

3.0 MOUNT PLEASANT TO PORT PENN RAILROAD

The Mt. Pleasant to Port Penn Railroad was constructed in August and September 1918 under government contract to the Army's Ordnance Department to haul building materials and supplies for the construction of a proposed bomb loading plant on the Delaware River at Port Penn. The 8.5-mile access line tied into the Delaware Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad (now Norfolk Southern) at Mt. Pleasant, a small crossroads village with a railroad station, located at the intersection of Summit Bridge Road (U.S. 301) and Boyds Corner Road (S.R. 896). The railroad hauled freight to the plant site until the armistice in November 1918, by which time the plant still had not been constructed. After the war ended, the access line and the plant site were turned over to the Philadelphia Ordnance District Salvage Board. The line was used to haul materials off the site during demolition and dispersal of the plant materials. The tracks were dismantled after the site was cleared out, and the right-of-way returned to the original property owners.

The route of the Mt. Pleasant to Port Penn Railroad is discernable on 1937 aerial photographs, despite the tracks having been dismantled over a decade earlier (Figure 2). It appears as a linear feature in some portions with the appearance of a road or farm lane, and in other places as a field boundary. In several cultivated fields the line is absent altogether, the corridor having been returned to agricultural use by the owner after removal of the line.

3.1 As-Built Conditions

The railroad was built through a low-lying agricultural area adjacent to the Delaware River. At the time of its construction, the area was a combination of cultivated farmland and marshy lowland with little concentrated development and was accessed by limited unimproved roads. Rather than being built on a direct east-west line between the two endpoints, the chosen route for the railroad followed the high ground along the drainage divide between Scott Run to the north and Augustine Creek to the south. The circuitous route followed farm property boundaries when possible and avoided water bodies.

The access line, which took approximately six weeks to construct, was built as a single-track, standard-gauge railroad with a 65-foot right-of-way. The grade consisted of a slightly raised earthen berm with limited ballasting, due to time constraints. Ballasting to help the grade withstand winter conditions was proposed for later construction, but was never actually finished. Earthen fill excavated by steam shovel and hand labor adjacent to the track formed the raised grade, leaving a borrow pit running for stretches along the length of the corridor. The government used 67- and 80-lb rail obtained from Bethlehem Steel as part of the left-over stock originally manufactured for the Russian government. Ties were spaced on 12-inch centers. The right-of-way was fenced in after the tracks were laid to keep farmers' horses and cattle from getting on the track.

3.2 Current Conditions

Because of the brief existence of this rail line, it does not appear on any historic maps of the area and its existence was not anticipated during the archaeological survey. It was a local informant who indicated that the raised grade was once a railroad that connected a military depot on the coast to the Norfolk Southern line at Mt. Pleasant. The majority of the former corridor is no longer intact or even visible on the landscape having been returned to active agricultural land

