CHAPTER VII: ISSUES TO ADDRESS Along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail

This chapter addresses #4 FHWA requirement for a CMP which is to develop a strategy for for maintaining and enhancing each of the byway's intrinsic qualities including, but not limited to how best to:

- Manage a long trail system
- Obtain public engagement and buy-in
- Provide adequate maps and signage as well as interpretive and wayside exhibits
- Expand the interpretation of the sites through oral interpretation, brochures, etc.

This FHWA requirement is also further addressed in Chapters VIII and IX.

There are a number of issues to address in regards to the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail initiative.

MANAGING A LONG TRAIL SYSTEM

The first is the length of the trail. With a trail system over 300 miles, it is a large task to take on. But to shorten the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail would mean the full story of the coalfields of Southwest Virginia would not be properly told and unique and treasured areas would be missed. Much consideration has been taken on this issue and the final decision was that the counties, working together, could develop and maintain the trail worthy of national byway status.

This region has set precedence for successfully taking on initiatives involving trails that cross both counties and planning districts. One of the best examples is the Crooked Road Music Trail which is a 300 mile trail through ten counties, three cities, ten towns, crossing five regional planning districts and involving four state agencies. Working together, they have established a website, set up numerous wayside exhibits along the route, produced brochures and both encouraged and helped market numerous music events along the entire route.

And in 2007, this same group of seven counties and the City of Norton that make up the Coal Heritage Trail counties came together to create the Southwest Regional Recreational Authority which oversees the Spearhead Trails initiative which involves not just themed driving tours such as the Coal Heritage Trail and the Crooked Road, but also hiking, biking, canoeing, horseback riding and all-terrain vehicles.

Another organization involving these counties is the Heart of the Appalachian which also has representation from each of the participating counties. Its goal and purpose is to help market and promote the many offerings in Southwest Virginia. They too have developed an extensive website and are the parent organization under which the Virginia Coal Heritage initiative falls.

OBTAINING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND BUY-IN

From the inception of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, all involved felt it best to create an advisory committee with representation from each of the counties involved, as well as representation from both state tourism organization and from the coal industry itself since this



specific trail was oriented towards the impact and significance of coal in this region. A list of the members of the advisory committee and contact information is provided in Chapter IX – Action Plan.

During the Corridor Management Plan development phase, one of the first things accomplished was a creation of a brochure that provided a map of the route, the reason for developing a corridor management plan and a complete list of all on the advisory council members and their contact information so anyone seeking information about the process or having an interest in participating had the information they needed to do so.





Information brochure about initiative to develop the corridor management plan

Throughout the entire process of developing the corridor management plan, the Advisory Team provided input, ideas, and recommendations. But more importantly, they helped the research team reach out and obtain both public engagement and support for the initiative and for the plan as it was developed.

MAKING THE ROUTE EASY TO FOLLOW

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail state route not only is long in length, it also takes the traveler on numerous back roads. It was the advisory committee who helped come up with the concept of dividing the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail into three distinct parts thus allowing the traveler to end up each time at a location which provided both food and lodging. *See APPENDIX B for list of traveler amenities.*

Placement of scenic byway trail signs was also an important part of the process. The public was asked to go out and travel the route to determine those areas that needed signage to insure the traveler stayed on the right roads. All were quite impressed with how well the VDOT had placed the signs which made it easy to follow the trail despite numerous road changes. In fact, only nineteen locations along the entire 325 mile trail were noted as needing additional directional and/or confirmation byway signs.



Sections to address include:

- 1. Additional byway trail signs through the Bluefield area along Hwy 102 directing travelers to Hwy 460.
- 2. Add a byway sign prior to the split at Hwy 460 onto Hwy 19 at Claypool Mill to give drivers the opportunity to get into the correct lane to turn.

