



CHAPTER VII: ISSUES TO ADDRESS
DEVELOPING YOUR COMMUNITY INTO A TOURIST ATTRACTION
Creating Walking & Driving Tours

Below is an overview of three communities and how each could benefit from developing historic walking tours to help bring their communities back to life.

WALKING AND DRIVING TOURS

A number of communities along the byway need to develop “coal tours” through their downtown areas in order for the traveler to even begin to appreciate the rich coal and/or railroad history in each of these communities. This became very apparent at the Norton town meeting. The researchers had driven through this community numerous times but had never even considered it for its coal history. This opinion soon changed.

Just a few of the sites that might be included on a “Coal Tour” through Norton:

- Norton Hotel
- Site of the “Miner’s Hospital”, its original use and how coal heated the building.
- Current hospital built on the second level of a coal bench
- Two homes built on coal seams. During the winter months, residents would go into their basement and extract coal to heat their homes.
- Kimmerer Building Coal Office
- Coal Company President’s home
- Post office that still says “U.S. Post Office and Mine Rescue Station”
- Stoney Lonesome Church, one of the churches at Norton’s coal camp, still stands today
- King Coal, 1908
- Hawthorne Coal Camp (just below Inn at Norton) where supposedly one can still find the company store.

Each of these sites would be numbered with information provided on a coordinating brochure printable from the website as well as available at the Chamber of Commerce.

Similar in concept to Big Stone Gap’s “historic tour”, these signs would primarily just include the name of the site plus a number that would coordinate with a brochure or pamphlet.



Concept Signage for VCHT



Big Stone Gap “Downtown Historic Tour” signage



As noted, Big Stone Gap has already developed an excellent walking tour for their community which others could use as an example.

But as the theme for Virginia Coal Heritage Trail is both rail and coal, more sites could be added to their existing tour such as the Westmoreland Offices and the site of the old depot (no longer in existence).



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“Downtown Tours” can be either driving or walking dependent upon the size of the communities and the distance between the sites. Communities that immediately come to mind that would benefit from developing walking or driving tours through their downtown areas are Pocahontas, Richlands, Jewell Ridge, Haysi, Trammel, Dante, St. Paul, Norton and Appalachia but there may be others.

On the following pages are a few potential sites to include on historic walking tours in the communities of Appalachia and St. Paul along with a concept walking tour for Dante. Buildings of historic significance were noted and suggestions were made as to:

- Which buildings should be included on a historic walking tour downtown and which of these need interpretation.
- Which buildings should become interpretive information centers or museums and what needs to be done to each in order to make them “visitor ready”.

Appalachia Downtown Historic Tour

On October 20th, a group of citizen took a historic tour of downtown Appalachia. Those in attendance included:

- Elaine Swiney, Appalachia Tourism and Entrepreneur
- Roy , Cultural Arts Center Committee Member
- Fred Lundsford, Town Manager for Appalachia
- Garnett Gilliam, Local Historian
- Bill Smith, Wise County Tourism



During the coal boom, Appalachia was the “Big City” for all the surrounding coal camps. Taxis and transit buses were making their rounds every half hour bringing people into town. In fact, at one time, Appalachia had over 300 buildings in its downtown area including numerous theaters, department stores, restaurants, café and more. On weekends, cars would be lined up double along the street. People would leave the keys in their cars in case someone beside them needed to pull out. This is a story that needs to be told.



Appalachia Cultural Arts Center



The first stop on the tour was the Appalachia Cultural Arts Center which is the most amazing building. It is a three story building, fully renovated and in excellent condition.

The first floor is used for stage performances by the local performing arts group who oversee the building which can be rented for weddings, special events and community gatherings.

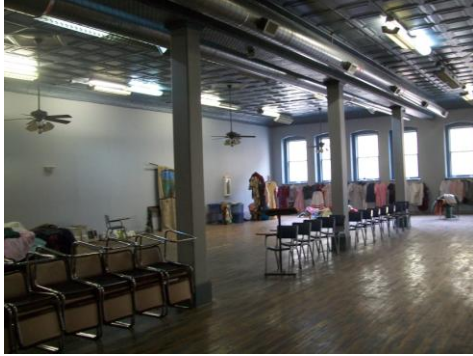
It offers a full kitchen for dinner theaters and catered meals and the walls are lined with historic photos of Appalachia as it once appeared in the early years.



