

MP 27.1 National Tunnel 623' Concrete Curved Bore

Mile 26.1 Trail MP 25.0

Bored 1913 Built with wooden liner – concrete liner added 1928

A Montour train exits the west portal in 1979. The tunnel was known by three different names. The most popular is National, named for the nearby mines, and used by the Montour Trail Council. It was also known as Bishop for the adjacent community and McConnell, for the farm land where it was built.



Gene P. Schaeffer photo

The tunnel was built with a wood liner, during expansion of the Montour Railroad from Imperial to West Mifflin in 1913. The concrete portals and liner were installed in 1928.



Bryan Seip photo

Railroad operations over this portion of the railroad ended in 1980. By September, 1983, nature was starting to reclaim the right-of-way, as P&LE engines were removing stored cars from the main line prior to abandonment and removal of rails.



Gene P. Schaeffer photo

Always known as a “wet” tunnel, water seepage builds an impressive crop of icicles inside the tunnel in the winter. During railroad operations, icicles could break windows of engines or cabooses and track gangs would sometimes have to clear ice build-up on the floor and tracks, as the ice could become thick enough to derail a train.



Bryan Seip photo



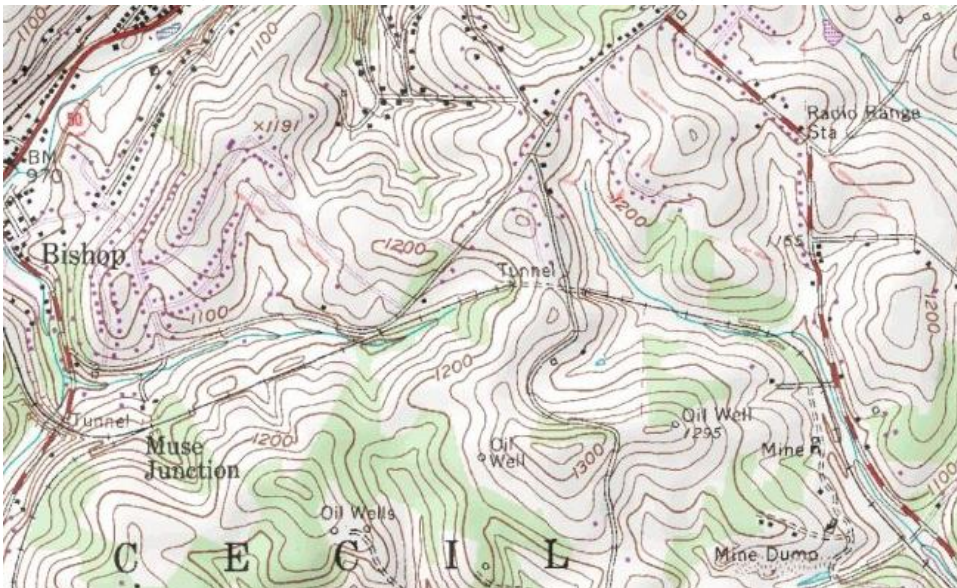
Tim Sposato photo 1990

Seen in 1937, this view was taken at the west portal. Note the smoke smudge at the top of the portal from steam engines' exhaust and the guard rails in place at that time.



Photo Courtesy Frank Kramer

Topo map shows the tunnel at center. The community of Bishop is at the left edge of frame. McConnell Road runs from left center to top center. Red dashed road from top to bottom at right is Cecil-Henderson Road. Klinger Road runs over top of the tunnel.



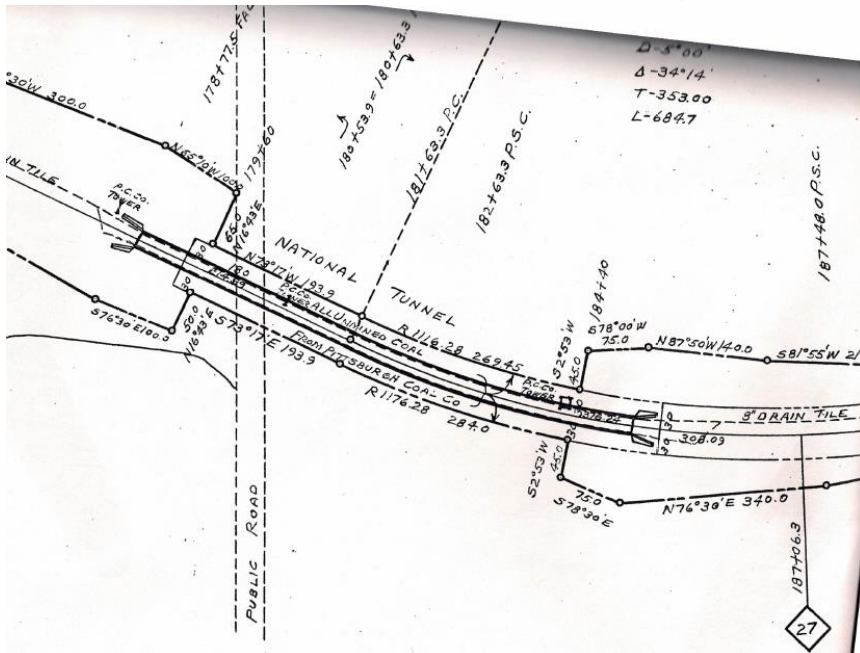
Courtesy Bob Ciminel / USGS

Aerial view from 1938 shows the tunnel at center. A smoke plume from a westbound train can be seen to the right of the tunnel, with a second plume from a helper engine pushing on the rear of the train further to right.

