

## RICH RAILROAD HISTORY Along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail

### APPENDIX M Rich Railroad History

In the process of developing a corridor management plan for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, it became clear the railroad played a huge role in the development of Southwest Virginia and in the history of coal. The story of coal is also the story of the railroad and its impact on the region. The railroad not only transported coal out of the mountains, it also brought in supplies and equipment to both the coal mines and the coal camps, carried passengers as well as worker from all over the world. Migrant workers included Chinese, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, Slavic, African-American, and Jewish. To better clarify this point, we have merged railroad-related information brought out in the CMP into this one appendix.

The map below shows a network of tracks that traverse across all seven counties and the City of Norton which parallels a major portion of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.

#### Railroad Tracks across Southwest Virginia



A few noted sites along the route which makes this a story well worth telling and preserving:

- The Costliest Railroad in America is the Carolina, Clinchfield & Ohio Railroad from Dante Va (Russell County) to Bostic, N. C., a distance of 211 miles. There are thirty-five tunnels, the sum total of the lengths of each making more than seven miles of underground travel. The longest tunnel on the line is through Clinch Mountain, bearing the same name. It is 4,200 feet long, and cut through solid rock the entire length. It took more than two years to drive it and cost over two million dollars.
- The 850 foot long Natural Tunnel in Scott County that provided a way through for trains to access the coalfields in 1890 and is still in use today.
- The Norfolk Southern Railroad Trestle visible from the byway located in Scott County.
- Bee Rock Tunnel connecting Appalachia to Big Stone Gap is listed in *Ripley's Believe or Not* as the "shortest railroad tunnel in the world". The tunnel is just 47 ft, 7 inches.

According the [www.Americantrails.org](http://www.Americantrails.org) website, there are also four noted rails-to-trails on or near the Byway. They include the 2.8 mile Little Stoney National Recreation Trail and the 5.3 mile Guest River Gorge in Wise County and both the 7 mile Devil's Fork Loop and the 8.4 mile



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Wilderness Road Trail in Lee County. For more on the Rails-to-Trails program where abandoned railroad tracks become community attractions by converting them to walking and bicycle trails, go to <http://www.railstotrails.org/>

Along the byway, there is also a number of railroad related artifacts still remaining including:

- Pocahontas: Original train depot (currently used for offices) and a red caboose. Portions of track have been buried with plans to one day uncover for a tourist train ride to Bramwell. Another track has been converted into a rail-trail walking track.
- Dante: Train Depot and track
- Coeburn: Offices and meeting space
- Between Dante and Sun in Russell County, one can view the CSX Railroad Turntable.
- Pennington Gap has a caboose soon to be used as an interpretive center.
- Railroad car at Big Stone Gap converted into a visitor center.
- Duffield: Actual Duffield Depot is privately owned and used as a storage shed. *The depot that houses a railroad museum in Duffield is actually a depot built for the movie "Coal Miner's Daughter" which was moved to its current site after the filming.*



*Fremont Depot – Offices*



*Dungannon Town Hall*



*Coeburn–Offices/Meeting space*



*Railcar in Big Stone Gap serves as their visitor center*



*Pocahontas Depot*



*A railroad museum in Duffield is in a depot from a movie set*

But where there were once a depot in nearly every community, there are now only six along the 325 mile route, four of which are noted above. The others are at risk of being lost forever. They include the Duffield Depot which has actually been moved from its original location and is being used as a storage shed in an area outside the region, the depot at Dante which is scheduled for demolition and the Appalachia passenger depot which is currently landlocked and in need of repair. Actually the town of Appalachia has two depots. One was for passengers and the other was used for freight. These four depots are featured on the following page. *For more on this, see "Sites at Risk" later in this chapter.*



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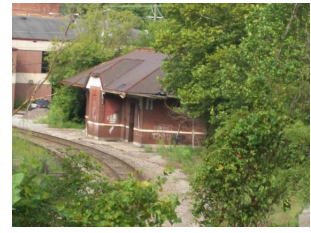
## FOUR DEPOTS CURRENTLY AT RISK



Duffield depot and depot in Dante are both at risk.



