

# A Century Ago on the Montour Railroad

By Bryan Seip – Montour Railroad Historical Society

Patrons on the Montour Trail between Imperial and Bethel Park may not realize that a century has passed since the original right-of-way was laid down by the Montour Railroad. 100 years ago, in 1913, the Montour Railroad started its most extensive expansion project, the Mifflin Extension.

New coal mines were opening south of Pittsburgh and railroad service was needed for these mines. The North Star and Mifflin Railroad was organized under Pennsylvania laws in October of 1912 to construct this new railroad property. On December 31, 1912, the North Star and Mifflin merged into the Montour Railroad Company.



**A track gang installs the east switch at North Star Junction near Imperial ca. 1913.  
Photo courtesy Andy Hanna / Kevin Kovach collection**

In 1913, the Montour Railroad terminated just west of Imperial. The new extension started at North Star Junction (Trail Mile 9.7), winding through the South Hills

to McDonald, Southview, through Cecil and Peters Townships and into Bethel Park, adding over 30 miles to the railroad. A connection was established with the Wabash-Pittsburgh Terminal / West Side Belt RR near Baptist Road. Trackage rights were obtained over several miles of the Wabash-Pittsburgh Terminal to allow the Montour to reach an interchange point with the Union Railroad at West Mifflin, where the Montour delivered coal loads and received empty hoppers for the mines.

It was estimated by engineers building the Montour Railroad in 1913 that about three million dollars would be required for the construction of the new railroad, including \$120,000 for purchase of the right-of-way property from local landowners.

During 1913-1914, fill and cuts were graded and dug to carry the Montour on its winding route. There were not many straight sections of track. More than 40 bridges and three tunnels were built. Each of the tunnels had a curved bore through its length.



**A construction camp is seen at the east end of Montour Mine #4 as the railroad crosses Valley Brook Road in Peters Township. This temporary wooden trestle was used during construction of the railroad until a steel deck plate girder bridge could be built. Photo courtesy Dave Richards / Gene P. Schaeffer collection.**

Bridges ranged from eight feet to the 962 foot steel viaduct at McDonald. Bridges were built in several types. Some were concrete arches or slabs, which were filled over and the railroad was laid on top of the fill. Some were steel plate or steel

deck girders, with either timber decks or poured concrete decks. As you travel the Trail, you will cross these different types of bridges

Sidings were built where coal hoppers could be dropped off near several of the mines and yard tracks were laid at the new coal mine loading tipples.

Switches were installed for mines at Montour #9 north of McDonald; Montour #1 at Southview; Montour #2 at Cowden in Cecil Township; a new shaft at Montour #4 in Peters Township and at Pittsburgh Terminal #8 at Coverdale in Bethel Park. Within a few years, National #2 in Cecil Township and the Henderson Mine at Hendersonville also received railroad service.

The Montour Trail follows the original Mifflin Extension right-of-way from mile 9.7 to mile 33.8 in Peters Township. The Montour Railroad main line then continued on the now Bethel Branch of the Trail, which reaches Logan Road in Bethel Park. As you ride, jog or walk along these sections of the trail, you are traveling on a century of history.

The Montour Railroad Historical Society, one of the Friends of the Montour Trail groups, is undertaking the placement of interpretive signs at several locations along the Trail to commemorate this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**This column appeared in the July-August, 2013 Montour Trail Newsletter.  
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