Montour No. 4 (Bob Ciminel ©2012)

Departing Henderson No. 1, we head east following McPherson Run and across Chartiers Creek and enter Greer Tunnel. Exiting the tunnel, we cross over the PRR Panhandle Division's Chartiers Branch and follow the grade down through Kamps Cut, crossing Valleybrook Road and Brush Run. At Hills Station we reach Montour No. 4 Mine nestled in the valley formed by Brush Run. The Pittsburgh Coal Company opened Montour No. 4 in 1914 to coincide with the completion of the Mifflin Extension. Montour No. 4 and Westland No. 2 were the last mines operating on the Montour Railroad before it was abandoned.

The topography along the Montour right-of-way at the northern end of Brush Run did not provided enough room for the extensive surface facilities or miners' village necessary to support a large underground mine. The Pittsburgh Coal Company remedied this by building a tipple, fan house, waste dump and other facilities on the north bank of Chartiers Creek on the PRR Chartiers Branch at Hills Station (MP 8). The miners' village for Montour No. 4 was called Lawrence and was located on the hill above the PRR tracks at Hills. An interchange was also built between Hills Station on the Montour (MP 31) and Hills Station on the PRR to connect the Montour and the PRR Chartiers Branch.

To avoid confusion when discussing Montour No. 4, we will refer to tipple on the Montour Railroad at Hills Station as the *Hoist Shaft* and the tipple on the PRR at Hills Station as the *Supply Shaft*. Both of these shafts were used until 1953 when a slope entry was dug into the hillside opposite the Hoist Shaft and coal was brought out by conveyor.

The Pittsburgh coal seam at the Supply Tipple was approximately 115 feet below grade. The coal seam at the Hoist Shaft was about 140 feet down. Montour No. 4 straddled the McMurray Syncline (an underground depression), with the coal rising toward the northeast and descending toward the southwest.

During its 66-year lifetime, Montour No. 4 opened additional portals on Hahn Road west of Van Emmans Ponds and on Bebout Road at Lake Jo Ann north of Venetia. These were called the Hahn and Lake Portals. Their primary purpose was to bring miners entering and exiting the mine closer to the working faces. They were not used for bringing coal out of the mine. The exact dates when these portals were opened and closed were not found by the author. Hahn Portal is now called the Hahn AMD Plant and serves as the primary treatment plant for acid mine drainage from both Montour No. 4 and Montour No. 10.

There were also ventilation, drainage, and electrical supply shafts associated with the mine. The Southwest Shaft near Lawrence was used for pumping water from the mine's eastern end.

The Hickman Shaft along Valleybrook Road between Route 19 and East McMurray Road was used for ventilation and power. The Murdock Shaft was located between Bebout and Sugar Camp roads, across from Peterswood Park and was used for a drainage pump.

Prior to the 1940s, waste from Montour No. 4 was dumped into electrically-powered Larry cars at the Supply Tipple and hauled to a large waste dump east of the tipple between Hills and Boyce Road. By 1942, a silo and overhead tramway had been built to dump the waste rock in a deep gulley located between Valleybrook and Hidden Valley Roads. The former waste dump is now a subdivision.

In 1955, Montour No. 4 had 11 coal cutting machines (continuous miners were not yet in use and No. 4 mine was not conducive to longwall mining), 16 loading machines, 11 shuttle cars, nine coal drills, 45 pumps, eight roof bolters and one or more rock dusting machines. For hauling coal, the mine had 27 mine locomotives and 570 steel mine cars running on 44-inch gauge track. The mine received electrical power from the West Penn Power Company at 2,300 volts and converted it to 550 volts DC for use inside the mine. A transformer provided 440-volt AC power for the tipple and fans. At that time, the mine had a life expectancy of 35 years, employed 290 men on three shifts and produced about 3,500 tons of coal a day.

The following table contains additional production information on the mine:

Year	Tonnage	Days Worked/TPD	Employees
1930		3,500	
1931	291,363	125	527
1932	556,527	207	728
1934	562,548	214	607
1936	825,735	231	931
1944	1,020,739	301	563
1952			425
1954	758,449		
1955			290
1960			317
1964	2,007,509	8,800	330
1966	2,218,000	9,500	344
1972	1,935,000	9,500	398
1973		10,000	
1974	1,404,675		
1975	1,479,274	9,500	
1977	1,065,280		
1978	775,157		
1979	916,000		419

Some historical incidents involving Montour No. 4 are listed in the following table:

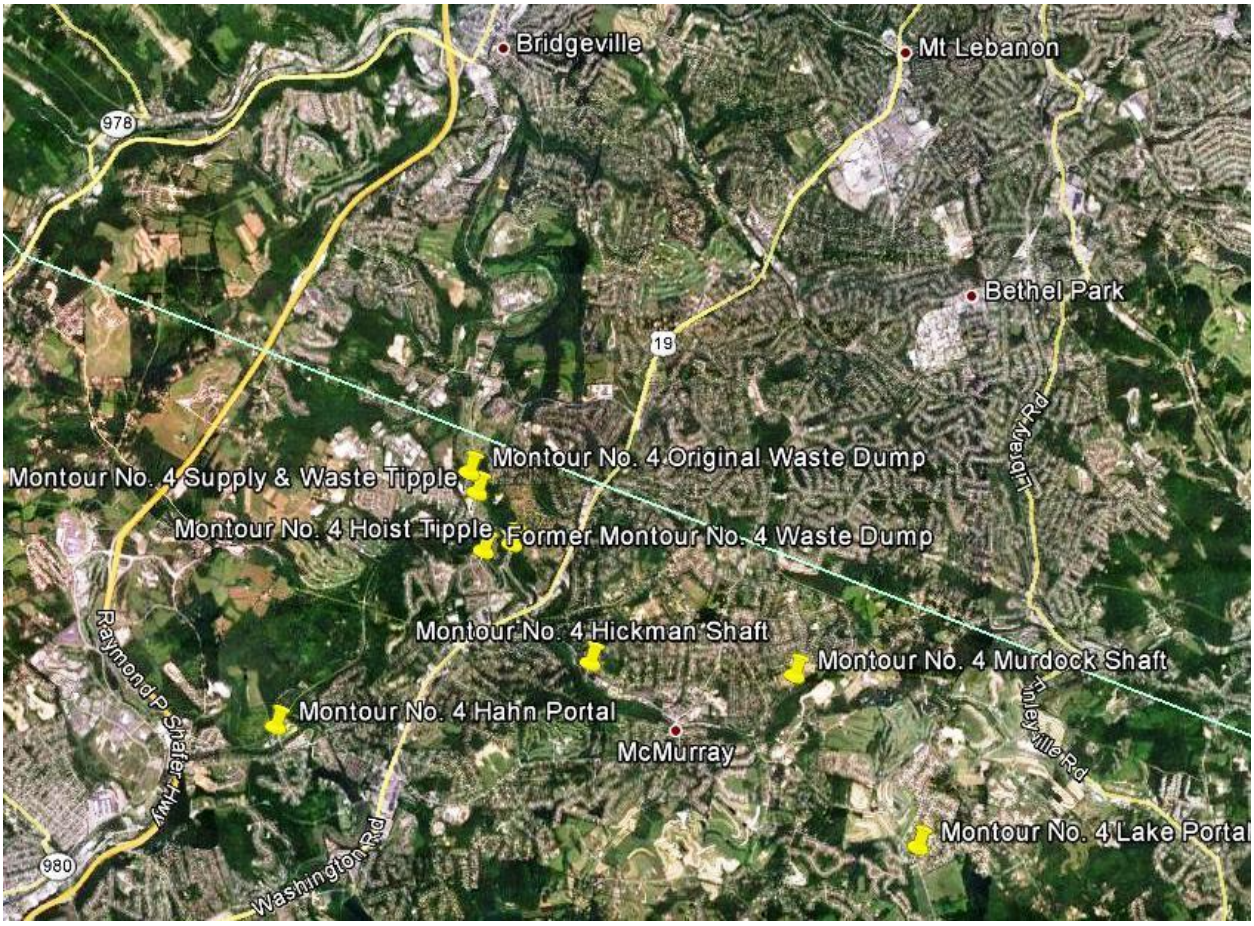
1936	Fire at Lawrence tipple, 10' from fan house
1943	Fire 3 miles from portal
1955	Two builders charged with running sewers into No. 4 and Coverdale mines
1957	Dry wells in Bethel Twp. Support is 35 cents per ton, $2,000-$3,000 for a house.
1960	Fire at automatic loading center 3 miles from portal
1963	Fatality at Hahn Portal. Roof fall.
1968	No. 4 treating 540,000 gallons per day of drainage. Fire at Hahn Portal compressor.
1970	Robert McFall, 22, first day on job, fatal accident caused by cave-in. Working 35' beyond last support posts. Area mined two weeks earlier. Foreman and two fire bosses cited for involuntary manslaughter.
1973	2,000 fish killed in Brush Run from McMurray bore hole drainage
1974	Fatality at Lake Portal. Man crushed between cars.
1977	Tipple car rider killed. Dropping 7 MTYs. Riding on side of three-car cut. Hit car on adjacent track. General Superintendent citied for involuntary manslaughter
1980	Flooding (August) "Doubt very strongly" it came from No. 10. Flooding began on Tuesday, 8/26.