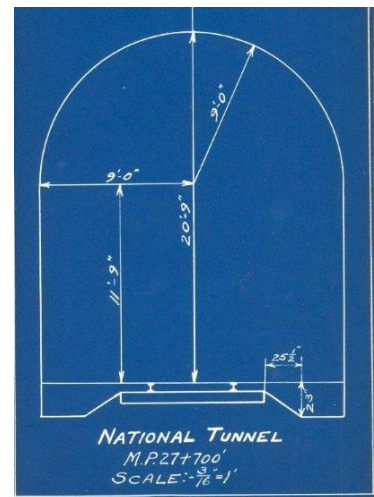


Courtesy Penn Pilot

Valuation plan shows the curved bore of the tunnel. The indicated public road going over the tunnel is Klinger Road. Note Milepost 27 to the right (west) of the tunnel. North is at the bottom of the plan. The bore diagram shows the tunnel's profile.



Courtesy Greg Corcoran



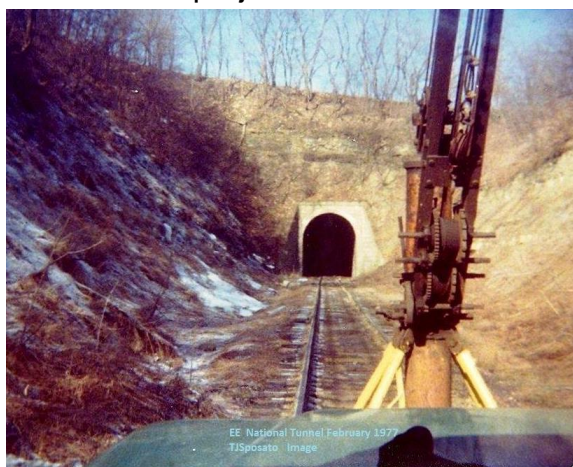
Courtesy Tim Sposato

1980 photo shows a train exiting the tunnel trailing a cloud of exhaust smoke. The tracks crested the hill inside the tunnel, but with a train stretched behind them, train crews had to keep full power applied while going through the tunnel.



Gene P. Schaeffer photo

Similar views at the east portal, taken in 1977 and 2012. On the left, a track gang in a Hi-Railer pick-up pushes a cart mounted, hand-operated crane while working a track maintenance project.

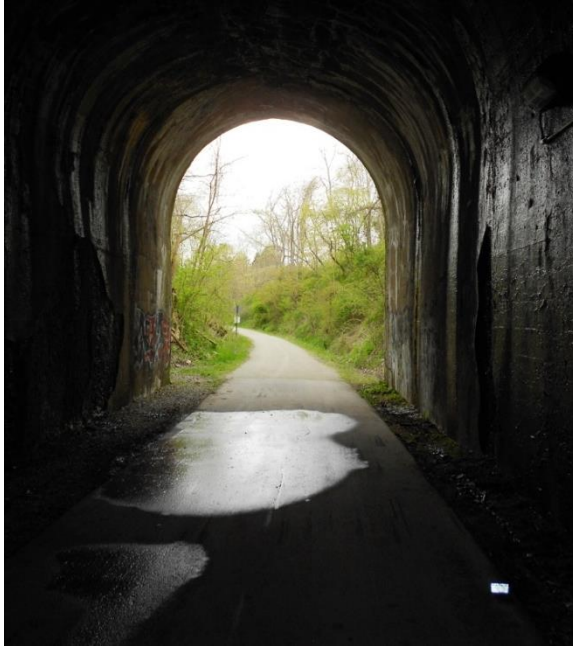


Tim Sposato photo

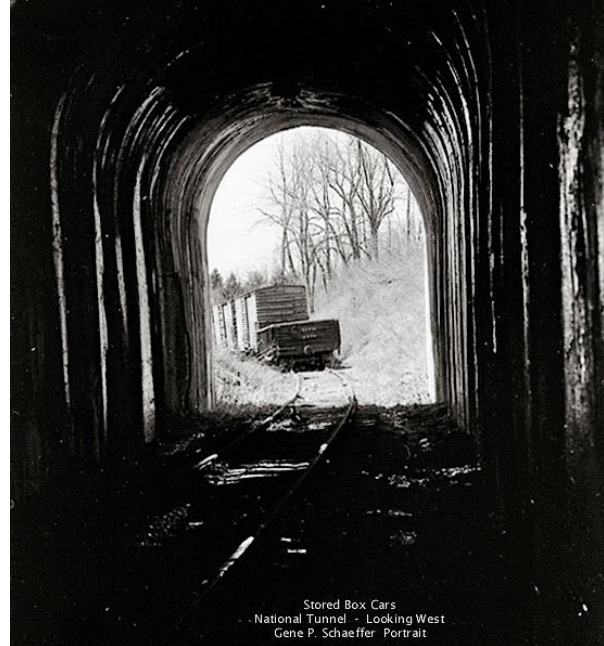


Bryan Seip photo

These views are looking out the west portal, with 2012 on the left and 1983 on the right. After railroad operations ceased in 1980, surplus box cars were stored on the main line until the rails were removed. To improve safety and visibility for Trail patrons, the tunnel floor was paved with asphalt in 2008 and lights were installed inside the tunnel in 2012.



Bryan Seip photo



Gene P. Schaeffer photo

In order to keep the trail open during winter months, plywood panels were installed at the tunnel portals in 2015 in an attempt to keep the tunnel free of ice. When the idea was proven to work, permanent steel doors with vestibules were installed a few years later. The doors are closed during winter weather keeping the trail open for use.



Dennis Sims photos

Compiled by Montour Railroad Historical Society members