Appalachia still has its passenger and freight depot



## RAIL CARS

Rail cars are also being used for other purposes along the trail which have helped to preserve them for future generation. The Coal Heritage Trail Train museum just outside of the town of Haysi is housed in an old rail car. And two cabooses next door are used for lodging for the Red Caboose Bed & Breakfast. The Railroad Museum in Duffield houses some of its railroad memorabilia in Norfolk & Western caboose. There is also a rail car featured at the park in Coeburn and Pennington Gap has plans to convert their Southern caboose into an interpretive visitor information center for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.



Caboose at Duffield



Visitor Center in Big Stone Gap

The visitor center in Big Stone Gap was once a private rail car used by the president of the railroad and is one of the oldest and finest examples of typical passenger car construction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Built in 1870 for the South Carolina & Georgia Railroad, it contains an observation room, two staterooms, a dining area and facilities for the porter and a kitchen area. *Most of the original fixtures are intact, including the lavatories, lighting fixtures, and even the speedometer in the rear observation room.*



Red Caboose B&B and Coal Museum near Haysi



Caboose on display in Pocahontas



Future Information Center in Pennington Gap



Caboose on display in St. Paul



This caboose is currently located in downtown Appalachia.

The NW Caboose to the left is scheduled to be refurbished soon and moved to a vacant lot near the Bee Rock Tunnel between Appalachia and Big Stone Gap where it will become a visitor information center for the trail system being developed.



Caboose in Coeburn



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### RAILROAD BUFFS WILL LOVE THIS!

In the basement of Appalachia Cultural Arts Center is the most unbelievable model railroad display!



Note from consultant: *I have never seen anything like it and it just keeps growing! This does not even begin to show it all. One will just have to visit Appalachia. That is all that can be said.*

- There is a freight elevator to all four floors which could be adapted for both freight and passenger use in order to make the entire facility ADA compliant making all four floors accessible to everyone while allowing stage props, furniture and supplies to be taken to the upper and lower levels.
- Access to the lower level is very limited and definitely needs work to make it ADA approved. The freight elevator converted for dual use as a passenger elevator will alleviate part of the issue but allowing public viewing on a more regular basis is a must. The exhibit is just too awesome to keep behind locked doors. A curator for the museum who can police who enters the lower level along with television monitors for those times when visitors are downstairs should allow the exhibit to be a little more accessible for viewing.



*More photos of the model railroad area which fills two rooms.*

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### SITES AT RISK

One of the sites at risk is the Coal Heritage Trail Railroad Museum and Caboose B&B near Haysi. The owner is considering selling both. This would result in the loss of both an attraction and much needed lodging for that portion of the trail. **Efforts should be made IMMEDIATELY to keep both!**



A few years ago, a proposal was written and funding received to renovate the old depot in Appalachia but when it was determined that a live track was located nearby, all work was stopped. In Dante, the community was provided the opportunity to acquire the Dante Depot but were required to move it 50' from the track which made the entire initiative cost prohibitive. This issue needs to be revisited before both depots are beyond repair. *The photos below were taken in Fall of 2010.*



*Appalachia Depot*



*Dante Depot*

*There are many examples of depots being renovated and used for other purposes while still being located next to a live track. Immediate action should be taken to save the depot in Dante.*

*Solution for Appalachia Depot provided on next page*



*Depot*



*Live tracks next to the depot*

*One example of a converted depot being used by the community for offices and meeting space yet is located next to a live track is the Coeburn depot. They had a fence erected that separate the tracks from the structure.*

*Learn more on Dante Depot & examples at <http://trailsrus.com/>*

### Another Depot at Risk...



*1950 photo of the Duffield Depot*

The Duffield Depot is currently being used as a storage shed. Efforts should be made immediately to obtain the depot and move it to the site next to the depot used in the "Coal Miner's Daughter" movie on display at the corner of Hwy 58 and 23 in Scott County. The building could then be used to house and display Kenny Fannon's tremendous collection of train memorabilia.



