



TMFRR • The Too Much Fun Railroad • Vic & Sue Thies, Proprietors



All Aboard! A GRNews.org EXTRA

About the authors

Vic and Sue Thies have been married for 47 years, living the entire time in Southern California. Vic retired after 30 years in law enforcement and, after the tragic events of 9/11, formed a company to help train governments at every level to better respond to natural and man-made disasters. Sue ran their personal seminar business for 15 years. When not working on the railroad, they both enjoy time with their three grandchildren – future railroaders! Both Sue and Vic work on the TMFRR with Vic doing most of the “field” work while Sue focuses on the buildings, characters and detailing of scenes.



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All Aboard! The best way to describe the layout is from the rider's perspective aboard one of the eight TMFRR garden excursion trains, so let's take a ride aboard the TMFRR helix rack and cog line.



After enjoying a quick bite to eat at Mr. Nick's Steakhouse and drinks at the Castle Ridge Saloon, take a seat ahead of the yellow rack locomotive at the Alhambra, CA whistle stop station (where we grew up). The departing train takes excited tourists past the TooMuchFun Circus, Tristan Falls and Lake Laura.





Before entering the mystical enchantment of dragons, knights and medieval jousting tournaments, the train comes precariously close to the ledge and sheer cliffs of a four-level helix where dragons greet each passing train. At the train's first stop, greeters from the Dragon's Lair Restaurant take orders for an outside dining experience high atop the northern helix mountain. Passengers then make their way across a precariously suspended rope bridge to Dragonsgate Castle and the jousting arena. As luck would have it, the annual jousting tournament is just underway and the queen and king are watching from their royal box.

Boarding the train after the tournament, the helix line excursion enters the vast canyons, valleys and sheer cliffs of the Utah Red Rock Mountains.

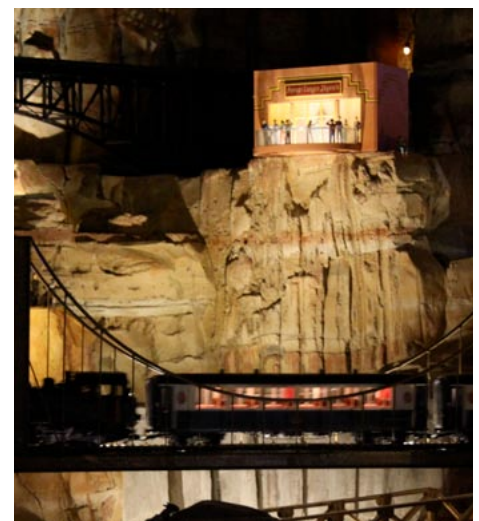
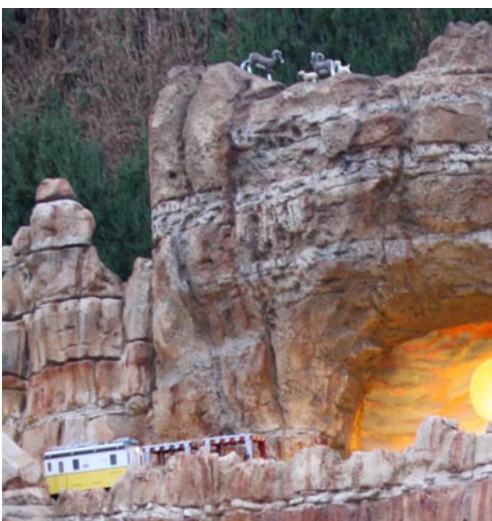


During darkness, ultraviolet LEDs give the helix dragons a menacing look while they wait for passing trains



Crossing a perpetual rising full moon shining through a natural arch, riders on the left side of the train are thrilled to see a family of mountain sheep looking over the entire TMFRR.

Continuing high across the mountains and steep canyons, passengers cross a long steel arch bridge. Far below a wagon train camp is set up for the night before continuing its expedition to the west. Passengers can stop at the canyon skywalk, which provides spectacular views of the Red Rock Mountain canyon dam and lake.

