

Bridge VB-2 at East End Hills

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

As we await the opening of the new trail bridge designated VB-2, over Valley Brook Road at Mile 30.3, the origins of the Montour Railroad included a different bridge at this location.

Built a little over a century ago, in 1913-14, it was known as East End Hills and carried the railroad over Valley Brook Road and Brush Run. It was 110 feet long, consisting of 2 deck plate girder spans of 80 and 30 feet. This deck plate girder bridge had two large rectangular steel girders fabricated of welded plates, making up each span. They were spaced so that the railroad rails would be located above each of the two girders. A timber deck was laid on top of the girders and the rails were laid on top of the timbers. A safety walkway was installed along one edge of the bridge.

As can be seen in the accompanying photo, the bridge was first built as a temporary wooden trestle, to allow construction of the railroad to proceed. Valley Brook Road was just a dirt path as it turned under the railroad bridge and then doubled back over Brush Run. The concrete center pier can be seen among the wooden supports. The tent work camp occupied what was to become a rail yard for the then-new Montour Mine #4.



A temporary wooden trestle waits for the steel girders needed to complete the bridge in 1914. Valley Brook Road is just a dirt path as it curves in front of the then new west abutment.

Photo courtesy Dave Richards.

Montour Railroad traffic hauled loads in both directions over this bridge. Besides the empty hoppers used to load Mine #4, raw coal loads from Montour Mine #10 in Library travelled westbound to the Champion Processing Plant near Imperial. Processed coal from Champion returned eastbound to the interchange points with other railroads at Mifflin Junction and at Snowden in South Park. Non-coal freight went in both directions to and from supply and lumber companies or other businesses in the area.



**A loaded coal train crosses the bridge over Valley Brook Road and Brush Run in 1952.
Photo by William N. Poellet**

After Mine #4 closed in 1980, this section of the railroad was abandoned and the rails were removed. Peters Township purchased the Montour right-of way from the railroad in 1985, but developed the Arrowhead Trail only east of Rt. 19, so this section of the railroad/trail sat dormant.

A realignment project was undertaken to straighten and add several new bridges on Valley Brook Road in 1985-86. The old railroad bridge was removed during this project and the east concrete abutment and the center pier were also removed as the roadway was straightened. The west abutment was left in place, as it did not interfere with the new road alignment. The portion of the trail from the Peters Sanitation plant west to the Cecil Township line at Chartiers Creek went unused for another 20 years.



**Four diesel locomotives lead a train eastbound across the bridge in 1979.
Gene P. Schaeffer photo**

When this section of the Montour Trail was developed in 2008, it used a portion of Valley Brook Road to detour around two missing bridges and an orphaned section of trail, but this was an unsatisfactory solution as it presented safety concerns by putting hikers and bikers onto a narrow Valley Brook Road, which included a blind corner before they could access the trail beside the old west abutment. An original piece of Valley Brook Road beside the abutment was used as a small parking area for people to access the trail.

A few years ago, the VB-1 bridge was constructed to cross Brush Run and bring trail users from the parking area at the Peters Sanitation plant up to a refurbished trail through the cut in the hillside, thus eliminating the blind corner along the roadway. However, a grade crossing of Valley Brook Road was still needed to get back onto the main trail until another bridge, designated VB-2, could be built.

The west abutment was able to be reused, after modifications to raise the bridge height, as the seat of the west end of the new trail bridge. A new abutment was poured on the east side of the roadway to accept the new bridge beams and a century after the original construction, a new bridge again carries Montour traffic over Valley Brook Road.