

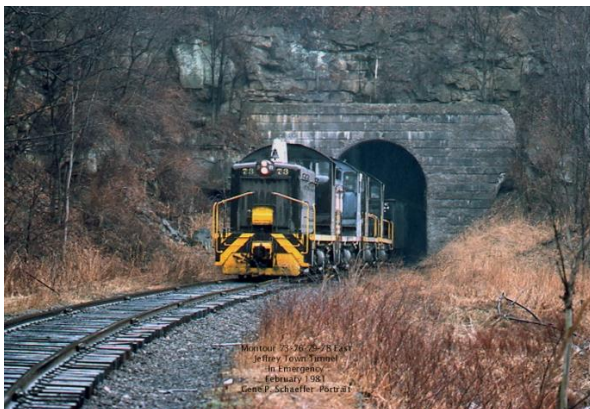
Tunnels on the Montour Railroad

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

With the recent re-opening of Greer and National Tunnels after repairs and winter closure, the Trail is again wide open for travel. I thought this would be a good time to reprise a previous Montour History column to inform newer trail users and to remind others about the tunnels present on the Montour Trail.

During the summer months, Montour Trail patrons enjoy a brief respite from the sun and heat as they pass through the tunnels on the Trail. How many tunnels are there on the Montour? Let's count them – Jeffreytown – Enlow – Peacock - McConnell – Bishop – National - Greer – that makes seven tunnels, right? Well, not exactly.

The first tunnel, at Trail mile 7.2, was actually the last one built and was known by two different names. Railroaders called it Jeffreytown for the settlement at the eastern portal, but it is also known as Enlow Tunnel, for the town located to the west. It was built in 1926 as a realignment project eliminating several sharp curves on the Montour's main line. The original railroad followed Montour Run as it looped around the hillside. The tunnel eliminated about a half-mile of track and some sharp curves by burrowing under the hill for 575 feet. This tunnel is the only straight bore on the Montour.



Jeffreytown / Enlow Tunnel - Gene P. Schaeffer photos

The next tunnel was probably the first one to be built, but now does not exist. It was bored through the hillside at Peacock, at Trail mile 19.2. Built during the 1913 extension of the railroad, it had a wooden liner, a curved bore and was about 600 feet in length. This tunnel had numerous problems, including rock falls and water seepage, as the ground was unstable and very wet. After a few years, around 1918, it was determined that the tunnel was too difficult to maintain as there had been too many blockages of railroad traffic. It was daylighted, which means digging out the roof and making it an

open cut through the hillside instead of a tunnel. As you travel through what is now Peacock Cut, you will notice that the hillside still stays very wet and rocks litter the ditches and occasionally roll out onto the trail surface.



Peacock Cut - Gene P. Schaeffer photos

At Mile 25.0 in Cecil Township, another tunnel was built in 1913. Bored through a hill on the McConnell farm, it was thus known as McConnell Tunnel. It was also called Bishop Tunnel, for the nearby community and when National #2 mine was opened nearby, it became more widely known as National Tunnel. Also built with a wooden liner, the concrete portals and liner were added in 1928. It has a curved bore and also crests a hill inside its 623 foot length. Pulling trains over the hill inside the tunnel meant the engineers had to keep full power on their train while transiting the tunnel. Smoke, steam and later diesel fumes made it an unpleasant trip and the crews tried many solutions, like water-soaked bandanas over their noses, to help them breath while inside the tunnel. Trains were often down to a few miles an hour going through the tunnel, which made the transit time even longer.



National / McConnell / Bishop Tunnel - Gene P. Schaeffer photos

The final tunnel was bored through the ridge above Chartiers Creek in 1913 at Trail mile 28.6. It also has a curved bore and was the shortest on the line at 235 feet. As with the others, it had a wood liner until concrete was added in 1922. A nearby tunnel had been previously bored to carry the Pennsylvania Railroad through this ridge and was called Bell Tunnel after the landowners of this area. The Montour called their newer tunnel Greer, for another nearby landowner. The active railroad now operating through Bell Tunnel's trainmen actually call their tunnel "Greer", as did some old U.S. topographic maps – a misnomer that adds to our tale. Greer is a tunnel with only one name, but seemingly with two locations.



Greer Tunnel - Gene P. Schaeffer photos

Now the answer to our original question, as Trail patrons know, is actually three. But the tales and stories are as numerous as the countless coal trains that have passed through those tunnels in the past 100-plus years.

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For more information on the Montour Trail – visit: www.montourtrail.org