Hills for Wargames

By Matakishi

I make my hills from 9mm thick cork tiles which are 30cm (1ft) square. I glue two together to make an 18mm high section and finally, after I've cut them to the required shape, I top them with a covering of grass mat which is trimmed with a scalpel or craft knife when everything is dry. I cut the cork into the shapes I want with a scroll saw which is not that expensive to buy these days and is a worthwhile investment if you plan to make lots of terrain and scenery.

All the gluing is done with PVA. The resulting hills are light and durable and provide a flexible, long lasting terrain system. There is no reason why you can't glue more tiles together to give taller levels other than cost. It is also possible to angle the scroll saw so that the cut edges of the tiles are angled. If I decided to make hills with taller individual layers I would go for this angled option for aesthetic reasons.

The simplest form of hills to make are separate layered hills. Cut several shapes of varying sizes like the ones shown above. You can then stack them in a variety of ways to suit your requirements as shown below. You can make round hills, kidney shaped hills, or any other shape you like. I'm using some 28mm figures in the pictures to give an idea of scale.

The next stage is to make sets of components that are designed to work together. As with all modular terrain you must ensure that it is going to match up when you've finished so you must begin and end all your cuts at the same point on all the tiles. Most of the time this will be exactly half way (150mm) along an edge although there are exceptions. The actual cuts should be irregular and not straight as it's these that will form the outer, visible edges of your finished terrain.
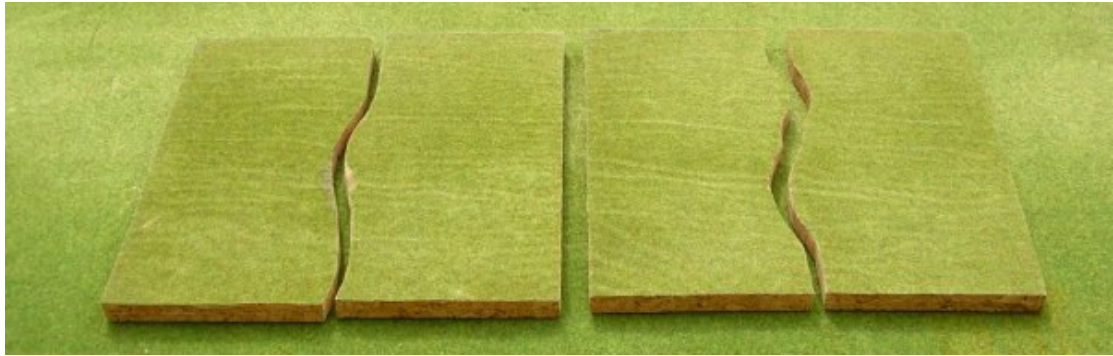
One of the most useful 'hilly' items is a ridge. Start by cutting two tiles in half.

Next, cut a third tile into three pieces. The outer pieces are 75mm wide and so the centre one is automatically 150mm.

Turn the cut pieces of the first two tiles back-to-back so the straight, factory-cut edges meet and then stack the pieces from the third tile on top and you have the beginnings of a large ridge.

Cut some end pieces and your ridge is complete. Seperating it in the middle and laying it out differently gives you a pair of spurs as an alternative.


There are many one-off pieces like the ridge that are easy and enjoyable to make. However, there is a third stage that allows features like this to be incorporated into a system that gives you an undulating tabletop of rolling terrain. I prefer this to a flat table with isolated hills; I think it gives a better feel of scale, particularly for small actions.

The basic principle involves complete 30cm x 30cm tiles and half tile-width edges; the same as the edges of the ridge. The only different components we need are corners. You can cut an inner curve corner and an outer curve corner from a single tile with no wastage as you can see in the picture below. Since the cutting is the time consuming part it's important to keep it to a minimum.


Here's an example of a section of rolling terrain built up stage by stage. I've chosen a simple corner because it uses all the different components but there's no reason why three quarters or more of the table couldn't be raised up this way. I'm assembling it in the middle of the table to give a clearer picture.