CHAPTER VII: ISSUES TO ADDRESS Along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail

- 3. Need better signage in the Richland areas directing travelers through the downtown area and to Virginia's Official Coal Miner Memorial at Town Hall. See APPENDIX H -Series of Town Meetings: Tazewell County for details as to the number of signs needed and their placement within the community.
- 4. Recommend a byway sign directing travelers to take Bearwallow Road which is a loop through Jewell Ridge, otherwise one may miss this excellent example of a coal camp community.
- 5. Recommend a byway sign letting travelers know they need to turn left at Hwy 635 onto Hwy 638 towards Whitewood after leaving Tazewell County on Hwy 67 and entering Buchanan County.
- 6. There needs to be a byway sign added when Hwy 638 takes a sharp turn reminding people they must take the turn to stay on the route.
- 7. There needs to be a byway sign before the turn onto Hwy 628 so the driver can prepare for this.
- 8. A byway sign needs to be moved closer to the intersection of Hwy 628 and Slate Creek Road in Buchanan to let the traveler know they are to turn left. Or an additional sign needs to be added prior to the turn with an arrow providing the direction one is to turn.
- 9. In Buchanan County, as one turns left onto Bull Creek Road off of Hwy 640, there needs to be a scenic byway confirmation sign on the other side of the railroad tracks confirming that one is indeed going the right direction.
- 10. Better byway signage through the Town of Haysi in Dickenson County and to the entrance to the old Splashdam Mine which then requires one to backtrack and turn onto 83W to get back on the trail. This is very confusing.
- 11. In Russell County, there needs to be a byway sign directing visitors to turn right onto Route 627 (Lower Bear Wallow Road) into the community of Dante prior to the moment one must turn. It is easy to miss.
- 12. As one comes to the intersection at St. Paul, there needs to be a scenic byway sign added telling the driver to turn left at the light onto Deacon Drive (4th Avenue) through Downtown St. Paul.
- 13. And there needs to be a byway confirmation sign after one turns onto Deacon Drive to let the traveler know they are indeed headed the right direction.



- 14. There needs to be a byway confirmation sign at the intersection of Hwy 23 and the connector road to Hwy 58A/Hwy 23 in Downtown Norton to direct people to continue on Hwy 23 to Appalachia.
- 15. 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)
- 16. There needs to be better signage directing travelers to turn onto Hwy 600 to Stonega and Derby, two of the most complete coal camps along the entire route.
- 17. Need a coal heritage sign at St. Charles in Lee County directing travelers to turn left onto Bonny Blue Road to see one active mining site and the remains of another
- 18. 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.
- 19. 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



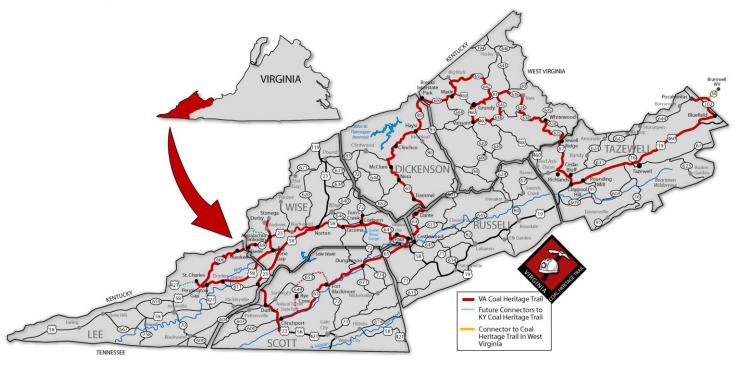
straight ahead on Hwy 421 which eventually crosses into Kentucky and could be the connector to the proposed Kentucky Coal Heritage Trail.

- 20. The temporary removal of the byway sign in Lee County directing travelers to continue West on Hwy 421N to the Kentucky state line when, in fact, there is destination beyond the point of the sign. When the Kentucky Heritage Coal Trail is developed, then this sign could be re-erected.
- 21. Better byway signage is needed through the downtown areas of Richlands so people will not miss the Section House, historic downtown and Coal Miner's Memorial of the Commonwealth. See APPENDIX H Series of Town Meetings: Richlands.
- 22. Better signage is also needed through Big Stone Gap, so travelers do not miss Meador Coal Museum, the Miner's Memorial Park, the Lonesome Pine School and Heritage Center and other coal related sites in Big Stone Gap. See APPENDIX H Series of Town Meetings: Big Stone Gap.

