

Using the Forum, Part 2

By Colin McKinney

Part One looked at how to register with Auran, what the different parts of a posting mean, and how to save time when reading by viewing new messages only. Here in Part Two are detailed instructions for how to search the forum to find the answer to a query you may have (or find a posting you read at an earlier time), and how to submit (post) your own messages. A small number of slightly more advanced tips is also briefly considered.

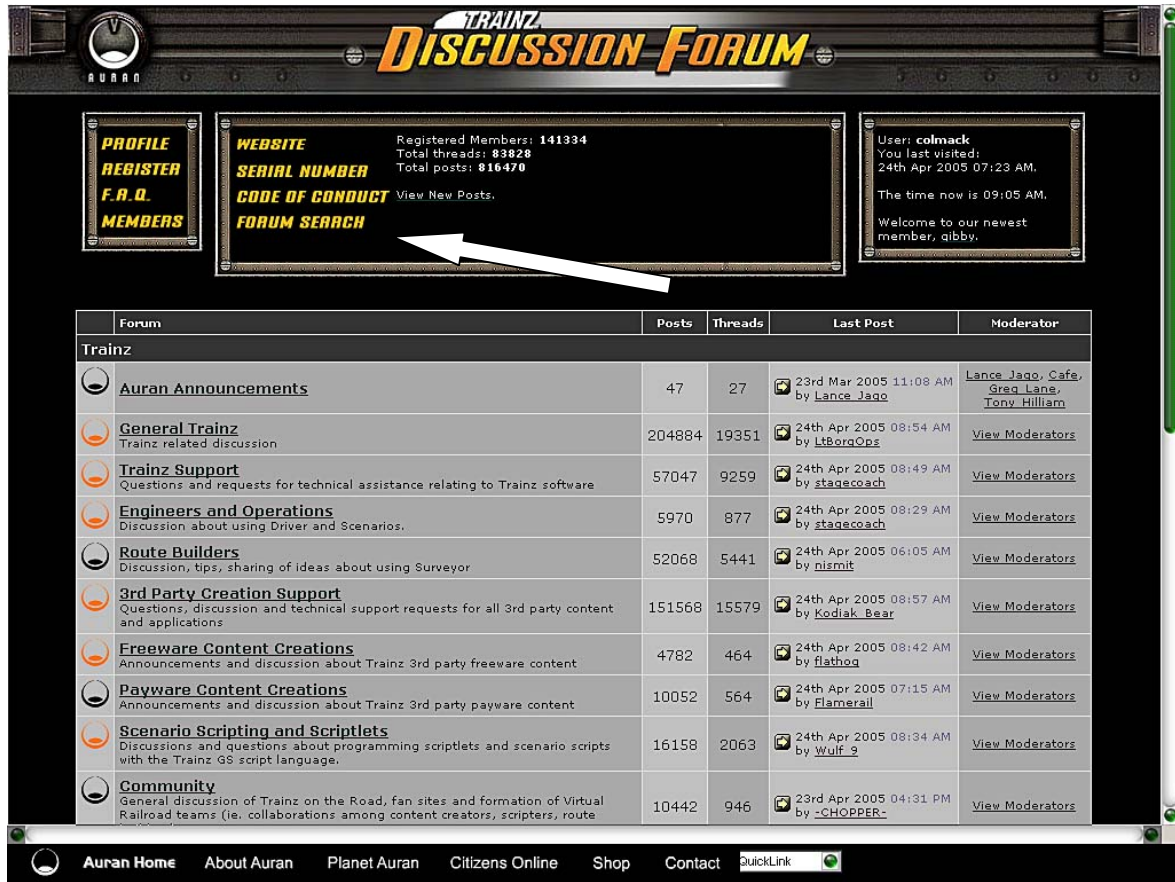


Figure 1: The main forum page, showing where to click to open the Search page.

Simply reading forum messages will certainly teach you things you didn't know before, but you are not really using the forum properly until you can actively search for information hidden somewhere in the vast number of postings made over previous months or years; or until you know how to submit your own postings. As you gain confidence, you will also find yourself joining in some of the discussions and adding your comments to threads begun by other users.

