

## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**



### **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

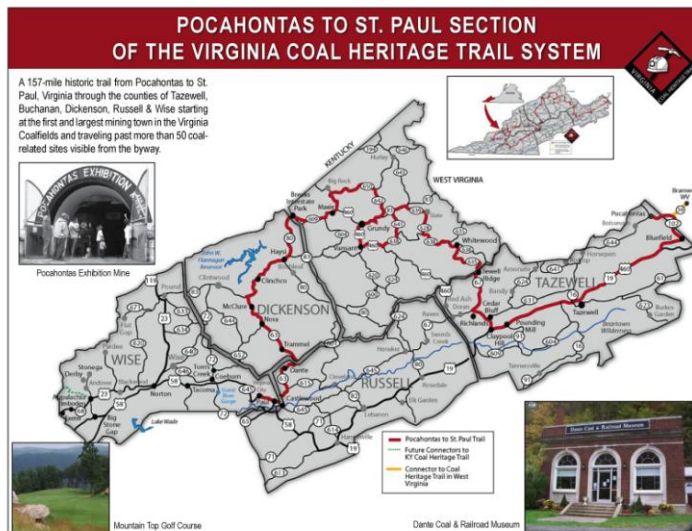
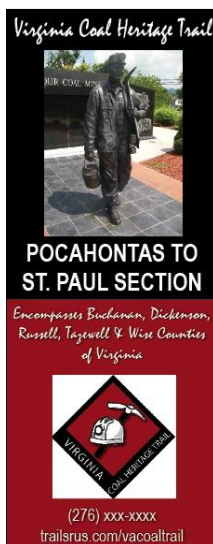
Creation and implementation of a successful marketing plan is essential to achieving the desired economic benefits of the trail. The primary goal of all marketing plans should be to stimulate a particular action. In this case, it is to create an awareness and encourage visitors to drive the Virginia Coal Trail, stop at the local attractions along the way, and spend money on food, gas, lodging and shopping while they are in the area. There are a number of marketing venues one can use. It is recommended that each be implemented as budget allows.

#### Brochures

Upon receiving state scenic byway designation and in anticipation of applying for national status, five of the seven participating counties developed 4-color brochures to showcase notable sites along the route through their individual counties that might be of interest to the traveling public. This information was invaluable as the researchers began inventorying all that one saw along the route.

It was suggested that in future printings of these brochures, that a map be added that includes the section through their individual counties but also includes a map of the entire route since most of those traveling the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail will not be stopping at the county line.

Each brochure featured the state byway logo but had its own unique design and format for the rest of the brochure. A recommendation was made that a consistent identifiable logo designed specifically for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail be included on each of the brochures and that a color scheme and basic design layout be chosen so one could easily recognize the brochures as being part of a much larger initiative involving all seven of the counties and spanning further than just one county.



*Concept Idea for Brochures*

These brochures should be distributed at state welcome centers, local chambers of commerce, special events, and in businesses all along the route.



# CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail

It is also strongly suggested that a more complete trail brochure be developed that includes the entire route or at least breaks it down into the trail and two loops. This would enable all communities to be represented in one publication, allow for a greater number of brochures to be printed at a reduced cost per copy due to increased quantity and broaden distribution with each county contributing their share to cover the expense.

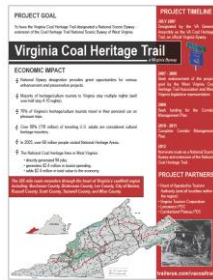
## Color Scheme

The Coal Heritage Trail of West Virginia has a yellow, orange and black color scheme. From the very start of developing the corridor management plan, red, black and white has been the color scheme for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail. This is evident in all the invitations, correspondence, website and concept ideas for brochures, signage, etc. It is recommended that these colors be adopted as the colors for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail and consistently used in all marketing materials related to the byway.

A consistent color scheme has helped create immediate recognition of the Corridor Management Plan (CMP) Virginia Coal Heritage Trail initiative.