Note: A West Virginia Coal Heritage Byway sign (yellow) needs to be placed at the intersection of Hwy 56 and 102 as one comes out of Pocahontas to let travelers know the connector route to the Coal Heritage Trail of West Virginia at Bramwell. At the same time, there needs to be a Virginia Byway sign (red) added as one leaves Bramwell on Hwy 56 and connects with the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail at Pocahontas. (See section on "Visually Appealing Signage" later in this chapter.)

CREATING MAPS THAT ARE BOTH INFORMATIVE AND USABLE

One of the challenges of creating a trail which takes back roads is that there may not be maps available that have all the roads listed. A basic state map does not always include each and every one of the roads. So considerable time was spent making sure the route proposed was the route intended and that each of the roads was appropriately marked on the map.

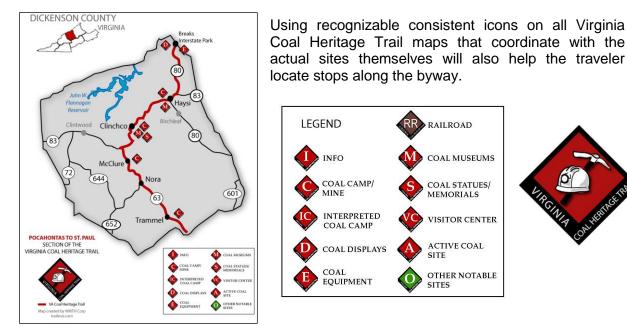




Corridor Management Plan for Virginia Coal Heritage Trail WMTH Corporation, 2011, trailsrus.com



RECOGNIZABLE ICONS





Another consideration is the safety of the roads themselves. Again this was addressed throughout the entire process. Specific areas have been noted which need either warning signs of sharp curves ahead or caution signs at intersections that come up unexpectedly. This information is included in Chapter V - Transportation and Chapter IX – Action Plan.

VISUALLY APPEALING IDENTIFIABLE BYWAY SIGNAGE

Currently the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail is using the state byway signs to mark its route. This is adequate at this time, but once the trail reaches national status, it is recommended that a different sign be used signifying first and foremost, that the route is a national byway, but also that it is specifically the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.

One recommendation is that a sign be designed that either matches or is similar to the design used on the Coal Heritage Trail of West Virginia since it has been agreed that this is indeed a continuation of that trail. In discussions with individuals within the communities and on the advisory committee, the following designs were discussed.

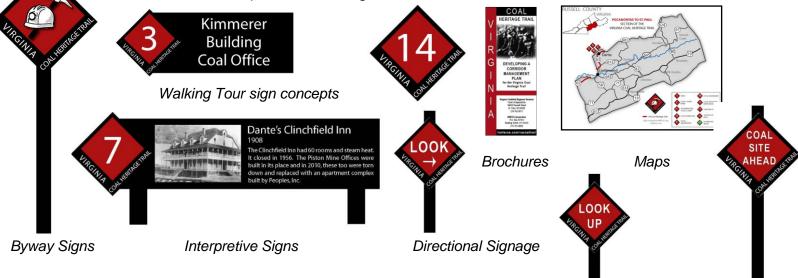


Please Note: So as not to be confused with stop signs, wrong way, or do not enter signs which often use a red background, it is recommended that the background color of the proposed Virginia Coal Heritage Trail byway sign have a more reddish-orange background.



CONSISTANT SIGNAGE THEME

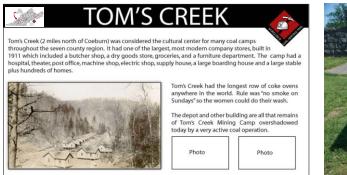
It is also suggested that a similar consistent design be used in publications, on maps and on signs and markers at specific sites to provide continuity and create identifiable recognition for the trail, setting it apart from all others, and noting areas along the trail that might otherwise be missed. See "Chapter X: Marketing the Trail and the Plan" for more on this.



Note: For directional or attraction-specific signage, contact Rick Burgess, VDOT Directional and Service Signage Program Manager at (804)225-4903 who can provide assistance on what kind of signage can go where. Most of those above will be located within the communities themselves and may or may not have to be addressed by VDOT.

INTERPRETIVE SIGNS AND WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

At many sites, an interpretive sign and/or wayside exhibit is needed to further tell the story of a particular structure or location. Here again, a consistent design is recommended.



