

McDonald Mine (Bob Ciminel ©2012)

The McDonald Mine was located beneath the McDonald Viaduct timetable east of McAdams and Montour No. 9. Rail access to the mine was via the McDonald Transfer Track that passed underneath the viaduct.

McDonald Mine was owned by the Carnegie Coal Company, which was not affiliated with Andrew Carnegie, and opened around 1917 mining northward on the west side of the Montour tracks and eastward, crossing the tracks on a trestle similar to that used at Montour No. 9.

McDonald Mine was service by the PRR Panhandle Division on a spur that came off of Track No. 4 just below Midway, PA. Hopper cars were stored in JO Yard east of the McDonald Viaduct. The Montour Railroad did not provide service to the mine until 1920 when Carnegie Coal Company asked the Montour to build a connecting track down to the mine from a point west of the viaduct. This new track eventually became the McDonald Siding and McDonald Transfer Track.

McDonald Mine closed around 1934; however, the former mine site was extensively stripped mined in later years when it became economical to dig down to the abandoned workings and remove the coal remaining in the pillars.

As with most mines that operated in the early 1900s, there were many accidents, both fatal and non-fatal. However, McDonald Mine had one of the most unusual fatalities ever to occur in an underground coal mine.

In May 1918, a coroner's inquiry determined that Albert Boyce, a foreman at the McDonald Mine, was guilty of negligence in the death of Felecient Houyons, a miner from Belgium who was 52 years old and married. Mr. Houyons was overcome by smoke when a fire started in the mine.

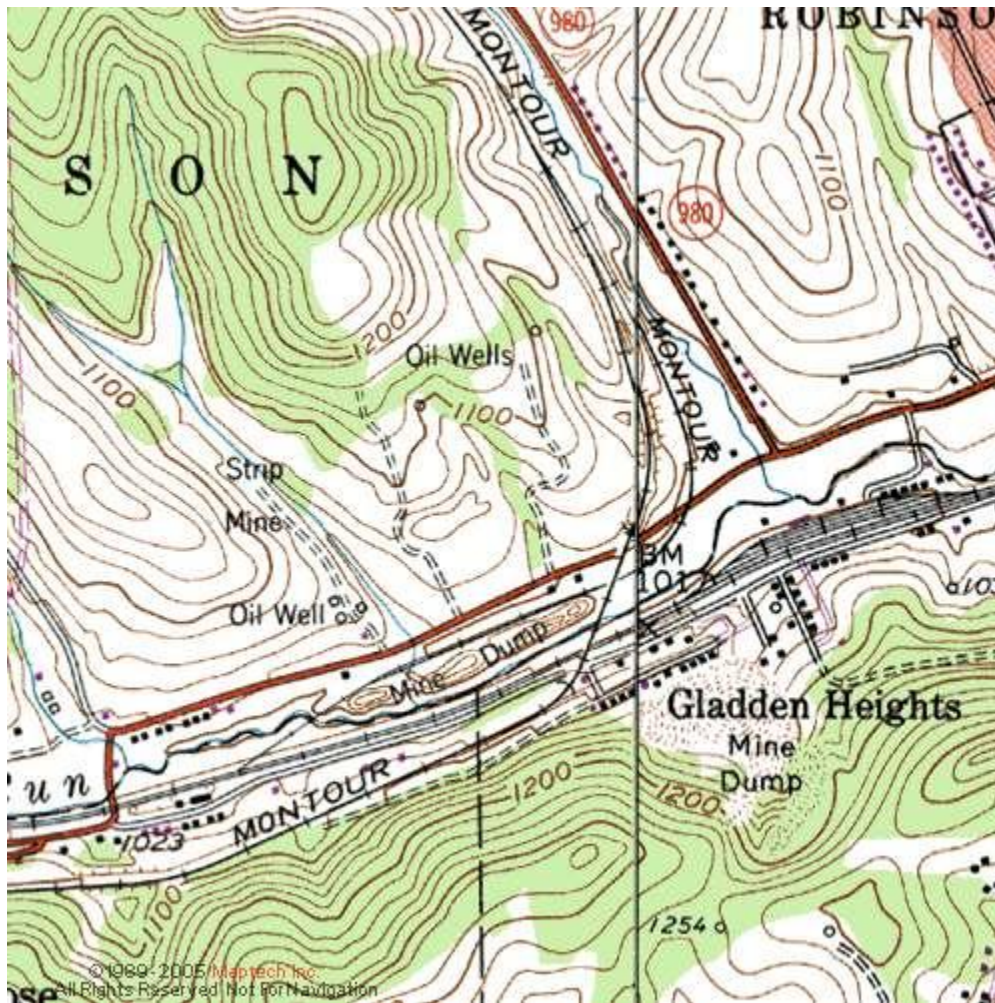
Several days earlier, miners struck oil in one of the mine entries. It was assumed that they had mined into an abandoned oil well that was not shown on the mine maps. Although Mr. Boyce was notified of the oil leak, he did nothing to protect the miners and the leak continued for several days. On the day Mr. Houyons was killed, a miner accidentally dropped his cap lamp (back then they used either candles or acetylene lamps) into the oil, setting it afire. Miners were ordered out of the mine, but Mr. Houyons either did not hear the message or was forgotten and could not get out in time before being asphyxiated by the smoke and fumes.