Stage set for 2010 production



Second Floor



Third Floor



Both the second and third floors are also in excellent condition. The second is used for some storage of stage props and the third is currently vacant. Wood floors and tin ceilings are on all three levels. The stairs to all three floors are in excellent condition.

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.*



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Recommendation:

- It would be suggested to convert the entire third floor into studio apartments and rented in order to bring in income to cover the expenses for utilities and maintenance of the building.
- The second floor would be dedicated to stage performances and special presentations.
 - One area would be sectioned off for dressing rooms and storage area for props.
 - A more permanent stage with actual theater seats should be purchased.
- The first floor should remain as the performing arts area until such time as the stage and theater seats are in place upstairs and the freight elevator is redesigned to allow passengers. Once the second floor is ready for performances, the main level will become a historical museum for the Town of Appalachia as well as serve as the Visitor Center of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail (VCHT) providing a central location for tourists to learn about both Appalachia as well as the many coal camps in the surrounding area.
 - Vignettes will be set up featuring each of the coal camps one will find along the Norton Loop of the VCHT including Derby, Stonega, Imboden, Exeter, and Keokee. Pardy and Dunlap can also be featured along with their “resurrection” during the filming of the movie “Coal Miner’s Daughter” and their eventual demise.
 - A small museum should be set up featuring artifacts and memorabilia of Appalachia in its heyday as well as current tourism offerings in the area such as dining, lodging and recreation opportunities.
 - With the kitchen area already in place, a small café could be opened to sell refreshments such as soups, sandwiches and desserts.
 - And definitely a gift shop should be included selling postcards, videos, gifts, books, photos, model railroad cars, conductor hats and whistles, pieces of coal, jewelry possibly made in the area including jewelry made with coal, coal carvings, and other items of interest to the traveling public.
- 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.
- A full time curator should be hired to oversee the building. One of the apartments could be provided as partial payment. They could also oversee the gift shop with a portion of those funds also helping to pay for salary as well as for restocking the shelves.
- 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.





Visitor Parking Becomes an Attraction



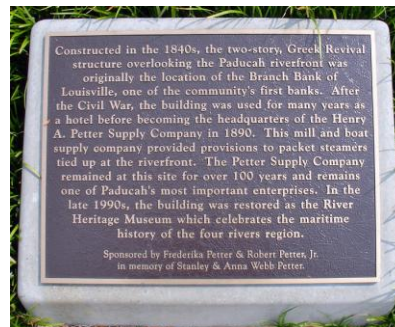
Across the street is a large parking area. This will provide the necessary parking for the Cultural Center while also serving as the staging area for the historic walking tours.

A tourism kiosk could be located in this vicinity which would include a map of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail featuring the Norton loop to many of the coal camps to be featured in the Cultural Center.



Elaine Swiney suggested a mural along the back wall which is an excellent idea and could become a tourist attraction into itself.

Example: Paducah Kentucky painted their flood walls and people come from all over just to see the artwork. Each mural includes an interpretation of what scene is being displayed.



http://www.galenfrynsinger.com/paducah_more_murals.htm for more examples



Paducah has nearly 20 murals throughout their community. Those above depict life along the river. Appalachia's focus would be on its strong history in coal and railroad.

Recommendation:

Utilize the blank wall as a canvas to feature sites one might see along the Coal Heritage Trail along with possible murals of how Appalachia appeared in the 1930's and 40's.

Please note: Appalachia already has some nice features such as all utilities underground and adding park benches and landscaping in areas which makes the community more visitor ready than some of the other communities.



This park bench is both pleasing and inviting to those passing by.



