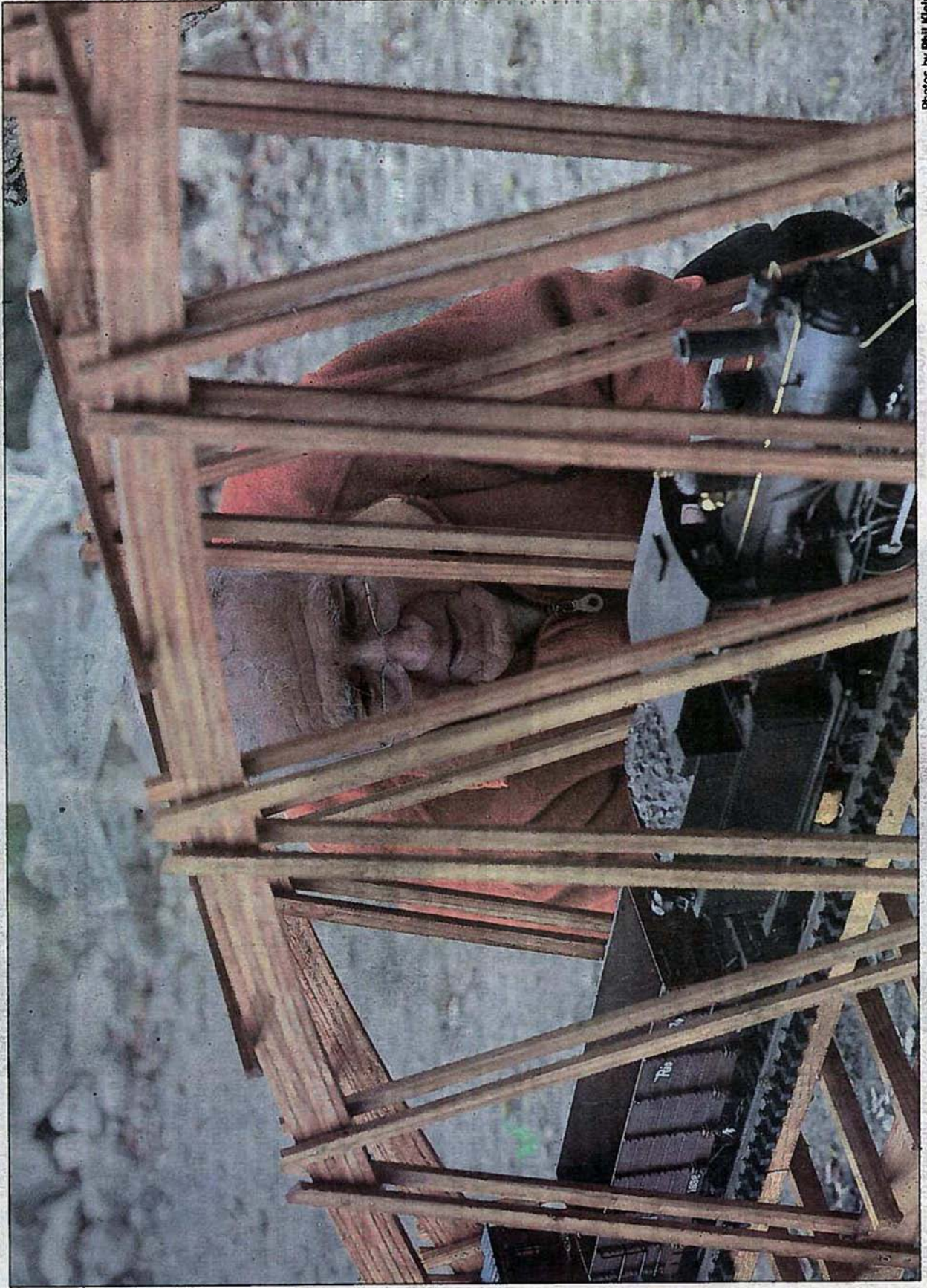


Workin' on the railroad in Arroyo Grande



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

Photos by Phil Klein

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

Addicted to trains, father and son create miniature

Handcrafted details mark G-scale railway

BY MIKE HODGSON
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Whether it's in Arroyo Grande, Nipomo 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 under reconstruction on a hillside in rural Arroyo Grande.

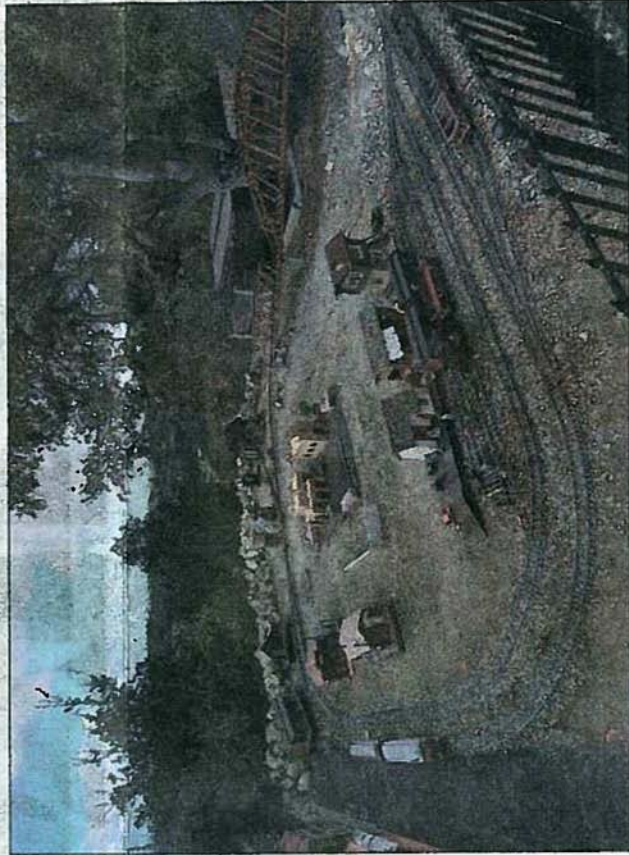
"It's the home of the PB&J," said Jamie Foster, who with his father, Bill, is building the G-scale railway in Jamie's yard.

