

Ile St. Ivre, minimum-size H0e

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Since at the time of writing we are fully locked down again in the Netherlands, I was looking for something to distract me from the eternal virus scare. A few years back I sold my 009 and H0e trains to pay for a live steam garden railway, which I still have and enjoy. But this has some drawbacks which can't be overlooked. In the first place it's outside. In rainy, cold or hot weather, it's not always funny, even though running a snowplough can be fun!

Secondly, you can't set up live steam operation in a few minutes. Live steam needs considerable time to set up: greasing and oiling the engine, filling up with water, gas and steam oil, then waiting until steam rises and meanwhile clearing the track from debris and weeds. So you need at least half a day off to get up steam. Besides that, since I want my steam locos to act like prototype machines, shunting is very much a hands-on job including the chance to easily burn your fingers!

A new indoors project in H0e was meant to make playing trains more fun in winter, including a lot of scope for shunting, and above all it had to be compact. In fact, it needed to be small enough to travel with me in the car or camper van without being an annoying obstacle.

This means that I couldn't build a layout suitable for eight-wheel Zillertal locomotives and long trains. The trains need to be very short, so four-wheel locos and tiny wagons is the way to go. I set myself a challenge of building a point-to-point railway including car-card and waybill operation in an area of 30x60cms. So about 1 foot deep and 2 wide. The operational requirements needed at least a few industries served by sidings to drop off and pick up wagons. Besides that, I wanted some form of passenger transport between different points of the layout.



And last but not least, it needed a fiddle yard of some sort, to exchange rolling stock without resorting to the 'hand of God'. This fiddle yard can be a simple length of track disappearing behind the backscene. Yes, even a backscene, lights, maybe even sound, the lot. Due to the built-up backscene I can add a lid to close it up after use - the lid can double as a base for the fiddle yard. This way it is practically a box with a train inside. Easy to store, easy to transport and hopefully interesting enough to keep me occupied shunting goods and running passenger trains.

In my new little world there exists an island near the coast of southern France not far from Corsica. This is Ile St. Ivre, the name chosen because of the horrid small size of the layout. "Il est ivre" is French slang for someone being drunk, which in Dutch anyway means that you have stupid ideas. A point-to-point railway with a harbour, a quay siding and a hilltop town with some crazy landscaping and about 6ft of track, all on a 1x2ft baseboard, could have been an idea conceived in a despicable state of intoxication, hence the name Ile St.Ivre!



Backdrop installed. Later on I changed the upper part to accommodate the lights and the lid.

The island is mainly populated by peasants, farmers and craftsmen. No bankers, no insurance companies or black ties. The island is so small that it even lacks a normal road system. There are a few roads, but they don't connect the harbour and the town, nor the west and east extremities of the island. It's just the town and some farms on the island that are connected by roads. The main transport to the harbour and the far side of the island is the train, operated by the CdFI (Chemins de Fer d'Ivre, which could be misread as "the drunk train company").

The town is called “Cambrousse” (with means something like “countryside” in French) and consists of some houses, a boulangerie, a “super-U” supermarket, a winery (owner Padde Gout, his wines are popular, but quality is questionable) and a small furniture factory owned by a Dutch professional named Rien de Vis. The factory glues everything together, so they need the train to transport all the furniture in one piece to the clients (mainly IKEA haters). Note that the fictional names, pronounced phonetically, say something of their products (*pas de goût*, tasteless, and *rien de vis*, no screws...).

Cambrousse lies on top of “Le Dôme Epais”, which is the name of the mountain. The town station has basic passenger, mail and goods facilities, apart from the connection to Padde Gouts winery and Rien de Vis' furniture factory. Padde's fields are away across the island, so grapes are usually transported to the winery by train.



More landscaping added.

Due to the abysmal road system, lorries and farmer’s vehicles can’t reach the harbour nor the town centre and need to tranship their cargo to the train. For this purpose the CdFI installed a siding outside Cambrousse with a parking area. Local farmers bring their crops to this siding for further transportation to the super-U or the ferry.

Because of the steep incline between Cambrousse and the harbour, the railway has a few very sharp bends and twists along the “Nez de Diable” cliffs (devils' nose) and through the “forêt-de-moutons” (sheep forest) before entering a headshunt under the “Nez de Diable” to change direction into the harbour area. Since the locomotive needs to be on the downhill end of the train for safety, the

station and siding have very simple trackwork. The train literally runs in the same direction both ways, so you don't need run-rounds. Saving money and space, both scarce commodities on St. Ivre.

In the harbour, wagons can be shunted on the dock siding, passengers can transfer between train to and ferry and the train can proceed further along the coast to the far side of the island, which is represented by the fiddle yard (and allowing for possible future extension).

Because of the size and shape of the layout and the trains are short. Minitrains four-wheel diesel locos, possibly an "autorail" (France is famous for their ingenuity in railcars!) will inhabit the CdFI railway network. The trackwork is Peco crazy track and points are hand operated Minitrix 19.5cms radius. Power is supplied on every rail joint to keep power failures to a minimum. The Minitrains locomotives also have exceptionally good flywheels to haul the train past dead spots. Together with a built-in electronic pulse controller I hope the trains will run smoothly.



The layout with lights on and painted backdrop.

The layout was built on a sturdy 9mm plywood base, track supported on 3mm ply with supports raising the track base. The power supply is hidden under the mountain. The scenery was made with polystyrene foam and polymax, which is a putty-like glue. Aquarium sand glued with coloured diluted PVA glue was used as ballast, also filling some gaps. The background is 3mm ply also, carved with multiple halfway cuts at the corners to allow bending around the sharp curves at the back, giving a neat, seamless backscene. For stability and a base to place the lid on, a 30mm wide support piece was fitted along the top, under which a LED strip was glued. Thus, the layout has built-in light. (Even with changeable colours, so I can simulate nightfall and pleasant summer evenings with it.)

Due to the small size of the layout, the cost of getting it built is very manageable and you don't need much time to get something running. The story behind the layout will make it fun to play with and

the shunting possibilities will keep you playing with it for a long time. The only thing with H0e or 009 is that the trains can be erratic to run, but I hope that a solid track base, good conductivity and mechanisms with flywheels will keep the trains running smoothly.

The lid with the fiddle yard. The track is movable to make space for the lights when the lid is closed.