Concept Idea for layout of Wayside Exhibits



Example of Wayside Exhibit

NEED FOR PULL-OFFS OR DESIGNATED VIEWING AREAS TO ALLOW ONE TO SAFELY STOP AND VIEW A SITE.

- 1. At the site near Falls Mill in Tazewell, there is a need for a pull-off to see and take photos of the breathtaking double falls which one can see from the road but cannot view properly without stopping.
- 2. Need a scenic overlook and photo-op location on Hwy 638 in Buchanan where there is a breathtaking view one does not want to miss.
- 3. Possible pull-off just past Cherokee Lane on Route 80 in Dickenson County in which the county Coal Heritage Trail brochure notes one can see portions of an operating mine shaft.
- 4. There needs to be an interpretive sign or viewing area in Clinchco where one can view the ovens but not access private property.

Please note: There are additional locations noted in Chapter IX – Action Plan in which pull-offs are recommended. Those listed below are specifically suggested for safety purposes.

MAINTAINING VIEWSCAPES

The northern portion of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail meanders through the mountains of Southwest Virginia with the lower portions showcasing both mountains and beautiful farmland.





Due to the proliferation of billboards in specific areas, the view shed is marred and unattractive and sometimes, blocked entirely. At each of the public meetings, this issue was addressed. Specific areas of concern included:



Locations where there are a proliferation of billboards are noted below:

- A 14 mile section of Hwy 460 from Bluefield to Tazewell
- The section of Hwy 460 through Claypool Mill in Tazewell County
- A 3 mile section of Alt 58 through St. Paul and Castlewood in Russell County
- The section of Hwy 23 N through Duffield into Lee County
- The section of Alt 58 from Norton to St. Paul in Wise County

A few other areas noted areas although limited in numbers were:

- A three mile section on Hwy 460 between Crab Orchard and Pounding Mill area
- A one mile section on Bus 23 between Norton and Appalachia
- A few around the Richlands area
- A few on Hwy 640 near Vansant and Grundy in Buchanan County
- Two on Hwy 83W near New Camp in Dickenson County
- Three on Hwy 421 as one nears Pennington Gap
- A few on Hwy 58A as one nears Big Stone Gap

ADDRESSING THE BILLBOARD ISSUE

In Article 33.1-369 of the Code of Virginia, it clearly states that "adjacent to any interstate, federal-aid primary or national highway system in the Commonwealth which has been designated as a Virginia byway or scenic highway" must abide by stricter sign laws. This would include the roads listed above but should be a consideration for all roads along the byway. See APPENDIX F for the specific language of the law.

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail Advisory Committee and communities should talk with VDOT staff about Federal Aid for Primary Road restrictions and the National Highway restrictions for billboards on scenic byways. VDOT Bristol District primary contact is Transportation and Land Use Director Steve Buston at (276)669-9959.

For issues or questions related to outdoor advertising and billboards, contact Dave Sims, VDOT Outdoor Advertising Agent at (276)642-2507, ext. 614.

BENEFITS OF RELOCATING UTILITIES

There is no doubt that placing utilities underground benefits the value of the property and the aesthetic beauty of a community. As shown below, the visual difference of no wire is dramatic.

There are also reduced maintenance costs and less utility disruptions due to falling limbs, high winds and ice. And accidents and safety risks significantly decrease. Relocating utilities underground is an expensive undertaking but the benefits in the long run can outweigh the initial costs.





See "Underground Utilities" later in this chapter for more on this subject.



EXOTIC PLANT CONCERN

Exotic plant species are another issue that will need to be addressed along specific areas of the route. There are sites along the trail which will soon no longer be visible unless action is taken. But kudzu and other exotics are not the only culprits.





Native plants can also do damage as trees begin growing through structures and view sheds are blocked as vegetation grows. Just outside of St. Charles in Lee County at one of the coal sites noted on the trail, the equipment showcased is nearly blocked by vegetation.

Recommendation:

An inventory of these problem areas need to be noted and, where possible, an effort made to eradicate invasive species and, in their place, plant native species.

