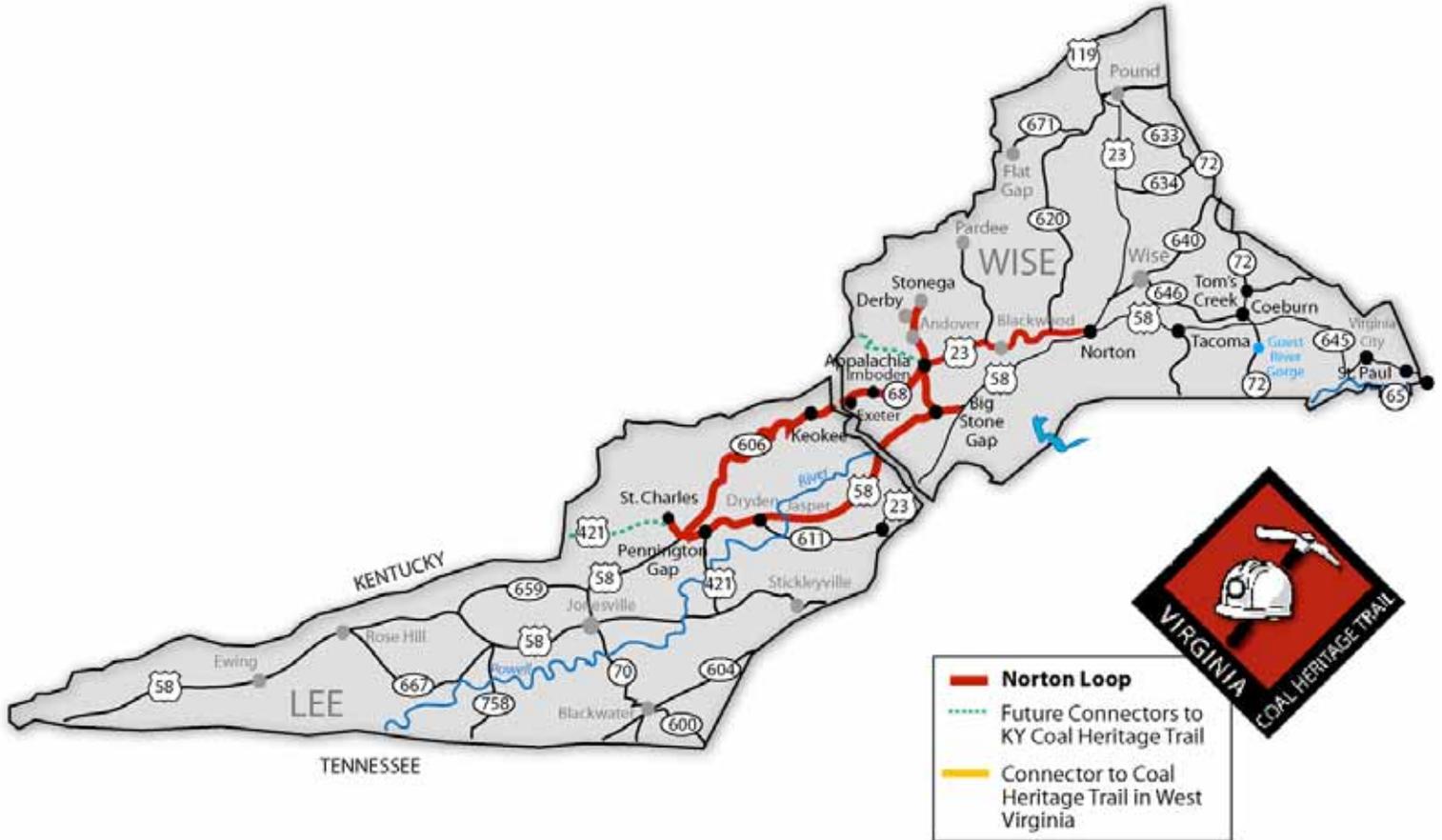




CHAPTER IX
ACTION PLAN FOR THE NORTON LOOP
Through the City of Norton & the counties of Wise and Lee



In the following section is an overview of the recommendations and plan for action for the Norton Loop section of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail based on town meetings held in Big Stone Gap, Jonesville, Appalachia, Norton and follow-up conversations. For details on these meetings, see APPENDIX H.

Please Note: All items noted in **red** on the action plan pertain to coal-related sites, those in **brown** indicate railroad-related sites while **blue** describes road conditions. All recommendations are noted in **purple** while any action taken is noted in **green**.



