

Welcome to the R&

A line designed and built for sharing with others



R&F Railroad!

by Sue Piper | Lakeside, California | Photos by the author except as noted



Roger and Faith Clarkson were married in the backyard of their home in Riverside, California, in 1983. Soon after, Faith was introduced to model railroading when Roger brought home an HO-scale engine. The following year, they began to transform their three-car garage into an air conditioned, fantasy HO layout that remains an amazing display of creativity and workmanship, with its 100-plus structures, miniature lights, and animated features, including an IRS building on fire. Eventually he ran out of space in the enclosed area, so Roger began looking for other train-related activities.

In 1988, while attending an HO-scale convention in Pacific Palisades, California, the Clarksons visited the home of Mary Barstow. After viewing a nicely done indoor HO layout, they heard the haunting whistle of a train coming from Mary's backyard. Unable to resist the lure, they followed the sound to find a large-scale LGB Mogul chuffing its way over a trestle and around a lovely pond. Roger turned to Faith. She said, "We could do this!" They were hooked!

Construction

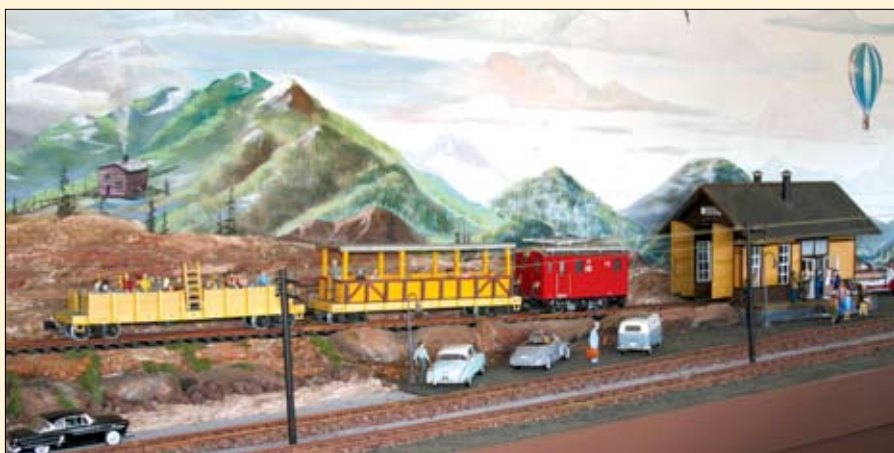
Returning home from the convention with an urge to get started, Roger borrowed a chalk-line marker from the local golf course. He didn't want to just draw plans on paper that might never get built. The Clarksons' large backyard included about one third of an acre of grass for their grandkids to play on. Now it was grass with chalk lines. The initial outline looked pretty good, but what next? They found *Garden Railways* magazine to be a real revelation as to just how widespread the outdoor hobby had become. Faith led the way to the library to find more information and instruction on how to proceed.

Ninety yards of dirt were needed to overcome the first obstacle of a 2½-foot drop in elevation in the newly designated railroad area. What seemed like a relatively small project was quickly becoming much larger and more complex and, of course, more exciting!

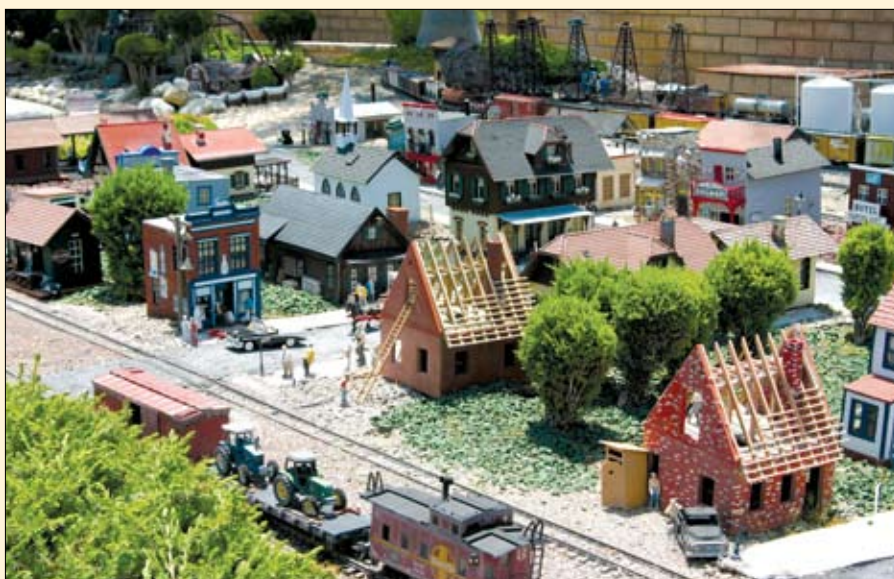
1. On the R&F Railroad, trains cross the rocky stream bed on the center island via scratchbuilt bridges. Banks of the stream are covered with easy-care groundcovers, such as lantana and sedums, accented with naturally small shrubs that include boxwoods and dwarf heavenly bamboos.