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Stuart-Faucett 5, 10 & 25 cent Store



Across the street from the Cultural Arts Center and next to the proposed parking area is the old 5 & 10 store which was written up in "Ripley's Believe or not" for having all four levels accessing at ground level. This definitely needs to be included as a stop on the walking tour with an interpretive sign out front noting its significance.



5, 10 & 25 Cent Store
Appalachia
All floors in this building open on the ground floor and was noted in "Ripley's Believe It or Not".

Gulf Service Center

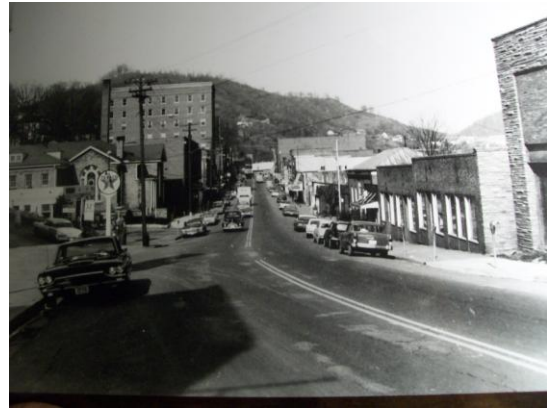


Here is another stop on the walking tour. There are many others.



Gulf Gas Station
Appalachia, circa ?

Downtown Appalachia Today



As shown in the photo above, many of the buildings along Main Street still exist. These should be interpreted through signage or a brochure.

Below are a few other buildings in Appalachia that could be stops along the tour



Old City Hall



The Hotel



The Dairy



Other buildings along Main Street





How to recreate what is no longer there



The Appalachia Hardware building was torn down a number of years ago. But it has interesting story to tell.

When the school burned down, students attended classes in this building. In order to get to classes on the upper floors, student actually had to climb the fire escape.

An interpretive sign can provide this information as one looks across to the location where it once stood.

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 depot and its freight depot. The freight depot is easily accessible and in excellent shape. 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.



Freight Depot in Appalachia

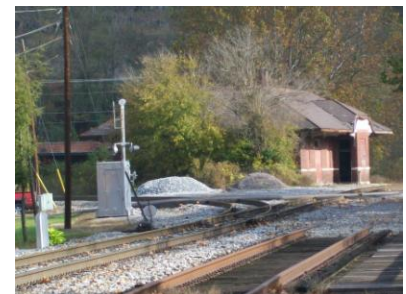


What the depot does have going for it is that it is very viewable from more than one location.



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

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



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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St. Paul - Tour of Historic Downtown

On October 22nd, a preliminary walking tour of St. Paul was conducted. Those in attendance included:

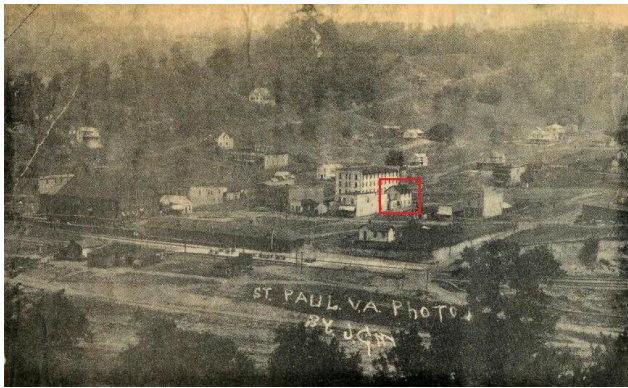
- Kyle Fletcher, *Mayor of St. Paul*
- Gary Hale, *Virginia Employment Commission*
- Lou Ann Wallace, *St. Paul Tomorrow*
- Sharon Steele, *Deputy Mayor of St. Paul*
- Jerry Couch, *Historian*
- Suzy Harrison, *St. Paul Tomorrow*

Photographer was Bob Harrison (*not shown*)



Below are a few of the St. Paul buildings noted and preliminary suggestions of how each might be best used or interpreted.