JUNKY AREAS

Surprisingly, there were very few notable junky areas on the entire 325 mile trip. A few areas were not as pleasing to look at due to billboards, commercialization, or in some cases, just from being old, worn out and not used. One place of concern is Sun Virginia in Russell County. There seemed to be an excessive amount of "items" in front of a number of businesses within the community.



A recommendation has been made to address this with the Russell County Administrators to see if something can be done to address the issue.

There may be other "junkyard" areas along the route but none were noted during the initial drive nor in any follow up town meetings.

LITTER CONTROL

Trash also did not seem to be an underlying issue along most of the route. In fact, nearly all of the counties have hired litter control officers. Below is a list of the litter officers and the communities they oversee:

LITTER CONTROL OFFICERS

NAME	<u>PHONE</u>	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Greg Cross, Wise County	276-328-1000	cross_g@wisecounty.org
Jake Dougherty, Scott County	276-386-6521	jdougherty@scottcountyva.com
Ashley Long, Lee County	276-346-7702	along@co.lee.state.va.us
Bobby Justus, Russell County	276-889-8145	bobby.justus@bvunet.net
Lester Turner, Dickenson County	276-835-8806	dclc@litterctrl.dcwin.org
Toby Edwards, Cumberland Plateau	276-889-8123	tobyedwards@bvunet.net
Jerry Ward, Buchanan County	276-935-6106	buchlitter@buchanancounty-va.gov
Randy Anderson, City of Norton	276-679-0754	micheleknox@comcast.net

And the Town of Richlands recently hired a litter control officer for their community.

There were a few places that need to be addressed which have been noted in the inventory and addressed to those within those areas. It is recommended that individuals periodically drive the route through their communities and see if they feel is it "ready for company". At each of the town meetings, this was suggested and the response was overwhelming positive that they would do so. It is also highly recommended that citizens and businesses along the route adopt sections of roads that become their responsibility and, when needed, help organize clean-ups.

WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY "READY FOR VISITORS"



Above is one community which looks ready for visitors.

Sidewalks, well-marked parking areas, landscaping, street lighting, underground utilities, uniform signage, well-maintained buildings and clean streets are a few recommendations.

See "Becoming Visitor-Ready" later in this chapter to learn techniques and ideas of how to better prepare your community for company.



PRESERVING THE PAST

There are a number of areas that are "at risk" due to age and the elements. Some of the more notable ones are the company store and superintendent's home in Trammel, the theater in Keokee, and a number of the historic buildings in Pocahontas including, but not limited to, an entire block of Downtown, opera house and fire house. Already the company store at Pocahontas is beyond repair and many coal camps have all but disappeared. *This is further addressed later on in this chapter.*



Trammel Company Store Buildings in Pocahontas Power House in Keokee Pocahontas Company Store

Coal equipment at old mining sites also tells the story of days gone by.



Two sites in Lee County

Two sites in Wise County

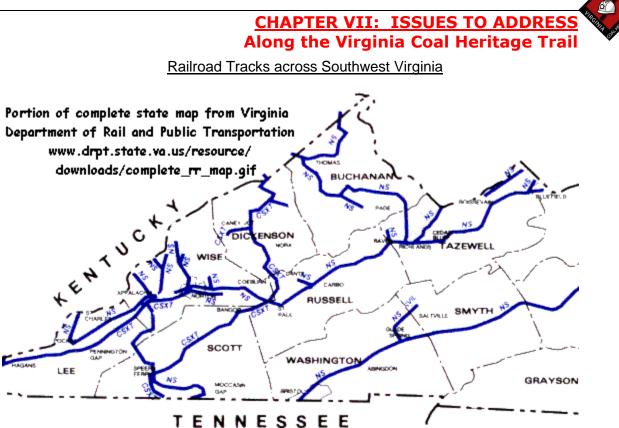
Tazewell County

Do keep in mind it is not just the physical structures that are at risk. There is a wealth of information about many of the coal camps and mines that will be lost if efforts are not taken to capture this information. Concerted efforts need to be made to interview those who once worked the mines and lived in the camps and record this information for future generations. *See Chapter IX: Action Plan - Oral History for more on this subject.*

RAILROAD PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE

There is no doubt that the railroad played a huge role in the development of Southwest Virginia and in the history of coal. It not only transported coal out of the mountains but 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.