2. The R&F Lumber Company's general store (right) keeps loggers and their families well supplied with groceries and other necessities. Bunk houses can be seen in the upper left.



3. An LGB cog train works the grade in the newly refurbished, 40' long, covered point-to-point line. A painted backdrop extends the view.



4. A pair of identical houses is under construction. Careful placement of structures gives the scene the feeling of an established neighborhood and the tightly trimmed cypress trees add privacy to homeowners' backyards.

About six months later, trains were running on the two mainlines. As time passed, additional track was added, structures were completed, and landscaping, figures, and accessories were put in place. In 1990, a 12-foot-long train shed was built to provide cover for the engines at night.

After attending the National Garden Railway Convention in 1992, Roger and Faith hurried home to tear out the grassy central area of their railway to build the center island. This required 66 additional cubic yards of dirt.

The latest major projects include the renovation of an elevated point-to-point railway under the cover of a 10' x 40' train shed, completed in March of 2006 at the back of the yard, which includes an LGB rack railroad. Several of the new buildings in this area boast working neon lights manufactured by Miller Engineering Company in Connecticut.

The railroad

The result of 19 years of inspiration, creativity, and hard work is an intricate, realistically detailed, beautifully and meticulously landscaped and maintained

The railway at a glance

Name: The R&F Railroad

Size: 110' x 165' (½ acre)

Scales: 1:20.3 to 1:32

Gauge: N° 1 (45mm)

Era: 1920s through the present

Theme: Predominately western railroads, including Santa Fe, Union Pacific, Denver & Rio Grande Western

Age: 19 years

Length of track: Total, 3,000'; double 500' mainlines

Type of track: 90% LGB flex brass, 10% USA flex brass

Maximum grade: 2%

Mainline radius: Varies between 14' and 30'

Power: Track power; two Aristo-Craft handheld controllers

Motive power: Mostly steam, some diesel, various manufacturers

Sound: Phoenix on-board units

Structures: 50% scratchbuilt, 50% kits

Web site: www.rfrailroad.com

garden railroad that features automatic operation and is entirely lit up at night. The large area involved encompasses a variety of activity, water features, and venues.

Waterfalls and streams feeding the four lakes are run by 11 hydraulic pumps. There are wooden trestles, and a covered bridge that also serves as a train shed to house two of the trains that run regularly on the center island. Of the various steel bridges, some were built by Faith's son, Dan, while others were done by Chris Bedore. The newest addition is a 17-foot-long steel bridge weighing over 250 pounds. It was brought into the yard in three pieces and assembled in place on one of the mainlines, where it spans the largest lake.

A charming New England harbor town sits at the water's edge, with a trolley to transport the fishermen and tourists. A seaplane waits at the dock for its next load of passengers while a magnificent 42-inch long, radio-controlled model of the *Brooklyn* drifts in the calm waters. (The actual *Brooklyn* was a tugboat that operated barges loaded with trains, back and forth across the waters around New York to connecting tracks before a bridge was built.) Overlooking the harbor scene is a miniature Mt. Rushmore.