Let's begin by conducting a search. You should do this before posting a question, as often topics have been covered before, sometimes several times, and it is no more than good manners to

check this before posting the same question again. That said, you should not hesitate to ask questions at any time, as generally members are only too happy to help 'newbies' (people who are 'new' to *Trainz*, who want to identify themselves as beginners).

Reminder: make sure you have a live Internet connection.

Searching the forum You conduct a forum search to find something specific, e.g. to answer a question you have, or to find something you've read somewhere on the forum in the past, but which you can't find now. As an example for this article, let's say you wonder why (in Surveyor) a loco sometimes faces one way when you place it on a track, and sometimes the other, and you want to see if this question has been answered already.

Open the Search page by clicking on Forum Search on the main forums page (refer to the white arrow in Figure 1). Figure 2 shows the screen that appears. In the space at top left (red arrow), enter what you are looking for. Generally you will get the best results by entering just one or two key words. The search engine is very literal: e.g. "loco direction" and "locomotive direction" are two different searches and will yield different results.

Figure 2: The Search page.

You will probably have more success if you change the default setting to "Search titles only" (green arrow). This means exactly what it says: if someone posted a question and named it "Loco direction – why does it change?" and your Keywords are "Loco direction", then this search will find it. On the other hand, if someone posted exactly the same message but named it "This is driving me mad!!!", of course it won't be found. This is one reason, incidentally, for making sure that when you post messages you name them as descriptively as possible.

Also, "Search titles only" is preferred to "Search entire posts" because the latter option may yield hundreds of threads – too many to be of much use. However, it does rely on members writing descriptive titles – and you guessing the right keywords – neither of which is necessarily true. You will develop your own preferred routine. This is mine.

Leave all other settings as they are, and press Perform Search (white arrow). This will take you to the next screen – see Figure 3.

