

TAC NEWS

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MODELING DESERT TERRAIN

Desert fighting has given us some of the most fascinating campaigns and personalities to be found in history. The names of Lawrence, Allenby, Rommel, Patton, and (dare we say?) Montgomery, are known by virtually everyone who has made a study of warfare. The see-saw campaigns of World War II and brilliant victories of World War One and the Arab-Israeli Wars have filled volumes of history books. So why does a theater of operations that produced such interesting history produce such mediocre war games?

An insight to this dilemma can be gained from this excerpt taken from the Designer's Notes of Avalon Hill's Tobruk boardgame. The author is explaining the methods used in the game to determine the effectiveness of armour-piercing shot against armour plate.

“Assuming the ground is perfectly flat (not a bad assumption in the desert) and assuming a straight-line projectile flight to the target plate (a bad assumption anywhere but one which gives the defender the advantage), it can be safely assumed that the plate's vertical slope is constant.”

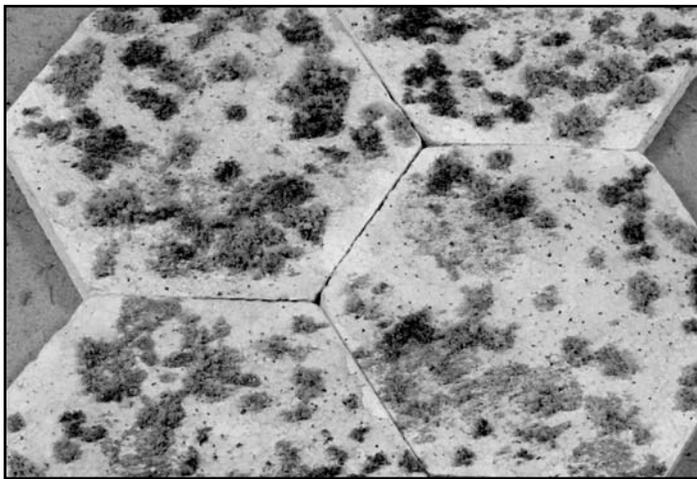
Assuming the ground is perfectly flat in the desert is not only a bad assumption, it is a perfectly lousy assumption. It is a fundamental myth associated with desert warfare. Flat, featureless terrain would never have allowed the Afrika Korps, with marginal German and Italian equipment, to inflict the crushing defeats they dealt to the British. Nor, would it allow the Israelis, with their inferior tanks, to prevail in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Desert terrain features rocky slopes, wadis, and vegetation. Subtle undulations can provide a hull-down position for a tank, scrub and depressions provide cover for infantry. No other theater of operations require the battlefield commander to make such minute reconnaissance of the terrain. The success in attack or defense hinge on its accurate assessment. For success in the desert, a commander must understand, and exploit, its subtleties. This harsh and unforgiving environment requires an adaptive and innovative mindset. Perhaps this is the reason why the desert has been history's proving ground for great commanders.

Only GHQ's Terrain Maker offers you the varied landforms actually found in the desert.

Making a Clear Desert Hex

The final spectacular results belie the simple and straight forward techniques to create Terrain Maker desert scenery. With this system you will now be able to make the unique terrain features that make the desert one of the more formidable battlegrounds in history.

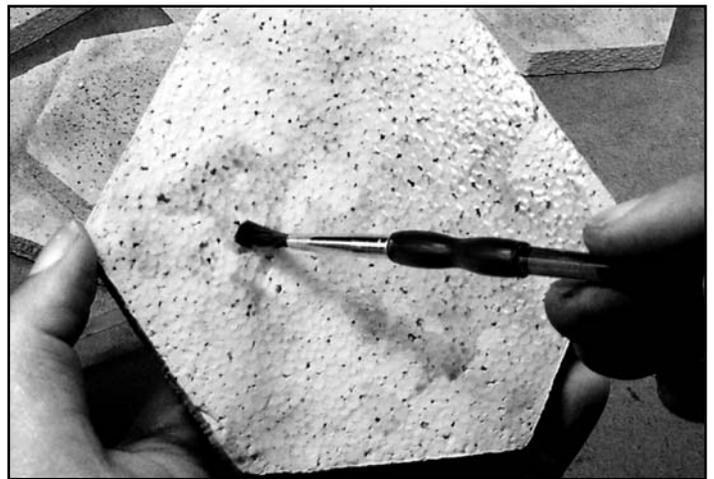


Materials

- 1 pack 1/2" (TM1) hexes
- tan flat latex interior paint*
- brown acrylic paint**
(dilute with water for dark wash)
- white glue
- 1"-2" paint brush***
- smaller brush***
- foam ground cover (I used mostly TMA6, TMA11)



