

Realignment of the Original Right-of-Way

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The original 10 miles of the Montour Railroad was built in 1879 from Coraopolis to Imperial, with many curves along its route as it followed Montour Run through the countryside. After the 1914 Mifflin Extension construction opened new coal mines, traffic increased and the original track alignment presented problems for longer trains with larger, more powerful locomotives coming into use. During the 1920's, several realignment projects were undertaken to eliminate some of these problem areas.

The first realignment was in the area now between Beaver Grade Road and the Parkway West, trail miles 3.5 to 5.0. Before Montour Run Road was constructed in the 1960's, Montour Run wandered along the base of the hillside, flowing behind the current YMCA site and along the edge of the valley. In 1920, three bridges were built and the right-of-way straightened in a half-mile area. All three bridges were steel plate girders with wooden decks.

The bridge at mile 3.5 is 54 feet long. Just south of the bridge are old stone abutments and two piers in the creek where the original line crossed Montour Run.

The next bridge at mile 3.7 is a 3-span 90 foot steel bridge that was moved from that previous location and reused. 1920 is stamped in the concrete abutments.

A short distance away is the third bridge, near Hookstown Road. A 49 foot bridge, it also has 1920 stamped into its concrete abutment.

The next project took place in 1924, at mile 2.7 and 2.8, where two steel bridges with concrete decks were built and a 35 foot deep cut was dug through the hillside to eliminate several sharp curves in the main line.

Another project occurred in 1926 between Cliff Mine Road and Enlow, when four bridges and a tunnel were built within a half mile.

At mile 6.6, a 70 foot steel through plate girder bridge was built with a concrete deck. This style has steel supporting girders beside and above the deck and traffic goes "through" or between the girders. It looks like a wide "U" shape, while a deck plate girder bridge looks like "TT" with the deck on top of the main girders. Either style could have decks of wood timbers or of poured concrete. Concrete slab bridges were also used in some places, which have concrete beams topped with a concrete deck.

Mile 6.7 has a 40 foot concrete slab bridge, consisting of two spans with a center support pier in the middle of the creek. 1926 is stamped in the concrete abutments.

At mile 6.8 is another steel through plate girder, 54 feet long. Old abutments from the original line can be seen along the creek bank.



A view from a caboose shows a train crossing the concrete slab bridge before entering Enlow tunnel. A date stamp can be seen in the concrete bridge abutment. Roy E. Parkinson photo from Gene P. Schaeffer collection.

Just before the tunnel, at mile 7.1 is a 40 foot concrete slab bridge with two spans and dated 1926. At this bridge, old abutments can also be seen along the creek.

The Enlow tunnel (called Jeffreytown by the railroad) was bored through the hillside to eliminate the loop of track following Montour Run around the hill. The tunnel eliminated almost a half mile of track.

The final project occurred in 1928 as five new bridges were built and the main line through Imperial was relocated and raised to eliminate a road crossing at Rt. 30.

Several different styles of bridges were used in this project. They are between miles 8.1 and 8.9 and each has a 1928 date stamped in concrete. While this final phase did not change the length of the main line, it did eliminate a dangerous grade crossing at Rt. 30. At this point, about a mile of main line track and many sharp curves had been eliminated by the realignments.



A 1930 view of the then new bridge over Route 30 in Imperial, which eliminated a grade crossing. County of Allegheny photo from Gene P. Schaeffer collection.

Very little realignment occurred from Imperial to Library Junction where the trail diverges from the railroad main line. The railroad main line continued along the Bethel Branch of the trail and on to West Mifflin, while the Montour Trail follows the railroad's Library Branch through South Park and extends to Clairton.

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