

A View of the Champion Coal Preparation Plant

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Champion Preparation Plant was the busiest industry on the Montour Railroad. Coal from the various Pittsburgh Coal Company mines was shipped to Champion where it was cleaned, sorted, crushed and sized to meet the individual specifications of Pittsburgh Coal Company customers.

Built in 1928, it operated for 55 years before a declining coal market and aging equipment forced its closure. The structures were demolished in the 1990's and now nothing remains of this extensive operation. The site is mostly an empty field along the trail at Mile 12.

This view of the Champion Preparation Plant in operation is from the Rt. 22 overpass, looking south, and shows the layout of the plant. Courtesy of Gene P. Schaeffer, it was taken February 24, 1981, a couple of years before the plant was closed.



The buildings at center are the processing plant. The drying plant with smokestacks is on the left side of the tracks.

The building at far left was the Disco plant. Disco (DIStilled COal) was a product of coal formed similar to charcoal briquets and used as a smokeless fuel for home heating. The disco process also produced coal oil that was loaded into tank cars and used by chemical industries. The 2 engines with accompanying cabooses on the left are on the lead track into the Disco plant, which was closed by the date of the picture.

The two tracks on the right led up the hill to the rotary dumper. Loaded cars from the mines carrying raw coal would be shoved up to the dumper to be unloaded by flipping the cars upside down, with the coal then entering the preparation plant. Note the four engines returning down the hill after shoving a string of loaded hoppers up to the dumper tracks.

The lighter color conveyors at the right carried slate and impurities cleaned out of the mine coal over Rt. 980 to a slate dump on the west side of the road.

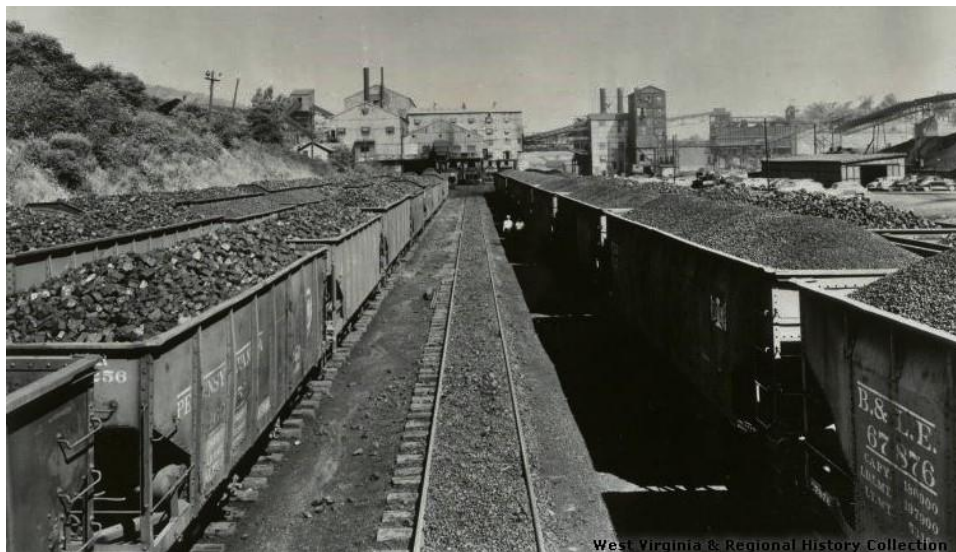
The track in lower left to center with 4 engines and empty hoppers is the main line which ran under the conveyors between the plant buildings.

Multiple tracks leading to the plant building make up the empty yard with empty hoppers waiting to be loaded with processed coal. The opposite side of the building had multiple tracks making up the loaded yard.

Champion was a busy place every day with multiple crews working the plant. Note that this picture shows 10 of the 12 engines available to the Montour on that date.

Below the photographer's vantage point was the yardmaster office – about where the current interpretive sign is located along the trail. This building was built in 1930 to house the Montour yardmaster, a company agent and a crew lounge.

Behind the photographer's position was the lead to near-by Boggs Yard. Boggs was used to temporarily store loaded hoppers from the mines while waiting to be unloaded. It could also be used to store empty hoppers needed for final loading of processed coal or empties to be returned to the mines. Boggs Yard was under control of the Champion yardmaster to be used as needed to keep coal traffic flowing in and out of Champion.



This view from the opposite side of the plant shows hoppers loaded with processed coal ready for shipping to final customers. Note the different textures and sizes of the coal in the hoppers.

For more information and pictures of Champion, go online to:
<http://montourrr.com/Mines/MP13Champion.html>

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For more information on the Montour Trail – go to www.montourtrail.org**