

Railways: Making the Earth Move with Elephants

Here is an interesting diorama using the latest offering from IDR Castings. It's the NSWGR elephant van from the early 20th century. There were six built from 4 wheel cattle vans. The height of the vans was increased to transport elephants but the vans retained their CW cattle classification.

The diorama is built on a piece of 17 x 20 cm balsa with a length of brass Fleischmann track and various ballast and ground cover materials to give the impression of elephants being unloaded for the circus.

The CW van was built and weathered specifically for the diorama. The elephants and figures are from Preiser. A special unloading ramp was constructed board by board and filled with dirt and sawdust to give the elephants an easy unloading experience.

On the left, the elephant is a little recalcitrant. The handler is really "putting in" to drag his charge to the tie up point around the base of the palm tree. Palm trees were common after the 1st War; returning servicemen brought dates from the Middle East to plant in their new places of work. Typically servicemen returning to the railways sowed three date seeds to represent the three services. The palms could be seen across the country and many still stand (I have one in my yard at Gunnedah, probably planted by the surgeon returning from War and originally setting up his practice in our home).

The second elephant couldn't care that his mate is arriving. A large stack of feed has his complete attention. (The feed is made from our lawn clippings.) Unfortunately elephants have to pass excesses. Elephant droppings are copious and considerable. Researching the colour of elephant shit was a mammoth task but there is information out there to answer even the most mundane of questions.

The woman behind the elephant is shovelling shit. She has a considerable task at hand but she seems cheery in her job.