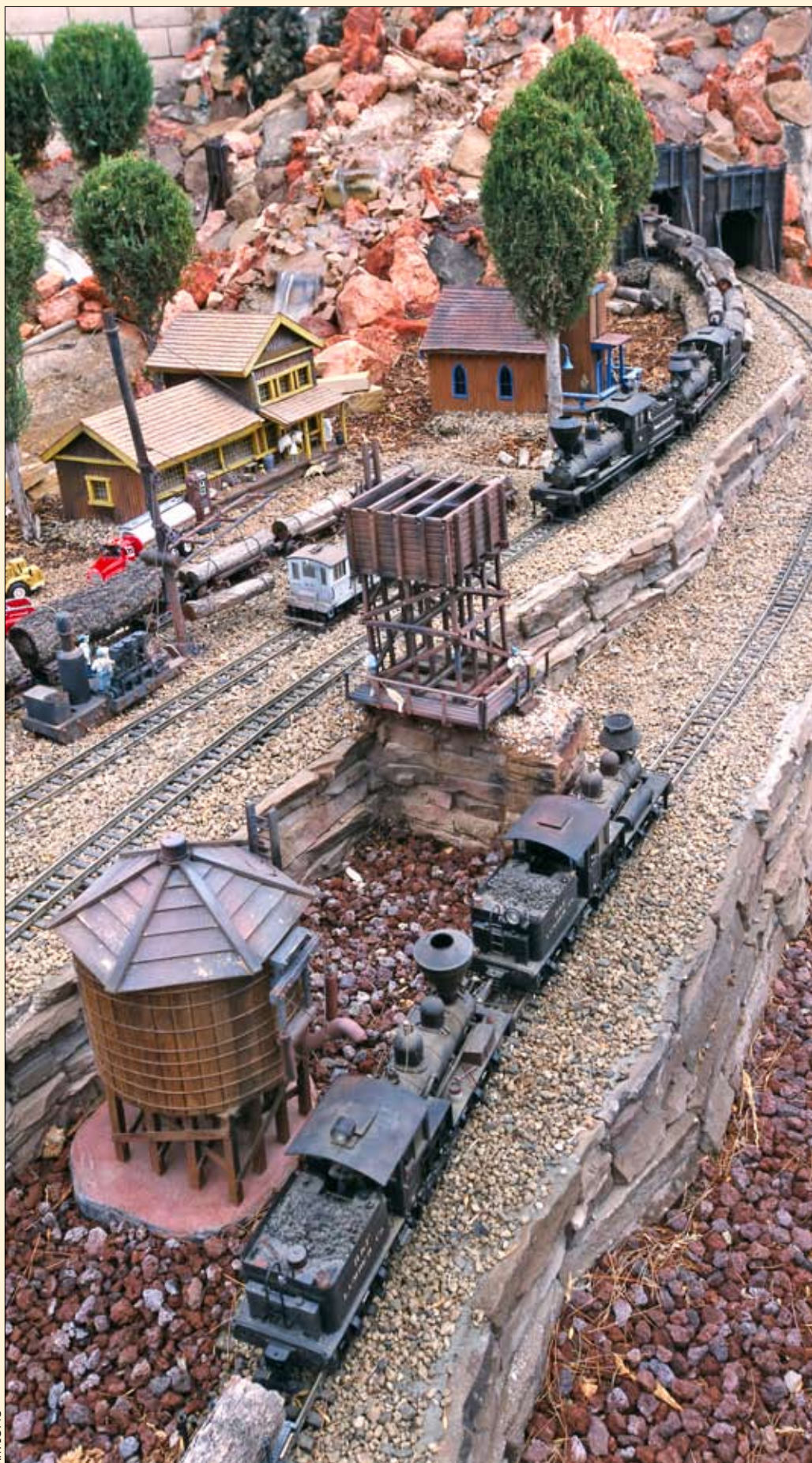
The Mission of Hope is modeled after a California mission, complete with an unusually realistic red-clay-tile roof. Support buildings surround the mission, providing shops for the tourists and mariachi bands for entertainment.

Three operating oil pumps are part of the Red Rock Oil Company, which supports the adjacent refinery. The refinery, which is eight-feet long, with a gas flame that shoots 15 inches into the air, was scratchbuilt by Roger. There are 110 miniature lights that illuminate the refinery in the evening.

An airplane hangar, with its private air strip, sits beside the local fire station. Here you will find a fine group of fire engines that are the envy of many fire departments.

The Shay Area is reminiscent of logging areas found in the northwestern states. Logs float downstream to be jockeyed into position to travel up a flume to the mill. Bachmann Shays keep busy hauling logs and lumber to their destinations.

5. The R&F Lumber Co. is busy hauling logs. Water towers were built by Ken Maxwell. Other structures and landscaping were done by the owners.