First we block out the corner with three complete tiles. You have to imagine that they're actually placed at the corner of your table.
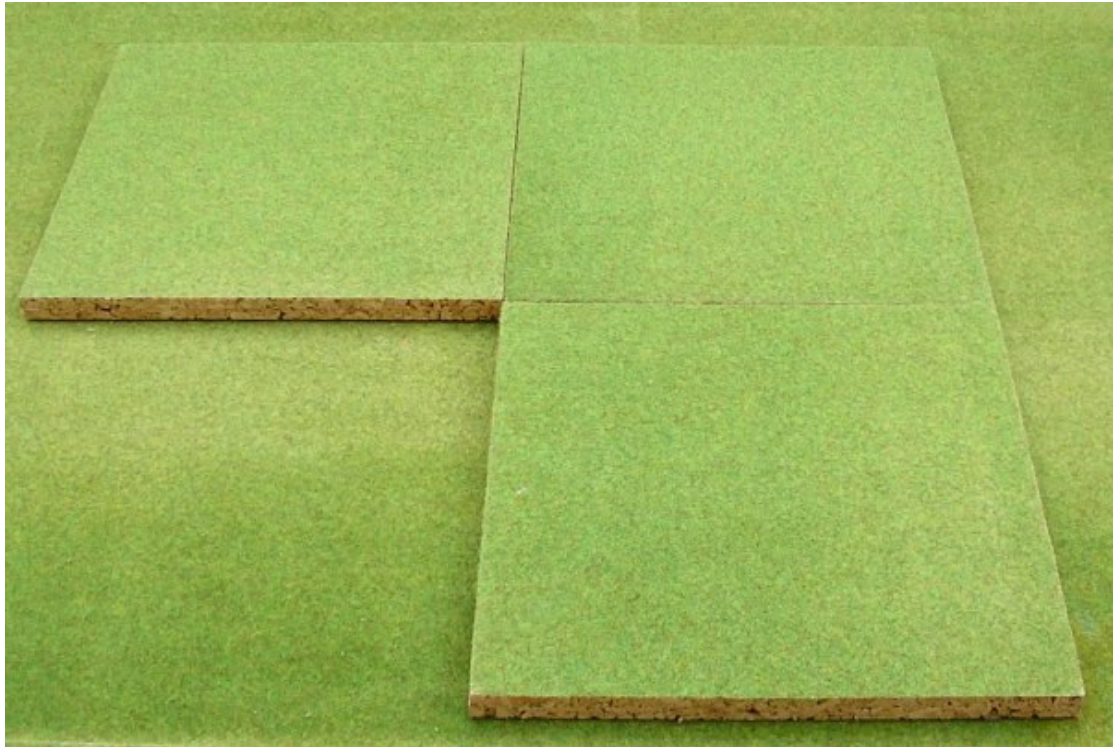
A second layer is added by placing another complete tile on top.
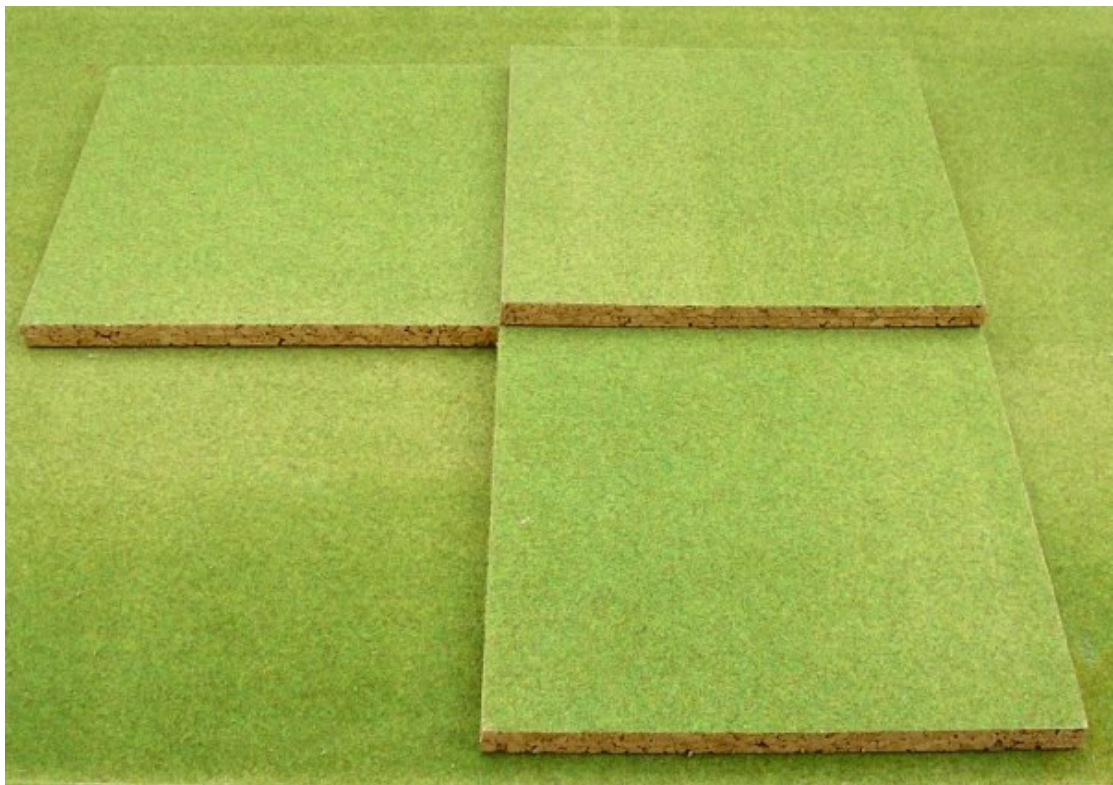
Then edge pieces and corner pieces are laid around the complete tiles for the final effect. The very top piece is just a corner piece on its own.

Here it is in position.

Here you can see a similar corner in use. The raised sections continue down the table to the left of the picture for most of its 8ft length. half way down it juts out into a spur with a German bunker on it. In total, nearly three quarters of the 8ft x 4ft table is 'above ground level'.

You may have noticed that the stepped hills and the ridge in the early photos are getting a little worn now. I made them fifteen years ago in 1991 and have used them ever since. For five years they saw daily service, taking on all comers, in my games shop. I think they've held up pretty well.

Here's an alternate layout I put together quickly. The boards underneath are warped unfortunately and they throw it off a little, but you can get the general idea.