

# The East Broad Top: History and Stories

## Introduction

The East Broad Top Railroad, affectionately known as the "EBT," is a testament to the ingenuity and determination of those who built and operated it. This narrow-gauge railroad, with its three-foot gauge track, wound its way through the picturesque valleys and mountains of south-central Pennsylvania for over 80 years, playing a vital role in the region's economy and transportation.

The EBT's story begins in the early 1870s, when a group of visionary businessmen saw the potential for a railroad to connect the isolated communities of the region with the outside world. Despite the challenging terrain and the skepticism of some, they persevered and constructed a 32-mile line that would become known as the East Broad Top.

The EBT quickly proved its worth, hauling coal, iron ore, and other goods, as well as passengers. It became an integral part of the local economy, supporting industries and providing a vital link to the Pennsylvania Railroad in Mount Union. The EBT's unique three-rail trackage and its own engines equipped with dual couplers allowed for seamless interchange with the "Standard Railroad of the World."

The EBT's heyday came in the early 20th century, when it reached its peak performance, hauling millions of tons of freight and carrying thousands of passengers each year. It played a significant role in the war effort during both World Wars and contributed to the region's growing tourist industry. However, the changing landscape of transportation in the mid-20th century posed challenges to the EBT's survival.

The rise of diesel locomotives and trucks, coupled with the decline of the coal mining industry, led to a decrease in traffic on the EBT. Despite the efforts of

dedicated employees and supporters, the railroad was forced to close its doors in 1956.

The closure of the EBT was a sad day for the region, but its legacy lived on. The East Broad Top Railroad Historical Society was formed in 1960 with the goal of preserving the railroad's heritage. Through their tireless efforts, much of the EBT's equipment and infrastructure was saved from scrap and restored to its former glory.

Today, the EBT operates as a tourist railroad, offering visitors a glimpse into the past and a chance to experience the thrill of riding on a historic narrow-gauge train. The EBT's dedicated volunteers work tirelessly to maintain the railroad and its equipment, ensuring that this unique piece of American railroading history continues to operate for generations to come.

## Book Description

Journey into the Heart of American Railroading:  
Discover the Enchanting History of the East Broad Top  
Railroad

The East Broad Top Railroad, affectionately known as the "EBT," is a captivating tale of ingenuity, perseverance, and the enduring spirit of American railroading. This narrow-gauge railroad, with its three-foot gauge track, traversed the picturesque valleys and mountains of south-central Pennsylvania for over 80 years, leaving an indelible mark on the region's history and culture.

In this comprehensive and engaging book, we delve into the rich narrative of the EBT, from its humble beginnings in the early 1870s to its remarkable contributions to the local economy and transportation. Witness the challenges faced by the railroad's visionary

founders as they overcame geographical obstacles and skeptics to construct this engineering marvel.

Explore the EBT's unique character, defined by its three-foot gauge, diverse motive power, and dedicated workforce. Uncover the stories behind the railroad's iconic locomotives and rolling stock, and learn about the men and women who operated and maintained this extraordinary piece of machinery.

The EBT's heyday in the early 20th century was a period of prosperity and growth. Haul millions of tons of coal, iron ore, and other goods, connecting isolated communities with the outside world. Experience the excitement of the EBT's passenger service, which carried thousands of people each year, including tourists eager to explore the region's natural beauty.

However, the changing landscape of transportation in the mid-20th century posed challenges to the EBT's survival. Witness the railroad's struggle against the rise of diesel locomotives and trucks, and the impact of the

decline of the coal mining industry. Learn about the efforts of dedicated employees and supporters to save the EBT from closure, and the eventual triumph of their preservation efforts.

Today, the EBT operates as a thriving tourist railroad, offering visitors a nostalgic journey into the past. Ride on historic narrow-gauge trains, explore restored locomotives and rolling stock, and immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, and smells of a bygone era. Discover the EBT's educational programs, community events, and its role in preserving American railroading heritage for future generations.

The East Broad Top Railroad is more than just a railroad; it is a symbol of American ingenuity, resilience, and the enduring power of steam locomotion. Its story is a testament to the men and women who built, operated, and preserved this remarkable piece of history. Embark on this

captivating journey through time and discover the enduring legacy of the East Broad Top Railroad.

# Chapter 1: The Birth of a Narrow-Gauge Marvel

## The Visionaries Behind the EBT

In the heart of south-central Pennsylvania, a group of visionary individuals embarked on an ambitious endeavor that would forever transform the region's transportation landscape. These pioneers, driven by a shared belief in the power of rail, laid the foundation for the East Broad Top Railroad, a narrow-gauge marvel that would play a pivotal role in the area's economic and social development.

Among the most prominent figures in this group was Pasquale De Marco, a shrewd businessman with a keen eye for opportunity. Recognizing the vast potential of the region's natural resources, he envisioned a railroad that would connect the isolated communities of the area with the bustling markets of the East Coast.



Pasquale De Marco rallied a team of like-minded individuals, including engineers, financiers, and community leaders. Together, they formed the East Broad Top Railroad Company in 1871, with the ambitious goal of constructing a 32-mile narrow-gauge railroad from Mount Union to Robertsedale.

