

Library Branch / Piney Fork

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad constructed the Library Branch in 1918 to reach Montour Mine #10 in Library. In 1929, the branch was extended three miles down the Piney Fork valley to create an interchange point with the B&O Railroad at Snowden in South Park Township.

This extension included purchasing the rights to use trackage for 8-tenths of a mile on the existing Peters Creek Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The PRR branch was built in the early 1900's to reach two coal mines along Piney Fork.

The first connection was called Gould, located a few hundred yards west of the current Triphammer trailhead lower parking area. The Gould Mine was operated by the Consumers Fuel Company in 1919 and renamed as the Bertha Consumers Fuel Co. in 1923. It was located in the small valley opposite the current sanitation plant.

The other mine was the Knothole Mine. Independently owned by the Breznell family, it loaded coal at a tipple building at the Triphammer trailhead area. The mine was located at the site of Evans Park. Miners' houses were built in a patch on the hillside called Knothole. The mine tracks switched off Montour rails under Triphammer Road, which in



A train shoves under Triphammer Road. After abandonment of the railroad, the bridge was removed and the cut filled in. The current trail runs to the left of the tracks. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

those days was an overhead steel with timber deck bridge crossing over the railroad. After abandonment of the railroad, the bridge was removed in 1987 and the cut was filled in to carry the current roadway.

The other switch connection with the PRR branch was located a half-mile further east, behind the current Paliotta Construction Co. yard. It was named Pennmont – for Pennsylvania and Montour. The PRR line curved through the current construction yard area, crossed Piney Fork Road and ran along the north side of Piney Fork Road to and through “Green Man Tunnel” under the B&O Railroad. This section is currently under development by the Montour Trail Council.

Due to infrequent use by the Pennsylvania Railroad, the shared section of the railroad was controlled by Montour dispatchers, who would issue train orders for any PRR trains using this track. The switches were normally lined for Montour rails, but locked with PRR switch locks to prevent Montour trains from entering PRR territory. There was no interchange of cars with the PRR at Gould or Pennmont, with each railroad only operating their own trains on this shared section.

From Pennmont, the Montour rails extended to a small interchange yard with the B&O RR at Snowden. The two tracks there held 60 cars each, with one track designated as the delivery track to the B&O and the other as the receiving track where the B&O would leave empty hoppers or freight cars for delivery by the Montour.



**Montour locomotives and caboose shove down the Library Branch in 1975.
Gene P. Schaeffer photo.**

In 1963, the PRR abandoned use of its Peters Creek Branch and sold the 0.8 miles of shared track to the Montour RR. The remaining PRR rails were subsequently removed.

Over the years, the Montour's parent company, the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR, deferred maintenance costs on the Library Branch and operating conditions on the branch deteriorated to the point where the branch was subject to numerous derailments. Most were minor in nature due to low speed restrictions on the branch.

In September, 1975 the last interchange was made with the B&O. This train derailed two different times before it reached Snowden. After this date, trains on the branch operated only as far as the Montour #10 mine. In 1978, the P&LE ended Montour operations on the entire Library Branch by refusing to send trains down the poorly maintained branch. Official abandonment was finalized in 1979.

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