

# East Broad Top

New Beginnings



Railroads are secondary industries. Their purpose is to transport stuff from one place to another. The East Broad Top hauled all sorts of stuff, but coal was primary and was moved from the mines to Mt. Union for transfer to the wider world. People also used the railroad to get from place to place.

Before the advent of the automobile, railroads were the way people got around. The East Broad Top connected the communities along its line with each other, as well as to the rest of the continent with its connection to the PRR at Mt. Union.



On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1956 locomotive #17 tied up after pulling the last common carrier train.

Written on the daily locomotive inspection form by the engineer - Fare well Ott"

Then a curious thing happened. A scrap dealer, Nick Kovalchick, purchased the railroad and couldn't bring himself to scrap it.

After lying dormant for four years, the railroad came back to life between Rockhill Furnace and the clay spur, Colgate's Grove, just south of Shirleysburg.



And so, for the next 51 years "Eastie" transported tourists on that short segment of track.

In 2012, the EBT was once again put into hibernation until 2020 when a group of dedicated people entered into a purchase agreement with Joe Kovalchick, Nick's son to purchase the line from Aughwick Mills to Alvan. Joe, a scrap dealer like his dad, miraculously and against all odds kept the railroad largely intact, making another rebirth possible for the East Broad Top Railroad.

Great credit is also due to the Friends of the East Broad Top who labored steadfastly to stabilize and secure whatever was necessary even when little hope for EBT's revival existed.