First meeting notice



Fact Sheet



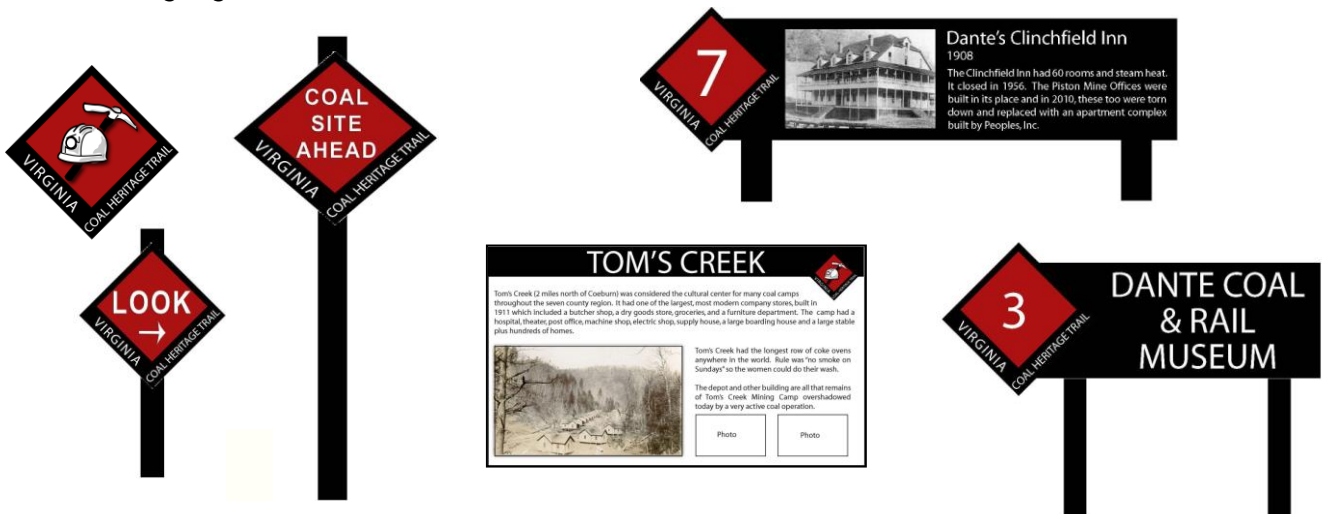
Post Card



Brochure

## Signage

Providing consistent, easily recognizable signage along the route that coordinates with icons used on the byway maps, brochures and website, will aid the traveler in finding their way and in locating the sites. See CHAPTER VII – ISSUES TO ADDRESS for more on signage.



Concept Ideas for Uniform Signage



## CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail



Here are three other examples of signs which could be used for both walking and driving tours downtown which are different in design but are easily identifiable as being a part of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.



Above is a community that has adopted a specific theme that is enticing, welcoming and most importantly, consistent. *For more on this, see Communities Becoming Tourist Attractions in CHAPTER VII: Issues to address.*



*Here are concept ideas for historic lighting that could be used in some of the downtown communities which would carry on the theme of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail.*



## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

### Telling the Story through Interpretive Signs & Wayside Exhibits

There are numerous sites along the byway that need interpretation for one to truly understand and appreciate their significance. Interpretive signs and wayside exhibits help to share the story.

Priority sites include:

- Butt Co. & Coffins in Pocahontas
- Opera House in Pocahontas
- Section House in Richlands
- Jewell Ridge Community
- Jewell Ridge Smokeless Coke Ovens
- Island Creek Coal Company in Buchanan County
- Keen Mountain Coal Camp in Buchanan County
- Splashdam Mine site near Haysi
- Binns-Count Center in McClure
- Site of Elementary School in Dante
- Section Manager's House in St. Paul
- "Western Front" in St. Paul
- Old Union Hall on Mew Road
- Flanary Historical Site in Dungannon
- Rye Cove Disaster (Sign placement at intersection of Hwys 65 & 649)
- Site of Clinchport Community
- "Duffield" Depot Museum in Duffield
- Tacoma
- Tom's Creek
- City of Norton
- Appalachia (*locate next to or across from Appalachia Cultural Arts Center*)
- Bullitt Mine Processing Plant near Appalachia
- Coal Power Plant/Theater in Keokee
- At miner's memorial in St. Charles about the history of St. Charles as a coal town
- At proposed Caboose Visitor Center in Pennington Gap



*This particular sign to the left allows one to feel the texture of the subject.*

Designs such as those above allow full access to all who wish to view them.

## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**



*Ramps, bridges and concrete walkways should be ADA compliant when possible.*

ADA\* compliant attractions, trails, restroom facilities, drinking fountains and other amenities along the route are also very important and should be noted on maps and on websites.

*\*American Disability Act*

### Using Technology to Interpret a Site

An **audio tour** provides a recorded spoken commentary, normally through a handheld device, to a visitor attraction. It provides background, context, and information on the things being viewed. Some of the more elaborate tours available include original music and interviews, offering both audio and visual interpretation of a site. In the past, these audio units were rented at a visitor center or designated location along the route or available onsite through a battery-operated radio ban system. This was the type of units Virginia's Civil War Trail used at many of their sites. The Crooked Road Music Trail along portions of the Virginia Coal Heritage Byway uses a prerecorded audio unit that receives its power through a solar panel on top or near the display.