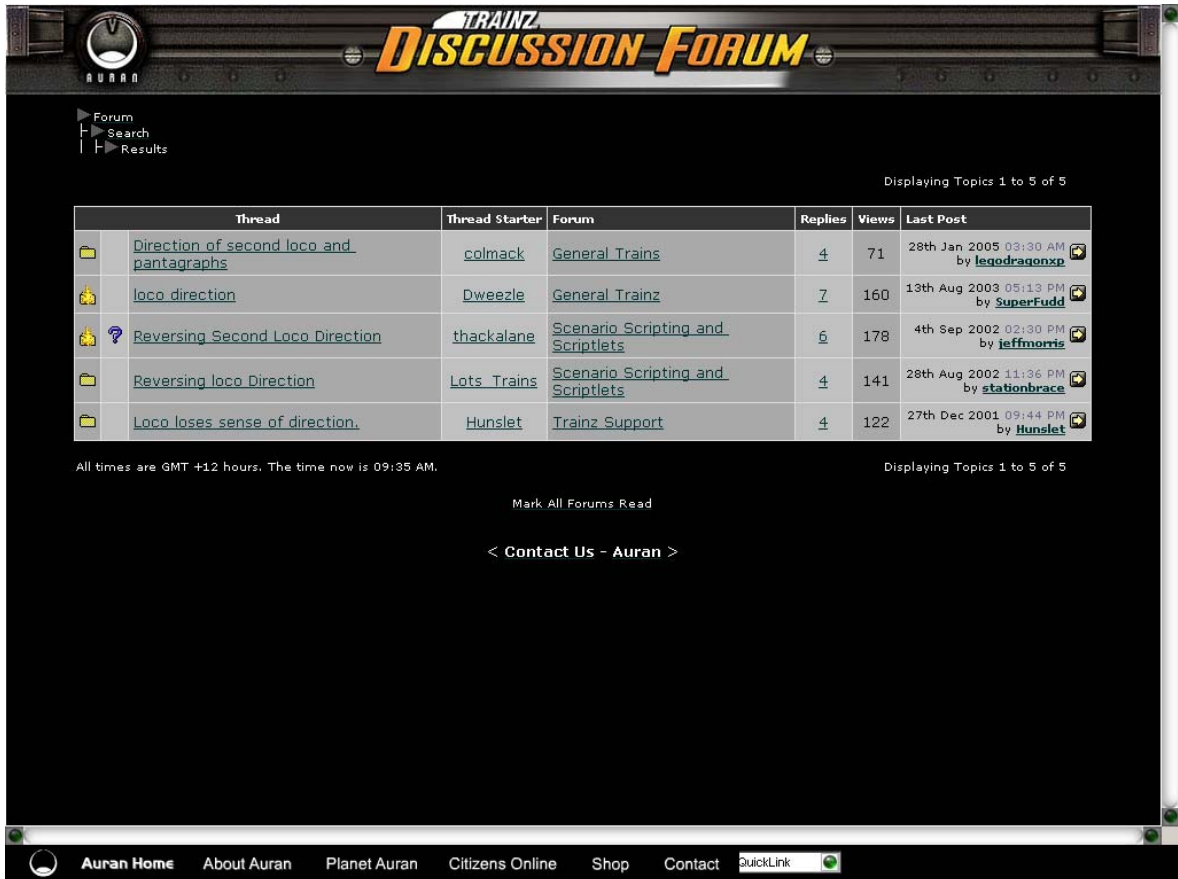


Figure 3: Search results using the keywords "loco direction".

Although these thread titles look promising, in fact what you would find if you opened each of them in turn is that they do not discuss the problem we are trying to solve. This happens quite often! So let's go back and try a different search, this time using the Keywords "wrong direction". Figure 4 shows the results of this search (without the red and white arrows, of course, which have been added):

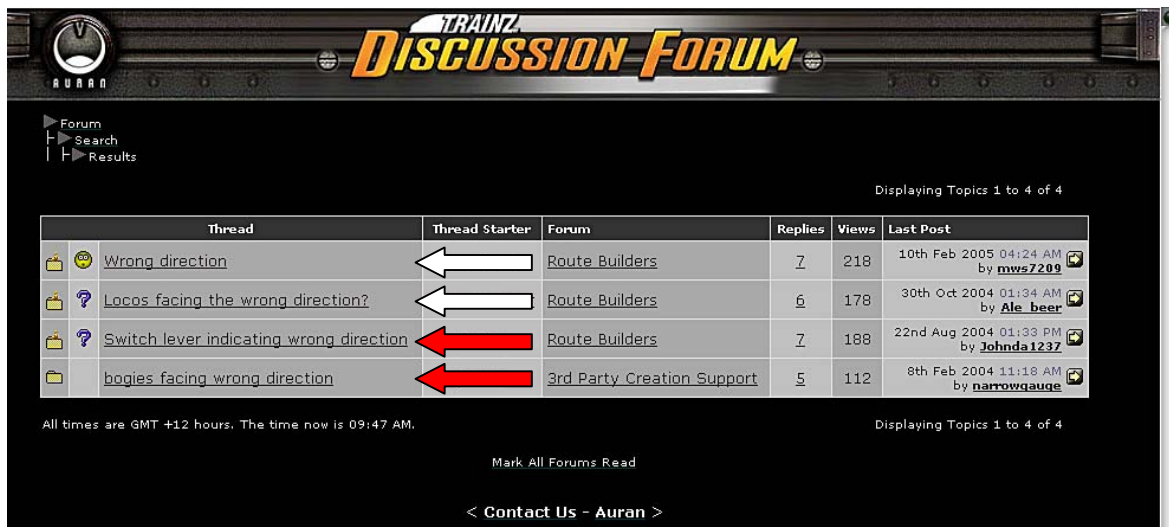


Figure 4: Search results using the keywords “wrong direction”.

