Trans Loading Sites

We called these Team Tracks in the past

By Glenn Guerra

The image of a wagon with a team of horses pulling up along side of a railroad car and unloading or loading the car does not fit in today's world. However, the concept is alive and well. There has always been a need for people to ship or receive goods by rail, even though they did not have a rail siding of their own. The classic image of a team track is behind or along side of the depot. Today, the railroads are all chopped up, the depots are gone, and the teams of horses are gone as well. Trans Loading is now the current terminology for the activity, and it takes place at Trans Loading sites. These offer some interesting modeling possibilities. We have three locations around Plymouth, Wisconsin, and I will get into them in a bit.

Many Trans Loading sites are located by themselves with no supporting structures or facilities, other than a place to pull up next to the car. This can be a relatively simple place to model. Trans Loading sites can receive or ship just about anything. This can add interest to your operation and car routing if you operate your railroad. It can also add some interest to an otherwise difficult location on your railroad to fit an industry, or that favorite car that just does not seem to fit will now have a location on your railroad. This is not something that just fits contemporary railroading. When I lived in the Chicago area in the 1980's, there was a Team Track on the three track suburban line in Arlington Heights. About once a month, there would be a car spotted there with a truck next to it unloading the car. The railroad also used the siding to spot maintenance equipment when it was in the area.

I have some photos of Trans Loading sites that may offer some inspiration. In addition, I will point out some of the details that I think may be interesting when modeling the site. If you look around your area, you will find similar sites that may fit your railroad better.

This site is on the old Milwaukee Road main line north of Plymouth, Wisconsin. The line is broken north of Hilbert, Wisconsin, and the rest has two different owners. This section is owned by the state of Wisconsin and run by the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad. The location is known a J Landing. Photo by John Winter

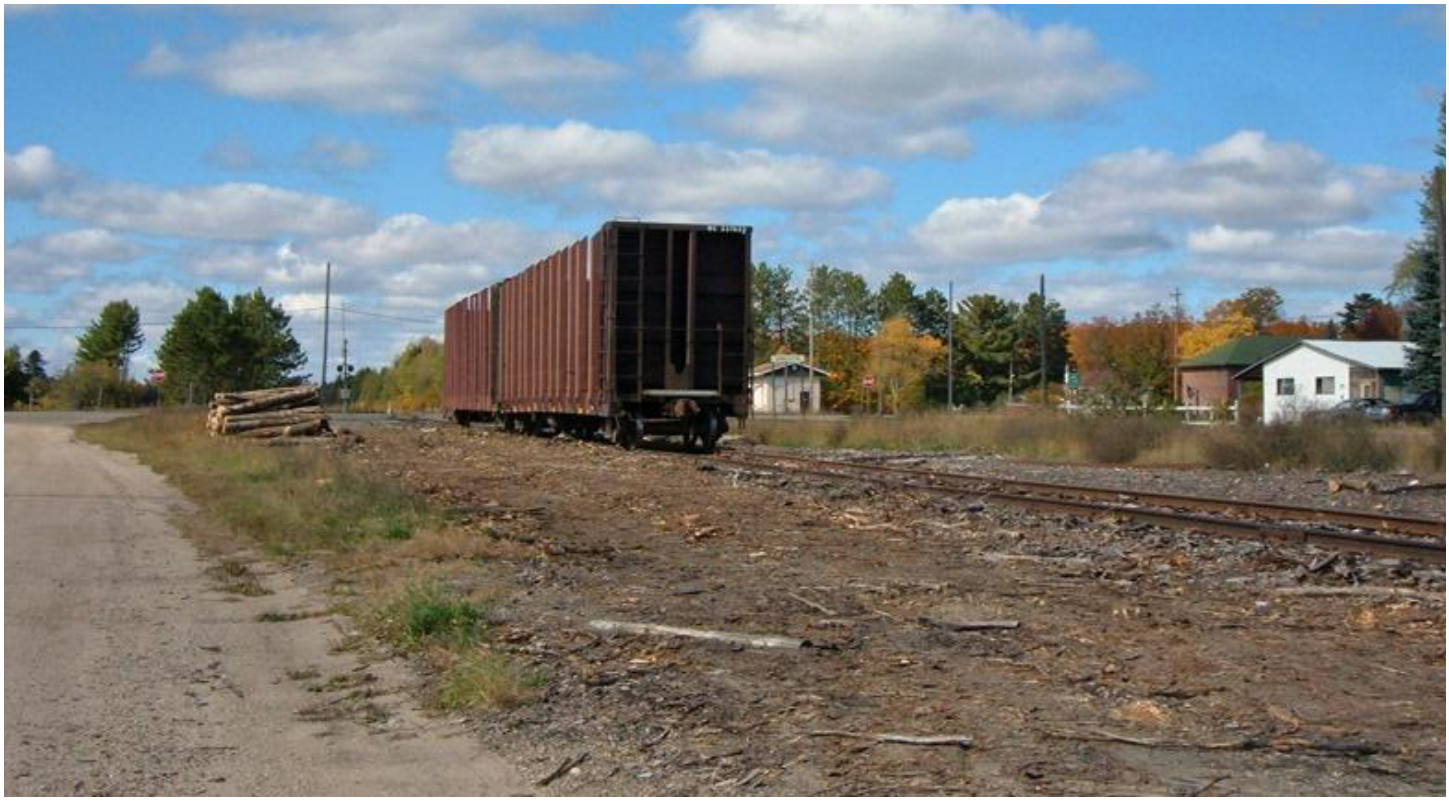
This is the Trans Loading site north of Plymouth, Wisconsin. The site is owned by Sheboygan County, and they use the gravel for road work. The flatcar has rings that are off loaded here and trucked to Manitowoc, Wisconsin, about 40 miles away, where they are used to manufacture wind generator towers. The rock in the crane sling is Limestone that is quarried nearby. The stones get trucked from the quarry to the site, and are loaded five to a gondola. Some of them were being sent to Texas for use in a sea wall.

