

## Bridges on the Montour – Part 2

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

On the 52 miles of original Montour Railroad right-of-way there were over 80 bridges that the railroad was responsible for building and maintaining. In the last newsletter, steel bridges were discussed, but there were also numerous bridges that used concrete construction consisting of slab, beam or arch types.

Several of the new trail bridges completed in recent years are actually replacements for original concrete railroad bridges at those locations. These include Muse-Bishop Road in Cecil Township and Bebout and Sugar Camp Roads in Peters Township.

Concrete slabs were the simplest of this style of bridge. They were mostly short in length and would consist of a poured slab sitting on top of two concrete side walls. Many of these slab bridges carried the railroad over small streams or single lane farm roads. Some examples are the small stream beside Beaver Grade Road, the pedestrian underpass at the Findlay Township Activity Center and along Hahn Road at the Valley Brook Country Club.



**This short concrete slab bridge seen under the caboose crosses a stream flowing into Montour Run next to Beaver Grade Road.**

**Gene P. Schaeffer photo.**

Concrete beam bridges were used over roadways, streams and as other medium length bridges. Some were made of pre-stressed concrete beams and some used steel I-beams encased in concrete. Locations for these type bridges include two of the bridges crossing Montour Run near Enlow Tunnel, at Cowden Road in Cecil and at the water company along Brownsville Road in South Park. Most of these had ballast rock placed on the concrete deck and then ties and rails laid on the ballast instead of using the timber decking style that was prominent on the steel girder bridges.



**The bridge at Cowden Road in Cecil Township used steel I-beams encased in concrete. This narrow underpass was completely demolished and re-graded in 2002, with the trail currently using an at-grade crossing of the road.**

**Dennis Sims photo.**

Concrete arches were used where the railroad would cross on a high fill above a roadway. These look more like a tunnel was dug under the railroad. The arches were typically 24 feet wide to accommodate a 2-lane road. Fill would be piled on top of the arch and then ballast and rails laid in the same manner as on flat ground. Often, when travelling over these bridges, trail users might not be aware that they are actually crossing a bridge, unless they would see a roadway going underneath the trail. It looks very similar to places where the trail (nee-railroad) runs on a raised dirt fill. Examples include Santiago Road near Imperial, Beagle Club and Donaldson Roads near Champion, Primrose Road near McDonald, and Southview Road and the adjacent Miller's Run bridge. Several of the arch bridges were removed due to traffic safety issues where visual clearance was blocked and cars could not see oncoming traffic, or

to provide access for large trucks which could not fit through the old arches. Some were replaced with new, longer trail bridges like those on Muse-Bishop Road in Cecil Township and at Bebout and Sugar Camp Roads in Peters. Approaches were re-graded to provide safer sight lines and the new trail bridges, which replace a 24 foot wide arch, exceed 100 feet. The concrete and fill removed at several of these bridge replacement projects was re-cycled and used as fill at other Montour Trail project locations.



**The concrete arch at Beagle Club Road was built in 1913 during construction of the of the Montour Railroad extension to West Mifflin. It is still in place today carrying the Montour Trail.**  
**Photo courtesy Dave Richards.**

Several concrete arch type bridges were removed in Bethel Park in the 1980's, at locations where the Montour Trail was not developed after the railroad was abandoned. These include Logan, Brightwood and Baptist Roads as well as Route 88.

There are also many concrete culverts crossing under the railroad and trail which are too small to be considered as true bridges, but they provide a very important service by draining water that is flowing off the hillsides along the right-of-way.

While some have been demolished and several have been replaced with new bridges, the Montour Railroad built many bridges a century ago that are still in use to carry the trail today and into the future.