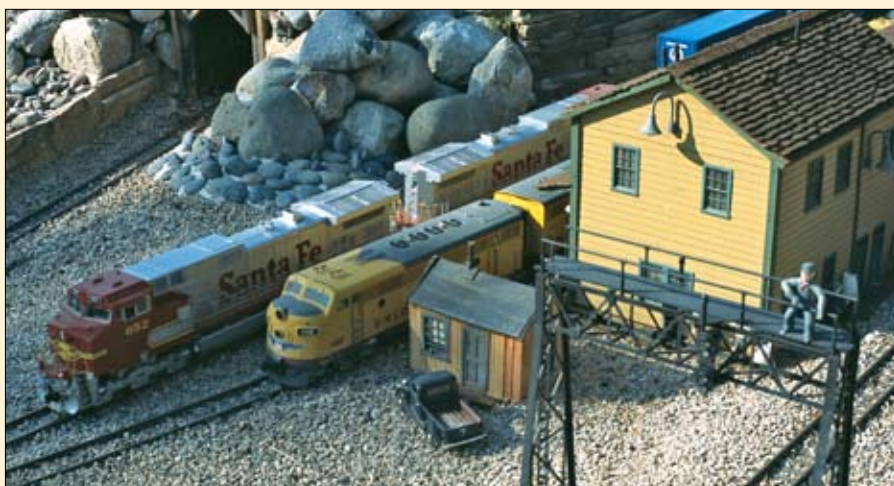




6. Newly cut logs float downstream to the mill, passing under a bridge being crossed by an R&F Lumber Co. Climax. These tightly trimmed cypress trees are about six years old, still growing in their original pots, and watered with a drip system. Faith prunes the tops of the trees twice a year, spreading a plastic cloth beneath the trees for easier clean-up.



7. A custom built 2-4-4-2 Mallet passes through a small village where a wedding is in progress. Town buildings include a pet shop, general store, and funeral home. A band plays in a lovely gazebo.



8. A Union Pacific passenger train stops at Riverside Station while a Santa Fe freight train speeds past.

The extensive collection of trains that run on the R&F Railroad includes engines and rolling stock from every well-known manufacturer of large-scale trains. On any given day, you can find an LGB Sumpter Valley Mallet and railbus; a Bachmann Consolidation, Shay, and Climax; an Aristo-Craft Mallet and SD45 diesel; an Accucraft K-27 and K-28; USA Trains Hudson; and a custom, 16-car work train built by a long-time friend, Mike Stewart. As many as 17 engines can operate at the same time, in some instances stopping and starting automatically.

Today and the future

After almost two decades, 160 cubic yards of dirt, 20 tons of rock, and 3,000 feet of track, documentation by CNN, NBC, Australian, and cable television, and newspaper articles too numerous to mention, garden railroading remains the focus of Roger and Faith's lifestyle. They held their first open house in 1992. Since then, they estimate about 15,000 visitors have enjoyed the R&F Railroad. In 2006 alone, they hosted 22 open houses for the public, plus several for organizations and garden-railway societies.

If you ask why they put so much time and effort into this, the first thing they will tell you is that's what their railroad is for—to share! They agree that the greatest reward is the look on guests' faces, young and old alike, when they enter this garden-railroading wonderland. They are not sure what people expect to see, but apparently it is not what these two have created. The Clarksons have participated in many home and garden tours, especially those that raise

TIM LONG

CARLA BRAND BREITNER

Thanks

Roger and Faith wish to acknowledge and thank the friends and volunteers who so enthusiastically assist in welcoming and entertaining the guests of the R&F Railroad! These include Michael Haworth (a special 16-year-old who has been a vital part of the R&F since he was just three), Mike Haworth (Michael's father), Art Lizer, Ken Maxell, Frank Pientka, Gordon Schell, and Mike Stewart.



9. Roger scratchbuilt this impressive refinery from plans drawn up by an architectural school.

Selected plants on the R&F Railroad

Riverside, California USDA Hardiness Zone 10

Faith has discovered that most miniature and dwarf plants available for garden railroads do not do well in the hot, dry, Zone 10 climate of Riverside, especially since there is no shade on the R&F. Having to make do with standard-size plants from the local nurseries, and with vigilant pruning and care, she has managed to create a splendid garden landscape for their railway. The following is a selected list of the multitude of plants displayed on the railroad.

SMALL SHRUBS & TREES

Boxwoods
Buxus spp.
Heather
Calluna vulgaris

Cypress
Chamaecyparis cultivars
Sago palm
Cycas revoluta
Junipers
Juniperus cultivars
Dwarf heavenly bamboo
Nandina domestica 'Harbour Dwarf'
Rosemary
Rosmarinus officinalis

GROUNDCOVERS, ANNUALS & PERENNIALS

Miniature lily of the Nile
Agapanthus africanus 'Peter Pan'
Snapdragons
Antirrhinum majus
Miscellaneous cacti
Chrysanthemums
Chrysanthemum x morifolium