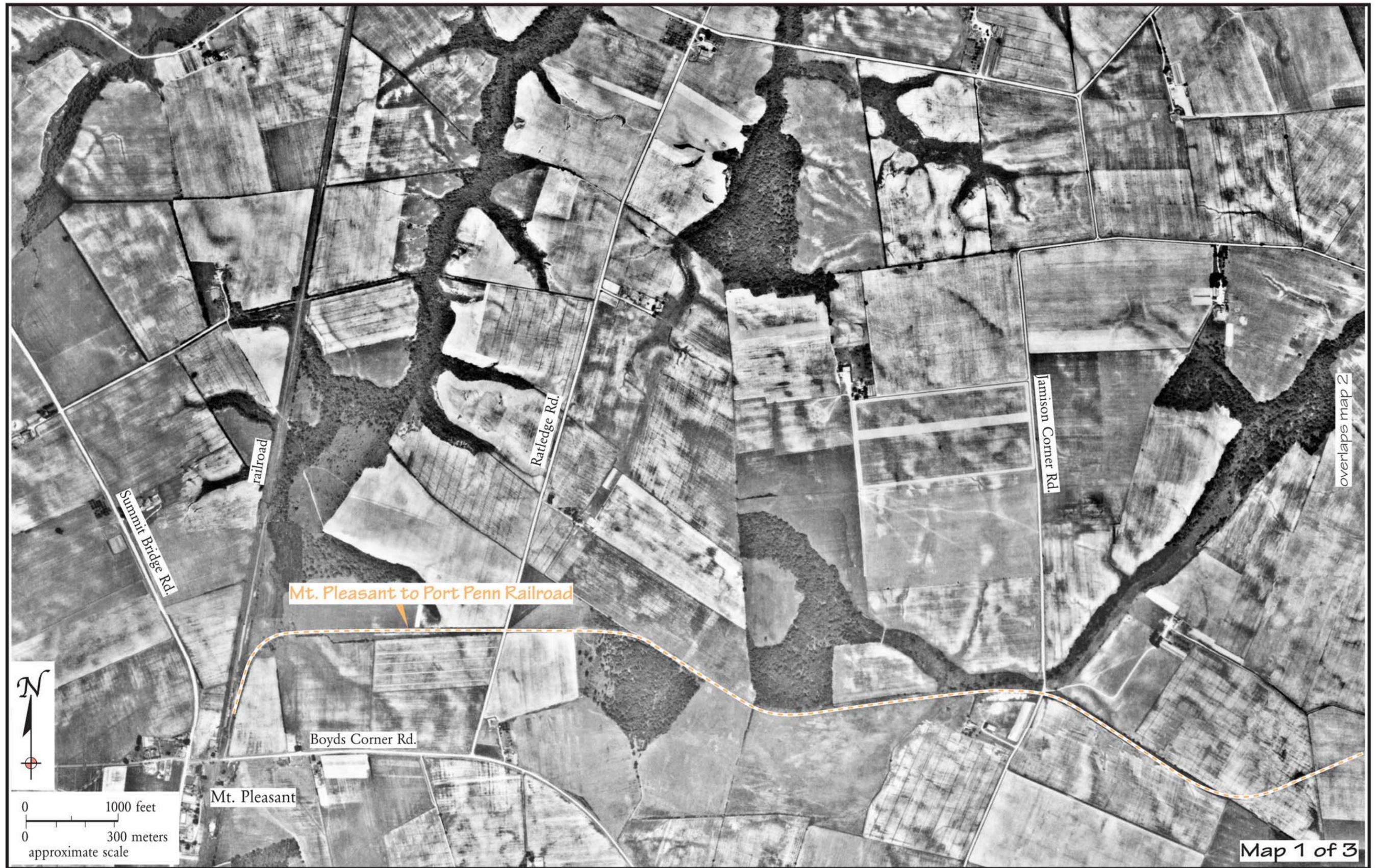


Figure 2: 1937 Aerial photography showing the former corridor of the Mt. Pleasant to Port Penn Railroad. The railroad route was clearly visible on the landscape on these aerials, despite having been dismantled over a decade earlier. Aerials accessed on Delaware's DataMIL.



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after dismantlement of the railroad prior to the mid-1920s, or built upon by modern developments (Photos 1 & 2). However, there are a few areas in which grade remnants are still in evidence, mostly located in undeveloped woodlots scattered along the length of the corridor (Photos 3 & 4). One of these remnants was observed during Phase Ib field survey of AHC Survey Segment 14 of Section 1 as a linear landscape feature crossing the APE in an east-west direction. The area through which the line passed was wooded, and the corridor was discernable as an elevated grade with relatively few trees (Photos 5 & 6). Measurements taken of the grade's cross section indicated that the grade consisted of a slightly raised earthen berm approximately one-and-a-half feet in height and 22 feet in width (Figure 3). A water-filled borrow pit extended along the north side of the corridor; this resulted from the fill excavated to build the railroad's grade (Photo 7). This extant portion of the grade extended approximately 1,500 feet (0.28 miles) through the wooded area only and disappeared in the agricultural fields to the east and west of the woodlot (Photo 8). Approximately 200 feet of remaining grade was located within the APE.