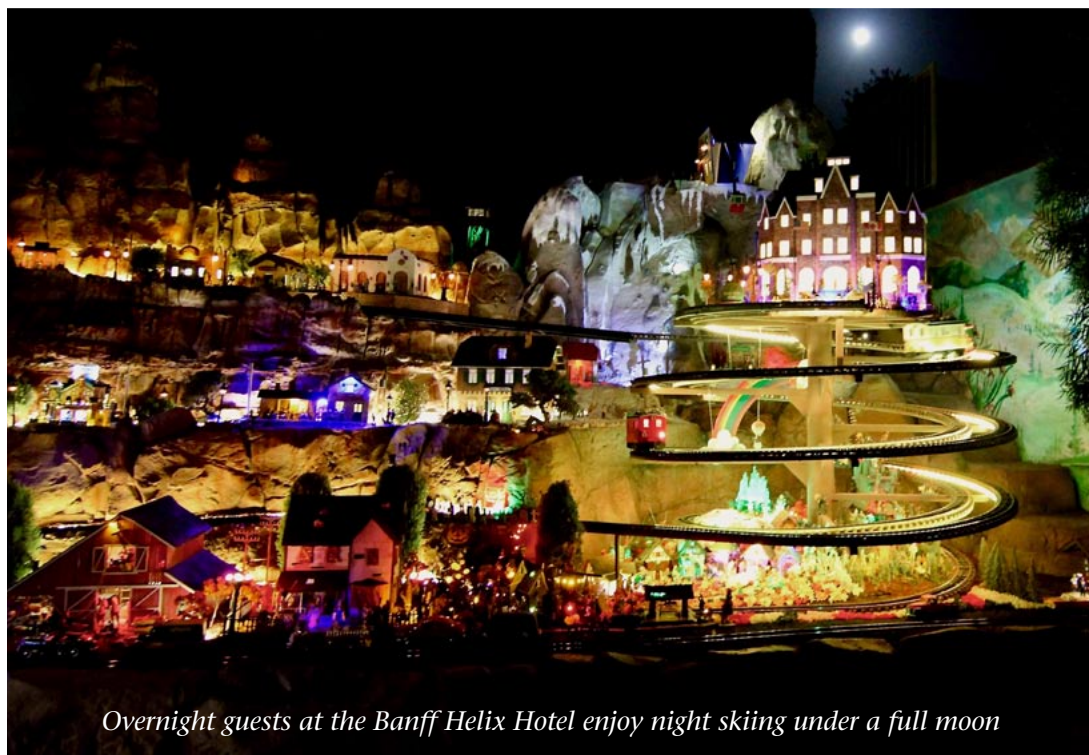




A steep 15-degree descent on the rack and cog railroad brings passengers to the town of Red Rock for a brief stop to explore the town's many unique historical attractions, including the old mission, art gallery and hiking trails. After a short ride down to the base of Mount Madison Ski Area, many passengers opt for an overnight visit at the iconic Banff Helix Hotel and take a gondola ride to the top of the double diamond ski runs.



Those passengers continuing on are in for the ride of their lives as the train descends a 25-30 degree double track helix and enters the fantasy world of the Wizard of Oz.



Overnight guests at the Banff Helix Hotel enjoy night skiing under a full moon

Hearing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (activated by a reed switch), riders soon experience lightning and thunder (animated & triggered by additional reed switches) as they circle over the Wicked Witch of the West's castle and hear her response to Dorothy throwing water on the scarecrow to save his life.



The double track helix passes through four Wizard of Oz scenes complete with animated lightning, thunder and movie sound snippets.

We continue past the remaining Wizard of Oz scenes before traveling through the “Had Too Much Fun” Cemetery where ghosts, skeletons and zombies “reach out” for help.

Our train ride comes to an end after passing below the Red Rock Canyon Dam, and passengers disembark back at the Alhambra depot for a well-deserved rest at the Carly Hotel, formerly the Hotel California, overlooking Route 66.

Thrilled by their helix-loop ride, tourists have the opportunity to ride on seven other exciting TooMuchFun RR train excursions with more historical and fantasy themes.



Tourists have the opportunity to ride eight TMFRR excursions. There's a lot to see and do.

Other TMFRR Excursions • Vic & Sue Thies, Proprietors



The 200 foot Pond Loop (with great fishing and a covered bridge), 175 foot City Loop (with circus, dog park and an N-scale garden railroad), and 155 foot elevated "L" Loop all offer great views of Route 66 scenes from Santa Monica CA to Meramec Caverns in Missouri.



The 60 foot Streetcar Line along the foot of the mountain range passes both a haunted house and an alien abduction in progress.



The Tree Line, a short 20-foot point-to-point, services the dam and gravel works.



The South Point-to-Point Helix Line offers a steep ascent through Wonderland to the hotel and ski area at the top of the five-level helix.