CHAPTER IX: ACTION PLAN

Norton Loop

ACTION PLAN FOR THE NORTON LOOP *Through the City of Norton & the counties of Wise and Lee*

Red - Coal-related site **Blue – Road Description** **Purple – Recommendations** **Green – Action Taken**
Brown – Railroad-related site

Starting point: City of Norton

Featured areas:

Downtown Norton:

- Numerous restaurants plus lodging and shopping opportunities.
- Many historic buildings and homes. A very vital downtown area.
- Local paper and radio station
- Active chamber for both the City of Norton and Wise County
- **Norton has a rich coal history one would not know on the surface.**

Recommend the Chamber be the site for travelers to pick up information, maps and brochures on the Coal Heritage Trail. Need “Coal Heritage Info here” sign to let people know.

Strongly recommend a driving tour be developed that takes the visitor through Norton and off the main street so people can discover for themselves the rich history Norton has in coal. See Chapter VII: Walking/Driving Tours and Chapter VIII: Series of Meetings - Norton for details and a few of the sites one might include on a tour.

Norton also has a rich railroad history. N & W, Southern, L&N and Interstate RR which ran from Lee to Wise County also ran through Norton. There were four different depots in Norton and at one time, everything on the south side of Main Street was owned by the Railroad. Ron Flannery can provide more information on this (276)431-2206. Both the story of rail and coal should be told through brochures and driving tours.

A location needs to be found within the downtown area for a museum for both rail and coal artifacts and displays. The Chamber building does not have the space. **Recommendation would be to use a portion of the Norton Hotel which is strategically located across from the Chamber.**

A kiosk with information about the Coal Heritage Trail and the history of coal camps in Norton along with a map of the route also needs to be located at the rest area next to the Inn at Norton.

Crossing into Wise County

ROAD DESCRIPTION: Business 23 – Two lane, curvy and windy road through the mountains.

- Log Cabin II - Appalachian Traditions Village – Where traditional music is played every week.
Potential site to provide information about the coal heritage trail, brochures and maps.
- Historic log building – Original site of Log Cabin I where performances were held
- **Elite Domestic Coal with sign that one may purchase their home coal at this site.**



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- **Remains of a coal operation.** Possible location for a pull-off and interpretive sign identifying the remaining equipment plus historic information of the coal operation itself.
- Central Drive-In – Still in operation. This is the only Drive-In movie theaters still in operation along the entire byway and one of the very few left in the state. **Efforts need to be made to insure that this stays a viable business so future generations can experience a drive-in movie.**
- Catfish Pond operation – **Needs improved signage. Looked like quite an operation.**
- **Coal conveyor across road – Coal Operation.** Excellent showcase of an operating coal site. Great opportunity for interpretive sign to describe the process. Ample room for pull-off. **Priority site for interpretation if property owners agree.**

Appalachia:

- **The old freight depot is in excellent condition across from the High School and has ample room to park and provide interpretive information. Needs an interpretive sign. Pulling off the road to see this, one also gets an excellent view of the old depot which once transported a tremendous amount of coal out of the area. Need to note “Photo Op” and add an interpretive sign at this location.**
- **Downtown Appalachia, a historic coal town. Numerous historic buildings still remain.** – Recommend a Visitor Information Kiosk for Coal Trail or a marked location in one or more of the buildings for information on coal in this area, historic photos, maps etc. Suggested location would be the Appalachia Cultural Arts Center building. The large parking lot across Main Street could be excellent for a Tourism kiosk on the trail. The wall along the back of the parking lot would make an excellent canvas for a mural. *See Chapter VII: Walking & Driving Tours for more on this.*



Include information on the history of Appalachia as coal town along with information about the Bullitt Mine Processing Plant as well as its rich history as a railroad community.

There is a model railroad display at the Appalachia Cultural Arts Center which needs to be more available to the public. *See Chapter VII – Walking & Driving Tours for more on this.* **Short-term – An arrangement needs to be made to make the model railroad display more accessible to the public on a more regular basis. Who will make this happen?**

- The Appalachia Cultural Arts Center is strategically located in the center of the community across from a large parking area. The structure is in excellent condition. ***The first floor of the building be open on a more regular basis and serve as the primary visitor interpretive center for the Norton Loop of the Virginia Coal***

Red - Coal-related site Blue – Road Description Purple – Recommendations Action Taken - Green
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Heritage Trail, the second level as the performing arts center with plays presented at different times throughout the year, the third floor converted into studio apartments for the curator or to rent out, and the basement remain the model train exhibit but be promoted more to increase visitation to this amazing display. Strongly recommend the freight elevator be converted to allow both passengers and freight to all four floors of the building making the entire facility handicapped accessible. (Immediate) – Contact the Appalachia Cultural Arts Committee to explore the possibilities of making this happen. See VII – Walking and Driving Tours for more on this.

