

Boulders and Rocks

By Paul Buhrke

If you think about it, we try to emulate Mother Nature and Her glorious treatment of what we Model Railroaders call scenery. At best we can only attempt to duplicate what she does in the real world. In our world's, most of our attempts seem to be lacking, some seriously and others are close but again, no cigar. Facing this reality I needed to add something to my Black Canyon of the Gunnison even though for the most part I was okay with the results. I say okay because I felt that something was lacking. After some judicious research I found what was lacking and needed to really finish off the canyon. The major item was rocks, actually Boulders of a size not used on the majority of layouts. I am talking about monsters size boulders as in those from blasting a way through the granite of the Canyon. In this case think automobile size as the smallest denominator here and larger. With this requirement in mind I went on the proverbial treasure hunt in my yard, the neighbor's yard and across the street for appropriate sized "rubble". What I found on this hunt was a surprising amount of large crushed stones mixed in with what is commonly used for "Arizona Grass" . Those large stones were exactly what I was looking for in boulders, er rocks.



I placed them in the Canyon and saw that they would work. The size of the rocks was just what was needed, just enough to be huge and imposing. There was enough texture as well to be noticed but as they are two feet from a viewer's eye, they would not pass for an up close and personal viewing. So far all was working out as planned, so far. Well things now started to go downhill quickly. While the rocks themselves were great the color was all wrong for granite. Now as a Modeler what was I going to do to correct this? "Let me see", I said as I perused my Canyon walls. I cast the rock walls; jigsaw puzzled them together then painted/stained them. Hold it right there, bingo.



The first item on the list of rehabilitation is to decide what side will be the down or the gluing side. There is one good reason for this: why paint/stain the side that is down? Plus it will be easy to see what side is down by being unpainted/stained. So I brought out my Woodland Scenics Stone Grey wash and with my well used paint brush I began to give the rocks a coat of granite. I did place them on wax paper as I needed to have a non-stick surface for the wash not to adhere to. The end result looked good but I did have to add one more step in the process.



The last step is my highlighting technique per se. I made a wash mixture of Woodland Scenics Concrete and Slate Gray. Why these two you might ask? Because they were on hand is why. I added some water to thin the mixture down and a bit of bleach. The bleach keeps the mixture from growing moldy and smelling funky. To wash the highlights on the rocks I used a small piece of sea sponge. My favorite size for this is about three quarters of an inch wide and shaped like a triangle. Holding the small or narrow end, I dip the sponge in the wash and then either squeeze most of the wash out or tap it on the wax paper to do the same.



When I was finished my highlighting, I left things alone to dry overnight. The next morning I inspected my handiwork and declared that it was good. I then took my granite boulders and placed them in their appropriate places. Actually I just started at one end and put them down where they looked good as it were. Not too close but not too far apart, just right was the mantra here. Remember I said that the unpainted/stained side was needed? It does make things go smoother in placement if at least I can tell up from down.



Well as in all good projects if an issue does not crop up as one is modelling then one must not be really trying. Yes I did have that item appear but it was rather simple to fix. It seems that there was a difference of opinion on what side was to be placed down on the scenery. It was of course not the side I decreed. Nope it was the side the scenery wanted, go figure.



Notice the “naked” side? Well that lay was what was wanted for that location and so now what to do? Well out came the trusty paint brush and with some Stone Gray, that side was done. After that boulder dried I then used my handy dandy gray wash and sponge to add the highlights. Okay I know it was a small issue but an issue it was so a mid-course correction was deemed necessary. The end results are in the last picture here. After I finished another run of rocks the canyon is now full of large Boulders. I will add rubble and talus to tie them all together. The last things to add will be a few dead trees and stumps along with some tall rushes. I see a paint brush being given a haircut for that scenario. And yes one day when I am finished futzing here in the Canyon, water will be added but not before. That in itself will be another major project.

