

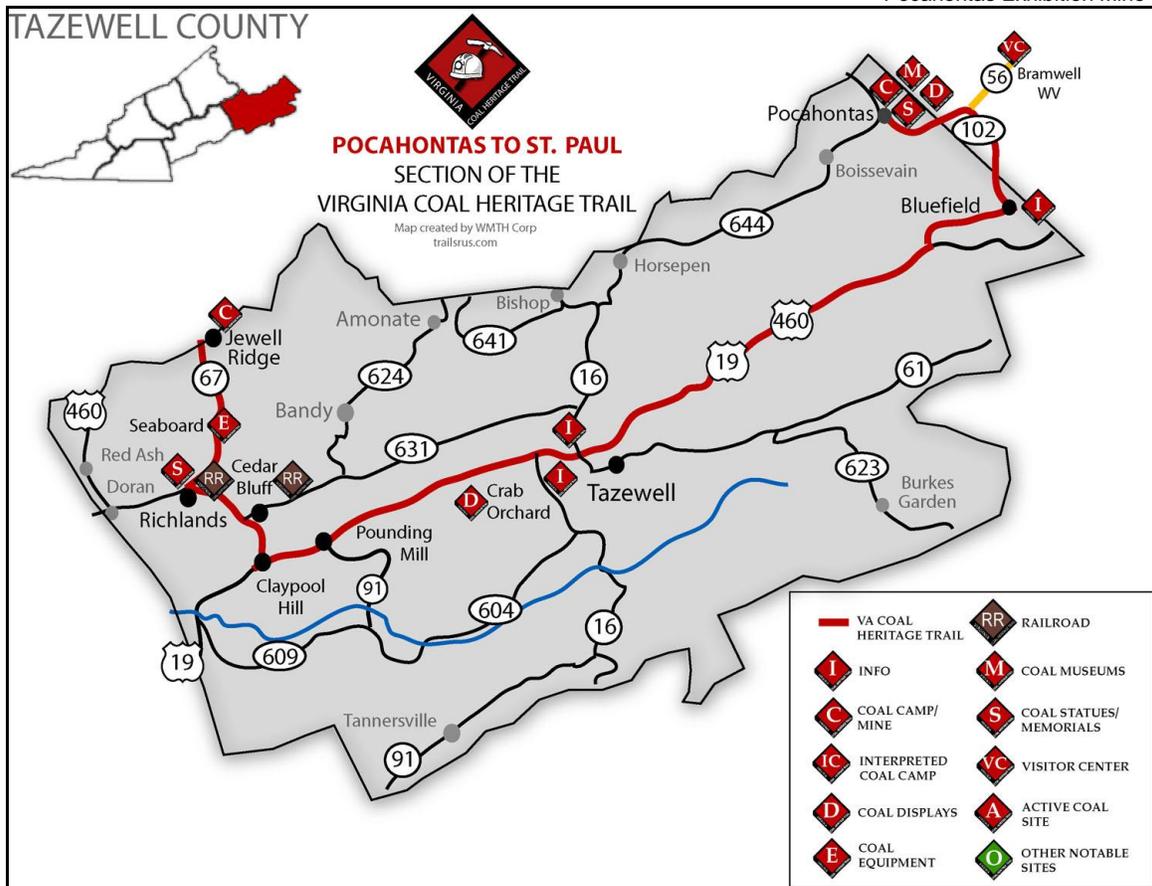
CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Along the Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail appropriately starts in Tazewell County at the Pocahontas Exhibition Mine, the site of the famous 12' vein, one of the largest and best quality veins in the nation. The seam has all but been exhausted but the tunnel remains open to tourists alongside the old coal office and shower house now turned into a coal museum.



Pocahontas Exhibition Mine



Heading west on Hwy 659 then left on Hwy 644, one comes to the historic town of Pocahontas, the first and largest mining town in the Virginia Coalfields. Since the closing of the mine in 1955, many of the historic buildings erected during the height of the coal mining industry have remained, maintaining the feel of a coal mining town from the turn of the century. A downtown walking tour has been proposed which will provide interpretation for many of these sites. See CHAPTER VII for more on developing walking tours. Additional recommendations are included in a study by Hills Studio.



Still remaining are many of the coal town's historic buildings including the old Opera House, the fire station and more.



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

And for every saloon that was built in town, an equal number of churches were built of nearly every denomination. One very worthwhile stop is the Catholic Church which has beautiful murals painted on the walls and ceiling.