- Recommend the Byway be extended to include a side trip on Route 600 to Stonega and Derby, two of the most intact coal camps in the entire region. This route takes one past one of the most elaborate **Miner's Memorial** and the **Central Supplies United Office** owned by Westmoreland that provided supplies for all the coal companies. (Immediate) – **Debby Spencer send information to Appalachia Town Manager, with examples of action taken by Buchanan County of what the town needs to do to “make it happen”.**
– **Action Taken - Examples sent to Appalachia 11-8-10**
- Need a walking tour through downtown Appalachia to some of the buildings that were active during the prime coal days. Include historic photos placed in different businesses to encourage visitors to stop in.
See Chapter VII – Walking & Driving Tours for more on Appalachia
- **History of Area: The Stonega Coke and Coal Company (SC&C) was formed in the late 1800's and nine coal camps were built near the town of Appalachia, Virginia. They included: Osaka (est. 1902), Imboden (est. 1902), Rod (est. 1903), Arno (est. 1907), 1910 - Keokee (est. 1910), Exeter (est 1917), Dunbar (est. 1918), and Derby (est. 1923). Some of these coal camps still exist today and can be seen as one travels this portion of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail along Hwy 606/68. See IX: Oral Histories and Chapter VI : Unique Features – Coal Camps for more on this. There needs to be information in Appalachia about these communities and a map showing where they were located and which ones still remain today. Individuals, groups and even students need to compile information and photos and develop displays on the first floor of the Appalachia Cultural Arts Center highlighting the history and interesting stories from each of the coal camps. Oral and written histories on each of the communities could also be shared within these displays. (Short to Mid-term) Who will be responsible for organizing this?**

TURN RIGHT ONTO HWY 68

ROAD DESCRIPTION: Two lane, curvy and very rural. Excellent route for motorcycles.

- Need a scenic byway sign saying “Turn Right” onto Hwy 68 before one gets to the intersection to warn them to be ready to turn right. (Immediate)

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- **On the left is a coal processing plant** – Excellent location for an interpretive sign to describe the equipment and the process. **(Short-Term)** **Who will take the responsibility for this?**
- **Lower Imboden Street** – Turn off to Lower Imboden coal town established in 1902 – **Railroad tracks run along side community.** – This community has recently installed a unique eco-friendly sewer system. Interpretive sign or information in a brochure describing the process is suggested.
- **Imboden Road turns off to the right through the community of Imboden (est. 1902).** As noted above, it is part of a coal town established in 1902. The road then **loops back and reenters Hwy 68.** Possible side trip into community with either an interpretive sign or information about the history of the community provided in a brochure. It is an excellent example of the coal camp row houses.
- **Meadow Branch Coal Company Sign – Active Coal Site.** Potential to pull off and provide interpretive information on current Coal extraction processes.
- **Lick Branch Road to the right takes one down to an old coal camp known as Lower Exeter with many of the row houses now privately owned.** Possible Side Trip.
- **Exeter is located on the left.** Turning on Upper Exeter Road, one travels a 1 mile loop through Exeter, a coal camp established in 1917 in which the homes are still being used today. Loop comes back out onto 606. If community is agreeable, this would make a wonderful side trip and could include an interpretive sign or additional information in a brochure to tell what other buildings once stood nearby as part of the camp.

Crossing into Lee County – Road name changes from Hwy 68 to Hwy 606 (same road)

- **Covered coal conveyor belt crosses road.**
- **Keokee Mine Site – Currently active.** Potential pull-off for interpretation.

ROAD DESCRIPTION: HWY 606 – 2-Lane and curvy through mountains with periodic view of Keokee Mine Site. Remains an excellent road for motorcycles or scenic drives.

- There is a noted turn-off to the Keokee Boat Ramp and Wildlife area which includes restroom facilities, picnic area and walking trails. **Need to note this on the Coal Heritage Trail brochures and website as a rest area.**

Keokee

- **A historic coal town (est. 1910) has a wonderful history.** *Details are provided in Chapter VI: Unique Features – Coal Camps.*
Recommendation: This coal camp definitely needs a driving tour and should include both signs of existing sites and those that no longer exist so the traveler can begin to recreate the town in their minds.