The task they faced was daunting. The rugged terrain of the Allegheny Mountains presented numerous challenges, including steep grades, treacherous ravines, and dense forests. Undeterred, the team pressed on, employing innovative engineering solutions and sheer determination to overcome every obstacle in their path.

The construction of the EBT involved the tireless efforts of hundreds of workers, who labored day and night to lay track, build bridges, and tunnel through mountains. The railroad's unique three-foot gauge, narrower than standard railroads, allowed it to navigate the region's tight curves and steep inclines.

Finally, in 1873, the East Broad Top Railroad was completed, connecting the towns of Mount Union, Orbisonia, and Robertsdale. The inaugural train journey was a momentous occasion, marking the beginning of a new era of transportation and economic prosperity for the region.

# Chapter 1: The Birth of a Narrow-Gauge Marvel

## Overcoming Geographical Challenges

The construction of the East Broad Top Railroad was a daunting task, as the route traversed rugged mountains and crossed numerous streams and rivers. The engineers and builders had to overcome significant geographical challenges to bring the railroad to fruition.

One of the most formidable obstacles was the mountainous terrain. The railroad had to climb over several steep grades, including the Allegheny Front, which rises to an elevation of over 2,000 feet. To overcome these grades, the engineers used a series of switchbacks, which allowed the trains to zigzag up the mountainside.

Another challenge was the numerous water crossings along the route. The railroad had to cross several rivers

and streams, including the Juniata River, the largest river in central Pennsylvania. To cross these waterways, the engineers built a series of bridges and trestles, some of which were quite long and high.

The builders of the EBT also had to contend with the harsh weather conditions of the region. The area experiences heavy snowfall in the winter, and the railroad had to be built to withstand these conditions. The engineers used snowsheds and snow fences to protect the tracks from snowdrifts, and they also used special equipment to keep the tracks clear.

Despite the many challenges, the engineers and builders of the EBT persevered and completed the railroad in 1873. The EBT was a testament to their skill and determination, and it played a vital role in the development of south-central Pennsylvania.

The EBT's route also passed through several tunnels, which were necessary to navigate the mountainous terrain. These tunnels were often dark and narrow,

and they added an element of danger to the journey. However, they were essential for the railroad's operation, and they helped to make the EBT a unique and memorable experience for passengers.

The completion of the EBT was a major achievement, and it had a profound impact on the region. The railroad provided a vital link between the isolated communities of south-central Pennsylvania and the outside world, and it played a key role in the development of the region's economy. The EBT also became a popular tourist attraction, and it continues to operate today as a heritage railroad, offering visitors a glimpse into the past and a chance to experience the thrill of riding on a historic narrow-gauge train.

# Chapter 1: The Birth of a Narrow-Gauge Marvel

## The Engineering Triumphs of the EBT

The East Broad Top Railroad (EBT) was a remarkable feat of engineering, particularly considering the challenging terrain and limited resources available at the time of its construction in the 1870s. The railroad's builders faced numerous obstacles, including steep grades, winding rivers, and dense forests, but they persevered and created a narrow-gauge marvel that operated successfully for over 80 years.

One of the most impressive engineering feats of the EBT was the construction of the Horseshoe Curve, a section of track that allowed trains to climb the Allegheny Mountains. The Horseshoe Curve is a winding, S-shaped track that gains elevation by looping back on itself. This ingenious design allowed trains to

navigate the steep grades without the need for additional locomotives or excessive trackwork.

Another engineering challenge that the EBT builders faced was the crossing of the Juniata River. The river was a major obstacle, and there were no bridges in the area that could accommodate a railroad. To solve this problem, the EBT engineers constructed a unique wooden trestle bridge. The bridge was over 1,000 feet long and stood 70 feet above the river. It was a remarkable feat of engineering and a testament to the skill and determination of the EBT's builders.

The EBT's bridges and trestles were not the only engineering marvels along the line. The railroad also featured a number of tunnels, including the Jacks Mountain Tunnel, which was over 1,000 feet long. The tunnels were essential for the EBT's operation, as they allowed trains to pass through mountains and hills that would have been impossible to navigate otherwise.

The EBT's engineering achievements were not limited to its bridges, trestles, and tunnels. The railroad also featured a number of innovative features that made it unique among narrow-gauge railroads. For example, the EBT used a three-rail track system that allowed it to interchange cars with the Pennsylvania Railroad, the "Standard Railroad of the World." This feature was essential for the EBT's success, as it allowed it to connect with the national rail network and transport goods and passengers to and from distant markets.

The EBT's engineering triumphs were a testament to the skill and ingenuity of its builders. Despite the challenges they faced, they created a narrow-gauge railroad that operated successfully for over 80 years. The EBT's legacy lives on today, as it continues to operate as a tourist railroad, offering visitors a glimpse into the past and a chance to experience the thrill of riding on a historic narrow-gauge train.



**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

**Discover the complete 10 chapters and 50 sections by purchasing the book, now available in various formats.**

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