Hillman House (circa 1910)



St. Paul in 1912

In the photo to the left, the Hillman House is highlighted by the red box. But after nearly 100 years, the structure began to show its age and eventually became an eyesore in the community. It would have been very simple to just tear the building down and make it into a parking lot. But there were those in St. Paul who had vision and chose to preserve the building rather than tear it down. It is wonderful!

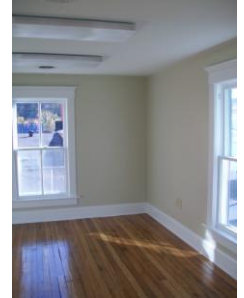
The Hillman House is a wonderful example of preservation at its best.



BEFORE



AFTER



Recommendations:

- *Its strategic location in the center of town and the wonderful story of its rebirth makes it an ideal location in which to provide historic information about St. Paul and an excellent starting point for St. Paul's Historic Downtown Walking Tour.*
- *Great location to display historic photos of the downtown areas, provide walking tour brochures, information on upcoming events The strategic location of the farmer's market and ample parking out front away from traffic makes this an excellent location to become the center nucleus for all the happenings in the community.*



The Old Bus Station



The Old Bus Station

Next door to the Hillman House and across from the Farmer's Market is the old bus station. The buses would pull into the rear of the building, load up with passengers then come out the front. Excellent opportunity to provide interpretation of this building and how it once transported people from everywhere into and out of St. Paul.

Farmer's Market



Mayor Kyle Fletcher and Gary Hale conferring during the tour of St. Paul.

The Farmer's Market is set up directly behind the old Auto Store which serves as a perfect backdrop. The large asphalt parking area is the perfect surface for trucks and trailers bringing in produce and provides additional parking area for those wanting to come in and shop.

Proposed site for Railroad Museum



Railroad Section Manager's Home

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 color history as a railroad community, it is recommended that this building become a railroad museum, providing photos and artifacts of train memorabilia. Also include historic photos of the "Western Front". Contact Ron Flannery, Kenny Fannon, and Frank Kilgore for additional railroad memorabilia to display.

Recommendations:

- 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. It is also suggested that a small gift shop be added to generate additional funds. 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.





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- 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. Once again, Big Stone Gap provides an excellent example of how this can be done.

Future shops and apartments



Work is currently being done to renovate this building which offers stores below and apartments above. Unique feature of this building is that the center open area is a courtyard for those living in the apartments.

A group of volunteers recently cleaned-up around this building, painted doors and trims, added plants and improved the looks overall. If properly managed and maintained, this structure should become self-sustaining and even profitable.

St. Paul National Bank (circa 1910)



Across the street is the St. Paul National Bank. The stone work on the corner of the building was stone cut by Italians who came to this region to work in the mines. Their talents were often used in masonry work for both buildings and coke ovens.

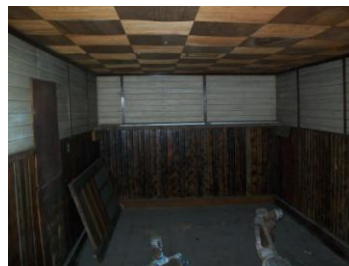


A geological survey is imbedded in the concrete next to this building.



The C & P Telephone office was originally in this building. Much of the old switchgear is still in place in the basement.

Ice House



Efforts are underway to preserve the old ice house.

Area is small and ceiling is low but lighting could be added and historic photos of the area could be added



Adventure Tourism Office



Located next to the Ice House, this a 1950's retro gas station is rarely found anymore.

Recommendation:
 Renovate this building to serve as the "adventure tourism" office for both St. Paul and the region.

The facility will be the location to:

- Rent canoes, bicycles and possibly golf carts and ATV's in the future.
- Provide brochures and maps on bicycle, canoeing, and walking trails in the area.
- Provide a bathroom break for those "taking to the trails".
- Sell water, energy bars, fruit and other nutritious treats.

This site could also provide maps and information on other trails throughout the region as part of the 7-county Spearhead Trails initiative.