For modeling, note the simplicity of the site and the variety of possible uses. Photo by Jerry Thompson

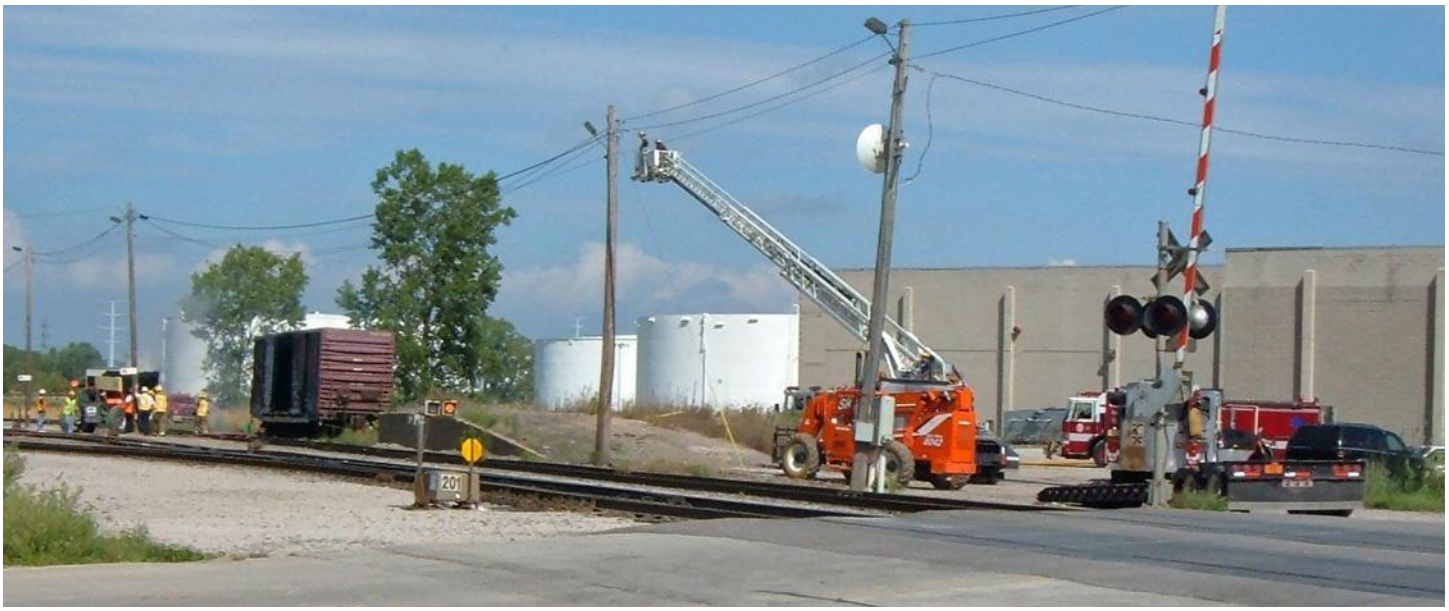
In this close up of the flatcar on the Trans Load site, we can see some of the details around the site. For example, notice the pile of used ties to the right of the car. The tie gang went through recently and piled ties here to be picked up later. The load itself is interesting. Note the rust pattern on the rings laying on their side. Think about how you would want to model this because it really shows that there are individual rings. Also, note the writing on the large rings, and again, the different rust pattern on the rings. The rings could be made out of slices of plastic water pipe or plastic electrical conduit. Make them individually, and paint them separate. Add some red or yellow to your rust paint to get some tone variation. Don't forget to drill out the bolt holes on the outer rings. Photo by Jerry Thompson

