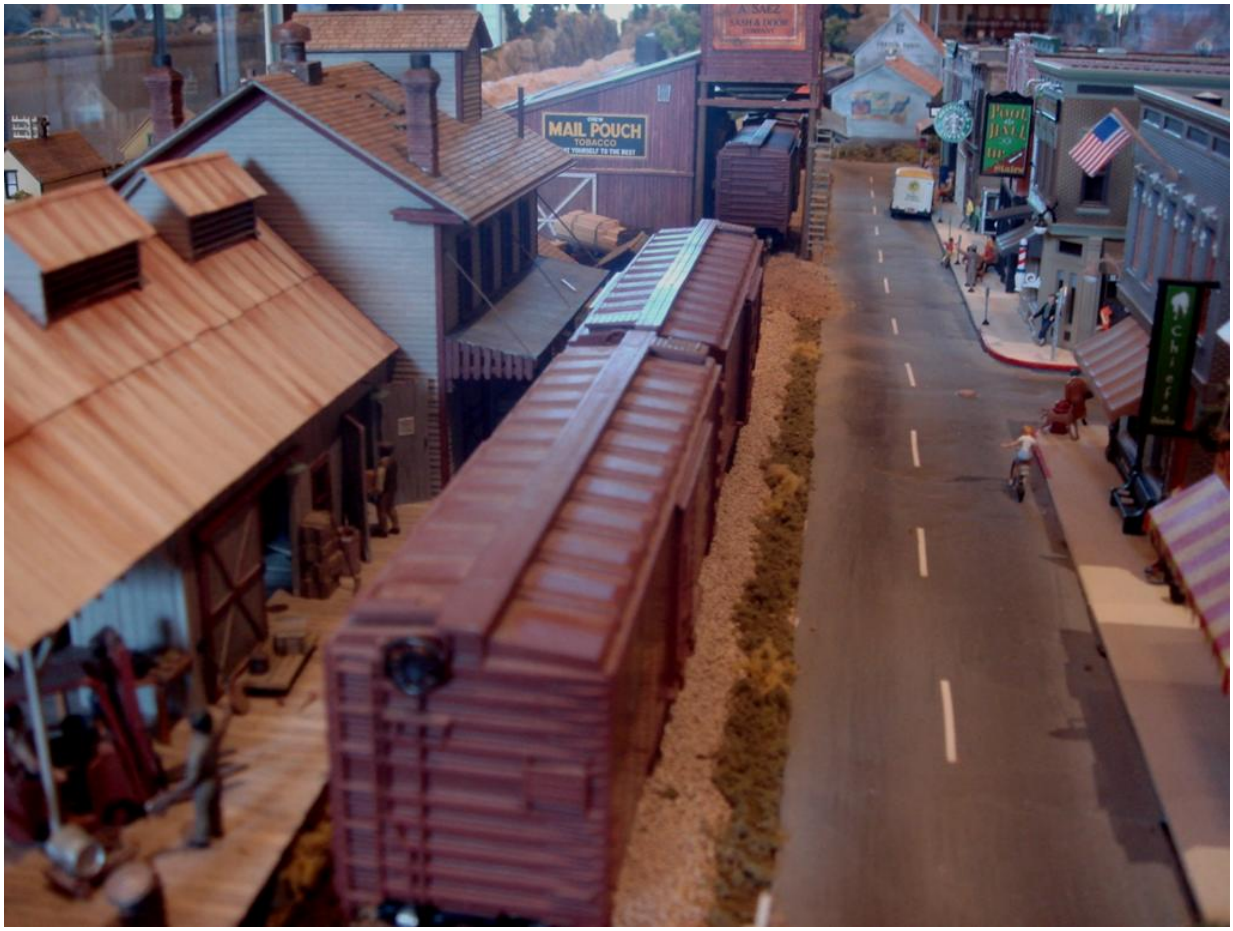


Phoenix steam engine facilities.



Downtown Phoenix.

The town of Glendale is next and is dominated by the beet processing plant which was modeled after the real thing. Other industries typical of small towns are scattered on both sides of the main. Wickenburg is at the end of a section of double track from Glendale and includes the junction of the line to LA, via staging, with the line to Ash Fork. The Wickenburg industrial district is up a hill and reached by a switchback. A large coal mine dominates the west end and a sausage plant with stock yard is at the east end. Various small industries fill the center. We then enter the line to Ash Fork known as the Pea Vine for the way it clings to the side of the hills like a vine as it climbs into the Arizona high country. Prescott and Ash Fork are in ranching country so stock pens and feed dealers outnumber the other industries. Ash Fork also has a small engine facility to handle the branch line power that serves Flagstaff. The line from Albuquerque arrives here from staging.



A busy morning in Wickenburg.

Passengers await the train in Prescott.

The standard gauge branch line out of Ash Fork takes us upgrade to Flagstaff, a large town with extensive dual gauge track to serve the interchange traffic between the standard and narrow gauge. For interchange, the narrow gauge brings limestone, timber, cattle and copper from Jerome. The standard gauge brings coal, oil, mining supplies and ore from Superior. A large saw mill process timber.

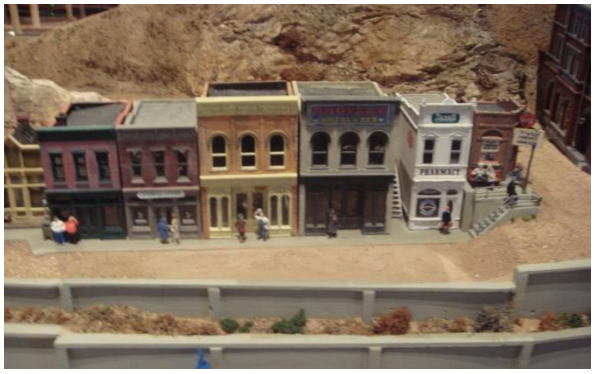
The Ash Fork station and rail yard.

The branch line to Flagstaff crosses the trestle in the upper left.

The narrow gauge out of Flagstaff crosses the canyon higher up on a delicate trestle.

The narrow gauge climbs south out of Flagstaff up on to the Mogollon Plateau and passes through the small community of Newman Park with livestock facilities and a limestone quarry. Next, a logging branch connects at Munds Park, which also has a tourist hotel. The narrow gauge then climbs to a summit before heading downgrade to Mogollon where there is a log transfer facility. Finally, the narrow gauge terminates in Jerome which has a copper mine and smelter among its industries. The town of Jerome clings to the hillside as in real life.

Water tank and buildings in Newman Park.



Jerome perches on the hillside.

We hope you have enjoyed this, the second article in our series describing our model railroad. In future issues we will cover the topics of:

Design process from concept to detailed plans

Bench work, roadbed and track

Scenery design and construction

Electrical systems

Computer systems and automatic trains

Prototype operations

For more information, visit: therailroadpark.com, scottsdalemrhs.org (HO scale), sun-n-sand.org (N scale), pandprr.com (O gauge) and scottsdalelivesteamers. com (7-1/2 inch gauge).