Request the use of sign next to building



An alternative choice for the "adventure tourism office" would be this building located just west of the "retro" gas station (Note the ice house in the background). Its two garages could store some of the canoes, bikes and equipment such as life jackets and paddles.

If so, the "retro gas station" should still be preserved and photos of the 50's displayed on its back walls.

Telling the Story through murals (See section on Appalachia for more on this)



Note the wording across the upper wall

Another unique feature one finds as they travel through St. Paul on the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail is that one passes under the "Norfolk & Western Railway – Clinchfield Railroad" as noted on both sides of this concrete "trestle" which provides access for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.



Suggest murals on both walls of tunnel

St. Paul plans to paint murals along the inside of the "tunnel" along the pedestrian/bicycle walkway. *Recommendation: We would encourage them to add murals along the west "motorist" wall as well.*



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More Historic Buildings in St. Paul

Below are a few of the other buildings in downtown St. Paul which could be included on the historic walking tour. Each should include a numbered interpretive sign along with a description of the year they were built and the types of businesses that have occupied them in the past.



Was once one of three theaters in St. Paul

The old clubhouse whose backyard accesses the "wetlands" walking trail

Placing lines underground will greatly enhance the downtown area. See Chapter VII for more on this.

St. Paul should also include Riverside Drive on their Historic Walking tour which includes AR Matthews Park with a public boat ramp, stage, playground and picnic shelters. One also finds a NW caboose, a wonderful nature walk and a few historic buildings that could be interpreted.



Interpretation of the "Western Front" could be shared while on this portion of the tour.

Note: A bird sanctuary is currently in the works which will also add to the walking tour.



Wetlands Estonoa Learning Center and Trails



Another unique feature in St. Paul is their interpreted wetlands, built and maintained by students at the local high school.

Recommendation:

The Wetlands and innovative “green” techniques used should be noted and included in the list of walking trails throughout the area along with the birding & nature trail St. Paul is developing down below the railroad tracks and the Sugar Hill Bike & Hike Trails along the Clinch River.

See Spearheadtrails.com for more on trails in St. Paul and throughout the seven county region.



Debora Baca joined Sharon Steele, Gary Hale and the rest of the group for a tour of the wetlands. She is the treasurer/clerk for St. Paul.



Capturing rainwater in a barrel

To the right is something one does not see very often anymore...
A telephone booth
 This is worth saving and interpreting as a historic relic.



ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES IN AN EXAMPLE OF CREATING A TOURIST ATTRACTION FROM WHAT YOU HAVE.....



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The Entire Town of Dante is becoming THE Attraction

The community of Dante started out as a small coal camp that grew quite large during the coal boom, adding schools, churches, a railroad depot, dry cleaners, theater, barber shop, large company store and more. It became a hub for CSX with tracks creating a triangle in the middle of town.

Much still remains but over time, they have lost both people and businesses. They are now recreating themselves to make the entire community the attraction by putting nearly every one of the buildings on a walking tour with information and interpretation on each.



Dante Bank



Previously a bank. Now a museum

The old bank has been converted into the Dante Coal & Railroad Museum. As shown below in the proposed historic walking tour sign, the exterior of the bank has changed very little in 80 years.



Dante Branch of the Dickenson Bank circa 1930
Currently serves as the Dante Coal & Railroad Museum

Inside the old bank, they have historic photos of the town. They also have a complete model of how the town once looked with each of the buildings built to scale in nearly the exact location they once stood. This will be the first stop on the tour where visitors can pick up maps and coordinating brochures that further explains the history of each of the buildings and provides a few of the stories about Dante and its people.

A model of Dante on display is the focal point at the museum



Scale Model of the entire Town of Dante as it once appeared.

(Photo Left) The model above shows the old Clinchfield Inn to the right and the Dante Depot in the front. The large white building in the center is the company store and if one looks closely, one can see the bank behind the office building.

(Center Photo) This part of the model shows the homes along the track along with a boarding house and the back of the Clinchfield Inn.

(Photo Right) Shows the old Clinchfield Tippleshed #2 along with a few more coal camp homes.