A train of gondolas loaded with rock is ready to depart from the J Landing Trans Load site north of Plymouth, Wisconsin. Photo by John Winter

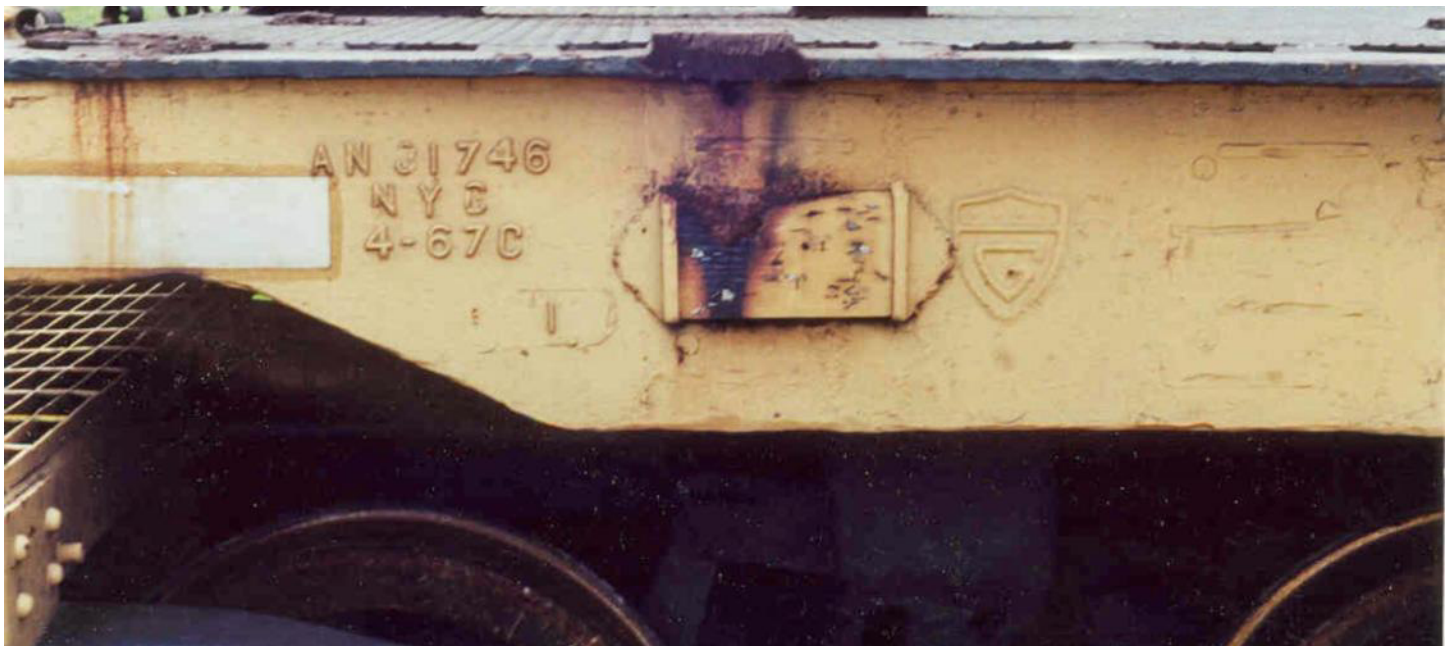
Another view of the J Landing Trans Loading site showing the stones lined up ready to load. The site is a flat place to load any kind of car, and offers a lot of modeling possibilities. In this case, all you need is a few machines and a bunch of rocks. The rocks could even be picked up and put in your gondolas for shipment, and then they would leave the site loaded. Photo by John Winter



