

BUILDING TERRAIN

By Brian Thomas



The author – silly-billy!

CAN'T SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES?

So you flew out and bought the new Warmaster figures, rushed home and painted frantically for a week, and on the seventh day it was done and it was good. You hot foot it down to your friends house to start a campaign of blood and carnage only to realise once you get there that the new figures you have painstakingly transformed require a slightly different set of terrain than you usually employ.

After you fight your first battle you both decide that new scenery needs to be produced. Don't worry because if you've played Warhammer before then you've already got a head start.

You must have a gaming board, be it a green cloth or even a custom made games table. A medium tree in 30mm is a large tree in 10mm, a small tree is a good sized small tree, a hill will always be a hill and so on. But what about all the other stuff such as buildings, roads, fields, walls, castles, defensive earthworks and other such paraphernalia?

I've been gaming 15mm World War Two for the last few years so my terrain making skills at this scale are fairly well developed. I have recently turned to the dark side of Chaos in Warmaster. I've been told that my terrain skills are quite good, so I thought I might be able to help with some inexpensive, effective stuff to fill out your games table.

Just in case you haven't already got a gaming surface to start with I'll begin there. All you need is 1" thick polystyrene sheet which is readily available from most wood yards, builders yards and the occasional DIY store. It comes in 8'x 4' sheets and costs around £8.00. You also need a 8'x 4'

piece of MDF to act as your base board. As an optional extra I would advise a trim of 1" and 1/2" to go round the edge of your base board to help keep the polystyrene sections (described later) in place.

STORAGE

You might find that an 8'x 4' gaming surface is a bit too large to store when you're not playing, if so get the wood yard to cut it for you into 4' square sections as it's much easier and neater than doing it yourself. If you go with this idea you will have to fit at least three strong hinges or even better, a piano hinge along the joint to give it strength when you open it up for a game.

POLYSTYRENE

There are a few different trains of thought when it comes to what size of polystyrene squares to use when making your gaming surface or whether to use squares at all and opt for hexagonal sections. You have to weigh up the pros and cons and decide for yourself. Hexes give you more flexibility as you can turn your terrain features through six different angles to give different variations where as you will only get up to four variations with square sections. But (and it's a big but, sorry no digs at Fat Bloke) squares are much easier to cut than hexes as the hexes have to be cut perfectly to work properly as in smaller scales the edges look like crevasses and they try to engulf all who dare to cross them.

The best way to cut polystyrene is with a hot wire, failing that try using a warmed bread knife. (Young or old get permission first.) I have opted for 2' squares myself and have also created some 1' and 6"x1' rectangles to give a little extra flexibility. The 6" I use for pre-formed rivers which cross the table completely. The 1' sections are great for making individual landmarks such as woods, single large buildings and mines, etc.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

So these are the bits you should have laid out in front of you.

1. One 8'x4' sheet of or two pieces of 4' square MDF (Medium density fibre board).
2. Twenty four feet of one and a half inch trim wood.
3. Eight 2' square sections of polystyrene.
4. Around 12 small screws for fixing on a trim.
5. Some form of hinging if you went for the two piece board.

Take a look at the diagram opposite to see how to put them all together. Easy!

TO FLOCK OR NOT TO FLOCK?

If you didn't already know, flock is what turns white polystyrene into a what looks like a grassy surface. It can be used to good effect to simulate fallen leaves in a wood or in the scale we're working in as wild heath

land or even corn fields. Model railway enthusiasts have been using it since the dawn of time and a quick trip down to the library will show you what can be achieved with very little effort.

