

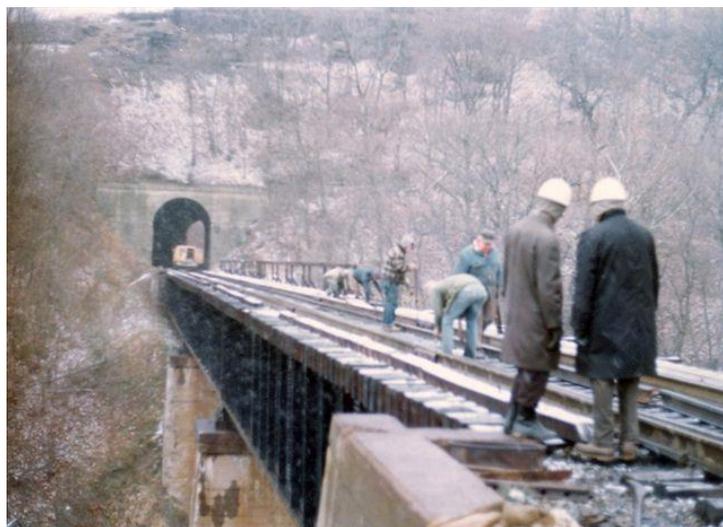
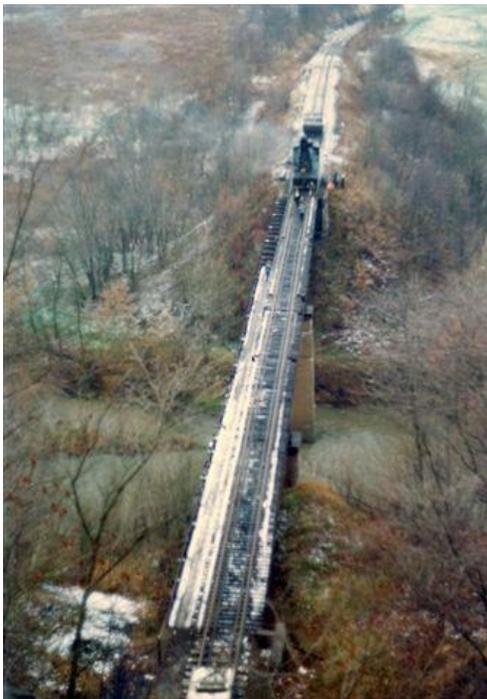
The Bridge Over Chartiers Creek

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The third longest bridge on the Montour Trail crosses over Chartiers Creek at the border of Peters and Cecil Townships. It is 270 feet long, consisting of 3 spans of 90 feet each, resting on concrete piers about 40 feet above the creek. It was built as part of the 1913 project extending the Montour Railroad from North Star, near Imperial, to a junction with the Pittsburgh & West Virginia Railroad at Salida in Bethel Park.

This type of bridge is known as a deck plate girder bridge and is a common type used on the Montour Railroad. Two large girders made of steel plates riveted together are the main supports. Cross beams and plates give the bridge stability. The girders are placed about the same distance apart as standard railroad tracks to put the weight of the load (trains) directly over the girders. Wooden bridge timbers, which look like oversized crossties, were laid across the top of the large steel girders, thus making up the bridge deck. The timbers were fastened directly to the steel girders and then rails were spiked to the deck beams. A safety walkway was added along one side.

Early in 1974, the wooden deck timbers were replaced with a completely new deck. The key piece of machinery used was the X1 crane. It travelled with a flat car loaded with pre-made panels of the bridge timbers. The accompanying picture shows the X1 at the far end of the bridge with the flat car behind it. The safety walkway on the left side of the bridge has been partially removed as the new timbers are set in place.



Tim Sposato photos

A cold wind was blowing up the creek valley that day and snow showers added to the track gang's discomfort as they worked on the exposed bridge. Even the thought of overtime earned by working on a weekend did little to warm their attitude. As current trail patrons cross the bridge and travel through Greers Tunnel, you will often encounter a cold wind blowing through this area. Imagine working an entire shift out on the bridge.

The first picture was taken from a rock outcropping above Greers Tunnel, near Hidden Valley Road. The second picture shows the work from track level, with laborers and supervisors braving the cold weather.

The project was completed as fast as the work could be done, so that the railroad would be shut down for as little time as possible. The mines were working and coal had to move. Trains loaded with coal from the mines headed west toward the Champion coal preparation plant near Imperial and processed loads travelled east toward shipment interchanges at Hills, Snowden and West Mifflin. It added up to a tremendous amount of tonnage crossing the bridge. More traffic of empty coal hoppers and other non-coal freight passed over the bridge as well, so the wooden deck took a beating.

As with normal ties on the grounded portions of the railroad, any bridge timbers developing problems like splitting or rotting could be individually replaced. In this case, the entire deck was replaced with new timbers.

The last train crossed the bridge in December, 1980, with this section of the railroad being officially abandoned in 1982. The main rails were pulled up and re-used on another railroad. Folks may remember rails remaining on the bridge, but these were guide rails, worn-out rails mounted inside the main rails, which acted as a safety bumper to keep any derailling cars from rolling off the side of the bridge.

After abandonment and sitting idle for 25 more years, the Montour Trail Council opened this area of the trail for use, eliminating a two-mile gap in the trail. In 2008, a new concrete deck was poured on the Chartiers bridge. Several other new bridges were built to open the trail from Chartiers Creek east to the Peters Township Sanitary plant along Valley Brook Road.

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