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- Keokee once had over 200 coke ovens. Only two are known to remain and are on private property. Efforts should again be made to allow public viewing of these ovens.
- The Power Plant which once fired up the ovens still exists and at one point, was converted into a theater but is now closed. An interpretive sign needs to be added that tells about its original purpose and what it became, the purpose of the coke ovens and how the town once thrived as a coal camp. Kelly's Convenience Store next door could provide additional information on Keokee but space would need to be cleared, better lighting added and a display built.
- The Commissary still exists and is currently being used as a gymnasium. Need interpretive signs outside the building providing interior photos as it once appeared when it was the Keokee Company Store. Need interpretive signs at both the commissary and the theater.
- Keokee Elementary School is where the old Hotel once stood. Recommend a coal sign be placed outside the building noting this and an interpretive sign be added as funds become available.
- Similar signs could be placed throughout the community at locations where buildings once stood during the coal boom.

Sigmon

- Entrance to Sigmon Coal Company – An active mine site. Could be a site to add interpretive information about present practices in coal extraction.

At mile 31 on the Norton Loop, there are remnants of an old mining operation.

Could be an opportunity for interpretation or just a sign noting which mining operation it was.

Calvin:

- As late as the mid 60's, the entire town was still intact and included a barber shop, ice cream parlor, a hospital, a high school, a theater the Carter's family once performed in, Bess's store and the Pennington store, even one or two buildings had elevators.

Recommendation: A sign needs to be erected showing where the Community of Calvin once was. Placement of an actual interpretive sign providing both information and past photos of the community in its heyday needs to be determined.

It is strongly recommended that taped interviews be done with Paul Bobrosky to capture the oral history of the area and in particular, the Calvin community in which he grew up and the depth of knowledge he has on coke ovens. He can also talk about the large tipple at Calvin which had the ability to store three days worth of coal and the "saw tooth" checks that were handed out to the miners to keep them all working even in slow times.

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Covered coal conveyor belt crosses road.

Scenic view of creek with small waterfall – pull-off currently exists but could be expanded for wildlife photo-op and picnic area.

Two miles down the road is a swinging bridge crossing creek. Another photo-op

On right is a coal operation now converted into a recycling center.

Interpretive sign could be added or at least a sign noting the mining equipment.

At intersection of 606 & 421, Virginia Coal Heritage Trail goes both left to Pennington Gap and right to St. Charles. Need to erect sign letting travelers know to the left is the main trail and to the right is a side trip to avoid confusion.

At the intersection of 421 and the turn off to St. Charles (Hwy 352) there is another confusion. One sign encourages travelers to turn, the other one directs travelers straight ahead on Hwy 421 which eventually crosses into Kentucky and could be the connector to the proposed Kentucky Coal Heritage Trail.

Recommend temporarily taking down the sign directing travelers into Kentucky until there is actually something there to direct them to. There is also a convenience/gas station at this intersection. Suggest they are provided information on the Coal Heritage Trail and specific information on St. Charles, its history as a coal town, as well as other coal towns and mining camps in this area.

St. Charles

- **St. Charles once was a thriving community with a depot, hotels, restaurants and more. In fact, at one time between 35 to 50 taxi cabs were operating in the community. See Chapter VI: Unique Features – Coal Camps.**
- **The United Mine Workers of America building which still has its name boldly written on its brick walls**
- **There is a memorial to the miners near the railroad track. It is recommended that interpretive signs be placed in this location which describes and shows photos of St. Charles and all it had to offer during the coal days. Include this as a stop on the driving tour.**

Action taken: Paul Bobrosky, retired U.S. Department of the Interior – Bureau of Mines manager and Dane Poe, Lee County Administrator have agreed to help put together the information and photos for this display and some of the others noted which are location within the Lee County portion of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.

- **Across the railroad tracks is an active mining camp and a few remnants of the Bonny Blue mining camp. More is located behind the gates of International Coal Group at the end of the road.**
- **Need a coal heritage sign directing travelers to turn left onto Bonny Blue Road and cross railroad track to reach the remains of the Bonny Blue Mine site.**

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- Need an interpretive sign at the mine and/or at the ICG gates describing the camp as it once was. **Action to Take:** *Contact Doug McConnell with ICG about placing an interpretive sign near their entrance to describe the Bonny Blue Mining Camp and what all once existed.*

(Note: If interpretive sign is added at the gate, a coal heritage trail confirmation sign directing travelers to continue straight ahead is recommended)

Action Taken: Conversations are underway between ICG and Dane Poe to see if ICG might assist in this endeavor.