The 1980 flooding of No. 4 mine spelled the end of its tenure as a working mine. For some reason, a barrier between No. 4 and Montour No. 10 mine, which was closed in 1970, failed and water from No. 10 poured into No. 4, flowing downward toward Hahn Portal, the lowest point in the mine. Although the coal company spent two weeks trying to pump out the mine, they eventually gave up and shut it down. The closing of No. 4 mine allowed the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad, which took over the Montour Railroad in 1975, to file for abandonment of the main line between Gilmore Junction and Hills.

The remaining artifacts from Montour No. 4 are the original hoist house along Valleybrook Road and the sealed slope entry for the conveyor on the east side of the Montour Trail, the old Hickman Fan House and the Hahn AMD plant.

The following maps and images illustrate the history of Montour No. 4 Mine:

This is a Google Earth image of former and current facilities associated with Montour No. 4 Mine



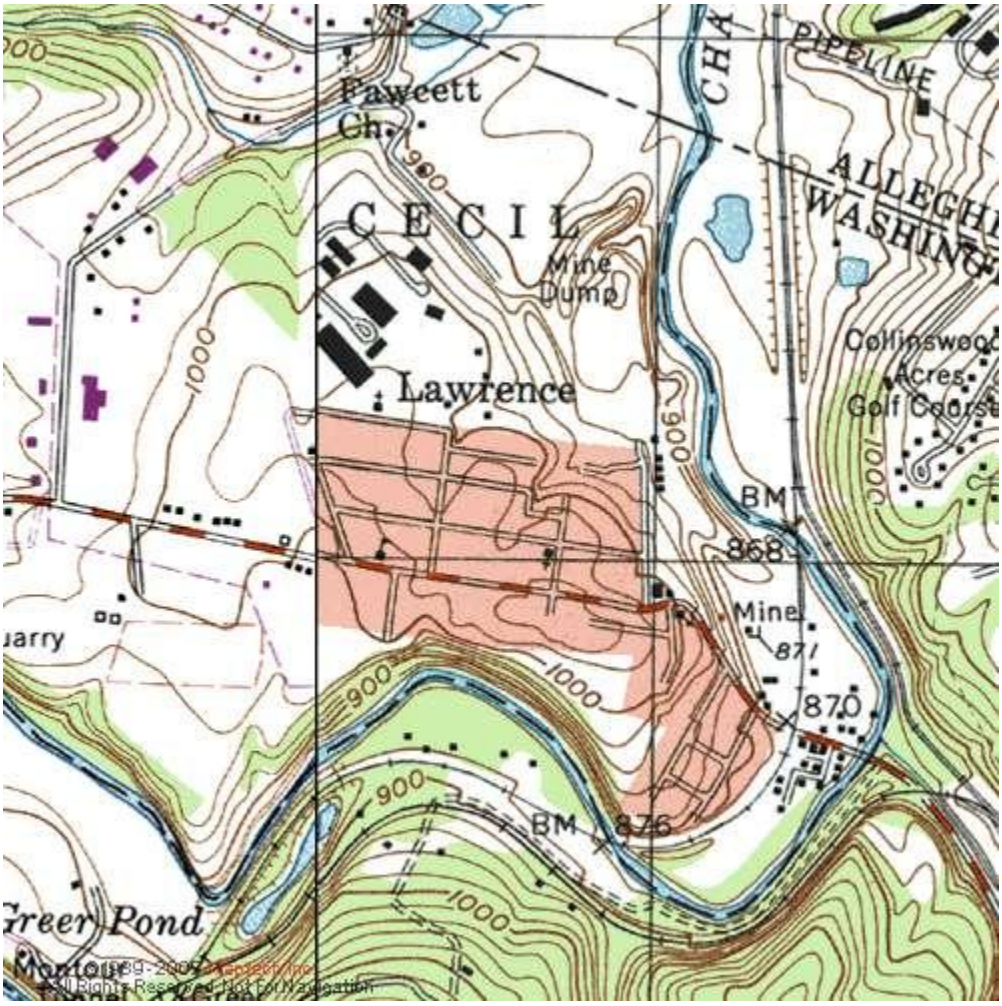
This is a closer view of Lawrence, the former miners' village for Montour No. 4. The Supply Hoist, Fan House and other surface structures, some of which are still in use, are at the lower right and the former waste dump is at the top, right of center.

This is a closer view of the site of the former Hoist Tipple along Valleybrook Road. The hoist house is the building with the green roof in the center.

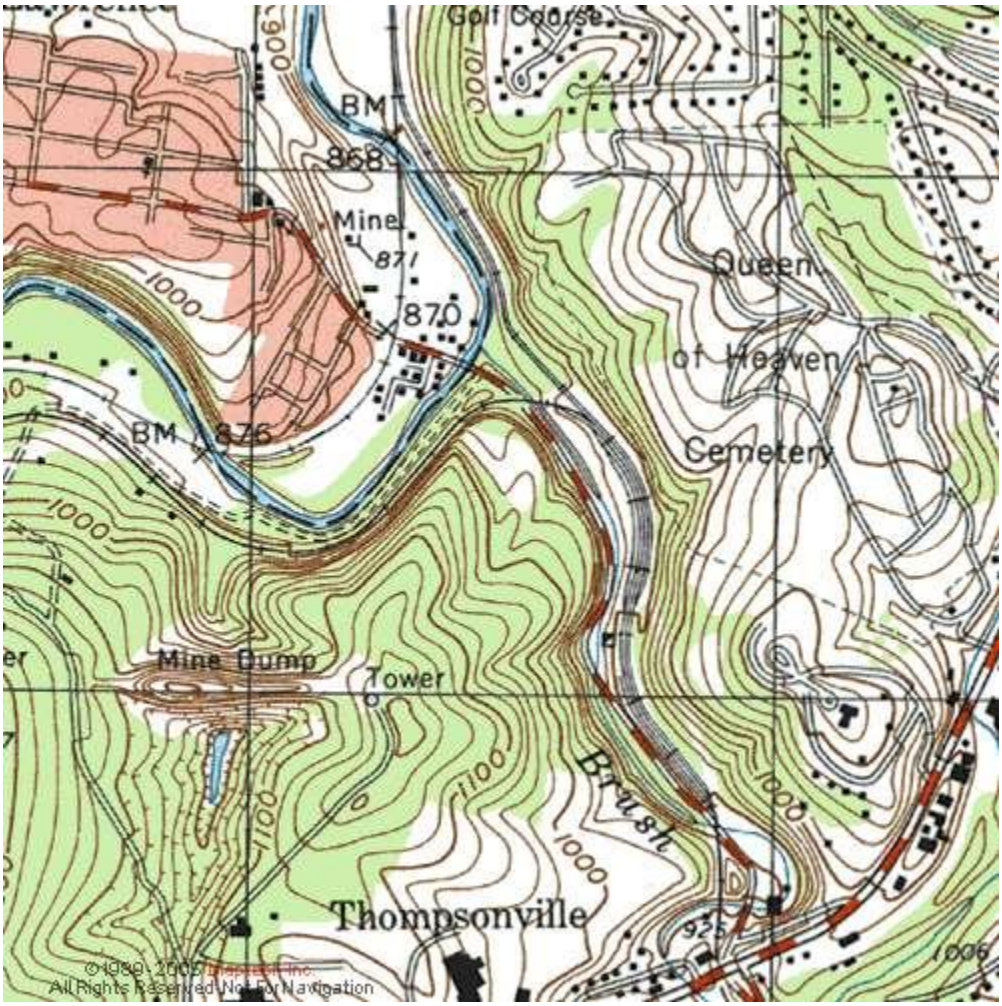
This view shows the Hahn AMD Plant and treatment ponds. The shaft and elevator were in the white-roofed building, with a parking lot to the east.