African daisy
Dimorphotheca aurantiaca
Hardy geraniums
Geranium spp.
Sweet alyssum
Lobularia maritima
Trailing lantana
Lantana montevidensis
Blue star creeper
Laurentia (Isotoma) fluviatilis,
Pratia pedunculata
Various sedums
Sedum spp.
Baby tears
Soleirolia soleirolii
Elfin thyme
Thymus serpyllum 'Elfin'
Woolly thyme
Thymus pseudolanuginosus
Johnny jump-ups
Viola tricolor



10. Two beautifully hand crafted, radio-controlled ships are moored at the new dock just completed by Roger and Faith.

Advice for the beginner

Roger will tell you that he has made just about every mistake possible, at one time or another, in the construction of the railroad. He will also tell you that he has learned from and, he hopes, corrected those mistakes. He and his son have given seminars and produced a “how to” film to aid other railway builders. Here are some of the considerations he believes most important before you begin.

- **The length of time you expect to live in your home** and have this railway should be a major factor when determining construction methods and budget guidelines. Roger has seen too many beautiful railways that had to be dismantled after only a couple of years, when the family had to relocate for one reason or another.

The R&F Railroad started out with simple troughs being dug for the track to sit on, as was the common method in 1988. This worked fine for awhile, but turned out to be an unsuitable long-term installation in an area where there is constant earth movement. Track now sits on concrete blocks with rebar footings and tensile steel between. If you

plan on enjoying your railroad for several years and will be using track power, soldered jumper wires or rail clamps are a necessary investment in both time and money to ensure smooth running trains.

- **What will be the purpose of your railroad?** The number-one purpose of the R&F Railroad is to be shared with others! This makes ensuring the safety of guests a primary consideration. Concrete walkways, sturdy handrails, and safety-reminder signs are integrated into the design of this railway.

- **Will your railroad be a seasonal display, or will it remain in place year round?** This will determine how practical and sturdy your buildings, people, and accessories need to be.

- **Will your plants be permanent features, or will you just plant annuals each spring and summer?** This will guide you in how dedicated you must be in only selecting landscaping that is appropriate for your climate zone.

- **Consider the types and lengths of trains you plan to run when establishing the maximum grades you will have.** Roger’s maximum 2% grade allows his

favorite 80- to 100-foot-long trains to run for hours with no problem. Since the initial track installation, he has eliminated most of the original 30 electric switches that seemed like great fun at the time. He feels they are just not worth the trouble they cause. The R&F Railroad currently has only five or six manual switches.

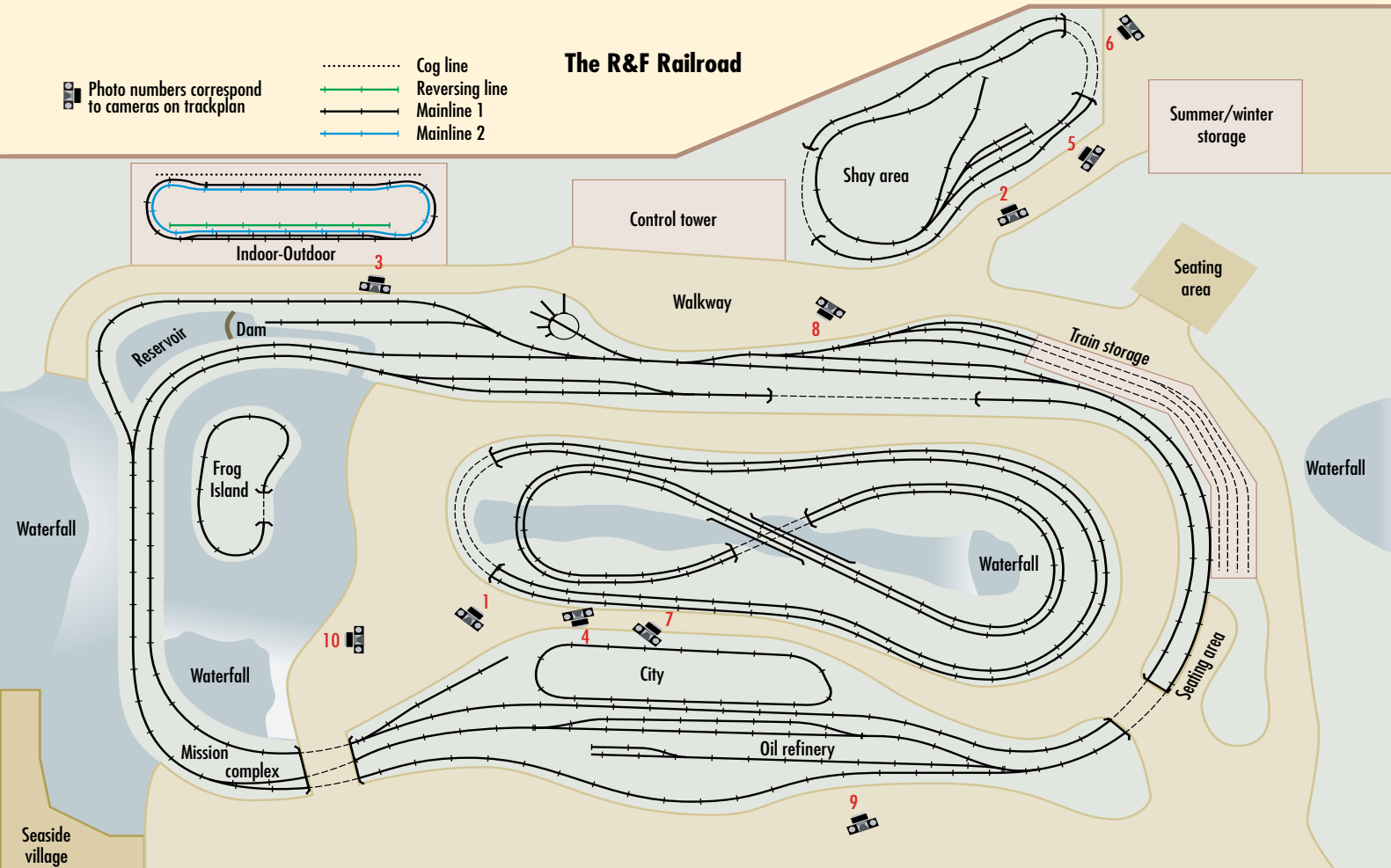
- **Divide your railroad into manageable project areas.** Finish one before starting on the next. Get a train running! Roger believes this to be one of the most common reasons why some railroads never come to be, even with the best of plans and intentions. Seeing an engine chugging along on the track you laid is the most amazing reward for your hard work! Don’t kid yourself; it is lots of hard work in the beginning. Keep it from being overwhelming.