The photos, maps and images below illustrate the history of the McDonald Mine.

This Google Earth image from 2010 shows the former site of the McDonald Mine. The mine continues to drain into Robinson Run; however, the acid mine drainage shown west of the McDonald Mine originates in the old Primrose Mine.



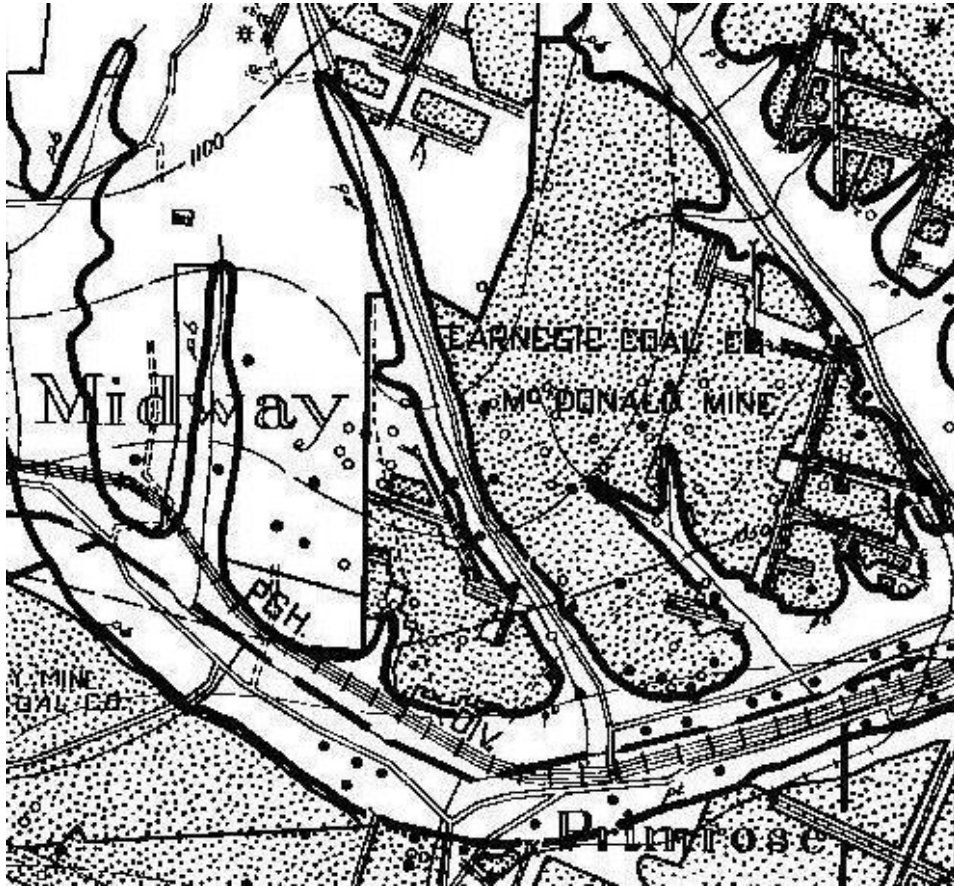
This topographic map shows the area where the McDonald Mine was located prior to the Montour's abandonment. The waste dump is still there and is shown in the next photo. Gladden Heights was the location of the Jumbo Mine.