One of the many churches



A mosque



The Catholic Church



One of the murals

The Town of Pocahontas is a reflection of its mining history. Immigrants of Hungarian, Welsh, Russian, Polish, German, French, English, Irish descent and more came to work in the coal industry. The cultural diversity is evident in the numerous sites and structures throughout the town.



A few of the buildings include (from left to right) the Butt & Co Coffins, the Cricket Saloon, the Coal Company office building now converted to a community college and the "haunted" hospital.



Manager's Home

The home of the manager of the mine overlooks the community while the company store is barely standing.

As with a number of buildings in Pocahontas, action needs to be taken to save several of the historic buildings from destruction.



Pocahontas Company Store

Leaving Pocahontas and traveling along Hwy 102, one actually goes in and out of Virginia two times before ending up in the town of Bluefield, home to the Last Soda Fountain Restaurant, Pharmacy & Gift Shop that has the original fountain circa 1935. Nearby is the Tazewell County Visitor Center, the historical society and Bluefield College.



Last Fountain Restaurant (left)

Tazewell Co. Visitor Center (right)



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail



Highway 460 west takes one past the community of Tazewell which offers some restaurants and shopping opportunities including the Coal Bucket Deli. Within the same shopping mall is the Tazewell County Chamber of Commerce which provides maps and information on the region.

Just down the road is Crab Orchard Museum that displays a timeline of Southeast Virginia and provides an exhibit of regional coal mining heritage as well as information, maps and other artifacts from days gone by. Also on the grounds are 15 reconstructed buildings from the area which includes a family dwelling, a cobbler's shop, a carpenter's shop, working blacksmith shop with its original bellows and anvil, kitchen, lardhouse, doctor's office/apothecary, loom house, apple house, spring house, smokehouse, a replicated barn, and corncribs.



Crab Orchard Museum

Other worthwhile stops while in Tazewell County include Cuz's Restaurant with its quirky paintings and memorabilia located just outside Pounding Mill, a scenic side trip through the small community of Cedar Bluff which includes a loader for freight cars, a historic mill, an interpretive sign on Virginia's Civil War Trail.



Cuz's Restaurant



A loader



An mill



Civil War site

The Richlands community offers a number of historic buildings, monuments and more.



This community is ideal for both a walking and driving tour and has a rich railroad heritage which needs to be expanded through interpretative exhibits and walking tours.



A "must see" is the wonderful monument to Coal Miners at Richlands Town Hall.

The Richlands Coal Miners' Memorial, designated as the official Coal Miners' Memorial of the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2009, was first dedicated in 2003. The memorial is a tribute to the men and women who sacrificed all they had to make a living in the coal mines and is a testament to the heritage of the Town of Richlands.



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS

Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail



The memorial, sculpted by Maria Kirby-Smith, depicts a miner exiting the mine. He is covered in the toil of the day with his lunch bucket and pick in hand as he catches a breath of fresh air. The black granite wall represents the mine. The cascading water shared the wealth of an ever-flowing natural resource we call coal. Etching of the history of mining linger on the face of the monument while the back bears the names of 1,000 miners who died filling their destiny.

Leaving Richlands and heading south on Route 67, one passes by the old Seaboard Coal Mining site where some equipment still remains.



Jewell Ridge is another treasure. As noted on its website, the community was used as a model for other coal mining companies planning to build their own in other regions of the country. The Jewell Ridge Community included more than just homes for the employees.

It had a school, churches, post office, theater, hospital, park, ball field, bowling alley and gymnasium, restaurant, Club House, Skeet Shooting Club, YMCA, and a company store that offered a wide variety of items - Tailor made suits for men and women, clothing, furniture, groceries, etc. It is now primarily a residential area with most of the coal camp homes purchased as private dwellings.

