



APPENDIX H: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION Series of Town Meetings: Russell County Dante Meeting

APPENDIX H: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – SERIES OF MEETINGS

Virginia Coal Heritage Trail Corridor Management Plan Meeting
was held at Dante for the Russell County portion of the Pocahontas Trail
September 22nd 2010 at 6 pm.

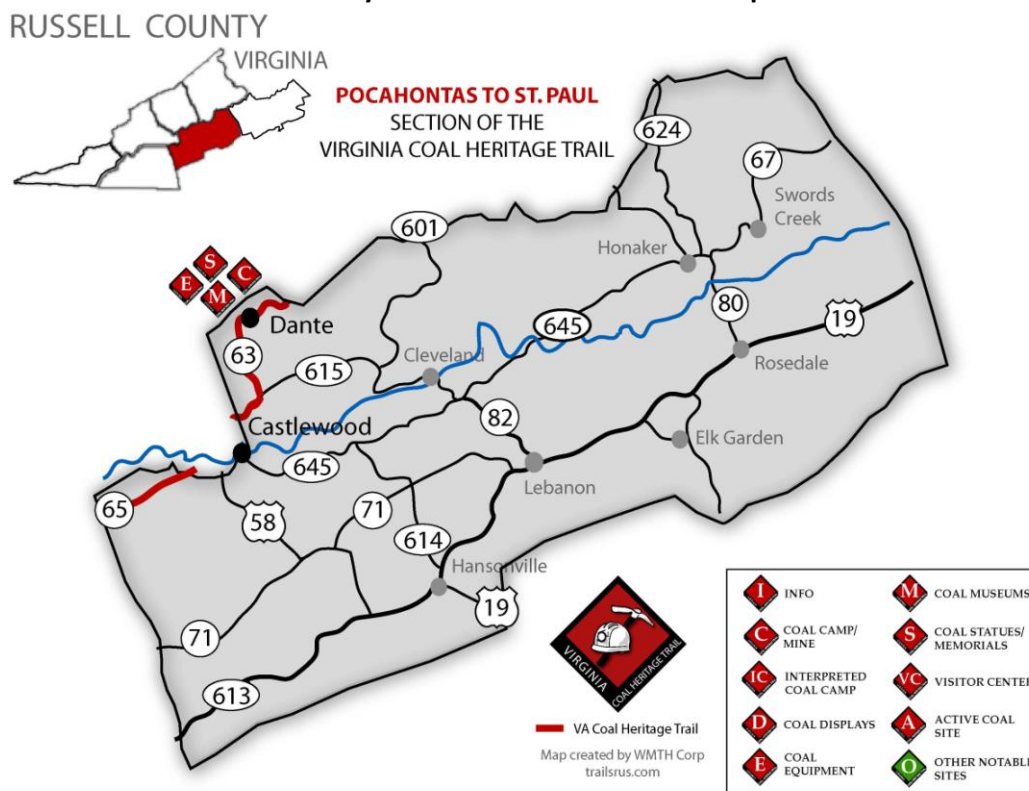
Attendees included:

- Linda Tate, Russell County Chamber of Commerce and chairman of the VA Coal Heritage Trail Advisory Committee
- Gaynell Cook
- Samantha Landingham, Heart of the Appalachia
- Aubry Z. Hupman
- Earl Jenkins
- Rick Hall
- Elsie Keith
- Bobbie Gullett, Dante Lives On
- Norma Addington
- Beulah S. Worley



Those in the Dante community embrace their coal and rail heritage and are working very hard to preserve it.

Below is the section of the Byway discussed in the Russell County meeting.
Primary coal sites are noted on the map.





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Dante once had a YMCA, hospital, theater, hotel, dress shop, shoe shop (shoes custom-made), barber shop, and general store which included clothing, sporting goods, furniture, grocery and beauty shop.

- There was a bus station and taxicabs.
- Had telephone service before many areas. Switchboard in Dante.
- Dante Elementary School had playground on the roof.

Note: School house burned in 1948.

- The bank ca. 1902 has been converted into the Dante Coal & Railroad museum. It has historic photos and a wonderful, detailed model of the entire community of Dante as it was in its prime. Replicas of all the buildings that once were in Dante are included in the model including the Tipple, the old hotel, and the houses.



Clinchfield Coal Company once owned everything in Dante shown in this model of the town.

- The Depot still stands but not for long if something is not done. Please Note: The railroad recently started to take it down saying it was a safety hazard sitting so close to a live track and yet this is where it has sat for over 40 year. The railroad offered the depot to the community if they would move it 50 feet but it proved to be too expensive. Demolition has temporarily stopped.



Do note, the Dante Church main entrance is located even closer to the live track and this has never been an issue. The Depot in Coeburn is also located next to a live track but is used daily as offices and meeting space for those in the Coeburn Community. Why could the doors facing the track be sealed and a small fence erected on either end of the back side of the Depot to prevent any concerns about the track.



Dante Church next to track

Action needs to be taken immediately to work something out to save the Depot. The depot is an intricate part of the story the town is trying to tell.



Depot in Coeburn next to a live track and used daily.

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The Steam building is currently privately owned and used for storage but appears to be in good condition considering its age.

- *The building needs to be returned to town*
- *Needs equipment moved and displayed*



Above are some of the remaining buildings and structures including the Dante Post Office.

Note: The building to the far right is a housing facility built by People's Inc. on the site of the elementary school. They have also talked about opening a small shop and snack stand.



A memorial to Dante Coal Miners located just above the town at the Dante Firehouse on Hwy 63.

There is a wonderful historic book on Dante which is currently out of print.

- Action needs to be taken to reprint publication. Many requests for copies.
- Need to develop a downtown walking tour with numbered buildings and a brochure.
 - WMTH will pay for printing the first 200 copies.

Ethnic Diversity included African-American, Polish, Italians, Germans, and Hungarians

- There was a Hungarian Boarding House
- German bread is a tradition in Dante.

Annual Dante reunion the second Saturday in August every year.

- Brings in 400 to 900 people back home every year.
- Note: Traditionally everyone brings covered dishes in the past but last year, health agent shut it down and said they must have approved chef even though the food was free. This needs to be addressed.



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ISSUE OF EYESORES

Within Dante:

A number of homes still remain and are now privately owned. But a number of them have been vacant for years and are falling down. There are absentee owners, many of whom have not paid their taxes in 40 years. This has become both a safety and health issue for those still living in Dante as well as providing an ugly eyesore, making it appear the community does not care which is not the case.

Action: The residents of Dante would like permission from the county to dismantle those houses that are beyond repair.

In Russell County:

Just past Dante, one comes to the community of Sun. Within a four mile stretch of road, there are refrigerators lining the road plus a garage that has a tremendous amount of junk scattered about and broken down vehicles on both sides of the road.



This is an issue, especially for those travelers who start the Pocahontas trail in St. Paul. What one finds in Sun is not representative of the rest of the byway but may be enough for those driving the byway to decide not to continue the tour.