Of these four results, the third one (red arrow) is unlikely, as the thread title shows that it is about switch levers, not locos. Similarly, the fourth (red arrow) is also unlikely, as it is about bogies, not locos – also, the Forum is one that is unlikely to have useful information for a beginner. However, the other two (white arrows) are both possible. In fact, on opening the second thread and reading it, you will find this section of the discussion:

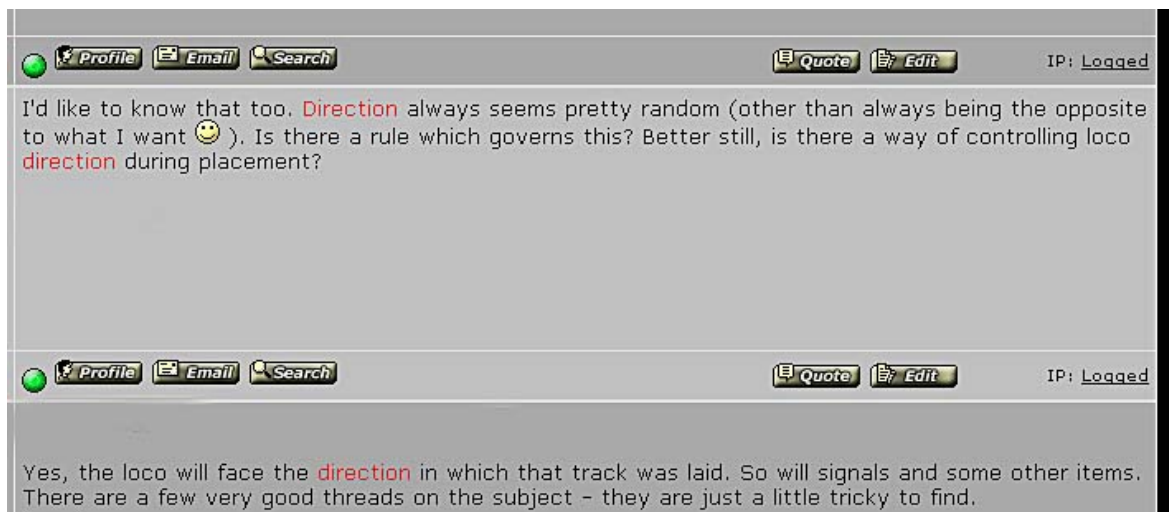


Figure 5: An extract from the second thread – *direction* is in red because it is a keyword.

So there’s the solution to our example problem: the direction a loco faces when you place it on a track in Surveyor depends on the direction in which the track was laid in the first place.

Note: After performing a search, clicking the browser’s ‘back’ button to return to previous pages does not always work

properly, so instead click on the appropriate words in small white text at the top left of the screen, which is a 'tree' diagram showing where you are.

One final point about searches: on the Search page, there is another option that can make a search that yields too many results less cumbersome. There is a drop-down selection box in the bottom half of the screen, which allows you to choose a particular forum in which to conduct your search, instead of *all* forums, which is the default. In the 'loco direction' example just used, the solution was found in a thread from the Route Builders forum, not General Trainz, which might perhaps be the forum a beginner would try first. However, Route Builders deals with predominantly Surveyor questions, so if you knew that, you could have narrowed the search by choosing that forum before clicking on the Perform Search button.

Submitting (posting) your first message

The time will come when you want an answer to a question, you try searching for it, but can't find the solution. It is time to post the question yourself. When you've done this a few times you think nothing of it, but for many people the very first time can be a little daunting – after all, many thousands of other people will see it. The thing to remember is that EVERYONE has a first time – and, if you've spent some time reading the forums, you soon see that every so often there is a question from a 'newbie'. One thing about the *Trainz* forum is that it is particularly tolerant of beginners, and if you say you're new you're likely to get many messages of welcome and encouragement, as well as answers to your questions.

The first thing to note is that there is not one *Trainz* forum, but twelve (in English) – see Figure 1. The one you are likeliest to need is the first one, underneath Auran Announcements: General Trainz. Click on the words *General Trainz*, and the General Trainz Forum will open. Near the top of the page, click on the right hand button, New Thread (see arrow, Figure 6):