This view shows the site of the former Lake Portal at Lake Jo Ann on Bebout Road. The building in the upper center would have been where the elevator was located. The ponds to the south of the building may have been former treatment ponds for waste water.

This is a topographic map of the Supply Hoist at Lawrence. Note that the map shows the mine entry as a drift or slope entry, not a shaft. Miners could reach the coal seam using stairs at this location. The tipple and hoist were used for removing waste and delivering supplies, such as mine props.

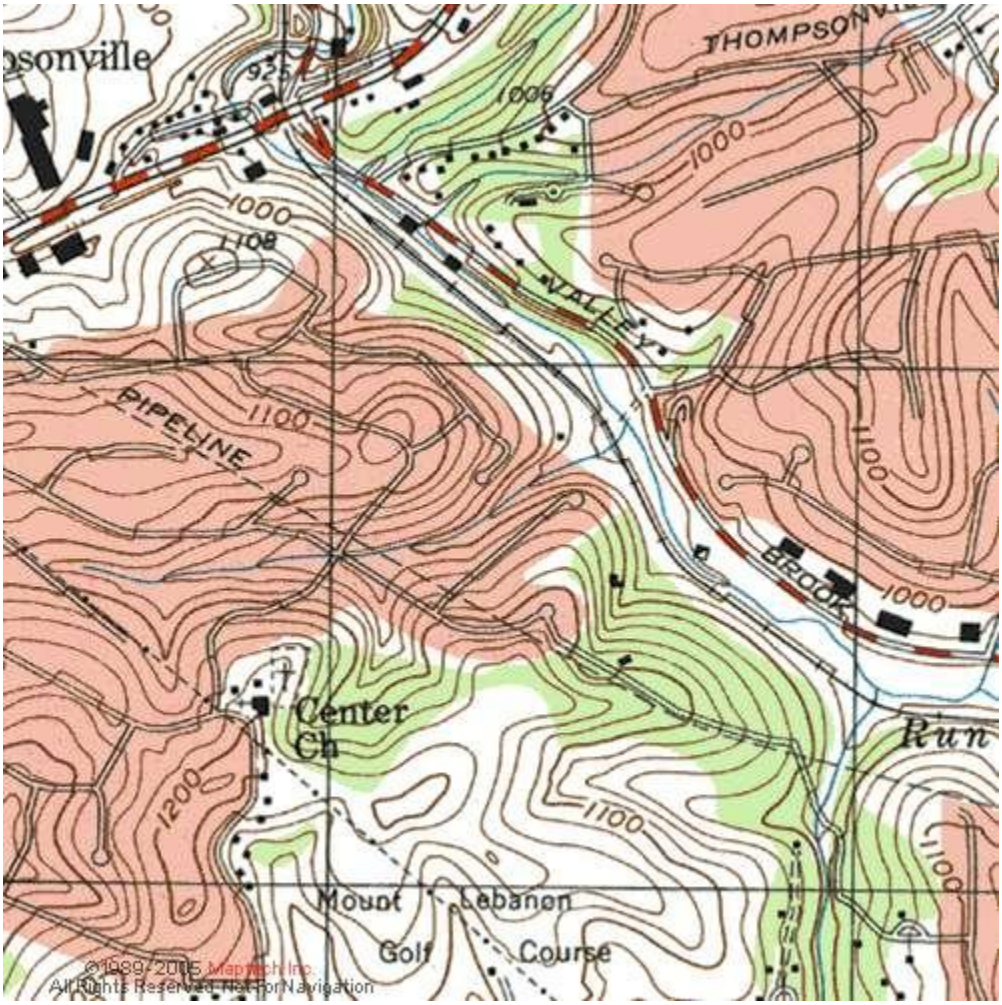


This topographic view shows the Hoist Shaft at Hills and the second waste dump. The empty and loaded yards and the Montour/PRR interchange are also visible. The Montour main track comes in from the west, skirting Chartiers Creek.

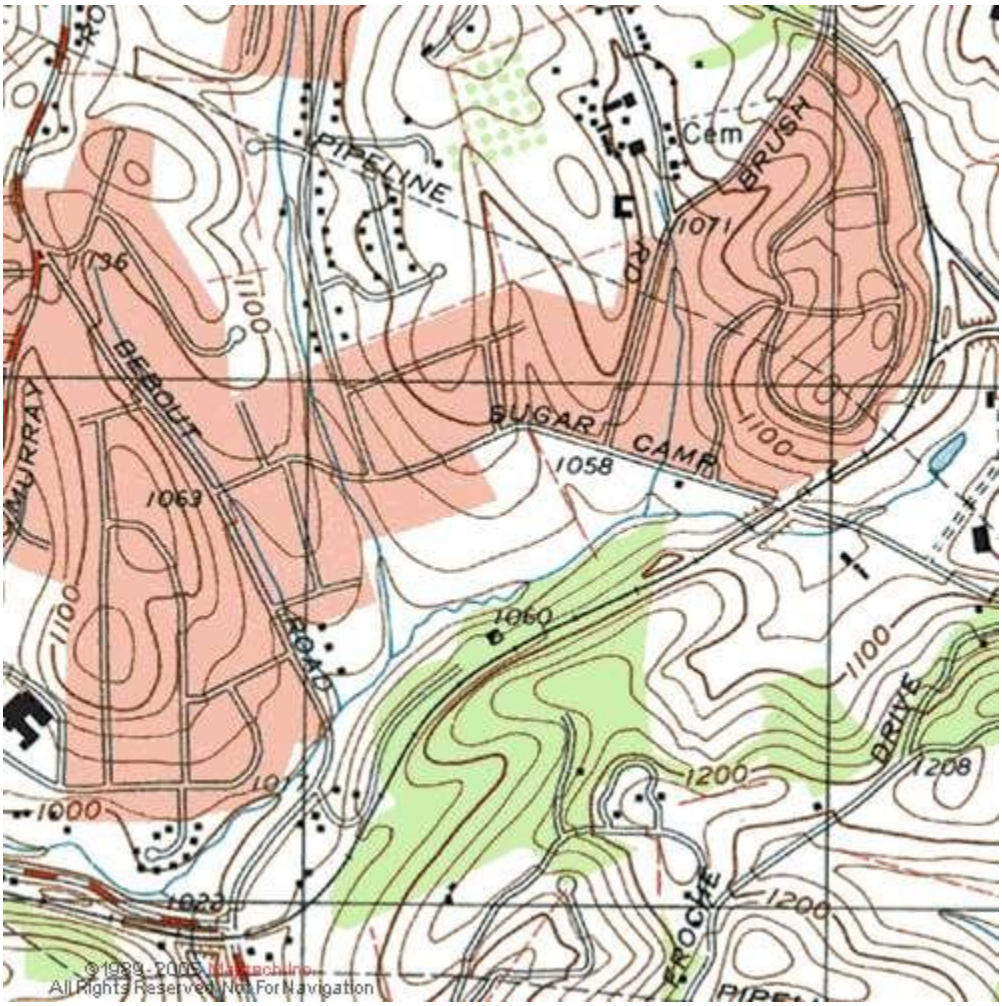


The Hahn Portal was located across from the “V” in Van Emman. Note that the surface elevation is 918 feet here. The coal seam was at 660 feet and was the lowest point in No. 4 mine, hence the reason for putting the AMD plant at this location.

