

Tea Bag Tarps

By Arthur Hayes - MMR

Most of us like a cuppa or two from time to time to recap on what we are trying to do or achieve. As I say when things are not going to plan, it's time to swing the billy. Overall, I feel modellers are good recycler's, turning trash into great works of art. My first layout I built came from "Volvo" cases used to import bus parts into Australia. On my current layout, the saw dust from cutting the frame work was used for the scenery. I have heard of other modellers collecting pallets to make their layout. I'm sure you to have a story to tell on items you have used in your modelling somewhere.



Modelling in HO, I'm finding increasing number of applications for using tea bags. After making a cup of tea, wash the bag under the tap and set it aside to dry **1**. Placing them on a tray in the sun will speed up the drying process.

staple and fold the bag out **2**.

Once the bag is dry or nearly dry, remove the



The ends will be open and the tea leaves can be removed **3**.

Gently pull each side of the seam to open the bag out into a sheet **4&5**.



You can wash the sheet again with detergent and scrubbing with an old tooth brush, fold it out flat to dry, this will remove most of the creases. Some stain left in the sheet is often a plus providing some weathering effects **6**.

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Once dry and folded out flat, the material available for your projects is 85 mm wide by 130 mm long. If you are happy to accept a few holes (from the staple) the length is 150 mm.

Tarpaulins; For many years I have used tea bags for a standard tarpaulin. If you model a prototype **7** you will find they will have set sizes for various applications. Some rail



operators may have wagons fitted with pipe supports or have portable bars from loads that don't come above the sides to ensure water runs off to the sides and don't pool between the wagon sides.

To give you some understanding on how sizes changed over time, the following is the measurements used for the railway network I model.

1962 General Appendix shows two sizes in general use:-

- Tarps marked with "A" are 20 ft. 5 in. by 14 ft.
- The larger tarps were 23 ft. 5 in. by 17 ft. (eight canvases).
- For wheat wagons the size was 48ft. by 14 ft.

1989 General Appendix shows the following sizes.:-

- General purposes - 6,700 mm by 5,200 mm
- Grain wagons 13,700 mm by 4,000 mm
- Traps on coal wagons for grain traffic 10,000 mm by 1,200 mm

In later years, a one size fits all approach was taken, excess could be folded up to it keep clear of running equipment. Two were used to cover loads on longer wagons **8**.



I have made templates from styrene sheet for these standard sizes **9**.

On the template is a centre line and the position of any supports, these marks can be transferred to the tea bag as a guide to centre the tarp on the wagon.

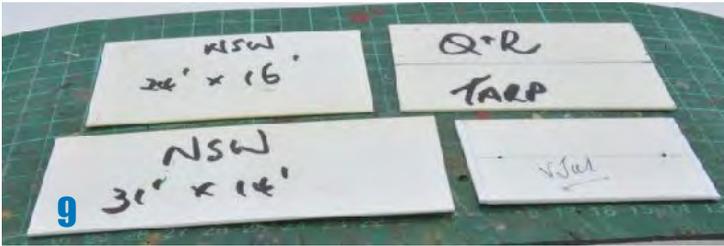
The tarp is cut from the tea bag and marked if

required. Super glue is used to fix the tarp into position, first start with the centre line, using your fingers to shape the tarp as required. The tarp is secured to the sides with

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super glue, overhand on the ends are folded down across the end of the wagon. If you study the prototype, you may find how the tarp is secured on the ends, this could vary somewhat. Some may fold back across the end of the wagon, other may fold back along the sides. Sheeting a wagon is often carried out by one person, it what works for you with the securing points/rings provided on the wagon.



Most of my traps are painted once secured in position taking care not to get paint on the wagon. Over time the colour of tarps on the various networks could have changed. For my prototype in the 1960s tarps were canvas and were green in colour. **10** In the mid 1970's P.V.C. tarps were introduced and they were yellow. If rag line (tarp rope) is required, I use paint brush bristles, a drop of super glue on the end and slide it under the tarp. Study the prototype, you may find the rope pulls back towards the end from the centre to pull the tarp tight. Most of the time this rope is tight, I found that is was hard to achieve this using cotton thread. Tarps often had marking as some form of indentation, this to may of changed over time. I use decals, applying them in the same manner as I do on wagons.