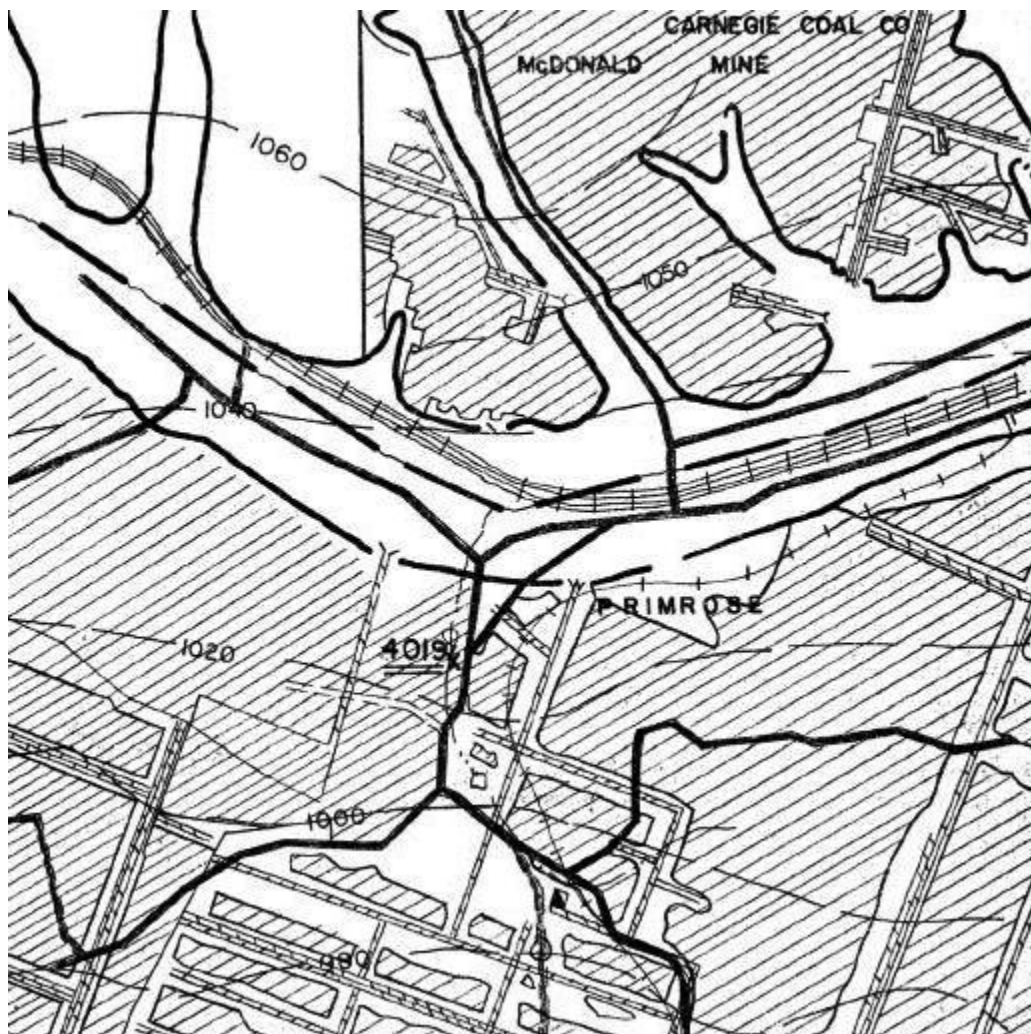
This close-up Google Earth image shows the old McDonald Transfer Track where it connected with the PRR Panhandle main track. Part of the McDonald Mine waste dump is visible on the right.



