

Montour Mine #10 – 100th Anniversary

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

One of the most productive coal mines served by the Montour Railroad was Montour Mine #10 in Library. By the 1930's it had become the largest coal mining operation in the United States, with over 900 employees and producing over 1 million tons of coal each year.

The mine actually started operation in 1883 in Bruceton, owned by the Keeling Coal Company and known as the Lick Run Mine. The Pittsburgh Coal Company bought and consolidated many of the area mines in 1900-01 and operated Lick Run until the Montour Railroad was constructed into Library in 1919. New entrances and tipple buildings were built and designated as Montour Mine #10 with the Lick Run coal reserves being reassigned to this new mine.



An aerial view of Montour Mine #10. Brownsville Road runs across the middle of the picture and the mine tracks are seen crossing the top and on either side of the tipple building. To the lower right of the tipple is the empty yard where empty hoppers were staged to be loaded and the loaded yard runs to the left. In the upper center is the slate dump.

The Montour #10 tippie sat along Brownsville Road in the Piney Fork Creek valley, just past the current end of the PAT trolley tracks. The tippie was at 960 feet above sea level and the coal seam at that point was at 1000 feet, meaning the mine was above the tippie site. The mine used two entrances, one on either side of the valley. One portal was on the north side above Wood Street and the other was on the south side of the valley, entering under Cardox Road. Since the coal seam came to the surface of the hillsides and could be directly accessed, no vertical shafts were needed. This type of mine is known as a drift mine.

The mine railroad came from the access portals across wooden trestles to the top of the tippie building where coal was dumped for sorting and cleaning before loading into railroad hopper cars for shipment. Overhead cable supported lorry cars carried waste slate and rock to a dump on the hillside across Cardox Road.

The Pittsburgh Coal Company added its own independent cleaning plant, known as Champion #3, in 1927 and it operated into the 1950's. Thus, coal from #10 did not have to be shipped to the large Champion Preparation Plant near Imperial and processed coal could be shipped directly to the final customer from the mine site.

The mine complex included large maintenance shops and offices where the current Park-and-Ride parking lot is located off Brownsville Road. Mine cars and equipment from all Pittsburgh Coal Co. facilities were brought to the shops for repair or overhaul. A research lab to test chemical properties of coal was also built adjacent to the mine. A small freight house was built along Pleasant Street to handle local freight shipments. It now houses the South Park Historical Society. At the corner of Brownsville Road and Pleasant Street a company store was constructed in 1941 to supply the miners and their families. It was also a distribution center for 57 other company owned stores and is now the Champion Plaza shops.

Due to a declining coal market, the mine was closed in 1957 and sat idle for 13 years. It was reopened in 1970 to recover its high grade metallurgical coal. An estimated 3.5 million tons of coal remained which would keep its 130 employees working for 6 or more years. 1978 saw the end of railroad service as the Montour Railroad's parent company refused to send trains down the poorly maintained tracks. Trucks were used to haul coal down Rt. 88 to the Mathies Mine at New Eagle, but this practice was not able to keep up with production. In July, 1979 the mine went to standby status and miners were laid off. In August, 1979 the mine was reopened, again trucking the coal, but again this did not work out and the mine was closed for good and its entrances sealed in December 1979.



In the 1960's, the cleaning plant was eliminated and a smaller tippel was built to load coal when the mine reopened in 1970. The mine rails are still evident on the overhead trestle leading into a dumping shed. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

This column appeared in the July-August, 2019 Montour Trail Newsletter.
For more information on the Montour Trail - go to www.montourtrail.org