The map on the following page shows a network of tracks that traverse across all seven counties and the City of Norton.



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 (Buchanan 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.
- The 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 feet, 7 inches.

According the 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 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 route, there are 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 Buchanan County, one can view the CSX Railroad Turntable.
- Pennington Gap: Caboose
- 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



Railcar in Big Stone Gap serves as their visitor center



Dungannon Town Hall



Pocahontas Depot



Coeburn–Offices/Meeting space



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.*

FOUR DEPOTS CURRENTLY AT RISK



Duffield depot and depot in Dante are both at risk.

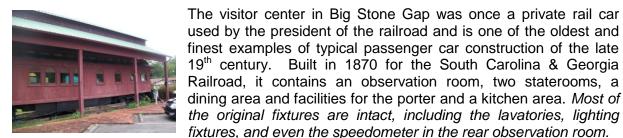
Passenger and freight depots in Appalachia

CHAPTER VII: ISSUES TO ADDRESS Along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail

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









Red Caboose B&B and Center Caboose on display Coal Museum near Haysi in Coeburn

in Pennington Gap

at St. Paul.



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.

This caboose is currently located in downtown Appalachia.

For a more complete overview of the railroad-related sites along the byway, see Appendix M.

NEW USE FOR ABANDONED RAILS

Another opportunity is to take abandoned railroads and convert them into trails. The Rail-to-Trails Conservancy based out of Washington DC heads up this program which is a nonprofit organization whose mission it is to create a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors to build healthier places for healthier people.

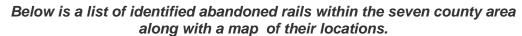


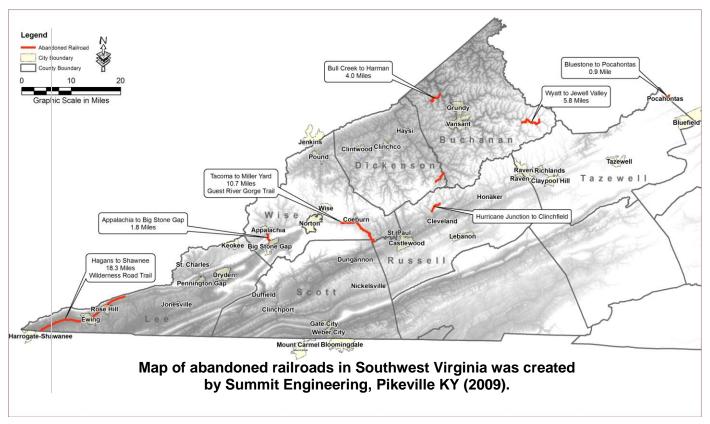
Guest River Rail-to-Trail



As noted on their website^{*}, "Rail-trails are multi-purpose public paths created from former railroad corridors. Most often flat or following a gentle grade, they traverse urban, suburban and rural America. Ideal for many uses, such as bicycling, walking, inline skating, cross-country skiing, equestrian and wheelchair use, rail-trails are extremely popular as recreation and transportation corridors. Rail-trails create healthier places for healthier people. They serve as wildlife conservation and historical preservation corridors, stimulate local economies by increasing tourism and promoting local business, offer safe and accessible routes for work and school commuting, and promote active lifestyles for all ages."

Name of Line	County	Trail Name	Rail Carrier	Miles Abandoned	Date Abandonment Granted
Tacoma to Miller Yard	Wise	Guest River	N&W	10.7	8/15/1986
		Wilderness			
Hagans to Shawanee	Lee	Road	CSXT	18.3	1/26/1987
Bluestone WV-Pocahontas	Tazewell		N&W	0.9	6/9/1990
Hurricane Junction- Clinchfield	Russell		N&W	2.9	8/15/1990
Russell Creek-Caledonia	Wise		N&W	0.9	8/15/1990
Wyatt-Jewell Valley	Buchanan		N&W	5.8	8/15/1990
Duty-Clinchfield Coal	Dickenson/Russell		N&W	3.3	8/22/1990
Long Spur Junction	Buchanan		N&W	0.4	11/3/1990





^{*}Rail-to-Trails Conservancy website is http://www.railstotrails.org/index.html