

# Wise County – SITE VISIT



## SITE VISITS TO WISE COUNTY

On March 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, toured portions of Wise County with Jack McClanahan. A follow-up tour was taken with Michael Wampler on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2009. Jason Hill and Mike Lintz joined us for a portion of the trip.

Wise County has a population of over 41,000 and is made up of the towns of Appalachia, Big Stone Gap, Coeburn, Pound, Wise and St. Paul.

*Please Note: Although the City of Norton lies within its boundaries, it is not part of the county.*

## BIG STONE GAP

Big Stone Gap has a population of 4,680. It also has numerous museums and offerings for visitors...



Visited [Southwest Virginia Museum](#) – Impressive!



A few historic homes in Big Stone Gap near the Southwest Virginia Museum

## [Harry W. Meador Jr. Coal Museum](#)

Tour Location #7 on the Virginia Coal trail



Wonderful coal museum although the coal equipment outside needs to be displayed differently to encourage greater visitation.

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Big Stone Gap is also the hometown of author John Fox who wrote “Trail of Lonesome Pine” which was later made into a movie. In 1960, an outdoor drama based on the story was started in Big Stone Gap and continues today. Next door to the playhouse is the Tolliver House, a historic home that now serves as both a gift shop and is open for tours.

Trail of Lonesome Pine – 1960 Outdoor Drama and Tolliver House historic home . Play continues today.



Home of John Fox Jr. – Author of “Trail of Lonesome Pine”.



June Tolliver House & Gift Shop w’ playhouse next door



The Old School House



Two of the “characters” in the play

There is also a wonderful [inventory of historic photos](#) of the area in the building just down the street from the Playhouse as well as [Jessie Lea’s RV Park](#) (Need to add photos of site and offerings) <http://www.jessielearv.com/>

“Home to Big Stone Gap” by Adriana Trigiani has also put Big Stone Gap on the map as a place to stop. Many of the sites and characters in the book can be visited.

*NEED TO CONTINUE TO CAPITALIZE AND PROMOTE THIS. DEVELOP A WALKING TOUR DOWNTOWN WITH INTEPRETIVE SIGNS.*



Mutual Drug Store is one of the noted sites in the book and contains many historic photos of the area.



Mutual Drug Store



June Tolliver House



Lonesome Pine Playhouse



Main Street in Downtown Big Stone Gap gives one a clear view of the gap where it gets its name.

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*More photos of Big Stone Gap including war memorial and old depot that will soon be torn down.*



Leaving Big Stone Gap, we then headed towards Lee County east on Hwy 23.



### RAILS TO TRAILS - POTENTIAL:

Rails to Trails from Big Stone to Appalachian Trails. Was L&N. Now Southern owns it and wants rail. 1.8 mile Rails to Trails once completed. Roaring Branch needs path to access Virgin Hemlocks. Follows Business 23? National Forest on each side.



*Requesting single track on right side of road. Has shortest tunnel (49' 10") visible from road.*

- Have trailhead next to bridge crossing. Funding for trailhead will come from funds originally to rehap Depot that is now landlocked.
- Penn VA Land Company owns 138,000 acres

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## STONE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Just north of Big Stone Gap, the Stone Mountain Trail starts at Roaring Branch Road in Wise County (parking is limited) and travels east into Lee County ending at Cave Spring Recreation area. A 14.3 mile hiking trail, it is rated by hikers as strenuous primarily due to the one mile of stairs that one must climb. It currently gets light use.

## Coal Town – Coal Heritage – Talk to Randy Rose with Virginia State Tourism



*Coal town along RR tracks*



*Active coal mining site*



55,000 acres – Forest Land Group – Contact: Craig Kaderavek.

- Another access through Pennington Gap?
- TVA (Clinch & Powell Rivers) & Corps (Buchanan and Big Sandy)

## POTENTIAL TRAIL: Dungannon to High Point – 28 miles for horses

Concern of Hemlock and Rhododendron as invasive species.

## POTENTIAL TRAILS: Along Hwy 68 to Keokee Lake Road.

Horse trails to the south. ATV trails to the north.