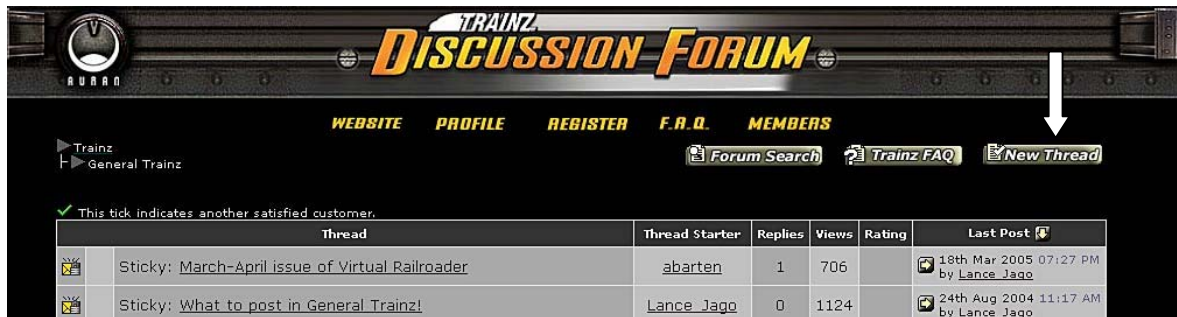


Figure 6: The start of the General Trainz forum, showing where to click to post a message.

A new screen will open: this is the one where you will type your posting. Figure 7 shows the top part of the screen.

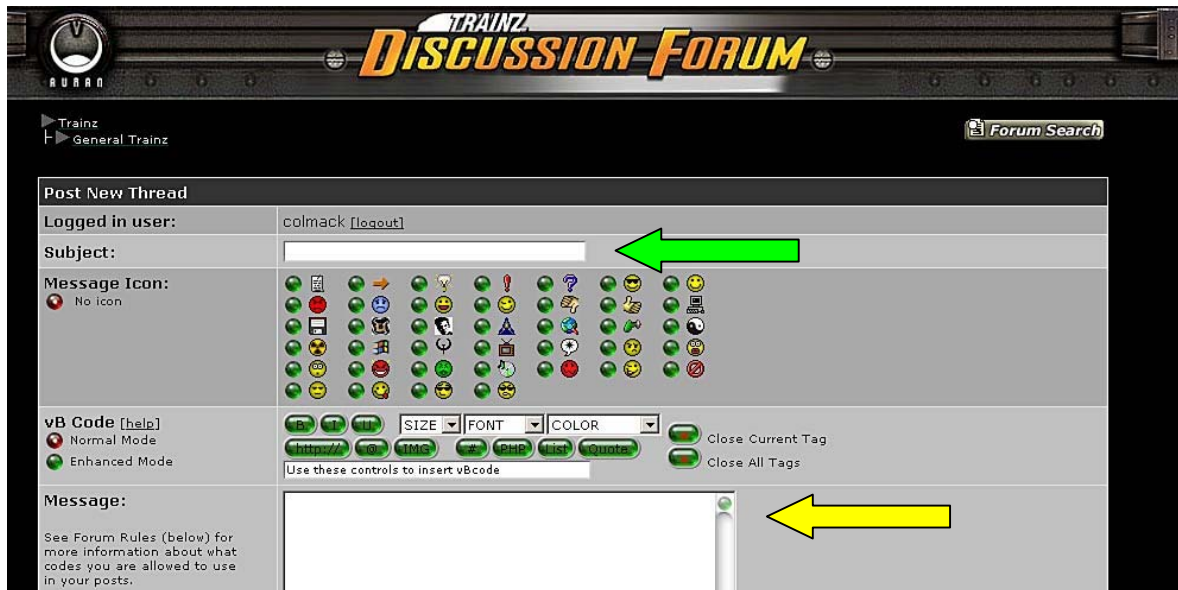


Figure 7: The top section of the Post New Thread screen.

For now, only those features that concern a person posting their first thread will be discussed. As your confidence increases, you will experiment with other features – or, if you want to, you could post a question to find out about any of them!

The arrows show all you need to begin a posting. First, enter a subject title for your thread (green arrow). This is what will appear on the forum page. Make your title concise, and descriptive of your topic: for example, *How do I use yellow direction markers?* gives readers a good idea of the content of your posting. It is also better for search purposes in the future, as discussed earlier in this article. Compare that with the unhelpful heading, *Newbie with a problem* – even if it is truthful!

Next, write your question in the panel indicated by the yellow arrow. Be as clear and direct as you can. It's best to limit your questions to one per posting.

The next step is to check the button next to Email Notification (see Figure 8, blue arrow) if you would like to receive an email whenever somebody replies to your posting.