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### INACCESSIBLE SITES WORTH INTERPRETING

Once there were railroad depots in nearly every community along the Virginia Coal Heritage 325 mile route. Now there are only six. Appalachia is unique in the fact that it still has both its passenger and its freight depots. The freight depot is easily accessible and in excellent shape.



*Freight Depot in Appalachia*

But that is not the case with the passenger depot. It has numerous challenges including:

- It is landlocked,
- It has two live lines running close to the building
- And it needs a lot of repairs.

What the passenger depot does have going for it is that it is very viewable from more than one location.



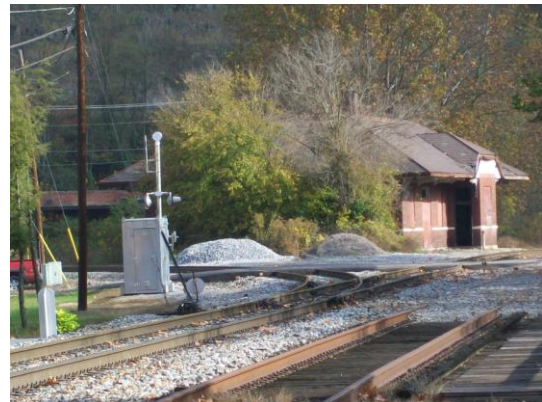
*Three views of the passenger depot in Appalachia VA.*



*View from freight depot*

To the left is the view from above from the turnoff to the freight depot. A great place to pull over and view the passenger depot.

Below is the view from old City Hall. Removal of a few trees and brush will make this a perfect location to view and interpret.



*View from the old City Hall*

### Recommendation:

*Renovate the exterior of the structure to its original grandeur to be viewed and interpreted from afar only. The overall cost will be far less since the interior will remain in its current state and yet the site will still be able to be interpreted.*

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A few other railroad structures still remaining along the route include:

- Railroad section house in Richlands – Proposed site for interpretive center. This section house sits near the tracks in Richlands Virginia and is in excellent condition considering its age. A few in the community have suggested tearing it down and making the area into a parking lot but it is in a:
  - Good location to share the interconnection of both rail and coal. Also could provide a display of the by-products of coal – plastic, medicine, etc.
  - Strategic location as one enters the historic district of downtown Richlands overlooking the railroad.
  - Ample parking and easy access to the Chamber and Coffee Station Restaurant across the street.
  - Easy walking distance to the historic buildings on Washington Square.
  - View of Richlands School underneath the metal siding. Another story to tell...



*Railroad Section House in Richlands*

*Recommendation:*

*The section house should be developed into an interpretive center and become a stop on the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail to tell the story about both rail and coal.*

- Railroad section manager's home in St. Paul - Proposed site for Railroad Museum
  - The railroad section manager's home at the top of Third Street is in excellent condition and currently used to display art, host meetings, and offers a small railroad collection.
  - Due to St. Paul's rich and colorful history as a railroad community, it is recommended that this building become a railroad museum, providing photos and artifacts of train memorabilia as well as historic photos of the "Western Front".



*Railroad Section Manager's Home*

*Recommendations:*

- *Contact Ron Flannery, Kenny Fannon, and Frank Kilgore for additional railroad memorabilia to display.*
- *A person who has an interest in railroads and a knowledge of the history of St. Paul should be sought to serve as the curator for the museum so that it may be open on a regular basis to visitors coming to the area.*
- *It is also suggested that a small gift shop be added to generate additional funds.*
- *Convert the two rooms upstairs into an apartment to rent providing security in the evenings for the building and generating dollars to cover utilities and maintenance costs.*
- *Signs directing visitors to the museum need to be added along with a tour sign at the building itself that coordinates with a Historic Walking Tour brochure.*





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*A few other railroad sites one will see along or near the route include:*