The 1930 WPA mine map shows the main entry for the McDonald Mine as well as the two entries on the northeast where the mine railroad crossed the Montour to enter the opposite hill. The main entry entered the coal seam at about 1,045 feet and extended up-dip, allowing the mine to gravity drain into Robinson Run. The gully into the hillside allowed the mine to go directly into the coal seam.



This is a more detailed illustration from an Operation Scarlift report that also shows the location of the Primrose Mine.



This 1939 aerial photo shows the McDonald Mine tipple and waste pile, and the McDonald Viaduct. The trestle where coal trains crossed the Montour tracks is visible in the upper right of the photo. The mine was close by this time; however, you can make out a string of hopper cars on the McDonald Transfer Track west of the tipple.



This photo from 1958 shows the former location of the McDonald Mine with tree-lined drainage channels running from the former mine entries. There is some evidence of strip mining near the old mine entrance.



This 1967 view shows evidence of additional stripping along the eastern and western flanks of the old deep mine.



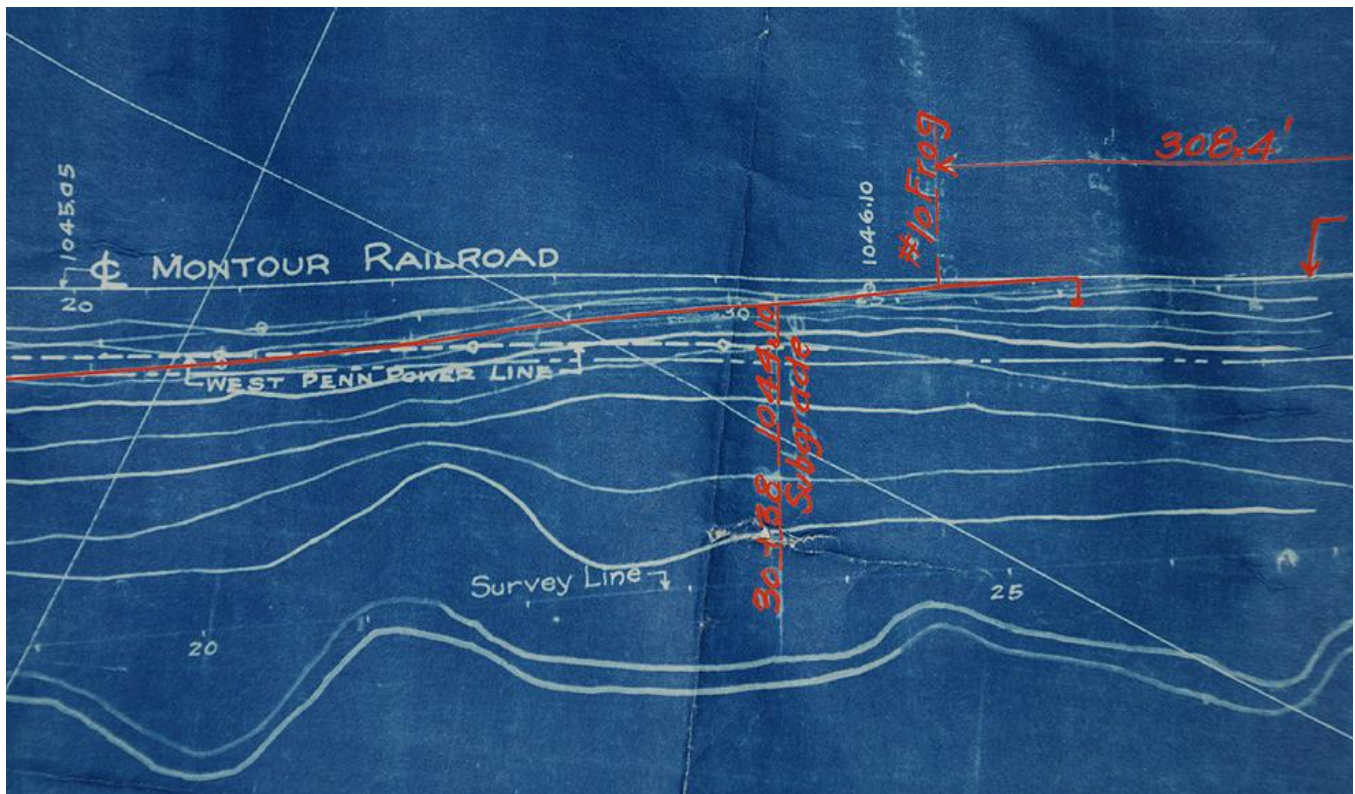
This is a close-up from the 1939 aerial photo showing a large number of coal cars being stored in the Panhandle's JO Yard. The designation "JO" stood for Jumbo, the name of the coal mine whose remnants show up in the bottom right of the photo.