Our new Fairy Garden Line excursion with 2 ft diameter curves requires "small" rolling stock.



The Tree Line, a short 20-foot point-to-point, services the dam and gravel works.



The TMFRR turns into a magical winter wonderland for the Christmas season.

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Railway at a Glance

Name: **TooMuchFun Railroad**

Website: **toomuchfunrailroad.com**

Size: **60' wide x 25' deep x 15' high**

Scale: **varies from 1:24 to O- scale used for forced perspectives**

Gauge: **G-scale plus a small N-scale railroad within a railroad**

Era: **From ancient medieval times to modern day**

Age: **10 years**

Power: **All 11 lines are track powered with multiple Bridgewater transformers; Lighting circuits are powered by a 12-volt DC 50-amp Astron power supply**

Total track length of 11 lines (3 overhead and 8 garden): **approximately 1,800'**

Type of track: **Mainly LGB & USA sectional, some Train-li-USA and LGB flex track**

Min diameter: **4' (Fairy Garden line 2')**

Max diameter: **8'**

Max grades: **3.5% on the "L" loop and 30% on the helix lines**

Structures: **Custom structures from Rainbow Ridge and kits from many of the G-Scale companies**

Lighting: **Over 98% of the 50,000 lights are LED with some incandescent street-lamps spread throughout the layout**

Some of the Plants on the TooMuchFun RR

Cuphea hyssopifolia

- **White false heather**

Thymus Serpyllum

- **"Pink Chintz" Thyme**

Chamlawsoniana Ellwoods Gold Pillar

Podocypus **"Peking"**

Juniperus procumbens

- **Dwarf Japanese Juniper**

Cotoneaster glaucophyllus

- **Cotoneaster Gray**

Variegated English Boxwood

Olea Europaea - **Olive "San Fernando"**

Coprosma - **"Rainbow Surprise"**

Myrsine - **"African Boxwood"**

Punica granatum - **"Nama"**

An Eclectic Garden Railroad for All Ages



How it all got started

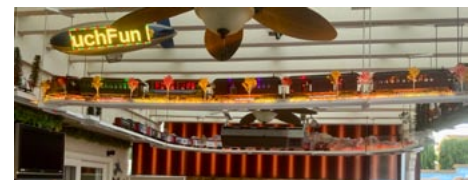
Our TooMuchFun RR adventure began in 2010 when we bought an overhead suspended layout system for our covered patio from Gold Coast Station after watching trains pass through the famous Tehachapi Loop, an amazing helix.

We rushed home to install it and, five months of installation later, we had learned that in this hobby nothing goes as quickly as initially anticipated.

The 150 foot loop travels around the covered patio with a siding through the house into the family room, where two additional yard tracks allow for parking of various consists waiting to be dispatched. An additional double-track suspended system in our family room allows for the running of up to three trains when outside weather is questionable.

Initial Design Concepts and Challenges

When we began planning for a true garden railroad in our limited space, a typical Southern California tract home backyard, our first challenge was to define our railroad; should we choose a specific era in time, a geographical



The suspended rail line over the patio extends into the family room.



area of the world and its trains, a consistent "scale" within G-scale or just have TooMuchFun? We reflected on one of the most popular and diverse train rides in the world, the Disneyland Railroad and its travels to multiple themed areas. We decided **not** to limit ourselves, but to have an extremely

eclectic layout similar to Walt Disney's Disneyland RR.

With that in mind, we started designing and building our *garden* TMFRR "on the fly." Over the last ten years, we have added dozens of scenes and themes from childhood memories, past travels, and ideas from visiting layouts throughout the country. To allow the fun to continue after dark, we added lighting to every building, landscape area and scene.



Our uphill-sloped backyard posed design and construction challenges, but after visiting a layout partially built on a similar slope, we decided to create a 3D diorama look to the TMFRR by adding 15 feet of height.

The Thoughts Behind the TMFRR

We read numerous instructional books/magazines, bought as many past issues of *Garden Railways Magazine* as possible, watched "how to" videos and asked lots of questions of club members.

We realized the following design concepts were important to us:

- Each track should have its own separate line and power supply.
- Everything (track lines, scenery, hardscape) is to be constructed to 30 inches or higher for easier access, maintenance and better viewing.
- Have multiple levels of tracks and scenes and include the slope area.
- Not restrict ourselves to any geographical area, era or theme.
- Be able to run and enjoy the layout during darkness.
- Build with more emphasis on scenery and themes than on garden plants.
- Build the railroad to last using solid construction techniques.
- Have TooMuchFun with the railroad!



