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Toy train magic, on your PC

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A virtual shot of the tracks near Jorebunglow

Darjeeling, Nov. 9: In about two years' time, you can step into the shoes of Franklin Prestage, the creator of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR).

The general manager of Eastern Bengal Railway Company had completed the engineering feat in 1878. Now, a team of eight software professionals scattered across the globe has started work on The Trainz Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Project, which once completed will allow the user to create a virtual DHR using realistic terrain and tracks.

The team started the project in 2006 using the computer programme Trainz Railroad Simulator 2004 that runs on Windows 98 and Windows XP. The user can build the railways and travel on the toy train either as a passenger or an engineer enjoying a 360 degrees view as in real life.

"Because the model is being created in full scale, it will take just as long to run a model train from the tea gardens in the foothills to Darjeeling as it does in real life — around 8.5 hours," wrote one of the creators, John D'Angelo, in an email to **The Telegraph**. "The difference is that you can stop the train and save your position in the programme and restart the next day."

While D'Angelo is the all round text processor, Peter Pardoe-Matthews from Australia is creating the steam models and the Hill Cart Road section. David Drake from the US is working to replicate the over 1,000 buildings along the stretch, while Tony Weber, also from Australia, is working on the natural surrounding and the individual stations.

American software professional Bill Slack is using US government survey maps and NASA geographic data as inputs to create the digital elevation model to replicate the terrain from an altitude of about 400 feet to over 7,000 feet in Ghoom.

"Noel Brettner (from New Zealand) is now working on the section from Rangtong southwards to our starting point near Milepost 5 (Mohorgong Tea Garden) and incorporating the completed customised items into the model. We decided to start from the Mohorgong Tea Garden as the section from New Jalpaiguri to the tea garden was less interesting," D'Angelo wrote. Rick Knepp (US) and Ted Stuckey (Australia) are also working on the project.

The creators maintained that the cost of the project is as low as US\$ 30, which the team had to pay to download Trainz Railroad Simulator 2004. "All the members of the group are doing this work free of charge. There is also no intention of charging anyone for downloading the DHR model when it is completed," D'Angelo added.