1. Use interior latex paint to paint the sides and top of the hex tan. Set aside to dry completely.
2. Make a dark wash by adding enough brown acrylic paint to water to make it look muddy but not thickened.



4. Randomly dab the dark wash on the surface of the hex. Blend the edges of the brown wash by vigorously scrubbing the edges with a coarse bristled brush.
5. Dab white glue on the hex and apply ground foam for desert scrub. Tap the hex to remove excess foam. Set aside and allow to dry.
6. That's your first finished flat land hex!



Making a Wadi

It does rain in the desert. The nature of the soil contributes to a dramatic run-off, with even the smallest amount of precipitation. This run-off is funneled into channels called wadis. This natural trench system varies in width and depth, from a slit trench to an anti-tank ditch.

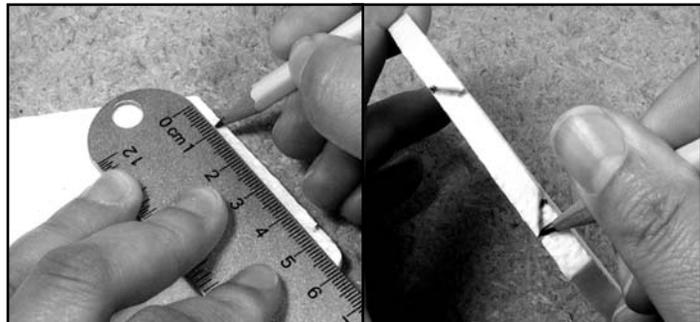
The methods for building a wadi hex are very similar to those for building a stream hex. In fact, we suggest you may want to review “Building a Stream Hex” in the TM2 hex pack. The template for a wadi hex is exactly the same as for the stream hex.



Materials

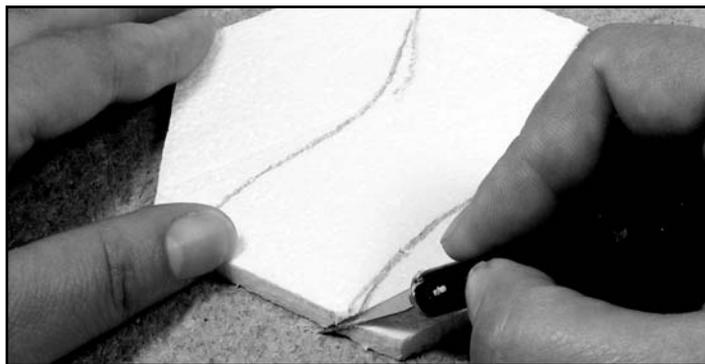
- 1 pack 1/4” (TM2) hexes
 - metric ruler
 - pencil
 - hobby knife
 - white glue
 - tan flat latex interior paint*
 - brown acrylic paint**
(dilute with water for dark wash)
 - 1”–2” paint brush***
 - small brush***
 - foam ground cover (I used mostly TMA6, TMA11)
 - gel or impasto acrylic paint medium, or Durham’s Water Putty**
 - butter knife or stylus
1. Along the bottom of one hex side, measure and mark with pencil 1½ cm inward from each edge. Repeat on the directly opposite side of the hex.

2. Along the top of the hex side, measure and mark with pencil 1cm inward from each edge. Repeat on the directly opposite side of the hex.
3. With a straight edge draw two diagonal lines connecting the marks on the top and bottom of each hex side.



