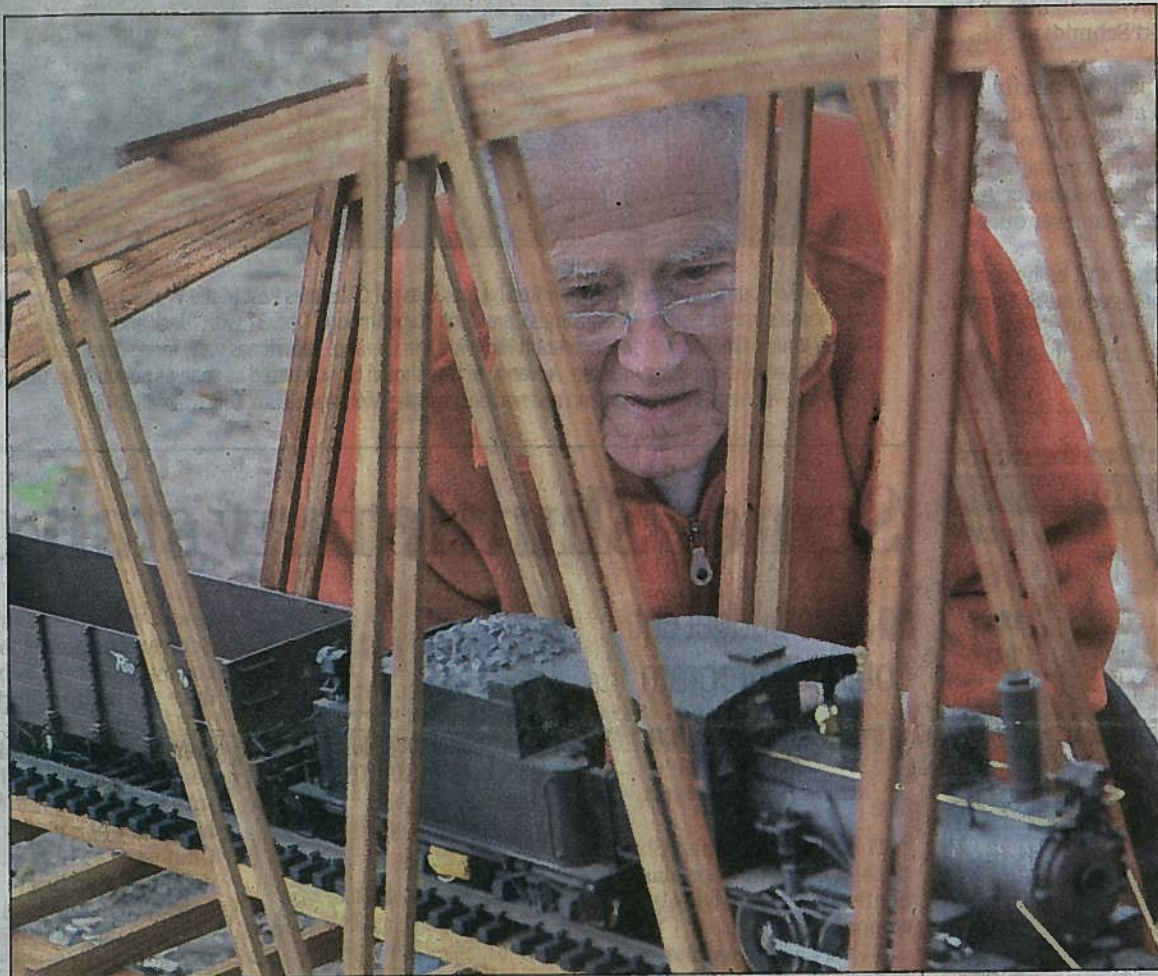


Addicted to rails



Phil Klein/Contributor

Bill Foster spends about 10 hours a day working on a G-scale railroad in rural Arroyo Grande. He just completed a 22-foot bridge, above.

Nipomo's PB&J Railroad lines under reconstruction in AG

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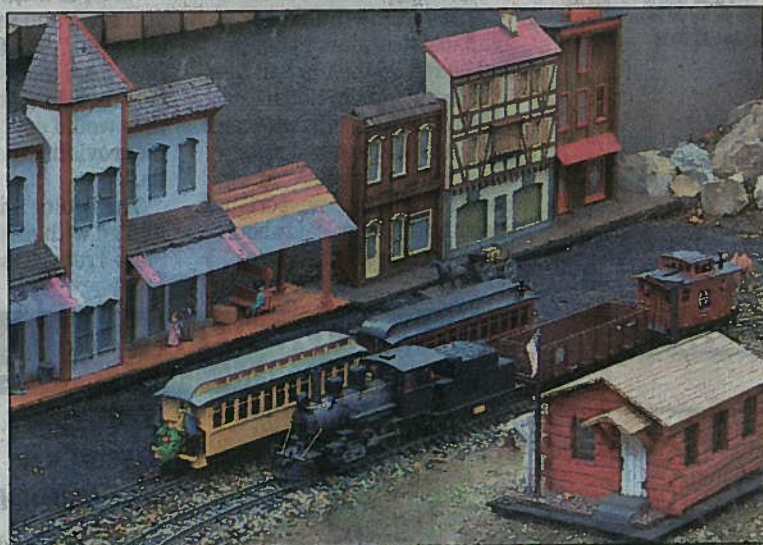
Whether it's in Nipomo, Arroyo Grande or even Kansas, the Foster family's railroads must roll.

That's why the third — and most complex — version of the Pacific Bill & Jamie Railroad is now under construction on a hillside in rural Arroyo Grande, where Jamie Foster and his father, Bill, are rebuilding the G-scale railway in Jamie's yard.

