

Sidings Along the Main Line

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad had a single track main line throughout its 42 mile length looping around the South Hills area. With multiple trains working in both directions to and from the various mines and businesses, meeting and passing locations had to be established to allow trains to pass each other.

Passing sidings were constructed every three or four miles to provide multiple places for trains to pass, thus keeping traffic flowing. Each had to be long enough to contain a complete train so that another could pass along the main line. Most were 3000 to 3500 feet long with a switch at each end and held approximately 60 to 70 cars, while train lengths were typically 45 to 50 cars. Locations of the sidings can sometimes be seen as a wider area along the trail as the sidings meant there were two tracks side by side.

The sidings could also be used to temporarily store cars, either full or empty, when tracks at nearby mines were already filled. Non-coal freight cars might be spotted on a siding until a local crew could pick them up for delivery to nearby businesses. A “local” train would take care of servicing non-coal industries with a few cars at a time so the full length “road” trains would not be delayed getting coal hoppers to or from the mines.



A short local train is seen passing Cowden Siding in Cecil Township, 1980. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

As years went by and the needs of the mines and businesses changed, some of the sidings were modified or shortened or eliminated.

Various employee timetables list 12 to 15 sidings. Eastbound from Montour Junction, sidings were located at:

Scott – Trail mile 4.5 – along Montour Run Road. It held 70 cars serving Scott Mine and later Nelson Industries.

Lotus – Mile 5.5 – along Cliff Mine Road – 35 cars.

Cliff Mine – Mile 6 – along Cliff Mine Road in the trailhead parking area – 30 cars - serving the Dickson Mine.

Boggs – Mile 11 – at the Boggs trailhead area – 50 cars as well as additional yard tracks serving several nearby mines and the Champion Preparation Plant.

Champion – Mile 12 – at the processing plant location near Rts. 22 & 980 – Separate from the plant's operating tracks, this siding for 65 cars could hold an entire unit train. Unit trains are made up of all one type of cars, in this case coal hoppers, which are kept together and shipped to one customer, such as a power plant or steel mill.

McAdams – Mile 15.5 – along Rt. 980 – 38 cars - serving Montour Mine #9 operations.

McDonald – Mile 17 – near the McDonald viaduct – 66 cars – plus it included the connection to the McDonald Transfer Track (now the Montour-Panhandle Connector).



Caboose 35 trails a coal train on the main line as it passes engine 80, which is on the McDonald Siding. The diverging track on the right is the McDonald Transfer Track (now the Montour-Panhandle Connector) leading to the PRR Panhandle Line. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

Peacock – Mile 19.3 – along Primrose Road – 66 cars - mostly temporary storage for empty hoppers headed to Westland Mine.

Cowden – Mile 23 – crossing Cowden Road in Cecil Township – 70 cars - also serving Montour Mine #2 during its operation.

Henderson – Mile 26.5 – along Cecil-Henderson Road – 65 cars - including the lead track into the Henderson Mine

Thompsonville – Mile 30.5 – along Valley Brook Road in Peters Township - 68 cars - used as storage to keep Montour Mine #4 tracks available for additional hoppers.

Library Junction – Mile 33.8 – at the wye track behind the current horse farm - 70 cars later shortened to 40 – mainly cars to or from Montour Mine #10 in Library.

Jewell – Mile 1 on the trail Bethel Park Branch – along East McMurray Road and crossing Clifton Road – originally 80 cars later shortened to a 20 car spur near the George Washington Elementary School.

Salida – In Bethel Park near Baptist Church Road, not on the trail – 65 cars later shortened to 16 - used as staging for cars going to or from Mifflin Junction.

In later years, several of the sidings were used by the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad (the Montour's owner) to store surplus rail cars as traffic was declining on the Montour. These cars were removed as sections of the Montour were officially abandoned and the rails were pulled up.

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