Dante Dry Cleaners



Next door to the bank is the old dry cleaners and processing plant. It is a two story building with a door to the second floor in the back of the building



Dante Dry Cleaners and Processing Plant

2 story building - back door enters on the second floor

Dante Dry Cleaners & Processing Plant

Italian Smoke House

Next door to the dry cleaners, is an Italian Smoke House where the Italians once smoked their meat which is Stop #3 on the tour.



Italian Smoke House



Italian's Smokehouse

Coal Car



Stop #4 is in front of one of the rail cars once used in the Clinchfield mines to bring out coal.



Coal Car from Clinchfield Mines

Clinchfield Steam Building

Stop #5 on the tour is the Steam Building that provided electricity to all the homes.



Clinchfield Steam House



Clinchfield Steam Building



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Dante Shoe Shop



Dante Shoe Shop

In the distance, the old shoe shop building still remains.

The building to the left was once the old shoe shop where a cobbler actually made the shoes on-site. This too will be noted but people will be directed to view it from afar since it no longer appears to be a commercial business.

Clinchfield Inn

Stop #7 on this tour no long exists. Dante's Clinchfield Inn was torn down years ago and replaced with offices for the Pittston Mine Company. In 2010, the offices were renovated into apartments. A tour sign such as the one below will be placed near where it was once located.



Clinchfield Inn, circa 1908

The Clinchfield Inn had 60 rooms and steam heat. It closed in 1956. The Pittston Mine Offices were built in its place and later renovated into an apartment complex by Peoples, Inc.

Dante Elementary School

Up the street is the site of the Dante Elementary School which once occupied the entire block. It has recently been town down and replaced by the new Dante Community Center. Uniquely, they have preserved the original gym and cafeteria floors which is what one walks on when they enter the new building. This provides an opportunity for interpretation.

Recommendation:

Feature photos of the old school as it once was as well as class photos on a wall of the community center. A library of yearbooks from years past can also be put on display along with some of the memorabilia that may still remain such as a few of the school desks, text books, etc.



New Community Center built on the foundation of the old school

This will be stop #8 on the Tour.



Site of Dante Elementary School, circa ?

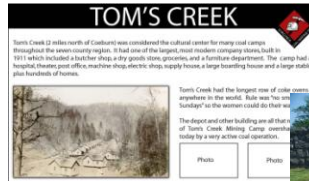
Torn down in 2010



Dante Elementary School

A unique feature of the Dante Elementary School is that the playground was built on the roof of the building. If one looks closely, they can see the basketball goal to the left.

This photo will be placed on a wayside exhibit (similar to the one featured below for Tom's Creek) along with information and stories about the school



Examples of wayside exhibits



The upstairs has been converted into apartments by People Inc.

Company Offices

Stop #9 will be at the building which now houses the Dante Post Office and will soon include a small café. This is one of the original structures in Dante.



Dante Post Office Building

Clinchfield Company Store "B"

Stop #11 is where the Clinchfield Company Store "B" once stood. Its footprint took up nearly a city block and included everything from hardware stores to candy shops. In fact, it had more variety of merchandise than a Walmart. The sign below shows the building.



Clinchfield Company Store "B"

Included a shoe store, furniture store, produce, meat market, candy shop, and department store.



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More on Company Store "B"

The second sign (*below*) shows some of the many businesses within the Company Store. An interpretive sign or wayside exhibit should include the floorplan for the store and actually layout on the ground the footprint of the store dimensions. Add small signs (or lay plaques in the ground that one can easily mow over) showing where the shoe shop, the dress shop, the candy store etc. were once located.