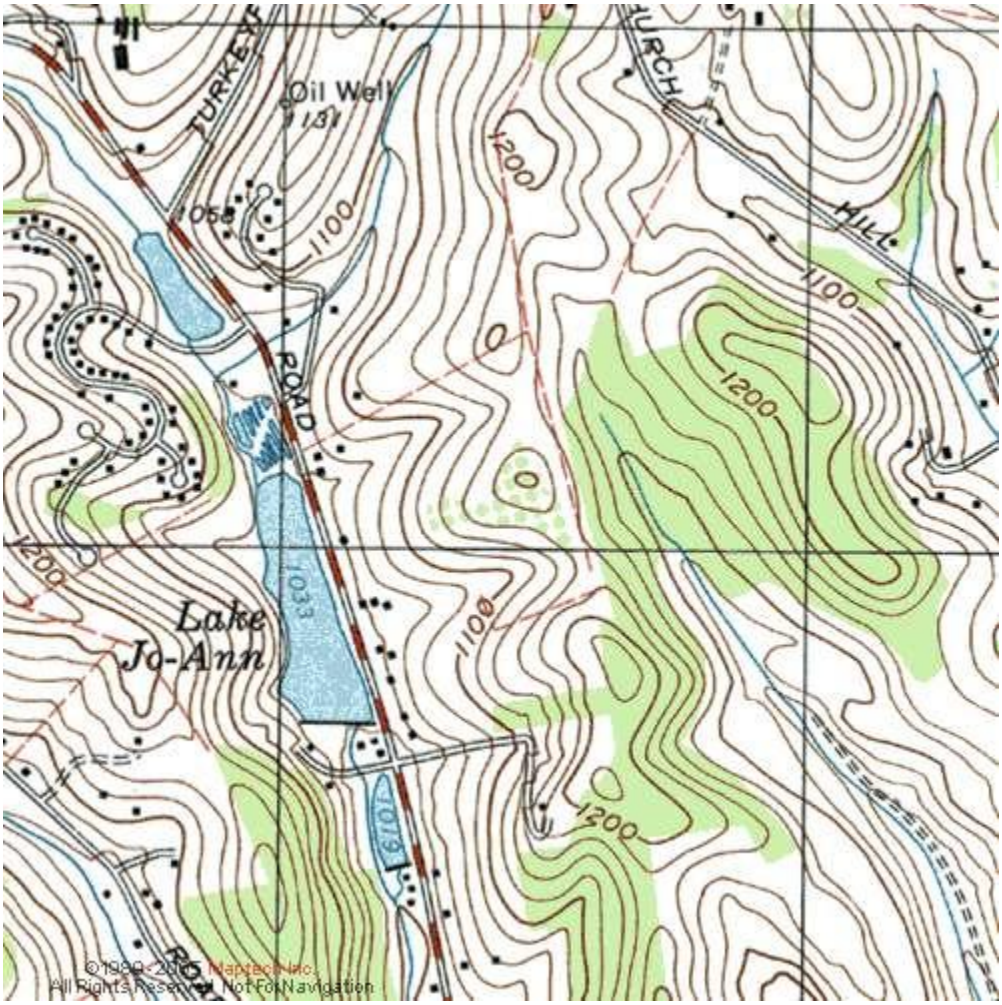
The Hickman Shaft is the black and white square next to the “B” in Brook.



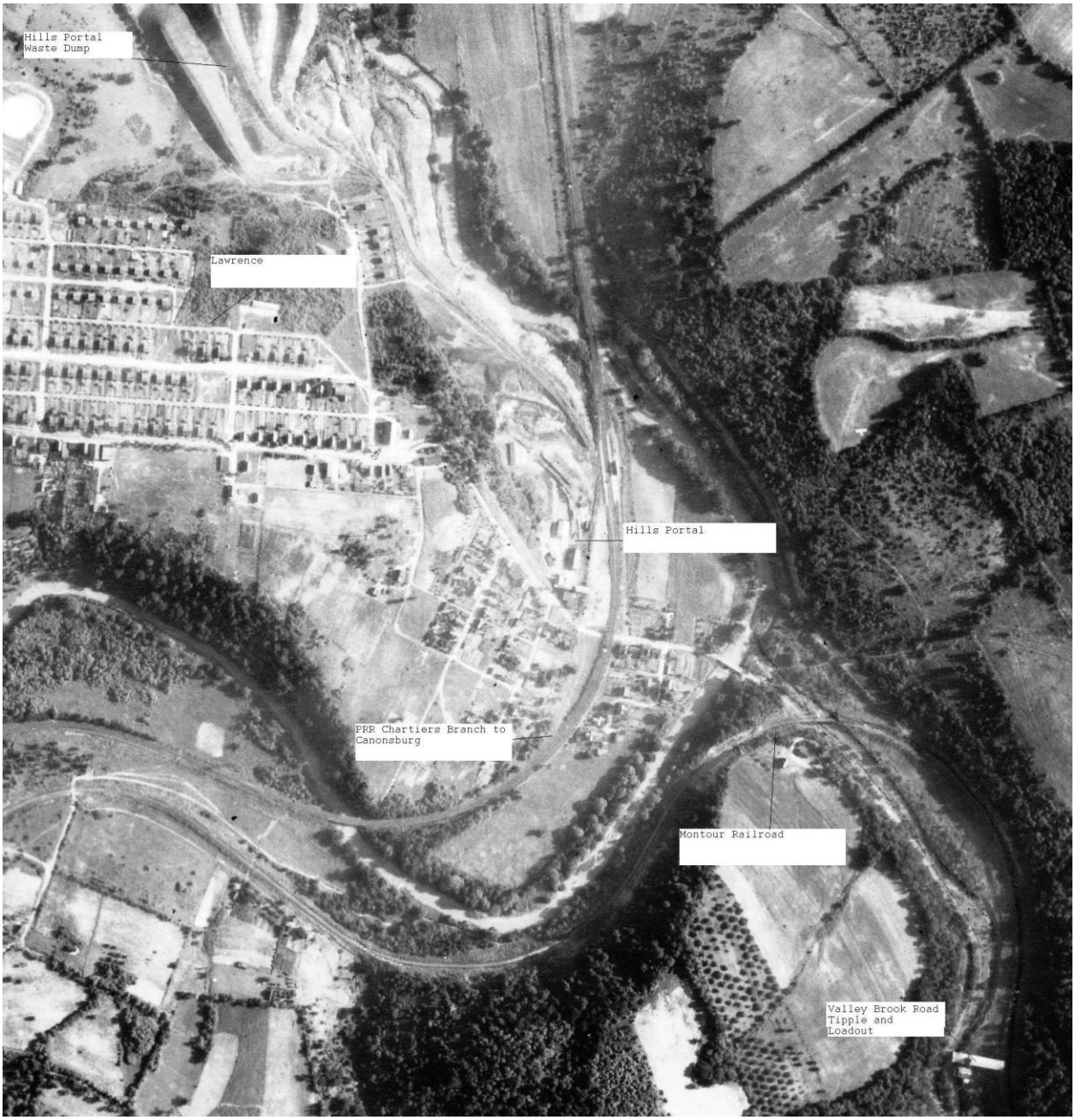
The Murdock Shaft is shown at elevation 1060 on this map. The coal seam was at elevation 810 at this location, and Montour No. 10 Mine abutted No. 4 at this point and was the most likely origin of the 1980 breakthrough and flood.



The Lake Portal was located next to the word “Road” and above the series of small ponds next to Lake Jo-Ann.



This 1939 aerial photo shows both tipples for No. 4 mine and the active waste dump north of Lawrence.



This 1958 photo shows the inactive waste dump at Lawrence and the Supply tipple has been removed.

By 1962, the new waste dump west of Valleybrook Road has been active for about 20 years. The slope entry and conveyor belt installed in 1953 are also visible.