*Pre-recorded solar-operated audio unit provides both spoken commentary and music along the Crooked Road Music Trail*

More recently, these audio tours can be downloaded from the internet or available via the mobile phone network. A **cell phone tour** is an audio tour where pre-recorded audio interpretation for a heritage site or a cultural exhibit is provided via a cell phone. Each venue is assigned a phone number with appropriate stop numbers, displayed next the exhibit. Once a visitor has dialed in, they will be prompted and can enter the corresponding stop number of the exhibit they're viewing, to hear the recorded content.

These tours also enable the visitors to: fast forward, rewind, pause, as well as leave a feedback message for each exhibit or the whole tour; simply by pressing a number. In addition to audio content, some providers are also able to stream video, and text message recent visitors with updates.



## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

Another option is the Quick Response (QR) Coding system which uses a matrix barcode designed to be read by smartphones. Waving the phone across the code will take one to a specific URL or other data much the way a scanner picks up on product and price information at the grocery store.

QR and Cell phone audio tours have the advantage that most visitors already have the equipment needed to take the audio tour, the initial cost is quite minimal, and the message can be changed often and easily from another site or by purely using one's own phone and re-recording. But do keep in mind that not all cell phones and smartphones work in the mountains of Southwest Virginia so relying on this type of interpretation may need to wait until more cell towers are added in the region.

### GPSing the Sites

During the process of inventorying the byway, it was the intent of the researchers to also GPS the location of each of the sites. But very quickly it became apparent that this task was too large a project to undertake. It is strongly recommended that funding is found to provide GPS coordinates for each of the major sites along the route, sites at risk, as well as sites which may or may not still exist such as coal camp areas which may have all but disappeared over time. Once these coordinates are in place, it would be very simple to implement geocaching.

“Geocaching” is a high-tech version of hide-and-seek where one explores the outdoors in search of hidden treasure and adventure. It costs very little to implement and yet has global appeal.

### Website

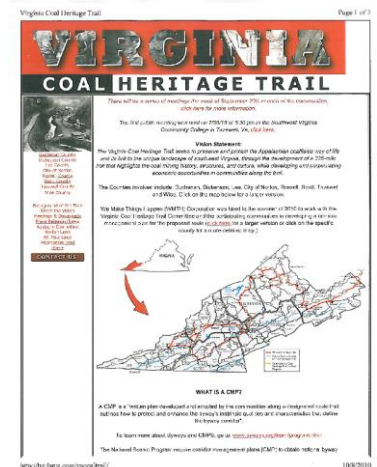
The current website at [trailsrus.com/vacoaltrail](http://trailsrus.com/vacoaltrail) was specifically designed to assist in the development of the corridor management plan. It contains information about the initiative, an inventory of the route, a list of those involved with contact information, and detailed information as to what a corridor management plan is, and why obtaining national status is important.

Information is also provided of upcoming meetings and outcomes of meetings that have been held. The corridor management plan in its entirety will be added to the website once it is completed to allow easy access for all to read and follow.

Once the corridor management plan is completed and adopted, a second website should be developed for the purpose of marketing the trail. Websites are more and more becoming the resource people use most often when making their travel plans.

Included should be that information which would be of interest to the traveling public such as:

- Downloadable guide maps of the route,
- Information of sites along the route, including information such as hours of operation, facts about the site or possible stories of days gone by that may not be evident when one actually drives past.



---

## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY** **For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**



- Historical information pertaining to what one might see or not see along the coal trail as well as more current day information about coal, the processes now used for extraction, and how techniques and processes have changed over time.
- Information on upcoming events along the route
- Lodging/restaurant and other amenities offered along the route
- Links to other area attractions nearby.
- Possible itineraries for the trail.

### Media

The media is crucial to the success of the trail. Developing press kits, writing news releases, and encouraging the press to write articles about the trails are three ways to help get the word out. Press kits should include color photos, maps, a listing of attractions and services and a series of prepared articles as well as basic information one might want included in a story. Including unique sites that might peak someone's interests, potential story lines and interesting facts can all lead to articles being written.

Paid advertisement in consumer magazines is another media source but can become quite expensive. It is suggested one choose wisely when using this venue making sure that it has a large distribution to the audience that would have interest in the trail. Submitting articles to publications and/or inviting travel writers to travel the trail are two other marketing techniques that can be used that have proven to be very successful for other trails.