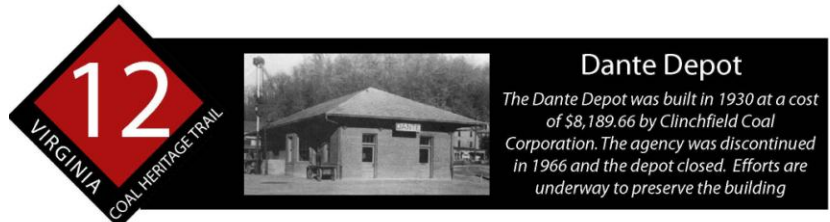


Dante Depot



The Old Clinchfield Depot

The townspeople are currently working with CSX to acquire the Dante Depot and restore it to its original state when it operated as a full-time rail station. The lower portion will serve as a community library and include an interpretive display on the impact rail has had on Dante over the years. The upper level could be used as a craft shop and display area for local artwork or other small businesses. It will be Stop #12 on the tour.



Dante Depot

The Dante Depot was built in 1930 at a cost of \$8,189.66 by Clinchfield Coal Corporation. The agency was discontinued in 1966 and the depot closed. Efforts are underway to preserve the building

Union Baptist Church



Union Baptist Church

One might also add when the Church was started and the age of this particular structure.



Coal Camp Homes



There are discussions of finding one or two of the coal camp homes that are no longer occupied and turning them into display homes, furnishing each with appliances and furniture from the time these were actually owned by the “company” or even as they may have looked later when they were privately owned.

Note: There are some homes that have been abandoned for years and have now become a blight to the community and a safety hazard to those living nearby.



Coal Camp Homes

Recommendation:

The community should work with the county to see what can be done about the houses that are no longer occupied or been abandoned.

If the county agrees to tear down those homes that are beyond repair, check to see if some of the parts can be salvaged to help repair some of the other buildings and homes in Dante.

Clinchfield Tipple



Clinchfield Coal Tipple #2, circa 1939

Dante Coal Miners Memorial – Last stop on the tour...



Dante Coal Miners Memorial





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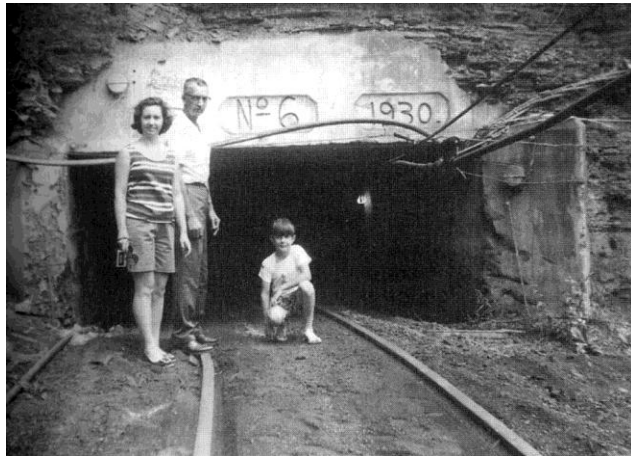
Recommendation for other communities

It is recommended that a number of communities along the route conduct similar inventories of their historic sites and buildings and consider strongly of developing both historic walking and driving tours. These communities include, but are not limited to, Richlands, Pocahontas, Jewell Ridge, Haysi, Coeburn, Norton, Appalachia, Dante, St. Charles and Pennington Gap.

RESURRECTING TOWNS AND COAL CAMPS THAT NO LONGER EXIST

A few of the coal camps such as Keokee only have a few coal-related buildings still standing. Other coal towns such as Splashdam have all but disappeared. All that remains is the mine opening of Mine #6 quite visible from the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.

But a town can “recreate” itself through a series of “photo” signs keyed to a detailed brochure which provides additional information and helps to recreate the “town” without having to rebuild the structures.



To the left is a photo of the Splashdam Mine #6 when it was still open and above is how it appears today. An interpretive sign needs to be developed that provides a history of the mine, the people who lived there, and the cause of its demise.



Below is a photo of the old school house along with a description of the community as it once was. There are other photos of Splashdam as it appeared years ago. These could be developed into interpretive signs and wayside exhibits and set in a pull-off area beside the existing mine shaft opening.



Splashdam Coal Camp

The Splashdam Mines opened in 1920. A company store, church, school, barber shop, community center were soon built as well as four rows of houses along the river and up the hillside. A gas explosion in '32 killed ten people and the mines were shut down.