

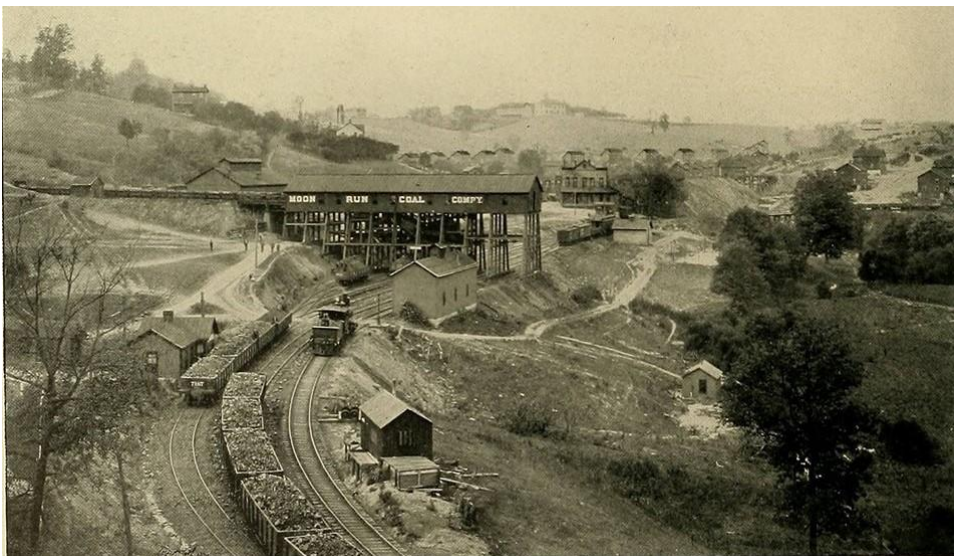
The Pittsburgh & Moon Run Railroad

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Pittsburgh & Moon Run Railroad was incorporated February 10, 1891, becoming fully operational early in 1893. Built by the Moon Run Coal Company, it ran six miles from Groveton in Coraopolis to its new Moon Run Mine near the current Rt. 60 & I-79 interchange. The right-of-way ran up the Moon Run valley and later was used as part of the I-79 highway route. A few segments of the original right-of-way can be seen along the big “S” curves as I-79 nears the Ohio River.

The P&MR also serviced the Clever Gas Coal Co., and the Relso Coal Co. along its route. Passenger and mail service were established with service from Moon Run to and from Pittsburgh on six trains daily except Sundays. The railroad connected with the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR in Coraopolis and acquired trackage rights to travel to the P&LE Station Square depot. This service was a necessity to acquire a state franchise and as an incentive to property owners whose land the railroad needed.

Passenger service ran into the early 1920's, finally ending in 1924. Several of the station stop names along the P&MR were named for the landowners where the stops were located. Some of those names live on, as housing developments used the names for local streets such as Verner, Forest Grove, Diebold, Clever and Aiken Roads.



A view of the Moon Run Mine complex before 1900, with the passenger station to the left of the tracks and the company store and miners' homes beyond the tipple.

Photo courtesy Tony Petrovic – Robinson Township Historical Society.

The Moon Run Mine was a drift mine, meaning its tunnels went directly into the coal seam outcropping on the hillside and no vertical shafts were needed. The Moon Run Mine eventually became a huge complex, extending southward as far as Carnegie and Rennerdale, northwest beneath Settlers Cabin Park and Robinson Town Center and

eastward to the bluffs overlooking Chartiers Creek beyond McKees Rocks Road. The mine had three sections, with the main tipple just below Route 60. There was also a tipple on the north side of Route 60 above Chartiers Creek and another tipple on Campbell's Run Road about a half-mile west of the I-79/I-376 interchange. Piles of waste slate and rock can still be seen to the north of Rt. 60 and Moon Run Road.



This view is from the early 1900's, after the Pittsburgh Coal Company purchased the Moon Run operation. Note the passenger car sitting at the left edge of the picture.

Photo courtesy Bob Ciminel.

In 1899 the Moon Run Mine and the P&MR RR were purchased by the newly formed Pittsburgh Coal Company, along with the Montour RR and many other coal mines in Western Pennsylvania. The Coal Company operated the railroads as separate subsidiaries, as the P&MR continued to operate using its 2 locomotives and its steel gondolas for coal loading. Those cars were marked with P&MR RR reporting marks. In 1912, the P&MR was merged into the Montour. After the merger, new cars with Montour markings were used on the P&MR.

There was no direct connection between the P&MR and Montour. The P&MR connected with the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad, then about a half-mile away the P&LE made another connection with the Montour.

Handling coal trains on the P&MR was a challenge for engineers, conductors, and brakemen because the railroad rose 350 feet from the river to the Moon Run Mine, a grade of 70 feet per mile, or about 1.7%, and runaway trains were a constant danger as the loaded coal was taken down the steep grade.



A loaded coal train descending the P&MR, after the 1912 merger with the Montour RR.
Photo courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer collection.

By 1936, the Moon Run Mine was the only customer remaining on the railroad. Then its coal reserves played out and the mine was idled. A petition for abandonment of the railroad was made in 1938 and executed in 1939 and the rails were removed.

The right-of-way lay idled for years until the construction of I-79 in the mid-1970's, as the highway followed the old railroad route down the valley to the Neville Island bridge over the Ohio River.

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