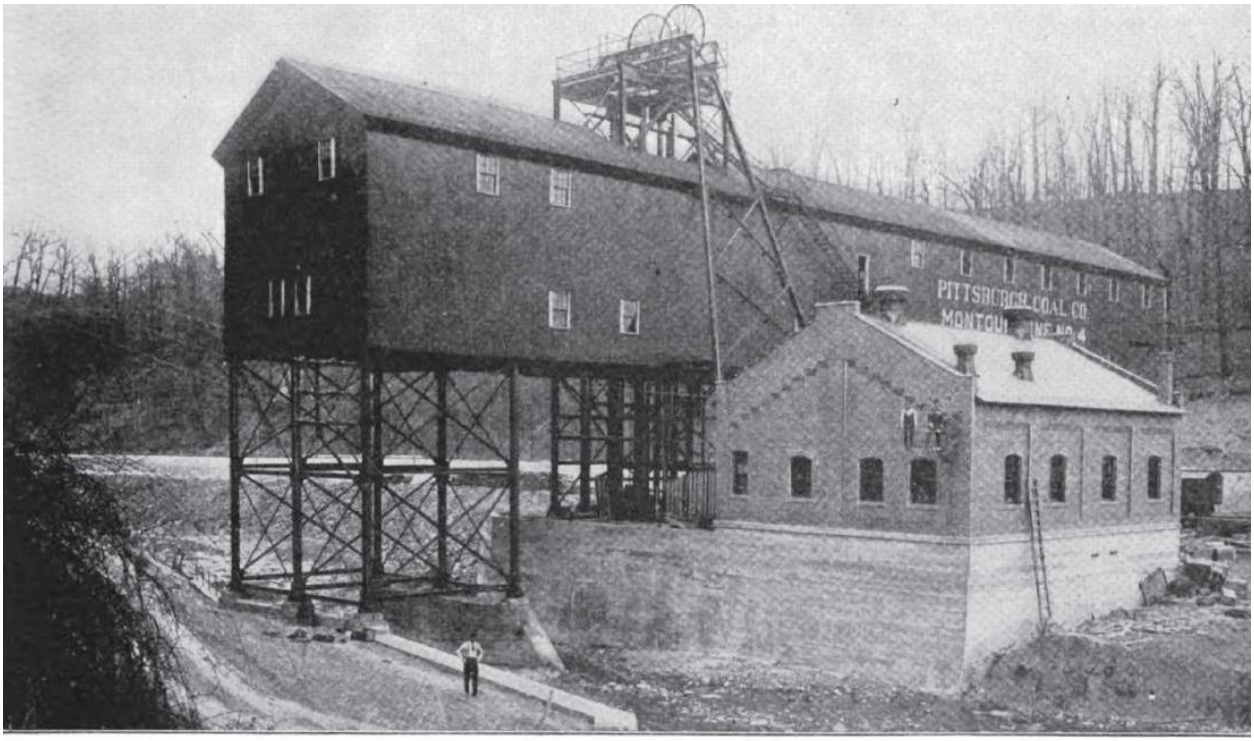
By 1967, Lawrence has become a community with tree-lined streets and the waste dump is being scavanged. The truck haul road follows the old tracks of the waste Larry cars.

This 1967 view shows the Hahn Portal before it was converted to a waste water treatment plant. The cars in the parking lot indicate that active mining was going on at this time.

In 1967, the Lake Portal was primarily being used for drainage, based on the absence of any parking facilities at the shaft.

This 1914 photograph shows the newly opened tipple at Hills on the Montour. The mine is still being developed, as evidenced by only a single loading track under the tipple and only one coal car with a partial load. There is also a lot of construction material around the tipple. The hoist house next to the tipple is the only building that remains today.

This view shows the Hills tipple looking toward the northwest. Note the workers standing on the side of the hoist house.

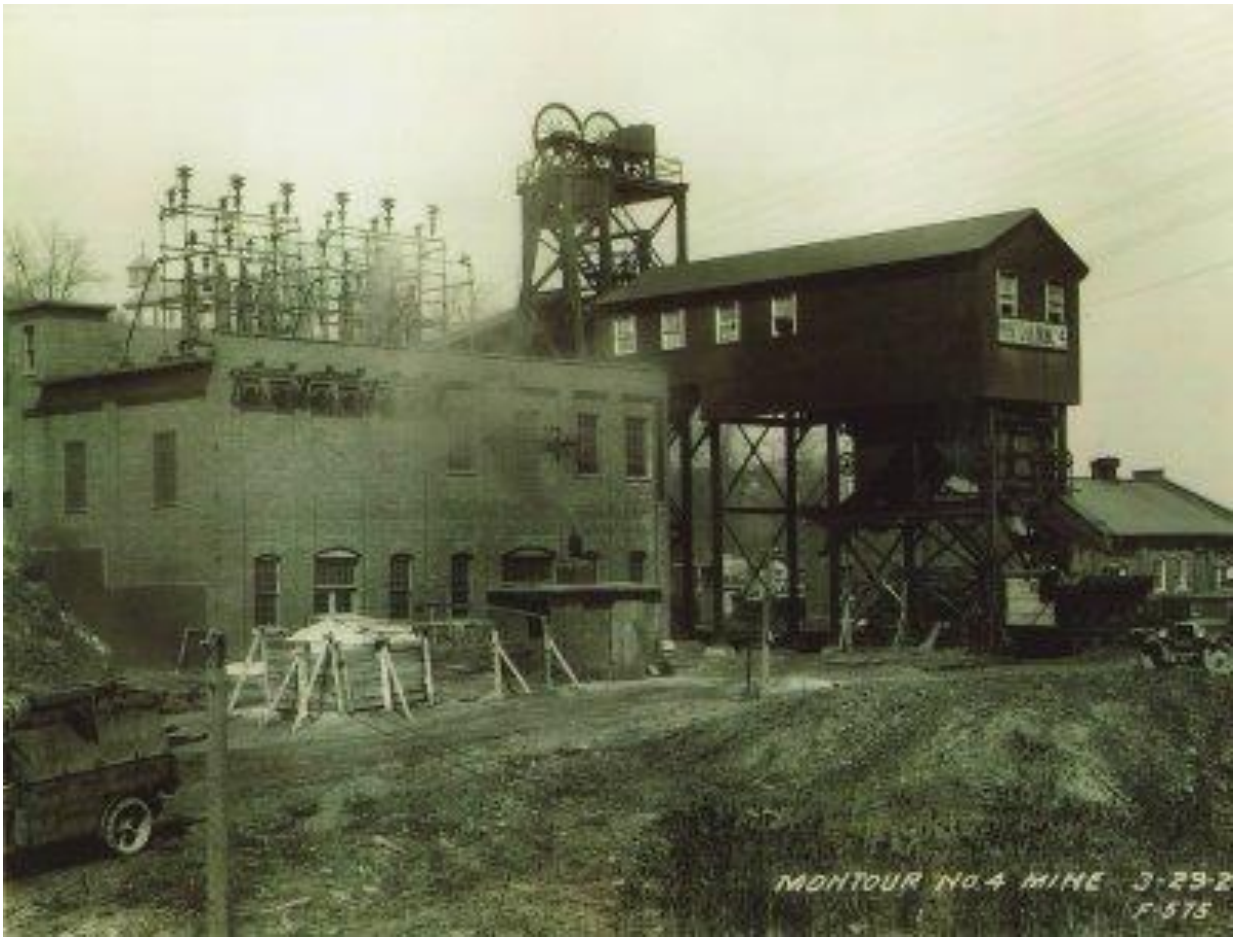


MONTOUR MINE NO. 4 AT HILL STATION, PENN., ON MONTOUR R.R., OWNED BY PITTSBURGH COAL CO.
ENGINE-ROOM BUILDING IN FOREGROUND

This 1927 view is of the Supply Hoist on the PRR Chartiers Branch. You can barely make out the tracks for the waste Larry cars and the power line next to the railroad tracks.

A closer view of the Supply Hoist at Hills Station in 1927. Those are policemen on the horses guarding the mine because of the ongoing miners' strike. Note the piles of mine posts in the background and the four chutes for dumping waste.

This is another view of the Supply and Waste Hoist. The building in the foreground housed the electrical equipment for the mine and tipple.



This 1942 photograph shows the village of Hills Station with Lawrence in the background. The Supply & Waste tipple is in the right background. Note the transmission towers that provided power to the mine.

This 1942 photo shows a train load of mine posts being hauled to the Supply tipple by mule. The fan house and ventilating fan are on the left.

This is another 1942 view of the supply yard showing stacks of mine timbers. As mining became more mechanized, roof bolts replaced timbers in most mines.

These miners are exiting the supply and waste hoist at the tipple.

Moving over to the Montour Railroad, we have a 1942 photo of that tipple taken from the Montour main track. In the distant background are load coal cars ready for pick up.