I wanted a wagon loaded with filled drums, drums full of fuel are loaded upright. The amount of drums I had on hand did not fill the wagon and at the time I was not able to buy any more, none in the shops.

Drums in a wagon are not covered with a tarpaulins, so I found a reason to use a tarp. Oil terminals also supply smaller tins of oils and grease in cartons for over the counter sales. Drums I had were used to half fill the wagon, from styrene, a replica load to the same size was made for the missing drums **11**. On top of the fake load, styrene rectangle shapes were made for the cartons of oil and grease. The styrene section and some of the drums were covered with a tarp giving that full load of drums appearance.

The same method can be used for road vehicles, gravel trucks can be made into a grain trucks **12**.



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Wool Bales: When visiting Merv our MainLine Editor's layout, I took special notice of his wool store and the penny dropped for a small scene for my layout. Growing up in Western Queensland, road trucks carried wool from sheep stations to the railway yard for loading onto rail. Wool was carried by rail to the various Stock and Station agents on the coast. Rail Operators have loading diagrams on how wool is to be loaded into open wagons.

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This wagon of wool 13 has a new P.V.C. tarp (QR 74-1475) on one end and an older repaired canvas tarps on the other end.

My bales are made from balsa and covered with a tea bag. The 1981 loading manual shows the following size was used to calculate the number of bales that can be loaded into a wagon. The length is taken a 4 feet 6 inches (1370 mm), width and height as 2 feet 6 inches (760 mm). The average mass is taken as 152 kilograms (335 lbs).



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A truck loaded with wool on a loading ramp 14 can create a location to spot or place an empty wagon for loading during operations. For the next operations session remove the truck of wool, the empty wagon becomes a wagon to be picked up (attached) to fill orders.

Folded Tarpaulins; Once a tarp is not required they are folded and returned to district manager by passenger train to fill orders. Placing tarps in empty open wagons is a serious matter that was investigated, often resulting in discipline action being handed out. The local Station Master was fined \$2.00. This is not to say it didn't happen. If modelling a modern era, freight forwarding companies returned folded traps and dunnage on empty flat racks containers. In the above photo you will notice I have placed two folded tarps on the loading bank to cover the wool load once loading has been completed.

Carriage Roof; Many wooden wagons and carriages had a canvas or malthoid roof 15. To achieve this textured look a tea bag that had been washed out and cut



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into strips was used. I later learnt malthoid comes in rolls four feet (4') wide. My first attempt was not the best, I applied super glue to the styrene roof and placed the tea bag over the roof. If you miss your alinement or try to move it, the result is not good. My current method is to pull the tea bag strip over the styrene to the position required and apply super glue to one edge. Once set, stretch the tea bag over the styrene roof and apply the super glue to the top of the tea bag, allowing the super glue to soak through to the styrene. Once the roof is completed and dry, any vents or handrails can be added and the roof painted and weathered.

Fettler's Camps; Track workers each day on arriving at the job site, would set up a fly for shade where they could have lunch, wait for trains or enjoy a cuppa at smoko time **16**. Various locations across their length of responsible were chosen. The sites would be near a "take-off" where they could remove their section car and trollies off the main line. There is a good chance the location had been used previously, forked posts with a ridge pole to swing the trap across could be in place. At others sites the tarp could be tied to the railway fence or a suitable branch of a tree. Generally, the site is clear of long grass, have a location to boil the billy and a log or sleeper or two for seats.



A nice scene can be created on your layout **17**. The track workers were driver's pulled from tractors I wanted to use for a wagon load.



This arrangements can be used in other ways, army camp, holiday campers etc. beside a creek. I have a Drover's camp set up at the cattle yard where a drover is sitting beside a camp fire looking after cattle in the yards while waiting for the wagons to be placed for loading **18**. Under the tarp is a rolled up swag made from a tea bag.

Painting; Over the years I have used most paint types, today, I mainly use Vallejo

Acrylic Model Colour. A few drops go a long way and it is easy to use. The colour can be changed quickly with a drop white or black mixed in so they are not all the same.



If you have used tea bags for a project or have a different method, I sure the Editor would love to hear from you.
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