Figure 8: The bottom section of the Post New Thread screen.

Email notification is a good idea, as it saves you having to keep checking your posting in the forum to see if anyone has responded. Of course, you need to have supplied your email address in your Profile for this feature to work. Finally, press the Submit New Thread screen (yellow arrow) and your message will be posted in the forum for all to see. If you have worded your question clearly the first response will probably arrive within minutes.

Don't worry if another member asks you for more information – just reply! (See below.) You're almost certain to be overwhelmed by helpful responses.

Responding (replying) to an existing message

If you are reading another user's posting – or you have posted a question and someone asks for clarification – don't start another thread, just continue with the existing one. To do this, scroll to the bottom of the thread and click on the Post Reply button (light blue arrow, Figure 9). A screen that looks like the Post New Thread screen described above appears, and you use it in exactly the same way except you can ignore the 'Post Subject' box at the top – just write your reply directly in the large white panel then click Submit Reply.



Figure 9: Posting a reply to an existing thread.

Note: while you are in the Post Reply screen just described, if you want to check on other messages in the thread, you don't have to go back – just scroll further down and you can see the other postings in the thread. For your convenience they are in reverse order, that is, the latest posting appears at the top.

As a final comment regarding the posting of messages, whether 'thread-starters' or responses, it should go without saying that any rudeness or signs of impatience will not be taken kindly by other forum users. (Serious rudeness contravenes forum rules and you can be prevented from using the forum by a forum moderator.) Remember that in the forum, just as with emails, something that might pass without comment in a letter or a conversation can often seem rude, so it is better to err on the side of courtesy.

A few final pieces of information

It is beyond the scope of this article to get into detail about some of the finer points of the forum. Like *Trainz* itself, there's a lot there, and you learn by experimenting – or by using the forum! To finish up with, here is a small miscellany of items in brief:

Main Forums page:

- At the bottom of the main Forums page, there is a list of all those members who are currently logged in. You might get by for years without ever using this feature, but the more familiar you become with the forum, the more you get to recognise individual members' log-on names – if you wanted to email a particular member, you'd know there was a good chance they were at home if their name appeared in this list.
- Clicking directly on any of the names in the list mentioned above brings up that person's profile

Any specific Forum page:

- The coloured or flaming folders on the extreme left-hand side indicate how often that post has been viewed or replied to – a key at the bottom of the page gives the details
- At the bottom of the page there is another search you can do to find, say, all posts sorted alphabetically by thread title, or by the number of replies (i.e. which ones have generated the most discussion), and a number of other parameters ("Using the Forum, Part 1" explained how to view only messages posted since the last time you looked)

When looking at a particular thread:

- You can open a 'printable version' by clicking in the appropriate place at the end of the thread – one use for this would be to make it easier to cut and paste material into a word processing

program, if you wanted to keep particularly interesting messages

- You can also email the link to a particular page (thread) to someone by clicking on the wording at the bottom of the page next to the previous feature – one application for this would be to send such an email to yourself at home, if you were checking the forum at work

When composing a new message:

- You can experiment with formatting in a message (for example, bold, italic, or coloured text) by clicking/choosing the appropriate drop-down menu items from the area just above the white panel where you compose the message, THEN writing the word(s) to be formatted in the pop-up box before clicking OK and continuing with the message
- More ambitious formatting (e.g. inserting hyperlinks into your message) can be explored by clicking on Vb Code [help] to the left of the symbols just described: a knowledge of basic HTML would help here, but even without that you can experiment by copying from the Help page and pasting into the message area, and making the appropriate changes to the text
- If you change formatting you won't see the effect until you either submit the posting or – to be on the safe side – check it first by clicking on Preview Post

When adding a comment (replying) to an existing thread:

- If you want to include in your reply a quote from another posting in the thread, locate the posting from which you want to quote and click the 'quote' button at its end. The text that you see (not anything in square brackets) is the entire text from that posting. Highlight and delete what you *don't* want, leaving only the section which you wish to appear in your reply as a quotation, taking care not to cut out the square brackets or any of the material inside the brackets. Continue with your reply underneath. Preview before sending (see last point above).

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