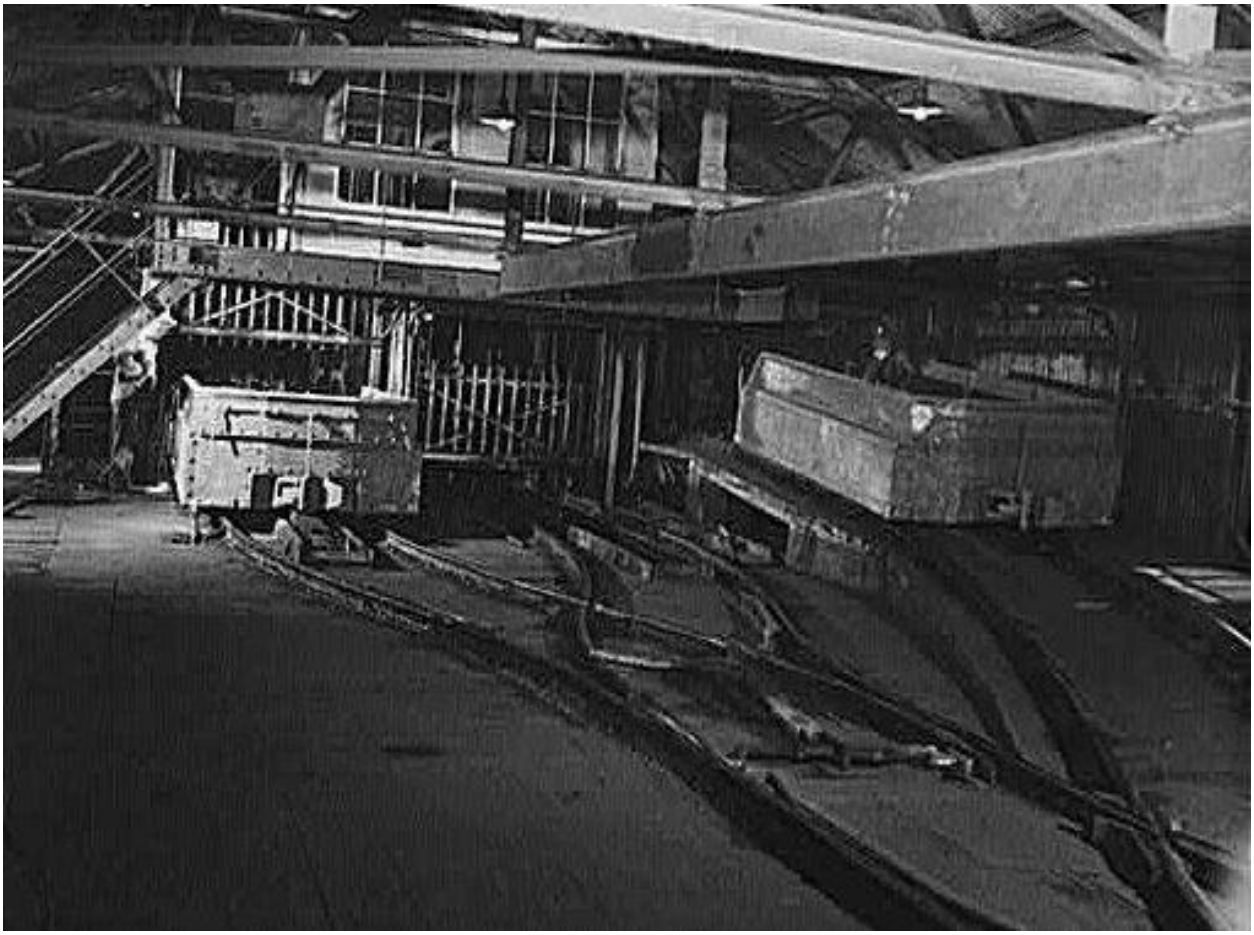
This is another view of the Hoist Shaft on the Montour showing the waste bin and tramway to the new mine dump across Valleybrook Road. It is obvious that this was an addition to the old tipple because the name of the mine is partially obscured.

This photo was taken from the hill above the mine and shows how the tramway inverted empty waste buckets for the return trip to the waste bin.

This is the bottom of the Hoisting Shaft showing a trip of loaded coal cars entering the hoist.

At the shaft bottom, loaded cars are hoisted up to the tipple as empty cars are returned to the mine. Here, an empty car is just now rolling off of the car hoist and rolling by gravity down the empty return track.

In the tipple, cars roll out of the hoist cages and into the rotary dumper.



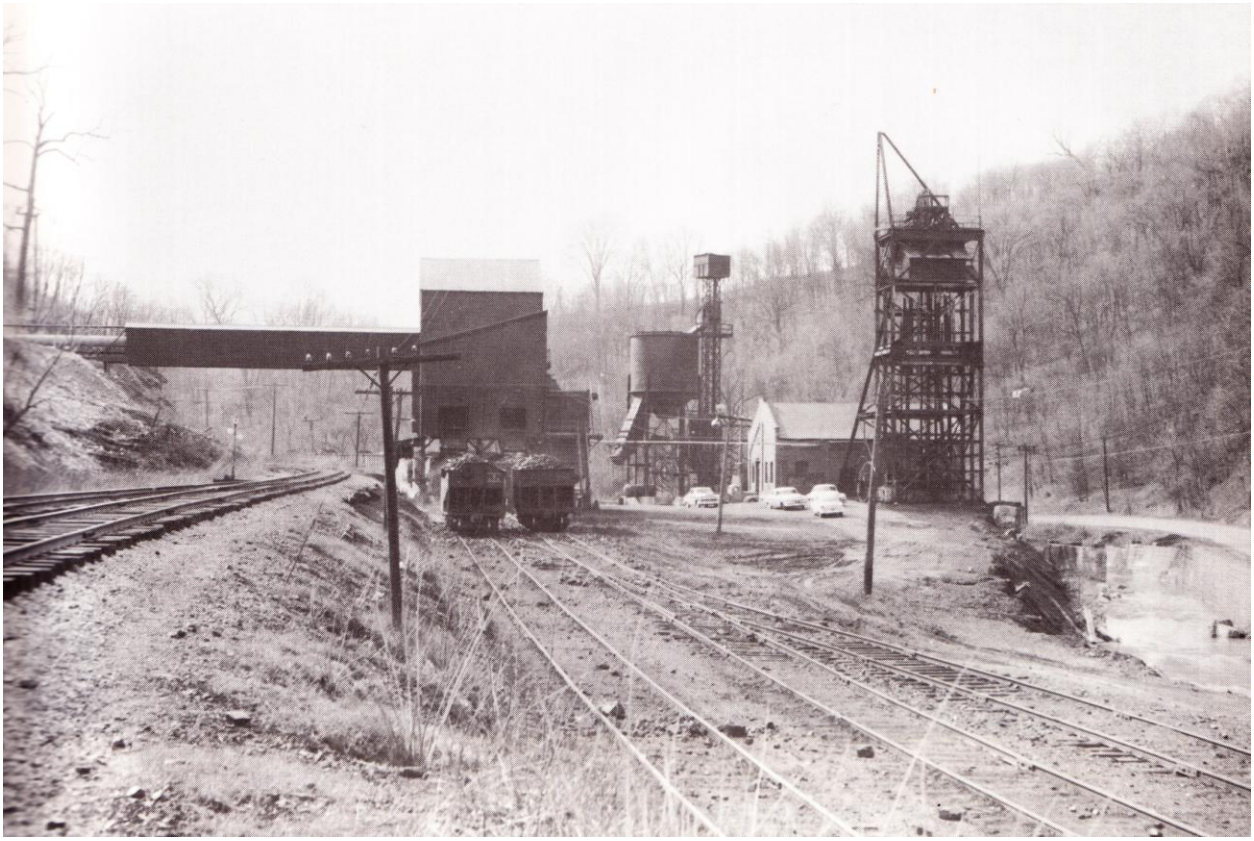
Cars are dumped at the top of the tipple. Note the row of signal lights on the right.

Down at the working face, a miner uses a mechanical loading machine to pick up blocks of coal recently shattered by a Cardox charge. Cardox was a shell of liquid carbon dioxide that was rapidly vaporized using an electrical squib and injected into the drill hole to shatter the solid coal.