These two photos are taken at Shingleton, Michigan. The cars are sitting on the house track that ran behind the depot. This was originally a team track that never went away. The cars are spotted, and the loggers drive up with loads of pulp wood and load the cars. This type of activity has been going on at this location for over 100 years, and could fit any era of modeling by changing some of the details. For example, you could put the depot back for an older era. Note the bark and clutter laying around in the top photo. These kinds of detail make the scene. This scene could work well on small layouts, and provide traffic to your operation. Photos by Glenn Guerra



These two photos show examples of Trans Loading facilities at terminals. The top photo is Portage, Wisconsin at the old Milwaukee Road, now Canadian Pacific, yard. The bottom photo is Green Bay, Wisconsin at the old Chicago & Northwestern, now Canadian National, yard. Both facilities have a raised platform to get up to car floor height. In addition, both facilities are located for easy access to the public road, and to keep the people loading the car away from the main part of the yard. In the photo at Green Bay, the boxcar had a load of plywood that started burning. They had the door open and were pouring water into the car. Note the differences in the platform and ramp. One is nice clean concrete, and the other is a concrete form filled with gravel. Photos by Glenn Guerra



This car showed up in Plymouth around 2001. The transformer was unloaded in Plymouth, and trucked to the final location. The car is a cast one-piece car made by General Steel Castings for the NYC in 1967. For those who are interested, Archer Transfers makes the raised General Steel Casting trademark. This car was a beast, and the empty weight of the car was more than the load it could carry. The building in the back of the top photo is the Borden plant where they make process cheese. The car was sitting on the passing track, and was unloaded there. This is an example of a highly specialized car showing up to be trans loaded. You can make a Trans Load site work for almost any kind of load. Photos by Glenn Guerra

Trans Loading sites can even be used as a place to put wrecked cars so the scrapper can cut them up. This photo was taken in Summit, Arkansas on the Missouri Pacific line through the Ozarks in 1984. The car is sitting on the old depot grounds, and the track to the left of the car was the old team track behind the depot. Photo by Glenn Guerra

We are back in Plymouth again, looking north. The covered hopper cars are full of plastic pellets that get loaded into trucks and hauled to nearby plastic molding places. The cars are sitting on the old Milwaukee Road team track. There was a railroad freight house and a private warehouse on the track at one time. Today, the trucks pull up alongside the cars to unload them. The railroad also uses the site as a staging area for their maintenance. The tan depot is the old Milwaukee Road depot, and the red building behind the crossing signal is the old Chicago & Northwestern depot. The track in the foreground is the old C&NW line from Sheboygan to Fond Du Lac. The tracks crossed over each other just past the depot, and continued on next to each other for a few miles before separating. The Milwaukee depot is used by the railroad, and the C&NW depot is a restaurant. The site is approximately the same as it has been for 100 years. The difference is in the details. If you are modeling the modern era, do it as the photo shows. Don't forget to add the abandoned tracks in the weeds and

Back in Plymouth looking south from the same location as the last photo. The cars are parked on the old C&NW main line to Sheboygan. The line was purchased by the state seven years ago, and is getting rebuilt back toward Sheboygan. When the line gets to Sheboygan Falls, the hopper cars will be able to be spotted at Bemis Plastic and not have to be trans loaded. For now, the cars are parked here, and a road has been built along side the cars for the trucks to drive on. The tall white building is a cold storage locker full of cheese that was once Kraft Foods. To the right of the cold storage locker is the old Milwaukee Road main line to Milwaukee. The Milwaukee and C&NW both served Kraft on different sides of the building. Behind Kraft was the Lakeshire Cheese complex, but it burned down in the 1990's. The brick building is also on the Milwaukee Road, and is the old Stokely canning factory. Many of the old sidings are still in the weeds; so, if you model a contemporary scene, don't for get abandoned facilities. You can also mix old buildings with modern cars. The fresh excavating and new track would show activity. The scene works on your railroad by providing a destination for cars that there are no local industries.

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