A shovel test, excavated in January 2011, indicated that this remnant section of the railroad grade consisted of unballasted mixed fill to a depth of 30cm below the surface, with no ties or rails (Photo 9). Field survey verified that the earthen grade was composed of material taken from the borrow pit running along the north side of the grade. Digital photographs taken during this field survey illustrated the condition of the remnant, its vicinity, and the adjacent borrow pit.

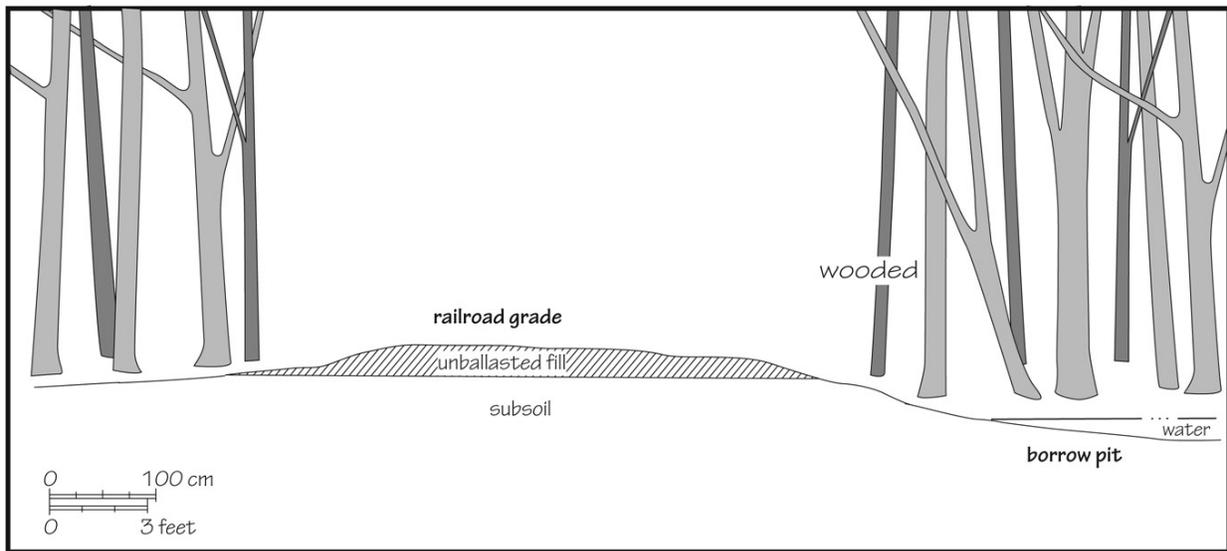


Figure 3: General cross-section of the former grade of the Mt. Pleasant and Port Penn Railroad, looking east along corridor within the U.S. 301 Project APE.



Photo 1: View along the approximate route of the railroad spur-line, looking west toward the modern residential construction along Ratledge Road. This section, which is outside the APE, has been returned to farmland.



Photo 2: View southeast along the former railroad corridor from within the APE. There is no trace of the grade within the cultivated field, but its route is visible as the gap in the treeline at the edge of the field.



Photo 3: The railroad grade is visible heading southeast into a woodlot, just west of the APE.



Photo 4: The railroad grade is clearly intact within this woodlot, which is just west of the APE. View looking southeast along the former corridor.



Photo 5: View of the railroad grade within the APE, looking southeast. The grade is slightly raised with a water-filled borrow pit on the left (north) side.



Photo 6: View northwest along the railroad grade segment within the APE.



Photo 7: View of an ice-covered borrow pit along the north side of the former railroad corridor within the APE. Looking east from the grade.



Photo 8: Looking west towards the woodlot where railroad grade is preserved, showing approximate location of the corridor. Taken from the cultivated field within the APE.



Photo 9: This view shows the approximate location of the shovel test and cross-section measurements. Looking east near the west end of the APE.