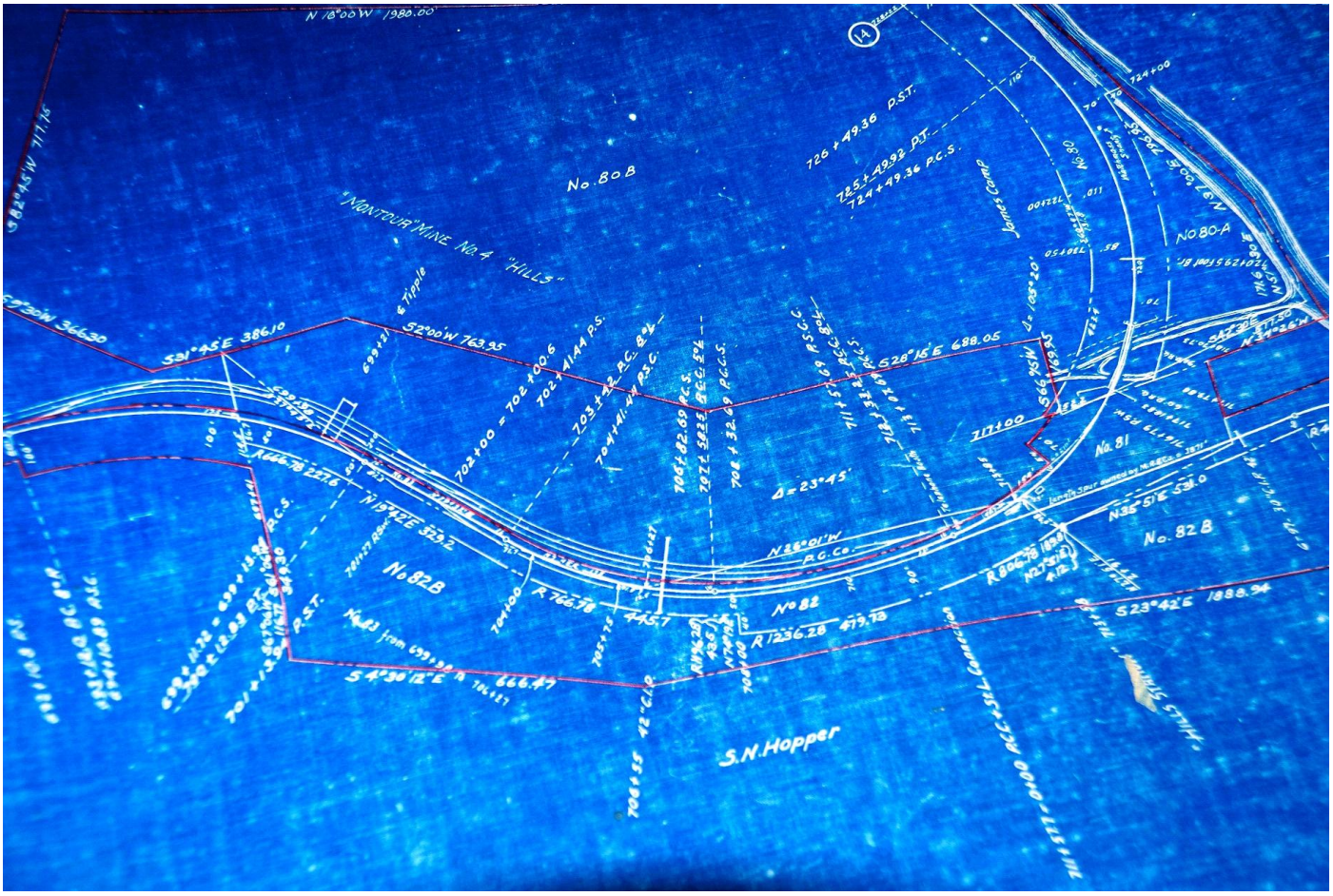
A loaded trip of coal cars heads toward the hoisting shaft. Note the signal lights on the right side. The white coating on the roof and ribs is rock dust, or powdered limestone that prevents coal dust from becoming airborne.

This is a 1957 view of the loaded yard at Montour No. 4 looking timetable west with the Montour main track and the switch leading to the Hills Interchange track on the right. Valleybrook Road is on the left. This is from a Montour Railroad accident report. Note that there are only two tracks coming out of the tipple.

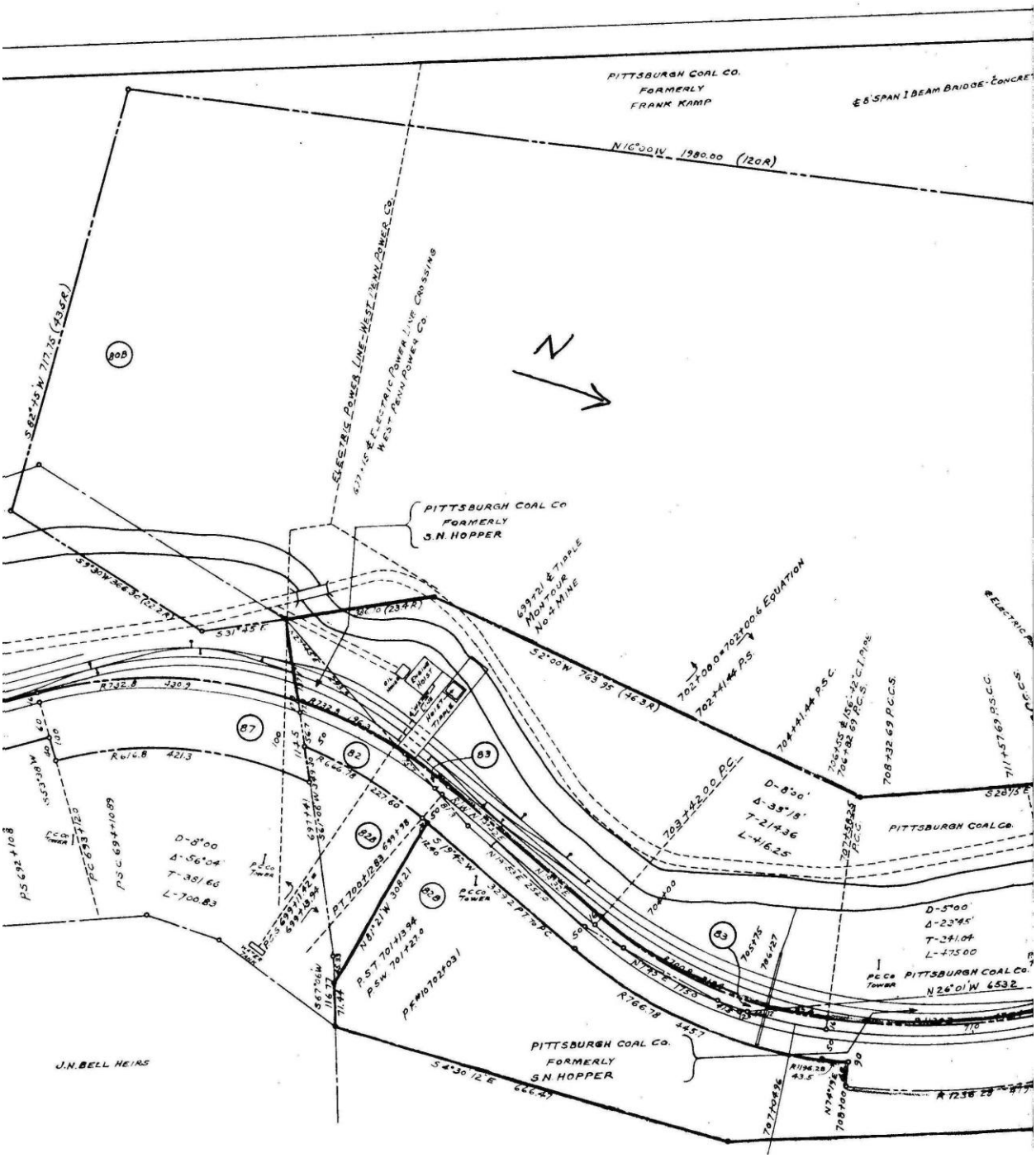
This photo was taken looking timetable east and shows the conveyor going into the newer and smaller tipple. Because all coal from the mine was washed at Champion, a tipple for sizing and cleaning the coal was no longer needed.