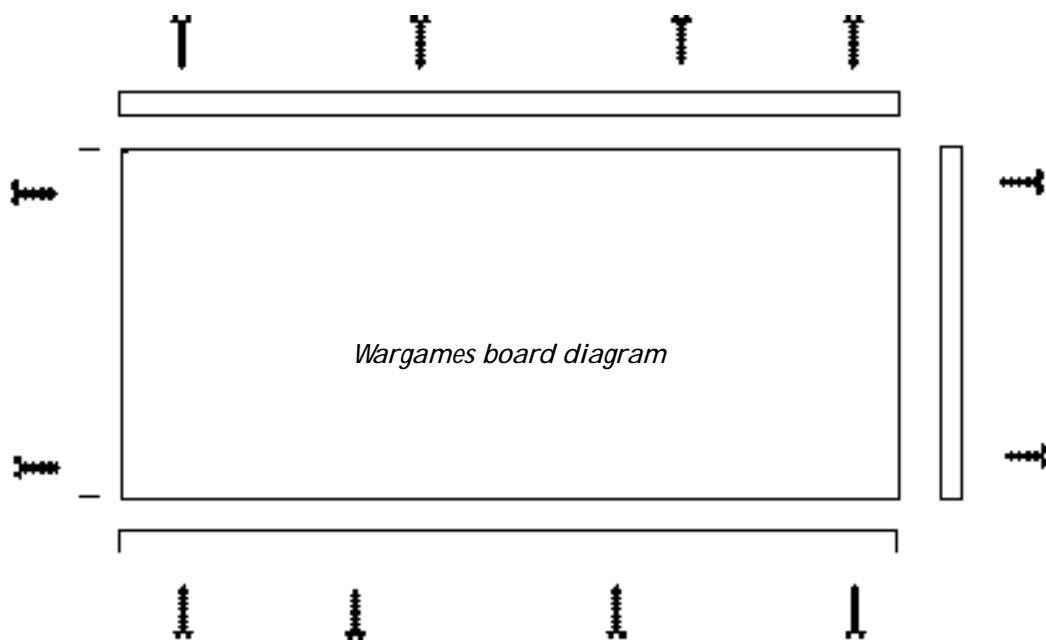
Many people use watered PVA glue as an adhesive, but after years of dabbling I have discovered that a sprayable hair styling gel gives a much more satisfactory finish and a cheap hair spray sprayed over the top will make sure it doesn't come detached for years.

The other method is to use ready flocked paper (also easy to find in most model shops) this has to be glued with thinned PVA onto the polystyrene surface and then a heavy weight has to be placed on top to stop everything from buckling as the glue dries out.

I've found it best if I cover the 2' square panels with the paper flock and any landmarks with scatter flocking to represent different types of vegetation.

SAND

Any time you dig a hole in your games board, or if your trying to represent an eroded strip of land (say at the edge of a river, the side of a mountain, etc.) you can't beat sand! PVA it on, paint it a dark earth colour then dry brush a light sandy colour over it for best effect. If you use Chinchilla sand it will look more natural than coarse sand.



Building Terrain

A final note about flocking. Always do it at least twice otherwise it will look bald, and always paint your surface an earthy, green colour first just to be on the safe side.

HILLS

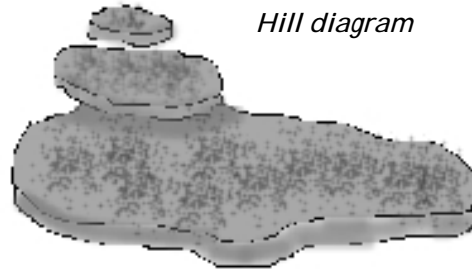
You now have a flat surface for your miniatures to battle across which will do fine for the first couple of games, but soon after (once you realise that only the front rank of your archers can fire. We've stuck to that rule in our house.) you (like some ancient god) will want to build some relief for the landscape (they are also good for hiding your rear movements). Get your sand and flock out, here we go again.

In this small scale I prefer to use polystyrene ceiling tiles, they are quite thin and by using a few stepped layers, one on top of another, work very convincingly once flocked. I have also added a rule which deducts a small percentage of the movement phase from any unit climbing each layer of the hill which feels quite realistic especially when attacking enemy units stationed on the top.

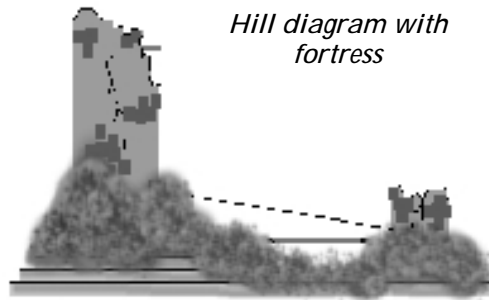
Hills made this way look 'cool' with a few trees dotted around them or maybe a ruined watch tower? Hills made by placing layers one on top of the other look pretty realistic, unless you need a rolling terrain. They also make it easy to see who is on what level during the shooting phase if you are on one hill firing at an enemy unit on another.