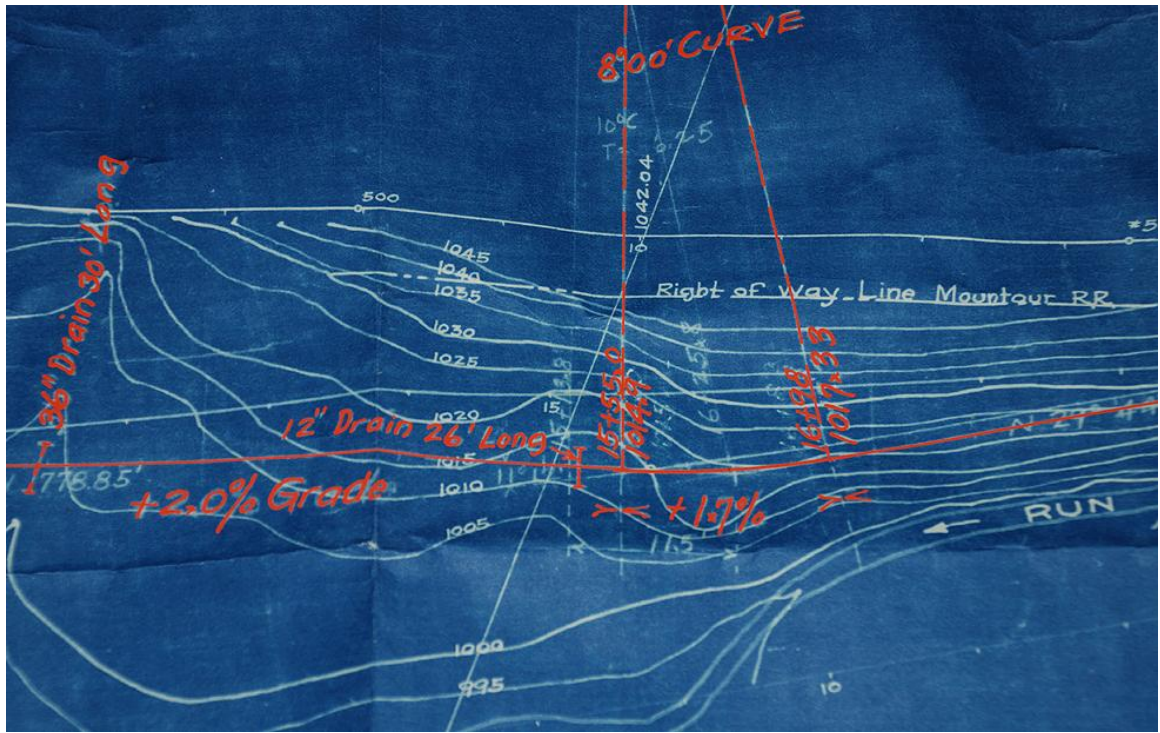
This is a scan of the original Montour blueprint for the new connection to the McDonald Mine as approved by the Montour's chief engineer. (This and the following blueprints are courtesy of Gene P. Schaeffer.)