## A FEW NOTABLE BUILDINGS WE PASSED WHILE TOURING



*WPA Building*



*Older house across from gas station*



*Continuing south on Business 23*



*Coal Elevator*



*Drive-In Theater*

# Wise County – SITE VISIT

## ST. PAUL



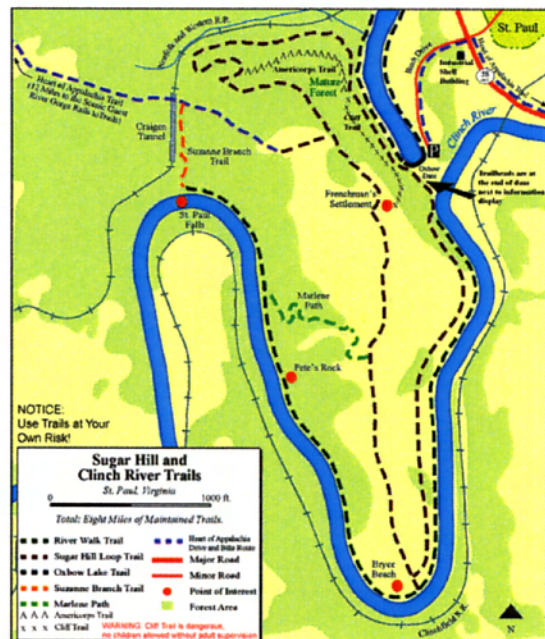
St. Paul is located in both the Russell and Wise counties. With a population in 2000 of approximately 1,000 people, the community offers lodging, numerous places to eat and a car wash. It also is home to the Oxbow Center, a multi-agency human services consortium serving a seven-county area. For more info on the center, visit the website at [www.oxbowcenter.org](http://www.oxbowcenter.org).



## SUGAR HILL AND CLINCH RIVER MULTI-USE TRAILS

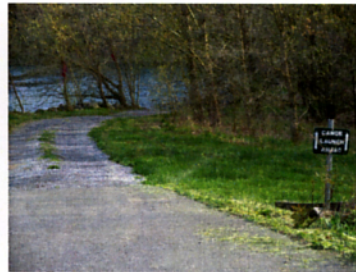
Map and information on the Sugar Hill and Clinch River trails in Saint Paul/Wise County can be found at <http://www.sugarhillclinch.com/>

It has been noted by a few mountain bikers riding the trails that the middle section of trail needed some work. Local users of the trail are following up on this and will do the work necessary to repair it. Currently used by hikers, mountain bikers and a few horse riders.



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Hiking and biking opportunities along the Sugar Hill/Clinch River Trails just off of ALT Rt 58 at St. Paul. Trails are included on the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail System. Also excellent area to fish. Canoe Ramp, two parking areas, restrooms and tourist information kiosk at site.



Part of the VBWT Trail System

Informational Kiosk

Canoe Ramp accessing Clinch River

Trailhead crossing



Directional and on site informational signage.

## TOWN OF COEBURN



Coeburn has approximately 2000 residents and the Mayor is G. Lynn Wells. It is on the Crooked Road Tour and is the hometown of Appalachian musical dynasty, The McReynolds including both Jim and Jesse McReynolds who are noted for their “walk” harmony vocals and their contributions to Bluegrass. Coeburn is also the home of the Ralph Stanley II and offers many music venues at the Historic Lays Hardware.

The downtown area offers brick sidewalks, antique lamps and pedestrian bridges. Loretta Mays, Town Manager of Coburn, has expressed interest in developing trails leading into and out of Coeburn but the community is landlocked by railroads so railroad crossings will need to be addressed. There is an active line that goes to St. Paul which could someday offer a scenic train ride.

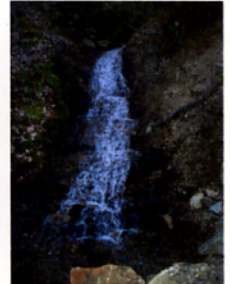


**TRAILS:** The community does offer a 3/8 mile race track. It also has a Suzuki and Polaris Sales Shop located off Hwy 72 South at Exit 1.

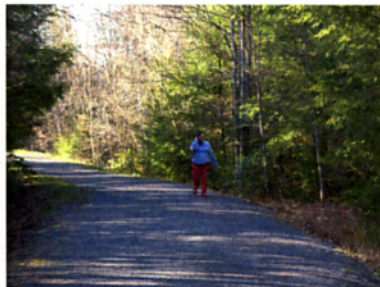


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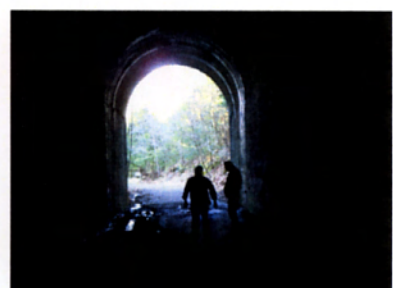
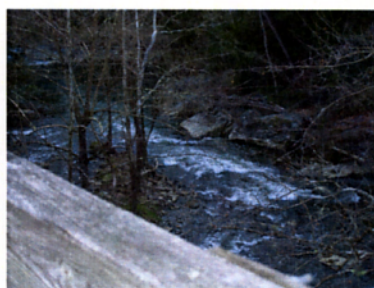
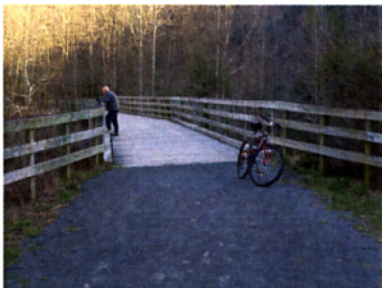
## **GUEST RIVER GORGE TRAIL** (near Coeburn VA)



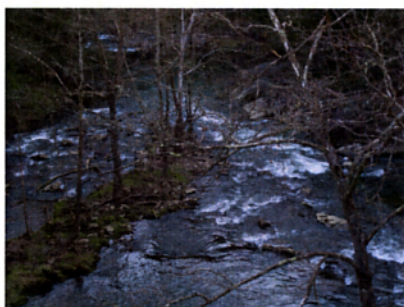
There is a 1 mile walking and biking trail that goes through a tunnel and ends at a bridge overlooking the gorge. Those wanting a longer walk can continue along the trail 5.8 miles to the Clinch River.