### Market to the Travel Industry

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail should be actively marketed to the travel and tourism industry. Considering the fact that the Virginia Tourism Association serves on the advisory committee should enable this venue to be tapped very well. Direct marketing to tour companies, travel agents and others should help increase the exposure of the Trail.

But do keep in mind, if one is interested in attracting tour buses, an analysis of the routes one would recommend should be taken. There are some areas in which a bus or large RV may have difficulty finding a location to park and/or turn around. Itineraries should be planned out that point out lodging options, restaurants which can handle larger groups and trail routes that are "bus friendly".

Also notably lacking were RV campgrounds along the route. Other than one being developed near Pocahontas, the Jessie Lea RV Park & Campground in Big Stone Gap and the campgrounds at Breaks Interstate Park and nearby Natural Tunnel State Park, no others were noted in our research. Further research needs to be done and noted sites added to the list of amenities along the route.

### Reaching the Travel Industry:

- Market the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail to various package tour organizations and companies such as the American Auto Association (AAA). They do not usually have trade shows but they often attend them. AAA is an excellent source to reach out to the traveling public. They also have a publication they distribute to their members which talks about interesting places to visit. The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail would definitely qualify.



## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY** **For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

- Participate and exhibit in both regional and national trade shows such as those held by the National Tour Association and the American Bus Association.
- Coordinate Familiarization (FAM) Tours. Those on the Virginia Coal Heritage Advisory Committee already have experience using this venue. In 2007, each of the seven participating counties conducted a FAM tour on their portion of the trail to educate those involved of all each area had to offer. The Advisory Committee should help coordinate additional FAM tours with travel industry representatives

and free-lance travel writers so they can see, first hand, all the sites the Trail offers which, in turn, could lead to publications about the route.

### Marketing to special interest groups:

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail offers several attractions of interest to special interest groups and organizations. These include but are not limited to:

- American History and History Buffs – The Virginia Coal Trail provides an opportunity for travelers to go back in time and learn about the past. The coal camps, cemeteries, churches, Civil War history are just a few of the sites that will interest them along the route. Heritage tourism is the fastest-growing segment of the tourism industry. They also tend to stay in areas longer, love getting off the beaten track and enjoy the smaller, more local businesses such as B&B's, small downtown cafés with local cuisine and unique quirky shops that often pop up in small communities. The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail promoters need to capitalize on this.
- Railroad Buffs – There are a growing numbers of those interested in railroads. In fact, recent studies have shown railroad fan clubs, magazines, publications and conventions are increasing in numbers across the United States but also overseas. Japanese in particular seem to have a strong interest and often take multiple week “holidays” to visit such sites. The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail is blessed with numerous railroad related sites along the route. See CHAPTER IX for more on this.
- Genealogy and retracing one's family history is also gaining in popularity as people grow more and more interested in their past and the “search for their roots”. Posting some of the common names in the region on genealogical websites can often result in interest being spurred in the area. Do keep in mind, there is a wealth of information about many of the coal camps and mines that will be lost if efforts are not taken soon to interview those who lived during the time in which coal camps were active communities.
- Workers representing many ethnic groups came to work and live in the mining camps. One site that comes to mind is in Clinchco where one can still see a bake oven used by Hungarians and Italians to make bread while they worked the mines nearby but there are many other such sites along the trail including some diverse ethnic churches and in some of the architecture styles still evident. Marketing to both ethnic organizations and publications would be recommended.





---

## **CHAPTER X: INTERPRETING & MARKETING THE BYWAY** **For the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

- National Periodicals, magazines and history related websites and television including American Heritage, National Geographic, HistoryNet.com, and the History Channel.
- Schools and Youth organizations such as Boy Scouts or Church Youth Groups are often looking for new venues for teaching. Developing a teacher's packet with information about the trail and its rich coal history is an opportunity to educate the young and enlighten both teachers and parents. By providing short itineraries to strategic locations and offering "teaching moments" along the route

may entice schools to set up field trips to learn not only about the history of coal in the region and the impact it has had but also how far the industry has come within the past few decades. A teacher's section with age appropriate questions and answers could also be added to the website.

- Classic Cars & Motorcycle Organizations and Clubs. Both love to drive on curvy, windy mountain roads which describes nearly all the roads on the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail. Hosting periodic rallies in conjunction with other events could result in a new venue to attract visitors. The Norton Loop is particularly ideal for motorcyclists. Other sections are not so ideal due to the number of railroad crossings which motorcyclists tend not to like to cross.