# Why is the East Broad Top important?



M1 1940



William Moedinger photos

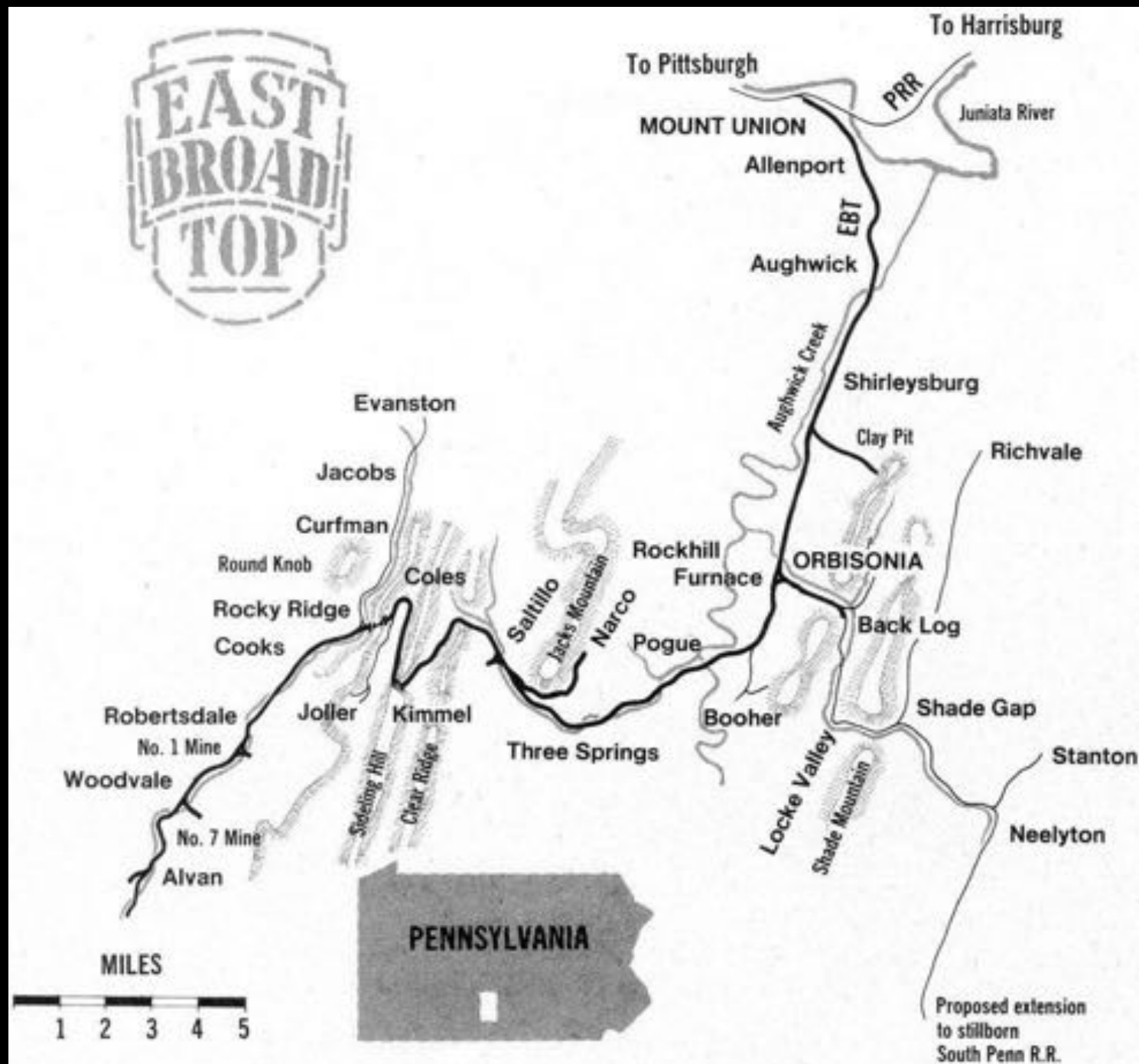
M1 1990



M1 2021  
Linn Moedinger photo

It's still here, remarkably intact, and arguably represents the most complete and comprehensive example of how industry and transportation operated in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States.

The EBT is important because it still connects communities. The line as it stands now runs from Aughwick to Alvan. The operable portion of the line from 1960 thru 2011 ran from Rockhill Furnace/Orbisonia to a wye where the Clay Pit spur left the mainline. Since 2020 this portion has been restored to operation.





Connecting  
Communities

Cooks



Robertsdale



Three Springs



Orbisonia



Saltillo



Since 1956 when the EBT last operated as a freight hauler, the industries that were the lifeblood of this area slowly drifted away. The 1960 revival of the EBT brought some relief, but ultimately the railroad suffered from the very thing that preserved it. Isolation.

East – west transportation arteries slip by to the north and south, and only one north – south cartway glances by the northern dozen miles between Orbisonia and Mt. Union. Raystown Lake, a major holiday destination is “over the mountain”.

Finally, this bucolic bit of the state has essentially been slumbering peacefully since 1956. Lacking a nearby population center and a unifying element to the area, there has been no significant enticement for people to visit in numbers needed to reinvigorate the economy.

The 2020 revival of the East Broad Top changes everything. The prospect of once again having a viable and compelling link between the communities of Aughwick and Alvan makes it feasible for private enterprise and community development to partner in establishing a sustainable economy based upon tourism.

The very nature of the permanence of a railroad allows for orderly, sustainable growth that not only invigorates the economy, but preserves the culture, history, and environment.