It's a great way to depict hill fortifications and you always have a flat surface to create your buildings on.

Hill diagram



Hill diagram with fortress



If you want your hills to look less angular try cutting the edges on a slope to create a gentle gradient, or if you wish to suggest a sheer cliff, just slice off the sections you want once the layering has been done and the glue has set. For a really amazing cliff face try gluing on a piece of tree bark, then dry brush it to bring out the detail, stick a bit of flock on any sticky out ledges and maybe the odd skeleton to make it look as if some one has plummeted from the ruined tower during a siege. Roads can be produced by cutting a gentle sloped section through your hill once the glue has set.



Hill with fortress – the finished piece...

TREES

On the subject of trees it depends how much time and money you have on your hands. Games Workshop carry some useful sizes instore, but you can make them yourself quite easily from garden wire and an old brush head (not the nylon type) and of course the ubiquitous flock.

1. Take a length of garden wire that's twice the length of the height of the tree you want to produce plus half an inch.
2. Cut some bristle from the brush head and lay it along half the length of the garden wire. Leave 1/2" free. You might find this bit easier if you first apply some neat PVA along the wire (fig 1).
3. Take hold of the middle of the wire with a pair of pliers and fold it back on itself (fig 2).
4. With another pair of pliers, get hold of the bottom of the two ends of the wire and start to twist. The longer you twist the tighter the 'trunk' becomes and the better your tree looks when it's finished (fig 3).
5. Trim the bristles to your desired tree shape (fig 4).
6. Flock it with thinned PVA at least twice.

The beauty of making your own trees is that no two come out quite the same just as in real nature (do I sound like a hippy?) And you can make around fifty medium trees from one brush head! Total cost is about £4.00.

It still doesn't look much like a tree yet, but keep going !

At last, something the National Trust would be proud of. They take a long time to make to begin with but the more you do, the quicker you become and the better they turn out.

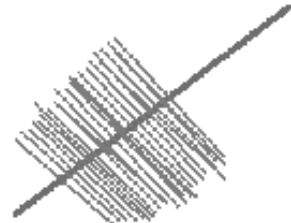


Fig 1

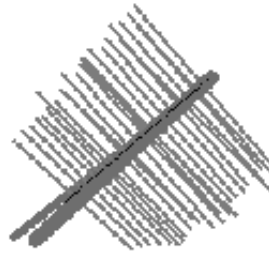


Fig 2



Fig 3

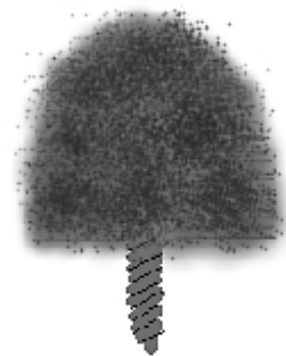
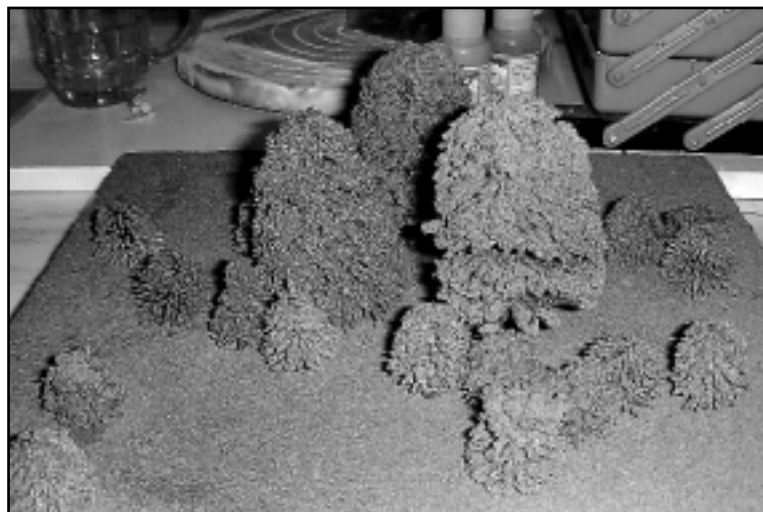


Fig 4



A mix of trees for Warmaster