

SAND PATCH TUNNEL  
Baltimore & Ohio Railroad  
.5 miles NE of SR 2006  
Sand Patch vicinity  
Somerset County  
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-375

HAER  
PA  
56-SAPA.V,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SAND PATCH TUNNEL  
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Location: Approximately .5 miles northeast of SR 2006, near unincorporated town of Sand Patch, Larimer Township, Somerset County, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1911-1912

Present Owner: CSX

Present Use: Railroad Tunnel

Significance: The Sand Patch Tunnel now used by CSX is the second railroad tunnel constructed through Negro Mountain at Sand Patch. The first tunnel, began in 1854 and completed in 1871, marked the original route of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad through the Allegheny Mountains. This 4,475'-long single-track tunnel was one of the largest tunneling projects in the nation at the time of its construction, but it was abandoned in 1912 after B & O engineers decided that a double-track tunnel was necessary. With a work crew of about 1,000 men, the second Sand Patch Tunnel, measuring nearly 4,000' in length, was erected in 1911-1912.

Historian: Scott C. Brown, 1992.

Project Information: The results of the study of Somerset County were published in 1994: Gray Fitzsimons, Ken Rose, and Patricia Summers (eds), Somerset County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service). The contents of the publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress as individual reports. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

Located at the Sand Patch Pass of Allegheny Mountain just past the 2,258' summit, the present Sand Patch Tunnel is the second tunnel at this site to be given that name. A cut is extant near the site of the east portal of the original tunnel but most of the original tunnel just to the south and parallel to the present tunnel has long since collapsed. The west portal has completely deteriorated, while stones at the east portal have been removed. There is one remaining brick oval air shaft above the original tunnel. On the east side of the present tunnel two grades leading to the original tunnel are extant. One of these grades meets the present tracks at what is known as Manilla, the former site of GR Tower.

The Sand Patch Tunnel is 4,475' long and 31' wide (at its widest point) and has concrete portals and a concrete interior. Inscribed above the east portal is "SAND PATCH." Between the summit and the west portal is a deep cut in the mountain. There are two brick air shafts over the present Sand Patch Tunnel: No. 1 Shaft (200' deep) and No. 2 Shaft (133' deep) are both constructed of brick and have concrete bases and roofs built over the top. Shaft No. 1, located on the east side of SR 160, is oval with a deteriorating base, has several bands of brick near the top and bears a concrete plaque noting that it was "Lined 1928" and bearing the names of officials. Shaft No. 2, located on the west side of SR 160, has a stone plaque inscribed with the date "1919" and the names of men and their titles involved in the construction of the tunnel.

Construction began on the original Sand Patch Tunnel in 1854 by the Pittsburgh and Connellsville Railroad Company. The single-track tunnel had stone portals, a timber-cribbed interior and three brick air shafts. The railroad constructed approximately thirty houses for workers above the tunnel itself. These houses were razed in the 1920s after all work on the present tunnel had been completed. The town of Sand Patch, built primarily along the tracks, once included a post office (established in 1873), the Sand Patch Hotel, at least two stores and as many as twenty dwellings (one is extant facing the tracks). Railroad structures included a switch tower, a depot, coal and water stations as well as a "wye". The contractors for the original tunnel, Carr & Gould, began preliminary work on the tunnel before any grading of the right-of-way because of the difficulty of excavating such a long tunnel. Irish laborers were brought in to work on the project and construction proceeded sporadically for many years, including during the period of the Civil War. In 1867 work resumed in earnest and the tunnel was finally completed in 1871 at a length of 4,777'. Reportedly a date stone above the east portal bore the date "1864."

The original Sand Patch Tunnel served adequately until after the turn of the century, when increasing traffic and the possibility that a competitive tunnel might be built in the area by the Western Maryland Railway forced the Baltimore & Ohio to begin planning a second tunnel through Sand Patch Pass. A plan for a 2.6-mile low-grade tunnel with its west portal in Glade City was rejected in favor of a double-track tunnel just to the north. The original single-track tunnel would be retained for use by slower trains. The Kerbaugh Construction Company began work in 1911 with headings made from both portals and the two shafts. A small reservoir, extant but filled with brush, was constructed between SR 160 and Shaft No. 1 to provide water needed for drilling hydraulics and steam power. Unfortunately the new tunnel was excavated too close to the original one and in 1912 a 250' section near the west portal collapsed from a hillside that gave away above. Trains were diverted to the recently completed Western Maryland Railway route nearby. The debris was cleared and the west portal was constructed 200' farther west than originally planned to protect the tracks from possible further slides. Rebuilding after the collapse, which included excavation from the air shafts, was an immense undertaking. Some 1,000 men labored for fifty days, and a number of fatalities occurred during construction. The present tunnel, when completed in 1912, was at a higher elevation than the original but was shorter in length. The original Sand Patch Tunnel was eventually abandoned sometime after railroad officials concluded that the present tunnel was able to handle all the traffic.

During World War I an army encampment was established above the tunnel for patrols guarding against possible sabotage. Stone bake ovens are extant at the site. In 1941, William Stone bought from the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad 600 acres, known as the "Sand Patch Tract," that included the original tunnel. Three years later stones from east portal of the original tunnel were removed and used to construct the foundation of Stone's Tavern (now the Rainbow Lounge) above the tunnel on SR 160. The face stone bearing "SAND PATCH" was also incorporated into the basement wall. After the railroad phased out steam locomotives with their excessive smoke in the 1960s, it was able to build roofs over the two air shafts above the present tunnel to cut down on ice build-up on the interior.

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