



Forest Service Centennial

Snapshot

Ohio's Iron Railroad

Wayne National Forest US Forest Service

Nelsonville, OH: The “Iron Railroad” began operation in 1851 as part of the DT & I (Detroit, Toledo and Ironton). The town of Ironton sprang up around its southern terminus on the Ohio River.

The iron railroad was constructed along a 13-mile stretch from Ironton north to Center Iron Furnace. The railroad was built by the owners of the iron furnaces in northern Lawrence County to transport their pig iron to the Ohio River and bring supplies back to the furnaces. The railroad cut through one 1,050-foot tunnel known as the Vesuvius Tunnel (later named the Royersville Tunnel). Its first locomotives were transported via Ohio River barges from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

In 1881, the iron railroad consolidated with the Toledo, Delphos and Burlington narrow gauge railway. Instead of changing the iron railroad’s standard gauge, the T D & B simply laid a third rail inside its existing track to accommodate the smaller cars which began running on it in 1883.

By 1892, it was known as the Iron Railway and established a barge service to transport its cars across the Ohio River.

During the 19th century, the D T & I predecessors such as the iron railroad

continued to grow with spurs to Springfield, Jackson, Lima, and Detroit. In May, 1905, all lines were reorganized as the D T & I Railway from Detroit to Ironton – 378 miles. For the first part of the 20th century, the D T & I struggled along, but in 1920 its stock was purchased by Henry Ford who, over the next 9 years, assured the financial future of the railroad. He greatly increased the freight revenue, and improved labor and traffic relations. He also established innovative approaches to the railroad’s function as an assembly line.

In 1929, Ford sold his railroads, including the Iron Railroad, and though it changed hands a few times, it eventually declined and ceased operation in the 1970s. Though the iron railroad outlived the iron furnace industry, it too is a legacy of past industrial eras. Railroad grades and some rails can still be found on the Wayne National Forest as testimony to the past.

The Detroit, Toledo and Ironton Railroad – Henry Ford’s Railroad. Scott D. Trostel. 1988. Cam-Tech Publishing, P. O. Box 341, Fletcher, OH 45326.

A Standard History of The Hanging Rock Iron Region of Ohio. Eugene B. Willard, ed. The Lewis Publishing Co. 1916.

Forest Fact

The 236,665 acre Wayne National Forest is one of 155 national forests celebrating the 100th anniversary of the agency.

Check out our Websites

www.fs.fed.us/r9/wayne
www.fs.fed.us/centennial

For more information

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