Darbyville & Monarch

- **North of St. Charles, in what was once the Darbyville Coal Camp, the small commissary has now been converted into a private home. Further yet is the Monarch mining camp which is currently not accessible.** It at one time employed hundreds of people. Neither site are currently accessible.

Recommendation: Interpretive signs should be added at the Mining Memorial in St. Charles describing both Darbyville and Monarch in their heyday.

Stoneface in the Mountain is visible from the byway on Hwy 421.

- **Need a designated area to pull over and take photos as well as a sign indicating drivers should look up.** *Crazy as it sounds, we actually missed it the first time we drove the route because we did not know to look up.*
- **Recommend working with the owners of the now closed Stoneface Mart to see if this might be a location for a pull-off. It could also serve as an excellent location to disseminate brochures and information about the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.**



“Public Water”

- Just before Stoneface in the Mountain is a place where people have for years gotten their drinking water from a spigot coming out of the mountain. Even today, one will find people stopped at this site and filling up containers. **This needs to be noted and marketed.**

Pennington Gap

- Oasis along the route offering gas, restaurants and some shopping opportunities, **Pennington Gap is noted more as a railroad town.**

It is recommended that the **old Southern Caboose**, strategically located right on the Virginia Coal Heritage trail on Hwy 58, be used as an interpretive information center for the Lee County portion of the byway. It is highly visible, easily accessed and offers ample parking.



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- *This would be an excellent location to provide maps, information on the Byway as well as historic photos of some of the mining communities which once thrived in this area. This would also be an excellent venue to talk about the importance the railroad played and the uniqueness of the area in the fact that there was hardly any coal found south of Stone Mountain due to a geological fault line.*

(Immediate) Contact Mayor Danny Carter (276)546-1177 about the Southern Caboose becoming a visitor center for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.

Action Taken: Mayor has been contacted and permission granted to develop the caboose into a visitor center as noted above.

ROAD DESCRIPTION: 58Alt – 4-Lane with grass median. Very scenic drive through beautiful farmland area. Wide shoulders make for numerous photo-op opportunities.

Worthwhile stop on 58A is the Country Porch Antique Shop.

Crossing into Wise County

Big Stone Gap

- Offers RV park, restaurants, shopping and numerous museums
- **Southwest Virginia Museum – excellent interactive coal display.** Need to provide information, maps, brochures and possible display of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.
- **Historic homes on West 1st Street North** - Most of these homes were built by the management of the Westmoreland Coal Company. Recommend a driving or walking tour to see these home that form a loop around the museum. A brochure could be created and handed out at the museum telling a little about the history of each of the houses and how a tornado came through and nearly destroyed man of the homes and uprooted numerous trees.
- **Harry W. Meador Coal Museum – includes historic photos, equipment and much more.** Need to provide information, maps, brochures and possible display of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail and information on the sites along the Norton Loop of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, information on some of the coal camps that once thrived in the area as well as the specific coal related sites one will find in Big Stone Gap such as miner’s park, Westmoreland Coal Company offices, the Lonesome Pine School & Historical Museum and more, the outdoor drama and more.
- **Lonesome Pine School & Historic Museum – includes photos and information on a number of the coal camp communities in the area.** Excellent source for information.
- **Miners Park and the previous site of the Monte Vista Hotel, a hotel that thrived during the coal days.**

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- **The Trail of the Lonesome Pines playhouse – Longest running outdoor drama in Virginia. Story on the impact on the area when the coal industry came to the mountains.**
- **The offices of the Westmoreland Coal Company. Needs to be added to the tour and a sign erected.**
- June Tolliver's Gift Shop & Museum – Actual home of one of the real characters in the book "Lonesome Pines". *Other sites around town depicted in book.*
- John Fox, Jr. – Home of the author of the book "Lonesome Pines"

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE ENTIRE PORTION OF THE NORTON LOOP.

The entire 67 mile loop through the City of Norton, Wise County and Lee County should be marketed to motorcyclists, sports car and classic car enthusiasts as the route to ride. Those along this particular loop should really capitalize on this and promote it heavily as it is an excellent niche market for those in the area and there is so much to see along this specific route. Other sections of the trail system but many have numerous railroad crossing which this specific group tends to avoid.

- Periodic safety signs should be added noting it as such and recommending other motorists watch out for them.
- Both motorcycle and classic car rallies should be planned throughout the year and during special events.
- Develop a brochure specifically for motorcyclists that includes the entire route but notes those sections which are more "motorcycle friendly" and note "must stop" and "don't miss" locations on a map within the brochure.

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