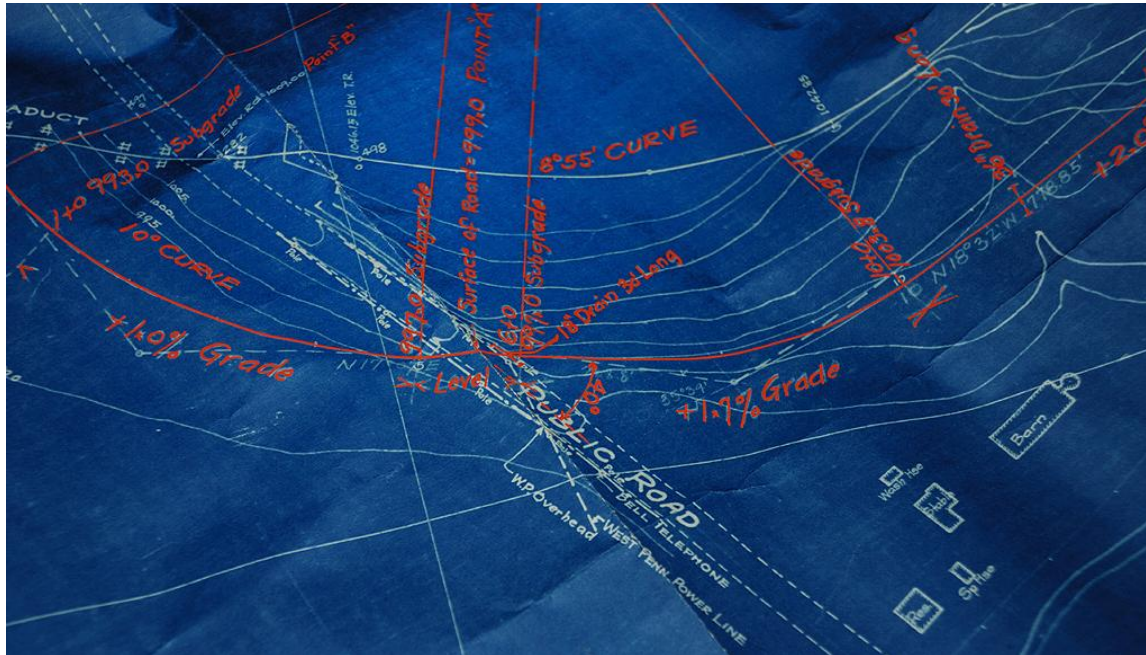
This print shows the connection to the Montour main track west of the viaduct. Note that the switch will use a No. 10 frog, which identifies the angle of the switch. The maximum safe speed through a No. 10 frog is 15 mph.



As we continue timetable eastward down the new connection we see the gradient increase from 1.7% to 2% as the right-of-way no longer parallels the hillside but begins to cut across the elevation lines as it descends from 1,025 feet to below 1,000 feet.



The new track crosses Noblestown Road and ducks beneath the West Penn Power Company overhead lines. The grade has decreased to 1.7% and reaches 1% after crossing the highway, which in 1920 was probably still a dirt or Macadamized road.



The new track passes beneath the McDonald Viaduct and connection with the tracks in the loaded yard for the McDonald Mine tippie. There is also a runaround track and all switches are No. 8 frogs rated for 5 to 10 mph.



The new connection passes beneath the south end of the tipple, crosses over the original runaround track and connects to the lump coal loading track. Note that the tipple can load three grades of coal, lump, nut and slack (see the article of the Champion coal washer for more information). There is also a supply track and a 36-inch concrete pipe that drains the mine water into Robinson Run.

