

Weathering ballast

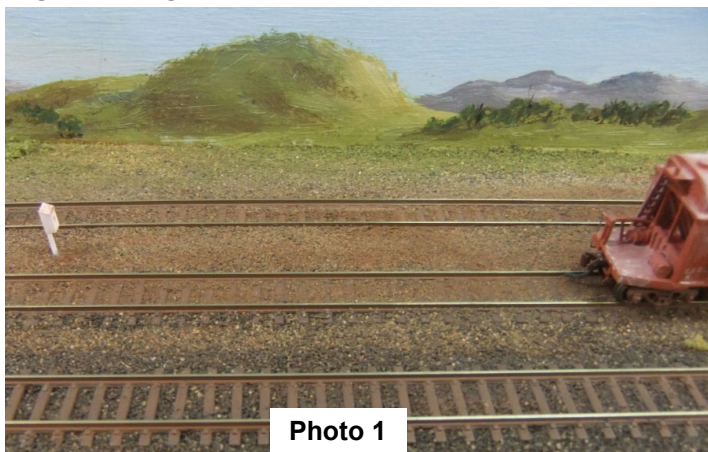
Text & photos Tony Scott

Ballasted track certainly looks a lot better than unballasted track, but the uniform colour of metres of ballast can look a bit monotonous, especially when it occupies large areas such as a yard.

Of course you can vary the colour by using different types of ballast or material derived from different sources, which is quite prototypical on main lines as well as branches.

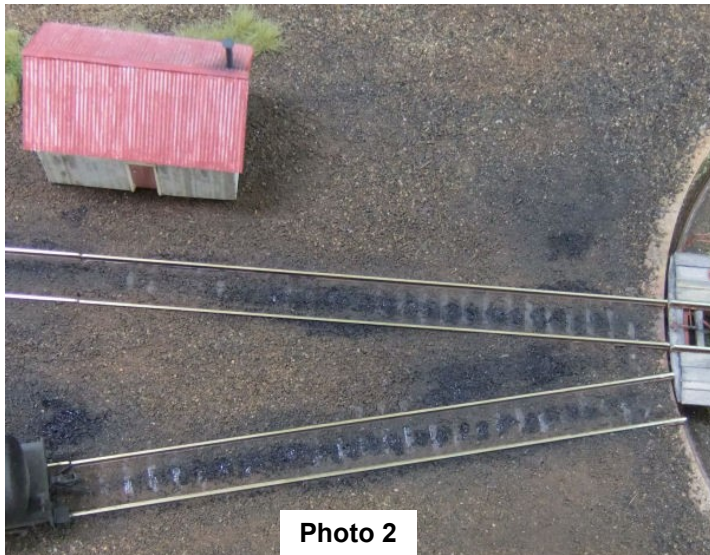
But at a station or in a yard the variation in colour is more likely to be due to the location of the track and/or the type of activity occurring on it. Obvious examples would be the spillage from gypsum, superphosphate or cement at a loading or unloading point, oil spills at a fuel depot, coal or oil at a loco facility, and perhaps grain at a silo.

Colour variation is also common at a station where brake shoe dust and rail filings have accumulated over decades and turned rusty. Oil or diesel can drip from locomotives where they often stand, and oily deposits can accumulate around point and signal linkages.



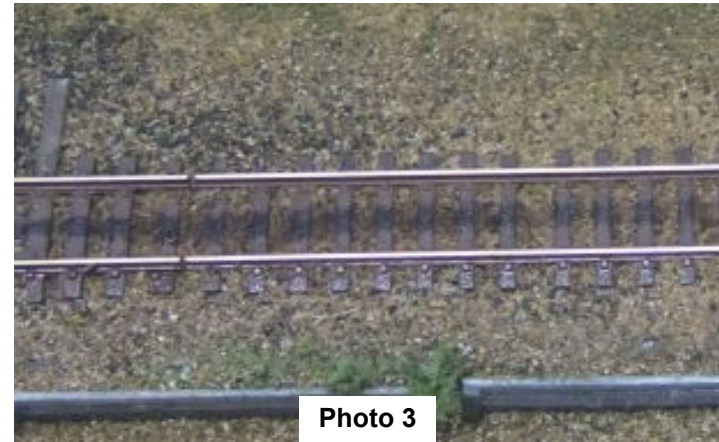
Such colour variation is easily added. For the overall rusty look due to dust from brake shoes and rails, I lightly apply weathering powder of the appropriate colour to the ballast between the rails and to either side as well (**Photo 1**). I concentrate mainly on stations, yards and their approaches, but you could do the whole layout if you so wish.

Oily deposits are more fun. These consist of black powder, or a black/brown mixture, spread liberally over the required area plus applications of gloss black paint in specific places, representing heavy oil soakage or even pools of oil. The latter could occur in patches at refuelling points, on loco servicing tracks, at gangers huts, etc (**Photo 2**).



Oily deposits often occur near the ends of station platforms where locos are most likely to stand for some time, and on downhill or uphill approaches to stations and yards. These are a little more interesting as the black deposits often lie in straight lines, either between the rails or sometimes outside them. I prefer to make just the one black line in the centre of the track—anything else is a bit too hard in N scale.

After applying brown powder in the general area, dust some black powder sparingly between the rails then paint on the gloss black acrylic using a narrow brush, which should be fairly dry to ensure the paint goes on in a line rather than spreading out sideways. More black powder can be applied straight on top of the paint, and more paint too, till you get the desired effect (**Photo 3**).



Point linkages and throwbars can be dusted with brown and black powders and small dots of black paint applied to specific places (**Photo 4**).

This type of weathering is fun and easy to apply, and makes a dramatic improvement to the realistic look of trackwork.