4. Connect the marks on the top of the hex as you sketch out edges of the wadi banks in pencil.

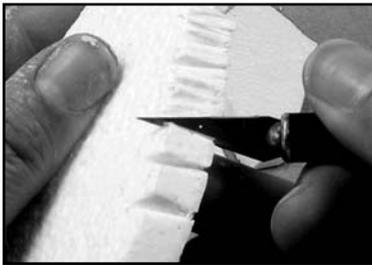
Note that even though the river bends and curves within the hex, as long as it enters and exits on directly opposite sides, it functions as a straight wadi. For a bend in the wadi bed (as in photo at left), make the exit one or two sides over from the mouth of the wadi, instead of making the exit at the opposite side.



5. To begin your cut, align the hobby knife blade on a diagonal. As you cut through the hex, the angle of the bank can vary, but the blade must exit the hex exactly on the opposite diagonal. This makes a standard bank contour to connect each hex.

When you have finished cutting out the other wadi bank, you will have three hex pieces.





6. Cut small notches to simulate sand erosion.



9. Use a blunt point, such as the bowl of a spoon to drag along the wadi bed. This will represent the action of wind and water on the lighter soil sediment. Set aside and allow putty/medium to dry.

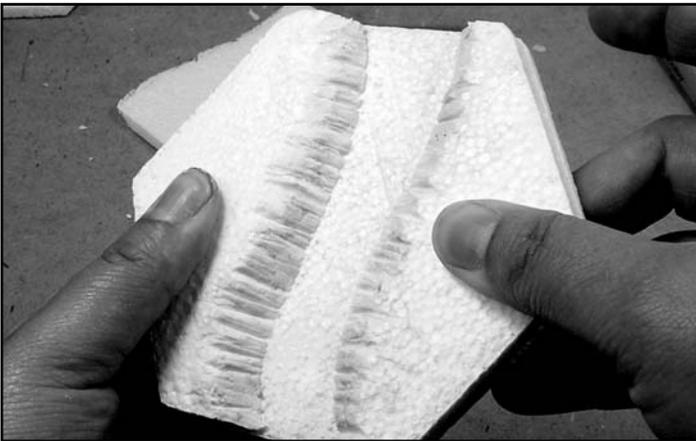
10. Paint and finish as you would for a clear terrain hex, with this exception: do not apply glue and vegetation to the wadi bed. Now you gotta wadi!

Notes:

* For the tan basecoat, pick up a quart of the cheapest interior latex paint you can find at your local home improvement store and have them tint it for you. You may want to get a few colors for variety. A quart will last you for quite awhile.

**Home improvement stores carry many sizes of super cheap brushes. You can pick up a 2" foam brush for under a dollar. For painting washes, I used kids' watercolor brushes I picked up for a couple of bucks.

***Craft stores carry acrylic paint and medium or you can buy Durham's Water Putty at home improvement stores.



7. Smear an even layer of white glue on the bottom of the two bank pieces, and affix to an uncut TM2 hex, making sure all the edges align. That extra middle section left over from cutting out the river banks can make islands, sand pits, ridges or other features in your terrain.

8. The dry stream bed of your wadi hex is of a different composition than the desert floor. To represent this, prepare your Durham Water Putty (or use acrylic medium) and apply it to the stream bed.

A Note from the Photographer:

With all of the effort you put into painting your miniatures, wouldn't you rather see them on beautiful 3D terrain than on an old bed sheet?

You don't have to be an artist to make great battlefields with the Terrain Maker system. By just using very simple techniques, readily available materials, and a few tools you probably already own, you can turn out amazing terrain!

I have never modeled terrain before. I am a total newbie. I was amazed at how simply and quickly I could put together some really sweet terrain. Flatland hexes (TM1) make up the majority of any board.

They are also the easiest and fastest hexes to make. Set up assembly-line style: paint a pile of hexes, set them aside to dry. By the time you finish painting all the hexes with the basecoat, the first hexes will be dry enough to apply the darker washes, and so on.

One thing to keep in mind is that every terrain board is viewed in full, so don't get caught up on the individual hexes. Nature isn't perfect or uniform, so your terrain certainly doesn't need to be. When you lay all your finished hexes out together and see them as a whole, I really think you will be blown away at what you can accomplish with some paint, flocking, foam hexes, and the Terrain Maker techniques in just an afternoon.