

CHAPTER V: TRANSPORTATION

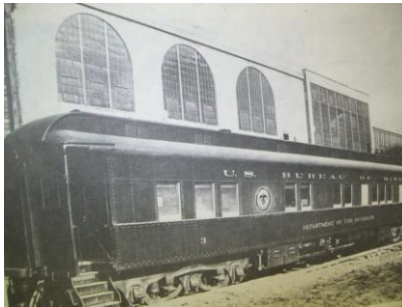
Modes of Transportation



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Modes of Transportation along the Byway

Although the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail is a driving tour, there are many different modes of transportation along its route. Along nearly the entire byway runs the railroad. In fact, if one were to figure the miles of rail along the route verses road miles, one may quickly discover much more track than road surface due to the railroad having two, three and sometimes as many as five or six tracks running parallel to the Trail. It was the rail that transported the coal out of the coalfields. It was the rail that brought in workers and supplies necessary to feed up to 20,000 men at camps in the remote mountains of the Appalachia. It was also the rail that provided a connection to the outside world and when there was a mine tragedy, it was emergency rail cars that were brought in to carry the injured out.



Mine Rescue Train Car #3

To the left is a photo of Mine Rescue Train Car #3. There were four such cars donated by Pullman specifically for this purpose.

On May 2nd 1929, the deadliest tornado in Virginia history hit the Rye Cove School in Scott County, killing twelve students and one teacher and injuring fifty-four others which was over 1/3 of the student body. The entire two-story, seven room school house was destroyed. Rail cars carried the injured to Clinchport and Bristol for medical attention.



Cyclone Hits Rye Cove School

The St. Paul Loop of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail goes right past this tragic site.

There are also walking and hiking trails along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, as well as greenways such as those found in Pennington Gap and Big Stone Gap. Sidewalks meander through many of the towns making it easy for visitors to park and explore the downtown areas with a number of towns already offering or are in the process of developing both historic walking and driving tours through their communities including:

- Big Stone Gap (available)
- Pocahontas (in the works)
- Appalachia (in the works)
- Coeburn (in the works)
- Dante (in the works)
- Norton (in the works)



Site Markers on the Big Stone Gap Walking Tour



Both Pocahontas and Appalachia now allow all-terrain vehicles and golf carts to travel on many of their streets and the Town of Haysi has plans to become an "ATV-friendly" community as well. This is providing new opportunities for people of all ages and those mobility-challenged to have the opportunity to explore the downtown areas as well as other sites they would not have been physically capable of visiting before.





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RV's & LARGE MOTOR VEHICLES

The majority of the 300+ byway are roads that are accessible to large recreational vehicles (RV's), tour buses and other oversized vehicles. The only sections where access might be a bit challenging are the section of road:

1. Into the communities of Stonega and, in particularly, Derby in Wise County where one may need to back up before turning around.
2. Just west of Keokee in Lee County where there is a very sharp hairpin turn. If taken slowly, it is passable. A recommendation is that adequate advance signage be provided along this route to warn drivers in advance that a sharp turn is up ahead.
3. Some of the mountainous area in the western portion of Tazewell County and eastern portion of Buchanan County where one is traveling along the mountain ridge.

There is a mirror strategically placed at a sharp curve just past Jewell Ridge as one crosses into Buchanan County and another one just off of VA 58A on VA 65 as one travels through Russell County into Scott County that help motorists see around two sharp curves. This seems to alleviate

The new proposed route through Buchanan County is passable for larger motor vehicles but caution must be noted to those wishing to take the more scenic original route which includes steep grades and sharp turns.

BICYCLING



A portion of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail from Breaks Interstate Park to Haysi travels along the same route as the 76 Bicentennial Bicycle Route. Signs designate the route. There are many other sections along the trail that would be ideal for bicycling. One of the recommendations is to work with area cycling clubs to develop designated

bike routes for the Byway and encourage bicycle rental businesses to open especially for communities located along the St. Paul and Norton loops. St. Paul, Appalachia, Big Stone Gap, and Norton would be excellent communities to implement a bicycle rental program.



Recommendation: Developing special bicycling lanes, encouraging the use of helmets and good safety practices, providing bicycle stands and clearly marking bicycle routes will help to make the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail safe for both motorists and bicyclists.



MOTORCYCLING



Since the byway travels through the mountains and back roads of Southwest Virginia, the roads tend to be windy and curvy with very little traffic, breathtaking views and a number of wonderful sites to explore. The roads are also asphalted rather than gravel or dirt. These are the types of roads motorcyclists love. The quaint small communities, unique dining opportunities, the significant number of notable sites to visit as well as gas stations and some lodging along the route, make the byway even more appealing to this mode of travel.

Breaks Interstate Park on the Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail has been noted by numerous motorcycle clubs as one of their favorite stops due to the twisty windy roads and natural setting. Some caution must be made for sections of this particular route due to the sheer numbers of railroad crossings one must make which motorcyclists tend to prefer to avoid. The Norton Loop through Wise and Lee counties and the St. Paul Loop through Scott and Wise are ideal motorcycle roads but need to be better marketed to this particular user group.



RIVERS & STREAMS

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail crosses or runs parallel along numerous rivers and creeks as it meanders north through the Appalachian Mountains and south through rich farmland. Designated Virginia Scenic Rivers on or near the scenic byway include the following:

- Big Cedar Creek near Lebanon 5.8 miles to the confluence with the Clinch River.
- The Clinch River from the confluence of the Little River 20 miles to Route 645 at Nash Foot Bridge in Russell County,
- The Clinch River from Route 58 in St. Paul 9.2 miles to the confluence with the Guest River in Wise County,
- One hundred feet downstream of Route 72 6.5 miles to the confluence with the Clinch River in Wise/Russell County.
- And nine miles of the Russell Fork River from the Splashdam railroad crossing near Haysi in Dickenson County to the Kentucky state line.
- Two rivers, the Powell and the Clinch, that parallel the scenic byway have been recognized by biologists and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as two of the "most biologically diverse aquatic systems in the nation" with vast ecological significance. The Clinch River is a wonderful river to both canoe and kayak with a number of river accesses in Scott, Russell and Wise counties while portions of the Powell is noted as one of the best streams to fish for trout.

See *Virginia Outdoors Plan* [Chapter VII-F Scenic Rivers](#) (PDF), pages 152-160, for more detail.



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In Tazewell County, there is a beautiful double waterfall on Hwy 102 at Falls Mills while one should not miss the breathtaking view of the Russell Fork River from the Interstate Park's balcony nor the view of the Russell-Prater River from the pavilion at Haysi. All along the route, the rivers, streams and babbling brooks beside the byway adds to the scenic beauty of the drive.



*(Left) Waterfall at Falls Mills in Tazewell Co.
(Center) View of Russell Fork in Dickenson County
(Right) Overlooking the Russell- Prater River.*

TRAILS ALONG THE ROUTE

There are numerous walking, hiking, biking and nature trails located along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail. A few of the sites that come to mind is the biking/hiking trail in St. Paul, the nature trail at Crab Orchard Museum, the trail that runs along the Guest River Scenic River and the overlook walking trail at Cedar Bluff. There are also navigable streams and trails for mountain biking, horseback riding and soon to be off-road vehicles. *A comprehensive list of trails for all seven counties along the byway is available by visiting the website Spearheadtrails.com*



Cedar Bluff Overlook



Hiking & Biking Trails near St. Paul



Walking Trail near Crab Orchard