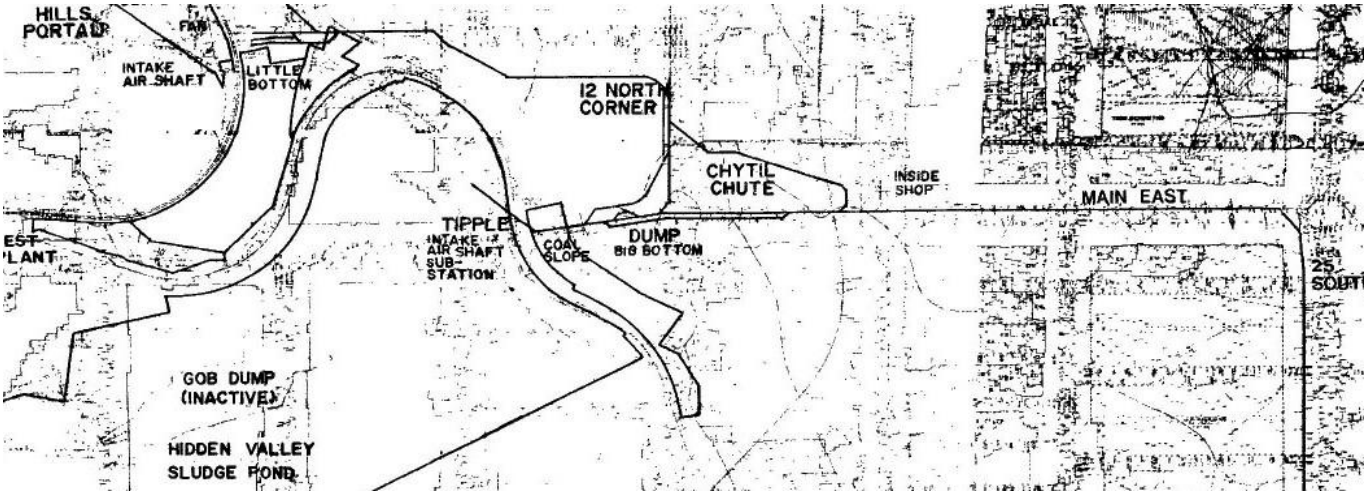
This is an early blueprint of the Montour tracks at the Hills hoisting tipple. A note above the Hills Interchange track says the length of spur owned by the Montour Railroad was 3,871 feet.



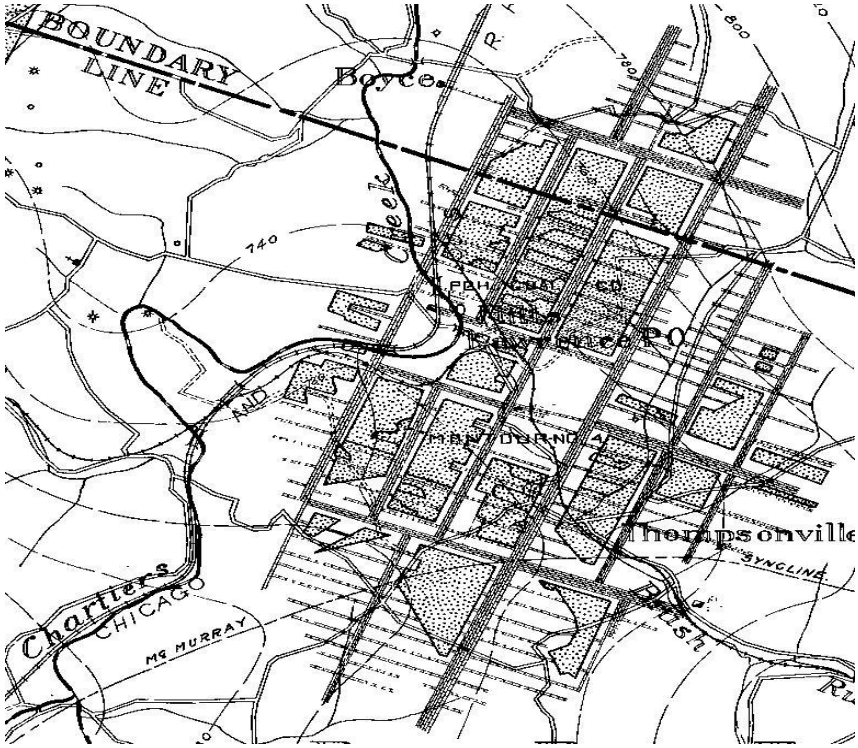
A later view of the tracks at Hills shows that the transmission towers were owned by the Pittsburgh Coal Company, not West Penn Power. This would indicate that the track diagram predates the time when the Coal Company transferred ownership of its intra-mine power lines to West Penn.



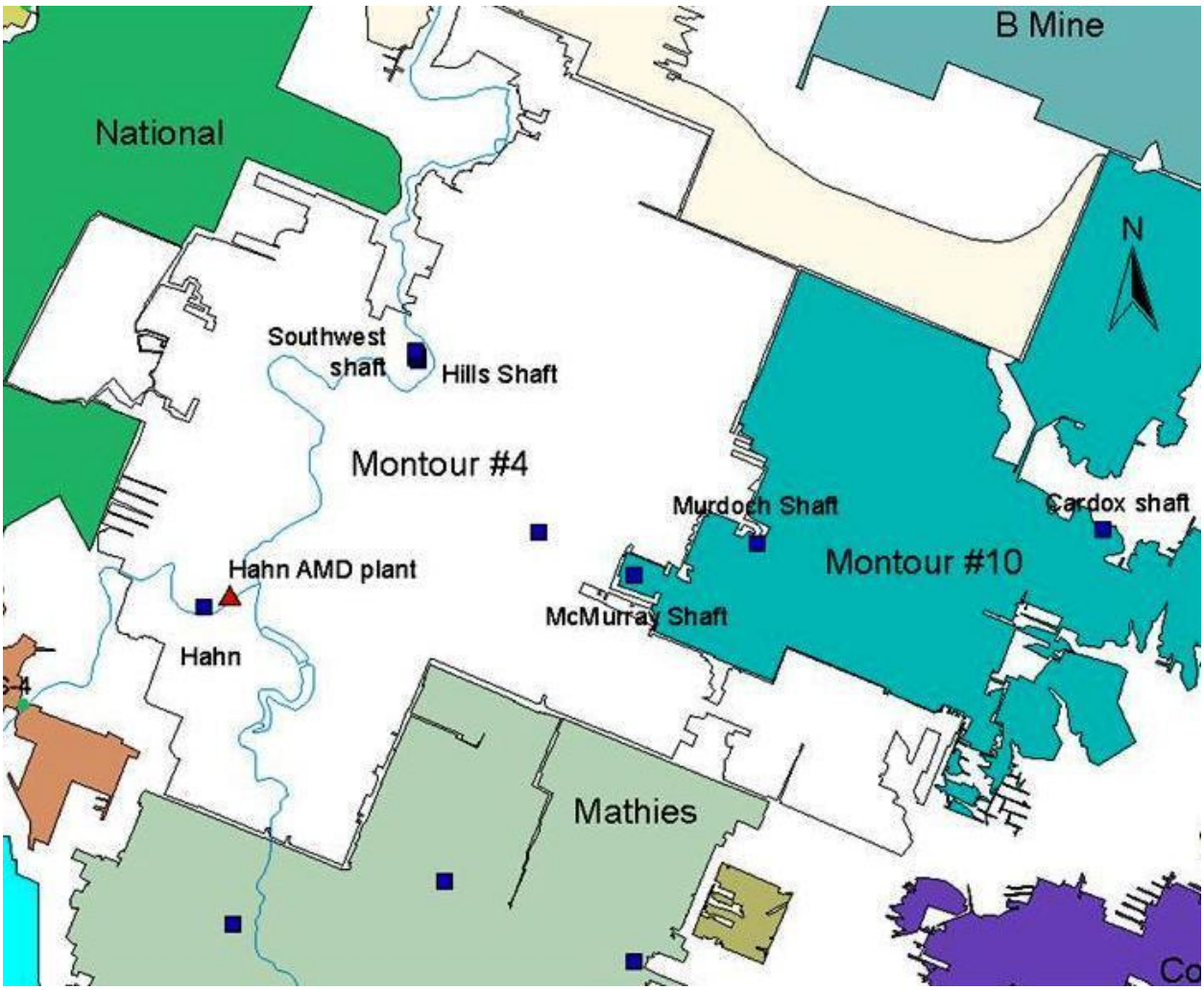
This underground map shows how some of the mine's features were named. This map was made late in the mine's lifetime because it shows the waste dump is no longer active.



This is an underground map of Montour No. 4 from the 1930s. Note that it shows an entry into the mine up at Boyce. This may have been an escape route.



This map shows the relationship between Montour No. 4 and the adjoining mines. The barrier between No. 10 and No. 4 that failed and flooded the mine was located near the McMurray Shaft. There is some confusion between the McMurray and Murdoch shafts because the names are used interchangeably on some mine maps.



This is a photo of the inside of the conveyor slope after the mine was closed. Power and ventilation were still in service, but the mine was closed.

Concrete is being pumped into the conveyor slope entry to seal the mine in late 1980.