

How Coal and Freight Moved On and Off the Montour

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad's main business was moving coal. Coal from the mines was taken to the Champion Preparation Plant for cleaning and processing and was reloaded for final shipment to customers like power plants and heavy industries. Non-coal freight also moved to and from local businesses along the Montour.

How did all this coal and freight get onto or off of Montour rails? The Montour established interchange points with five major railroads where cars could be exchanged for further shipment. Some remnants of these interchanges can still be seen as you travel the Trail.

At Montour Junction in Coraopolis (Trail mile 0), a connection with the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR was established in 1879, near the current Neville Island Bridge. The Montour Junction complex was built in 1900 and was the main terminus of the Montour, with yards, offices, shops, scales and a passenger station. Coal to be shipped on the P&LE was delivered here and empty hoppers for the mines were received. Non-coal freight cars going to and from businesses on the Montour were also exchanged at Montour Junction. Until passenger service was discontinued in the late 1920's, a station here allowed passengers to transfer to and from P&LE Pittsburgh trains.

A connection with the Pennsylvania RR was made at McDonald in the early 1920's. (Trail mile 17) McDonald was used mostly for delivery of loaded coal cars to the PRR's Panhandle Division. Trains were taken down a transfer track and delivered to the PRR receiving track. This transfer track connecting the two railroads is now the Trail's Montour-Panhandle Connector.



Empty hoppers cross McDonald Viaduct as a loaded coal train heads down the transfer track to deliver its cars to the interchange with the PRR Panhandle Division.

Tim Sposato photo

At Southview, (Trail mile 21) an interchange was made with the Pittsburgh & West Virginia RR. This track could hold 38 cars. It was in the same area where the new railroad branch was recently built, except that it climbed the hillside in the opposite direction. The Montour switch was near Antil Street and the P&WV connection was near Galati Road.

The PRR connection at Hills (Trail mile 30) was one of the busiest interchanges on the Montour. The PRR delivered a steady stream of empty coal hoppers to be used at the adjacent Montour #4 mine as well as others. Non-coal freight from the PRR was also delivered or picked up at the Hills Transfer. A total of 115 cars could fit on the two tracks here. In the 1970's, Montour #4 was loading up to 130 cars a day, thus train crews were constantly pulling empty cars off the transfer to supply the mine's loading tipple.



Engine 76 works the Hills Transfer track in Peters Township as it pulls non-coal freight from the PRR interchange. The empty hoppers and caboose sit on the main line, which is now the Montour Trail. The loaded hoppers on the right are in the loaded yard at Montour Mine #4.

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In 1929 the Library Branch of the Montour was completed at an interchange with the Baltimore & Ohio RR at Snowden, about a mile beyond the current Trail's Piney

Fork section (Trail mile 39). Two tracks each held 60 cars, one used for deliveries to the B&O and the other to receive cars. This interchange was last used in 1975.

Also on the Library Branch, the Montour maintained a connection with the PRR at Pennmont (Trail mile 38.5). This was not used for interchanging cars, but was a remnant of the old PRR Peters Creek Branch that had serviced coal mines near Triphammer Road.

Near Baptist Road in Bethel Park (beyond trail's end) was the interchange at Salida with the P&WV (later N&W) RR. A siding there held 60 cars and was used for interchange with the P&WV or for storing cars that were on their way to or from Mifflin Junction. This track was last used in 1976.

The eastern terminus of the Montour was at Mifflin Junction, in West Mifflin. The Union RR maintained a rail yard which also provided a connection with the Bessemer & Lake Erie RR. The Montour interchanged cars at Mifflin Junction, where they had a scale and local agent office to handle shipments. Countless Bessemer hoppers came onto and off of the Montour at Mifflin Junction, which was in use from 1914 until 1975.

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