"Guess what he serves at his (railroad) open houses," joked Bill, a resident of Prairie Village, Kan., where he has his own backyard G-scale railway — the Foster & Sisco.

So far, the PB&J 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 to 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 his father



G-scale railroad tracks course through Jamie Foster's backyard. It took his father Bill two weeks just to scratch-build the 12-foot redwood trestle.

is responsible for almost all the work on the rail line and village.

"He designs it, and I do the work," said Bill, who comes to California twice a year for a month-long visit and spends eight to 10 hours a day working on the railroad.

It took Bill two weeks just to scratch-build the 12-foot redwood trestle.

It took even longer to construct the three-section, 22-foot bridge — the scale equivalent of 528 feet — after first custom-building a 16-foot workbench to

handle a project that size.

To install the bridges level — and make sure they stayed level — the Fosters had to make their own molds and cast concrete piers.

With their trestle troubles behind them, the Fosters are now searching for the best way to build a Spanish mission, the centerpiece of the village.

"This is California — you have to have a mission," Jamie said.

They're also planning the landscape, which has to consist of live plants and

To find out more

Learn about the current and former PB&J Railroad lines and find links to other railroad sites at www.jf2.com/r.

miniature trees in proportion to the scale, and surveying a route into the other yard.

That will require removing lumber piles and other obstacles, which Jamie said will be no problem at all.

"The railroad is all-powerful," he joked, echoing the late-1800s railroad barons. "We have eminent domain."



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 1/2 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 much of the layout is being recycled from two previous PB&Js.

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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.

"I think the phrase was, 'This just screams railroad,'" Jamie said. "Three days later when I came home from work, I looked down and track was being laid."

When the Fosters moved to Nipomo around 2005, the PB&J moved, too, and was joined by a 7.5-inch railroad with engines and cars big enough to ride on.

In 2007, the Fosters moved to rural Arroyo Grande. Although the 7.5-inch layout remained in Nipomo, the PB&J was relocated to what they now call the Oak Way Division.

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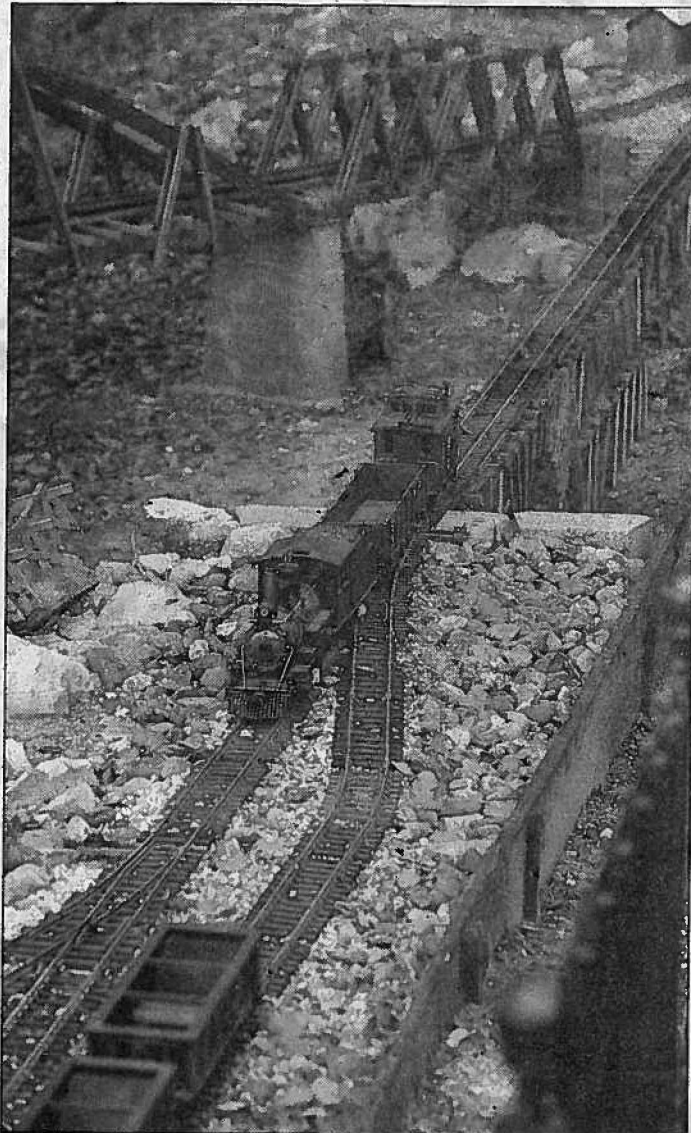
So what prompts two adults to spend so much time, effort and money building — and rebuilding — a miniature railroad? Bill admits he's a "railroad addict," and Jamie calls himself an "addiction enabler."

"I've had railroads all my life," explained Bill, who is 82. "We've always had a layout, in the basement or wherever. When I retired 16 years ago, I no longer had a place to build one but outside."

So, the former Presbyterian minister turned to G-scale — the "G" stands for "garden" — and began laying track behind his Kansas home.

For Bill, the allure of model railroading 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



Phil Klein photo

A G-scale railroad train follows the tracks that wind through Jamie Foster's Arroyo Grande backyard.

do this?" he said.

Jamie expects the PB&J 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."