Jamie's first rail line popped up in 2000 in his backyard in Arroyo Grande. Visiting from Kansas, Bill surveyed the yard and told Jamie it would be a good site for a layout.

"Three days later when I came home from work, I looked down and track was being laid," Jamie said.

In its second incarnation, from about 2005 to 2007, the PB&J rolled along the rails next to a 7.5-inch



line off Camino Caballo in Nipomo, where the trains frequently drew the attention of passers-by, especially children.

"The kids would walk by and stop and look when the trains were

running," Jamie said. "We'd say, 'Come on down and watch.'"

While the 7.5-inch line circled the house, the PB&J occupied just

Rails: Allure for Foster is in the challenge of building the layout

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a corner of the lot, connecting the village of Fosterville with a mine, a farm and the Shamokin Rail Yard.

The "G" in G-scale stands for "garden," and Bill noted you either build the layout in an existing garden or you build the railroad and design the garden around it.

Although such layouts properly should be landscaped with plants and miniature trees proportionate to the scale, Jamie said it was tough to grow anything in the soft sand of the Nipomo Mesa. So Bill laid down some artificial turf.

"The next time I came out to visit, it was gone," Bill said with a chuckle. "He'd ripped it out."

When the Fosters moved to rural Arroyo Grande in 2007, the 7.5-inch line was left behind because terrain at the new site was too rugged for the larger scale.

But the PB&J was dismantled and has now been under reconstruction a little over a year at what the Fosters call the Oak Way Division.

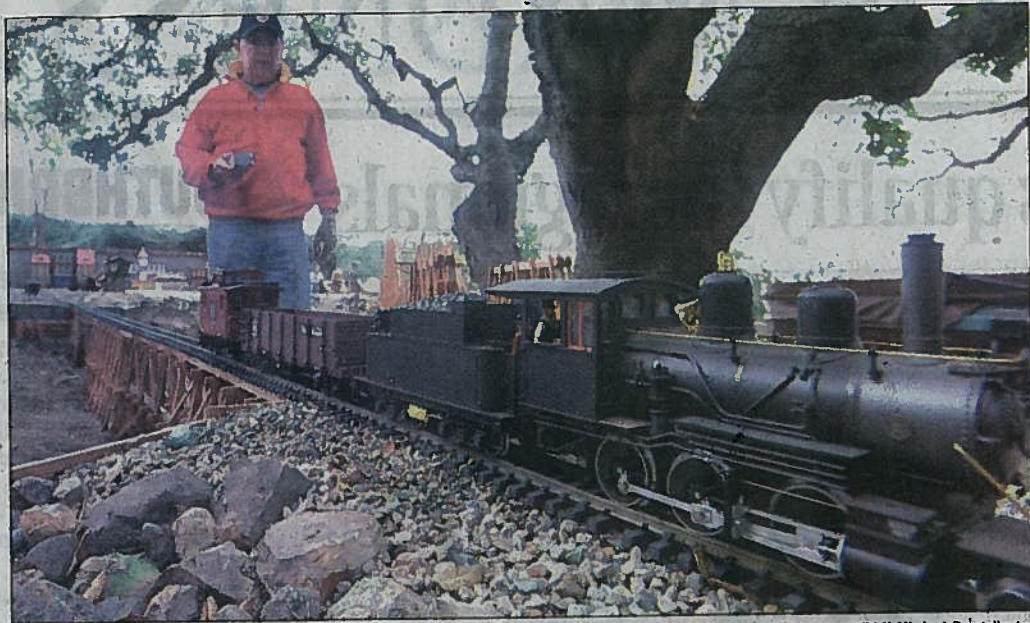
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So far, the new layout is a short line — 50 to 75 feet running down one side of the house and looping through a village. Eventually, it will extend through a breezeway to the other side of the house and make another loop through a farm scene.

But the short length belies the hundreds of hours it's taken to create its many details — like the hobo camp beneath one of the two bridges, which in themselves are feats of engineering.

"Every railroad has to have a hobo camp," Bill explained.

Jamie is quick to point out almost all the work on the rail line and village has been done by his father, who comes to California twice a year for a monthlong visit.



Phil Klein/Contributor

Bill Foster works the remote controls for the G-scale railroad train in his son's backyard in Arroyo Grande.

To find out more

■ Learn about the current and former PB&J Railroad lines and find railroading links at www.jf2.com/r.

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Just like those railroad barons, the Fosters have invested a considerable amount of money in the PB&J, although Bill and Jamie are reluctant to calculate exactly how much.

But consider: A good-quality G-scale engine costs about \$500. Adapting it to battery power and radio control can drive the cost up to \$700 to \$1,500 — and Jamie has four engines, although one is an inexpensive model reserved for children's use.

He also has 20 or 30 freight and passenger cars that cost \$50 to \$200 each, and the track runs about \$1 a foot. When it reaches its full length, the PB&J line will total 200 feet or more.

"You do the math," said Jamie, adding that much of the layout is being recycled from the two previous PB&Js.

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So what prompts a couple of adults to spend so much time, effort and money building — and rebuilding — a miniature

railroad? Bill admits he's a "railroad addict," and Jamie calls himself an "addiction enabler."

"I've had railroads all my life. We've always had a layout, in the basement or wherever," explained Bill, who is 82 and has his own G-scale railroad — the Foster & Sisco — in his backyard in Prairie Village, Kan.

For him, the allure is the challenge of building the layout — especially on rough terrain.

"That's the fun part, when you stand there and scratch your head — 'How am I going to do this?'" he said.

Jamie expects the PB&J's Oak Way Division to be completed in "a couple of years," but he said it will never be finished.

"A railroad layout is never done," he said. "If you do get it done, you rip something out and redo it."

As Bill explained, "Once it's done, you can run the trains. But the process of putting it together is the thing. It's the journey, not the destination."