- **Maintain your railway!** The best way to keep yourself motivated to do regular maintenance is to schedule open houses and invite guests to visit your masterpiece. Keep the weeds at bay, the ballast in place, the plants trimmed, and the track in good condition.

The R&F Railroad

Photo numbers correspond to cameras on trackplan

- Cog line
- Reversing line
- Mainline 1
- Mainline 2



money for charities. Roger's proudest accomplishment is a 4' x 8' HO layout that he designed, built, and donated to the Riverside Regional Medical Center for auction. The miniature railway raised \$4,250 for their Abused Children's Center.

There is hard work and stress involved in welcoming strangers into your home to view your creative efforts and prized possessions. Perhaps because this couple has so much experience at it, or maybe because they really enjoy what they are doing, they maintain a smile and a sense of humor through it all. Roger's way of handling a guest who knows everything about building garden railways and has lots of ideas as to how the R&F could be made much better is to say he would love to visit the critic's railroad to see how it should be done. The loudest critics, of course, usually have no trains at home.

What to do when a train has an operational problem? Roger says that the more action there is and the more trains that are running, the less likely it is that visitors will notice when one stops unexpectedly. And *never* rush to fix anything. That attracts too much attention!

When asked about the future, Faith

About the authors

Roger Clarkson has a BA in Business Administration and a Juris Doctorate in Law. He was the CEO & President of Clarkson & Associates, Inc. Faith Clarkson is a retired Bank Operations Manager. The couple owned and operated Pacific Coast Hobbies from 1992 to 1999.

As partners in this garden-railway venture (hence the name R&F Railroad), Roger is the builder, while Faith, considered to be the inspiration of the railway by her husband, maintains the great variety of buildings and structures and is the talented gardener who selects and meticulously tends the beautiful mixture of trees, shrubs, and groundcovers. An open-house schedule is available on their web site: www.rfrailroad.com



talks about the areas she plans to spruce up for this year's open houses. Roger mentions looking for other organizations who might like to come visit.

The only thing more impressive than Roger and Faith's spectacular railroad is the genuine warmth and hospitality with which they greet their guests. They understand that, even though there is no fee

charged to view the R&F, visitors have invested their time and the cost of transportation to come visit. The Clarksons believe that they are obligated to provide something worth visiting—and they do a magnificent job of it. As Roger explains, "For some people trains are a hobby, for some they are a vocation, but for others, trains are a way of life!" **II**