**So, what do we  
face going  
south?**



1936

Now







Malkiewicz

2021

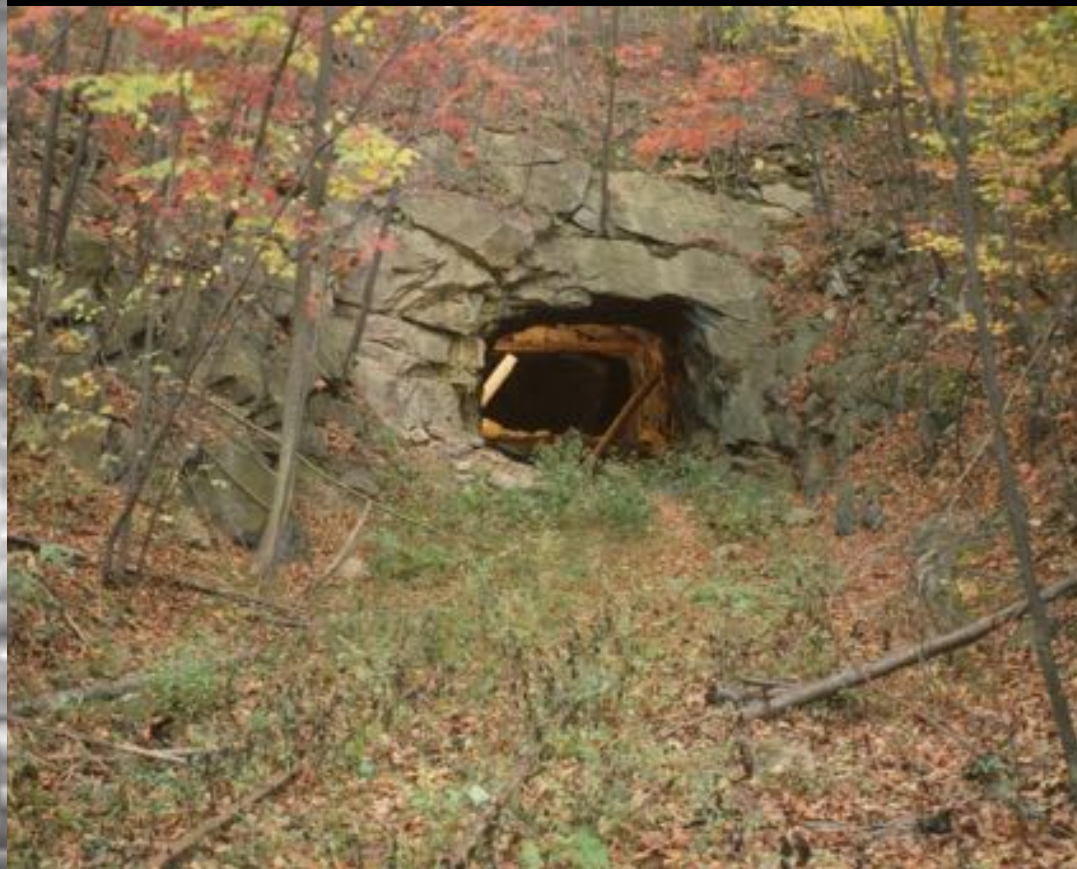
1941







Lee Rainey Collection



2022

1940s



1940



Lee Rainey Collection



2021

Malkiewicz



**Not as bad as it  
looks**



2020



1937

**Trees have been  
removed in 2022**



1941

2021

Malkiewicz



# RESTORATION & REVIVAL

As seen in the previous slides, restoration will have its challenges. Everything about the East Broad Top Railroad existed in a world when labor was cheap and humanity more analog. There is a very good reason steam locomotives and wooden cars no longer exist.

A properly restored EBT that reflects what really was will of necessity be the unsanitized version, reflecting an environment where people trod at their own risk and seeking compensation for a carelessly stubbed toe would elicit nothing but scorn.

Sharing the “real” EBT with the general populace is a major challenge. It’s a challenge working on analog equipment in a digital age of keystrokes when it is intuitively applied hammer strokes that are most appropriate.

**Getting  
the right  
people is  
critical.**





That's the big cheese, GM Brad Esposito with his hand in the air. Not only does he know how that inverted spaghetti bowl works, he fixed much of it, in addition to running the company.

No historic railroad has succeeded without can-do, multi-talented individuals willing to get their hands dirty doing whatever is needed to get the job done.



And then there is track.

The guys leaning on bars aren't resting. When the hammer hits the spike, they'll feel it.

3000 ties per mile, 4 or 6 spikes per tie. Do the math.



Miracle





However

DONT ASK WHEN

Removing old staybolts to  
install doorsheet patch on #16





Rockhill




Colgate Grove

Malkiewicz

Malkiewicz



A photograph of a train coach in a workshop. The coach is dark green with a curved roof. A large wooden structure, made of many horizontal and diagonal planks, is built against the end of the coach. This structure appears to be a temporary support or a frame for a new end beam. The workshop is dimly lit, with some bright light coming from the left. A small white machine on wheels is visible near the base of the wooden structure. The floor is concrete, and various tools and materials are scattered around.

Coach 8 ready for second  
new end beam.

Combine 14 rebuild  
by the FEBT





Machinery  
restoration and  
interpretation





Not bad for  
two years of  
work.

And a  
pandemic...