This rails-to-trails project follows an old railroad right-of-way paralleling the Guest River, a Virginia Scenic River. Trout fishing is permitted in the river, as well as kayaking and canoeing. Features along the six mile trail, including an old railroad tunnel, bridges using the remaining railroad trestles, waterfalls and rock outcroppings.

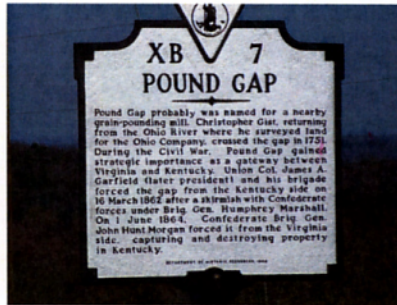


Both the Guest River Gorge Trail and the Clinch River Trail are included on the Heart of the Appalachia Trail System.



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## POUND GAP



Pound Gap is at the crest of the Pine Mountain Thrust on US 23 at the state borders of Virginia and Kentucky just south of the town on Jenkins Kentucky.

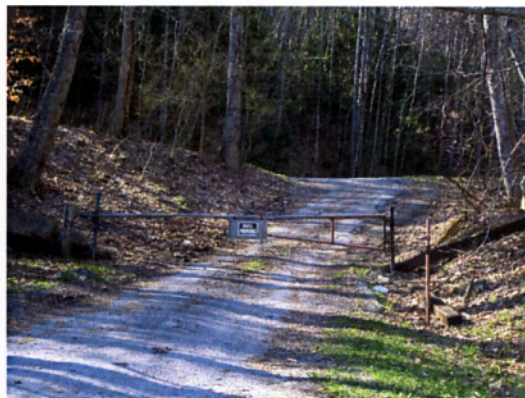
**CUMBERLAND MOUNTAIN TRAIL:** Runs across the ridge at the state line along the counties of Letcher County KY, Pike County KY and Wise County VA.



*Two views of Pine Mountain from Pound Gap*

**AUSTIN GAP TRAIL:** A 4-mile moderately difficult side trip from the Cumberland Mountain Trail.  
[http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/qwj/clinch/recreation/hiking/austin\\_gap\\_trail.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/qwj/clinch/recreation/hiking/austin_gap_trail.shtml)

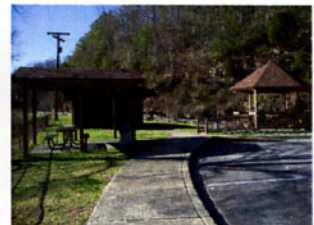
**RED FOX TRAIL:** Just past the Pound Gap historical marker is the Red Fox Trail which follows an old railroad track. It is a 2 mile round-trip interpretive hike back to 1892, when a massacre at the site left several people dead.





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## NORTH FORK OF THE POUND RIVER



The North Fork of the Pound includes 5000 acres of extensive lake and riverside habitat that can be enjoyed by nature enthusiasts. It offers ample parking, picnic areas, restroom facilities, a tourism information board and is handicapped accessible.

## **PHILLIPS CREEK LOOP TRAIL AT POUND RECREATION AREA**

The Pound Recreation Area offers a 2-3 mile hiking trail along riparian woodlands that surround the river which is part of the Lonesome Pine Loop of the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail. Known as the Phillips Creek Loop Trail, the trail wanders through mature hemlock and hardwood forests, dense rhododendron thickets, and uphill towards oak and hickory woodlands, with the occasional presence of shortleaf or pitch pine. The trail forms a loop, but also connects to the Pine Mountain Trail System for those who are interested in a longer hike.



## **"ROUND THE MOUNTAIN" ARTISAN TRAIL**

Proposed – "Round the Mountain" artisan site similar to Tamarack and North Carolina's initiative. Primary goal of the initiative is to encourage visitors to follow a trail to the artisans and crafters locations along the route. Todd Christensen with Virginia ARC is heading this up.

35,924 acres of the [Jefferson National Forest](#) lie in Wise County, supporting a multitude of outdoor recreational opportunities: hiking, biking, swimming, canoeing, hunting, fishing, camping, boating, picnicking...and of course, it's a leaf-looker's paradise.



*Taylor's Country Store (shown to right) provides breakfast and lunch for those in the area and could benefit greatly from the increase in trail users coming to the area.*