A Tale Of Two Bridges
By Tracy McKibben

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. My new N scale layout was underway, progressing nicely. All of the benchwork was completed, solid as a rock, and the base layer of pink foam was in place. The track plan consisted of two loops, both traveling different paths around the 9’x9’ around-the-walls layout. Conceptually, the layout represented two towns separated by a river. To cross that river, the two loops would converge to cross a double-tracked bridge. Running parallel to that bridge would be a highway bridge, allowing non-rail traffic to travel between the two towns. I was on a roll, the two loops were nearly completed, and I was ready to start constructing the bridges. This section of the layout would also serve as a duck-under, and was, by design, quite narrow. Hmmm, this looked good on paper, but there’s not enough room for two bridges! Now what? All this work, potentially at risk, can things get any worse?

I pondered over this problem for a week, before someone in an online forum (thank you, Mark Watson!) suggested the idea of a double-decked road/rail bridge. A what? I had never seen one before, and didn’t know they existed. After five minutes of online research, I found that they’re not uncommon. I also found a prototype photo (below) at http://bridgehunter.com/me/cumberland/323/ that depicted EXACTLY the original look that I wanted for the river crossing, with the bonus of a double-decked bridge.

A few revisions to the track plan, and I was ready. I purchased three of the Walthers double-tracked truss bridges, and enough Rix highway overpass parts to span the 30 inch river
crossing. I couldn’t find a set of N scale bridge piers that would accommodate both the road bridge and the rail bridge, so I chose to use a set of HO scale cut-stone piers from Chooch Industries. A couple of easy cuts with a scroll saw, and the bridge piers were ready.

After cutting out the “notch” for the road bridge, the white innards of the cast resin piers. I needed to disguise that somehow. Some rummaging through the scraps box turned up a partial sheet of printed stone cardstock. The stone pattern on that sheet was a nearly IDENTICAL match for the stone on the bridge piers. Cut, cut, snip, snip, and the bright white resin disappeared. After weathering the piers, and applying the same weathering to the cardstock inserts, the “paper” rocks virtually disappeared.
So, at this point, I’ve figured out how to get both cars and trains across the river. I have a solution without a problem - I needed a river! To the “other” scrap box I went, the one that holds all of my assorted pieces of “pink stuff”. I scrounged up enough to stack up to form the opposing riverbanks, glued them in place, and the next day, carved them to actually look like a riverbank. An extra Rix deck piece was sacrificed, cut in half to form the bridge aprons on each hillside. The hills were painted light brown/tan, the deepest part of the river blank, and the areas in between were blended from black to tan, to simulate shallower water. For good measure, I threw down some ground foam and some talus along the water’s edge.
A day or two later, after the paint and glue had fully dried, I poured a layer of Mod Podge Gloss Medium, a craft product, over the painted riverbed. This stuff goes on white, like white glue, but is crystal clear when dried, with a nice glossy finish. It looks just like water! While the gloss medium was still wet, I put the bridge piers into place. The gloss medium would hold them there like glue. It takes a few days for the gloss medium to completely dry. I waited, patiently, checking every half hour, to see if it was done. Eventually, it dried, and I finished assembling the bridge.
What’s the point of all this? I dunno. Lots of people have built bridges, painted rivers, there’s nothing new here in that regard. What IS new, at least to me, and maybe somebody reading this, is the concept of the road/rail bridge. Until encountering this “problem”, I didn’t know they existed. I’m glad that I found out, however, because I love the result. My original plan was good, but this, “It is a far, far better thing”. 