Solid construction techniques allow for years of enjoyment.

With these concepts in mind, we began what would turn out to be a multi-year process of building and adding new areas to the TMFRR.

Construction Techniques

Working with sectional track, ropes, marking paint and cardboard cutouts of building footprints, we began the long process of laying out the basic track designs. After raising the valley or flat portion of the railroad with over 100 cubic yards of dirt, we used the "Split Jaw" PVC roadbed system.

This allowed us to easily add and hide an extensive drip & mist system, as well as electrical wires for track power and accessory lighting.

Numerous metal bridges for several raised lines were ordered from Eaglewings Iron Craft.

We hired a very talented local concrete sculpturing artist who had never worked on a garden railroad before (his area of expertise was concrete grottos, waterslides, ponds and such) to construct rock walls, tunnels and a four level helix to raise the train up to the slope area. We would eventually hire him four more times as we added to the TMFRR.



Building up the concrete Utah-look Red Rock Canyon and mountains.

We recommend extensive research into construction techniques that work for you, your climate and weather, and the durability of your layout. Our approximately 1,500 feet of garden railroad track (eight “garden” lines) rests on metal bridges, concrete or the PVC roadbed system; nothing is on dirt or unstable ground.

Murals bookend both ends of the layout, with the north side reflecting a medieval dragon theme and the south side extending the mountain and valley scenery.



Controlling It All

Knowing our limited electronics expertise, our home electrician, Kevin, offered to design and build a portable roll-around control center to run the eight garden trains and all accessories. All components, including two large 80-wire harnesses connecting the control center to the layout, were built to industrial/military grade specs. This will hopefully allow for many years of worry-free use. Multiple Bridgewater transformers power the train tracks.

The original concept was to have around 10 to 12 lighting and accessory circuits. As we discussed the lighting plans, Kevin made a suggestion (for which I am



The fun continues after dark as both static and color-changing lights come on.

thankful) to increase the number of fuse protected circuits to forty so as to quickly identify a “short-circuit” based on a geographical area. While the number of “shorts” has been minuscule, this has been a huge time saver when a short has occurred.

An Astron 50-amp power supply provides pure 12-volt DC current to all the lighting and accessories for the entire layout, maintaining clean and flicker-free DC power to the thousands of LEDs. Low cost, but durable, variable DC to DC voltage reducers placed inside weather-proof plastic boxes reduce voltages for animated circus rides, sound effects and specialty lights.

TMFRR Description

The TMFRR consists of approximately 1,800 feet of track spread out over eight garden lines and three suspended railroads. Having

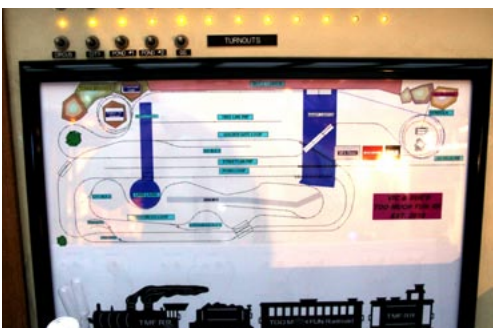
an eclectic multi-themed layout doesn’t restrict us to steam, diesel or a certain railroad line. We enjoy changing the overhead trains on a weekly basis. The TMFRR runs everything from Disney, Peanuts and whimsical trains to more traditional passenger and freight consists.

There are over 250 buildings and structures made of various materials within 15 different theme areas. Desiring unique buildings not available through traditional suppliers, we discovered Rainbow Ridge and their Precision Board buildings. This material is extremely durable and lightweight. Many of our buildings are “one of a kind” and add tremendous and unique character to the TMFRR.

For Video Tours and Information

www.toomuchfunrailroad.com

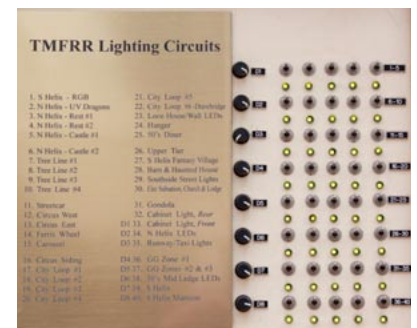
Visit toomuchfunrailroad.com for the latest new additions.



Track Diagram



The TMFRR Control Center



Lighting Circuits Panel