

Welcome to

HOGERLAND NATIONAL RAILWAYS



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Background

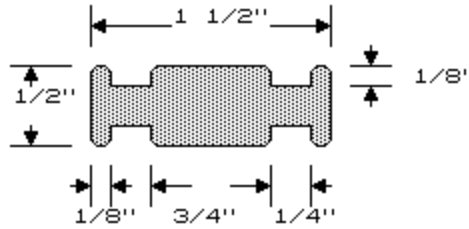
I first started making wooden trains for my nephew [David](#) and friends' children in 1997. I had priced the name-brand trains, and they were just too expensive for my wallet. Also, they tended to be *too* toylike - I wanted something somewhere between toy and model trains. So, I borrowed a couple pieces from my friend and senior play-tester [Russ](#) (he was not quite three years old at the time), got out the ruler, and went to work. Several months (and a lot of experiments) later, here are my results. It turned out to be really easy and fun. My friends have said that I could make money doing this, but it wouldn't pay as well as computer support, and I know no better way to spoil a hobby than turn it into a job (I gave up programming at home when I started doing it at work). So I'm going to put my plans on my web page with the hopes that handyman Dads and Uncles out there will find some inspiration. Copy my designs, modify them, improve them, I don't care - the point is to be creative and have fun.

If you're wondering where the name "Hoogerland National Railways" comes from, it's because I've gotten a lot of ribbing over the years about my last name. Everyone wants to know where the country "Hoogerland" is. Well, "Hoogerland" is Dutch for "higher land", so I assume it means my ancestors were not from the parts of the Netherlands that are below sea level. Anyhow, when I started making trains, I decided that I would be working on the railroad of the sovereign state of Hoogerland. Location: just off the edge of the map. Population: me.

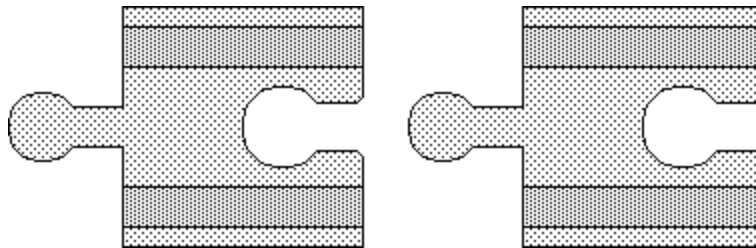
Standards

The only real standards for wooden trains are the rail gauge, the connectors between track pieces, and the magnetic couplers.

Here's the rail gauge: the grooves for the rails are $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide, $\frac{1}{8}$ " deep, and $\frac{3}{4}$ " apart. There, wasn't that simple? See the drawings for details.



The connectors between track sections are like jigsaw puzzle pieces. A key on one end fits into a slot on the other end. The key is about $\frac{3}{4}$ " long, with a $\frac{1}{2}$ " round end and a $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide shaft.



Here are some operational limits that I have found by trial and error:

The maximum size of a one-piece locomotive that will handle the curves is 3" and six $\frac{3}{4}$ " wheels, with a $\frac{1}{8}$ " gap between the wheels. More than that, and the locomotive will have to have a hinged or "articulated" frame, or else wheels on separate flexible trucks.

The minimum distance between wheels on a 4-wheel car or engine is $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Less than that, and derailments occur. This applies to both "shorty" cars like tenders and cabooses and also trucks for larger pieces like passenger cars and diesel locomotives. However, on cars or locomotives with flexible trucks ("bogies"), the gap between the wheels should be $\frac{1}{8}$ " so that they track like a single wheel.

Cars and engines longer than 4" tend to have problems going up the one-piece ramps for bridges, because those ramps are too steep. However, the long cars and engines work fine if you use the gradual stacking risers.

Cars and engines over 6" long tend to make a pretty good dent when flung across the room at Mommy. Smaller is usually better. ✍

Name Brands

There are a number of manufacturers making wooden trains with pieces that are more or less interchangeable.

The original wooden trains which set the standards were made by Mr. Marshal Larabee, who founded the [T.C. Timber](#) company. T.C. Timber track has painted cross-ties and is

usually slightly taller and narrower than other brands.

The best-known wooden trains in the U.S. probably are Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends (by [Learning Curve Toys](#)) and [BRIO](#).

Of course, the Thomas trains are based upon the British children's television series made popular on PBS and video. They are made in China. Thomas "cliketty-clack" track is has pressed notches into it so that it makes more noise as trains pass over.

BRIO, founded in 1884 in Sweden, is the largest producer of wooden toys in the world. The BRIO name comes from its founders, the [BR](#)others [I](#)varsson of [O](#)sby, Sweden. Their product line is so extensive, I won't bother talking about it.

If the links for Thomas and BRIO are slow, there are several dealers with large websites, like [AnneMail \(formerly The Toy Chest\)](#) and [Someone Special](#).

[Maple Landmark Woodcraft](#) makes wooden "letter cars" - letters with wheels and couplers that you can join together to make "name trains". They also make track, though I haven't gotten any samples yet. In 1999, they are woodburning or branding crossties onto the track.

The [Whittle Short Line](#) makes wooden trains with American styling and paint schemes. They have added a number of products, including track their own big Amtrak set.

[Lillian Vernon](#) carries a line of wooden trains made in Germany. I think they are made by a company called Hermann Eichhorn. I've found a couple references to Eichhorn wooden toys, including trains, in German-language web pages, but I haven't found a working home page for the company yet.

For a while, Playskool marketed a line of wooden trains made in China under the Timberland Junction name. There were three different sets, from a simple oval to a big over-and-under set. Each set included some nice hardwood track and a rather homely battery powered locomotive with a sound card. Until early 1999, I could still find some of these sets on clearance at [Toys'R'Us](#). Since then, I've found a "super deluxe" set that is virtually the same under the Lil' Tree Imagination brand at [Target](#) stores. The distributor is Maxim Enterprise, of Middleboro, MA, 02346.

Even [Lionel](#) has gotten in on the act in a partnership with Learning Curve to make "Great Railway Adventures" story sets that use the same standards with die-cast and plastic parts. I have a couple of their battery powered locomotives, and in 1999 they added more cars with lights or sound.

I have also found generic train sets at [ZanyBrainy](#) and [KB Toy Liquidators](#).

TootsieToy made some compatible cars with Sesame Street characters, though I think they are out of production now. I have seen individual pieces and sets (Cookie Monster was the engineer) at toy and train shows.

So there are a lot of brands out there to give you ideas!

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Plans

Locomotives



[S1 Steam Locomotive](#)



[Photo Gallery](#)

Since I've been slow to get drawings done, here are pictures of almost all the trains I've made.

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