

The X1 Railroad Crane

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

It doesn't seem like it has been 10 years since an old piece of railroad equipment came home to its current location beside the trail at milepost 30. This is the X1 Railroad Crane, which first appeared at this location 70 years ago. It is now under a continuing preservation project as a historical display of the Montour Railroad.

The X1 was purchased new by the Montour Railroad in 1947 to replace an older steam powered crane. Built by the Ohio Locomotive Crane Company, it weighs about 39 Tons, was diesel powered and with a 50 foot boom had a lifting capacity of 25 tons.

X1 is self-propelled, but with a top speed of only 4 miles an hour, it often would be added to a train and towed to a work site from its home at Montour Junction in Coraopolis.

The crane was mostly used at the Montour Junction shops, loading and unloading materials and supplies. It would work in the outdoor car shop, where a steel panel for the entire side of a hopper car would be lifted and held while the car men riveted the panel in place.



X1 unloads wheelsets at the Montour Junction car shops.

Chuck Ross photos

X1 was used for track projects and to replace decking timbers on many of the bridges on the Montour. In some instances, it was sent out to a derailment site to help in re-railing cars. While its capacity was not enough to lift a fully loaded car, it could pick up one end and move it back onto the tracks.

The X1 also employed a clamshell bucket, which was used at the shops to unload sand from a gondola into the locomotive sand house and was also used out on the line to clear ditches or recover spilled coal.

X1 had an electromagnet, which it would use to move steel parts and scrap. When a section of track was replaced, often the old tie plates and spikes were removed and thrown on the ground. When the track replacement was completed, X1 would move slowly along with its electromagnet a few inches above the ground and it would pick up those old spikes and tie plates, along with any other metal objects that had been discarded.

X1 often traveled with the X3 flat car, using it to carry the clamshell or magnet and other tools and supplies needed at a work site.



**X1, accompanied by flat car X3, sits at Champion in 1981 while on a ditch clearing project. The clamshell bucket was being used for this job
Gene P. Schaeffer photo**

X1's final Montour project was to help dismantle the railroad. After the railroad ceased operations in the 1980's, X1 was used to pull up the rails for reuse or for scrapping.

Retired in 1983 when the Montour Railroad ceased operations, X1 was sold to Briggs & Turivas, then located in Robinson Township. B&T was moving their operation to Dennison, Ohio and the X1 went with them, working there for 10 years until it was sidelined by a major engine failure. X1 was later purchased by the Ohio Central Railroad System, but was never returned to working condition and sat idle in Dennison for another 10-plus years.

In 2008, the Ohio Central was sold but the new owners had no use for an old broken-down crane and X1 seemed headed for the scrap list. The newly formed Montour

Railroad Historical Society approached its owner, Jerry Joe Jacobson, to see if the old Montour relic could be saved, and he agreed to donate it to the MRHS.

A new home for the crane was found when Tom Robinson agreed to have it placed on his property at the old Montour #4 mine site for cosmetic restoration and display.

A contact was made with Century Steel Erectors, who were heavily involved in the J. R. Taylor Memorial Bridge project on the trail. Century offered their help to move X1 from Dennison back to its Montour home and within a few weeks in September, 2008, X1 was home again, where work was started for its cosmetic restoration.

However, due to a lack of manpower, funding and equipment, the MRHS restoration ground to a halt and in 2015, the MRHS ceded X1 to Tom Robinson, who now continues the restoration project.

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