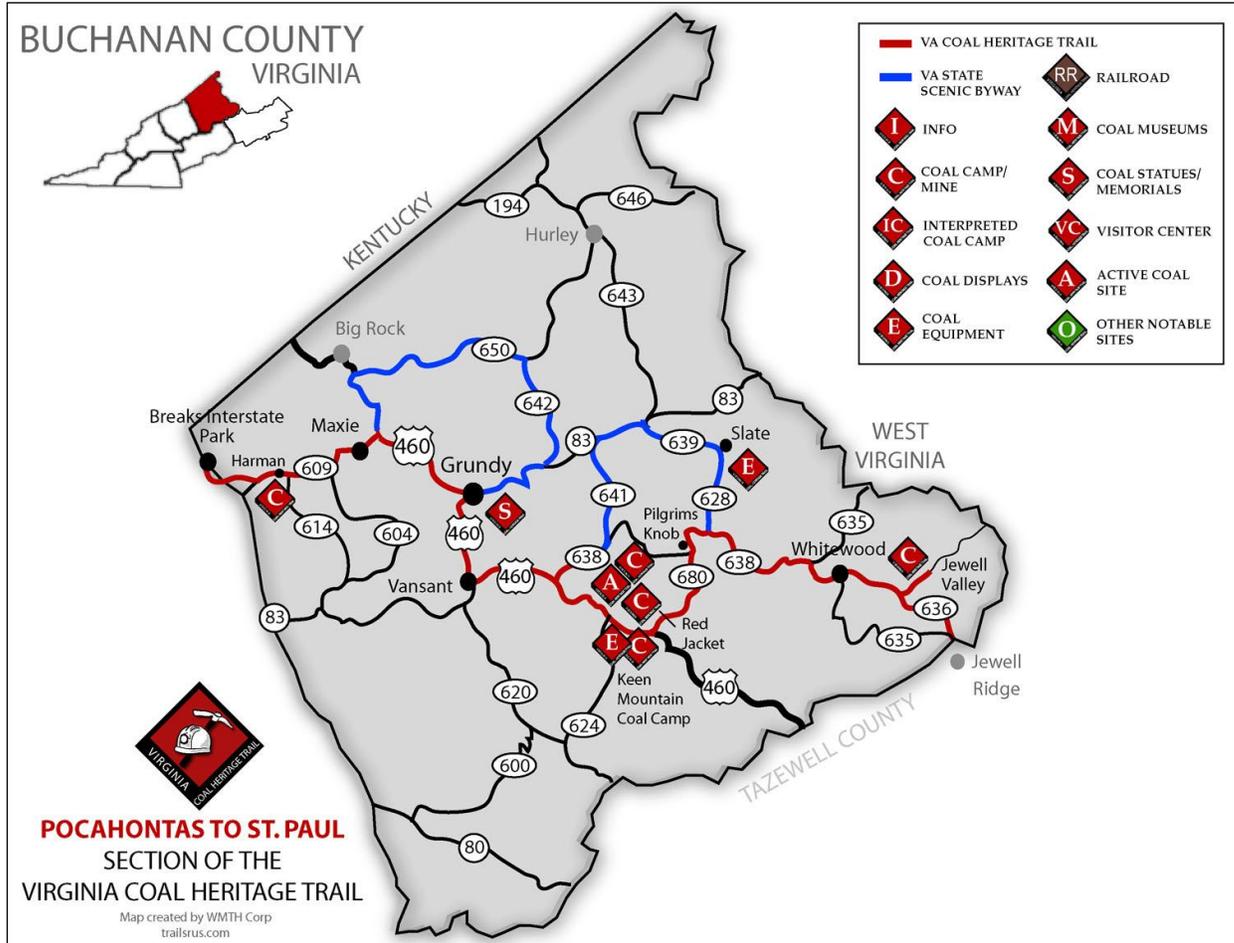


An interpreted driving tour and museum is strongly recommended so one will better understand and appreciate what it took to transport supplies, building materials, and people up the mountain, and the thriving, self-contained model community it became.

CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

SITES IN BUCHANAN COUNTY

When entering Buchanan County, remember you are in an active coal mining community and be very alert for coal trucks that will be sharing the highway with you. You will view many active and inactive mine sites- even passing through one active tippie at Big Rock, VA. Coal stockpiles and mining equipment are around every turn.



As one travels through the mountains, there are many breathtaking views of the valleys below. Be sure to visit the 9-hole Mountain Top Golf Course developed on reclaimed coal land nearly 20 years ago.



One will also pass the remains of the mine site of the Island Creek Coal Company. Much of the equipment still remains although the site has been inactive for decades.



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS

Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

Just past Island Creek are the Jewell Smokeless Coke ovens located on Rt. 460 near Dismal. This is an interesting site to view even during the hustle and bustle of an ordinary work day for the miners. But many people like to come back at night when the entire area is lit up like a Christmas tree.

The Grundy Mural near Vansant is a community project that tells the story of the county's ties to the coal industry. The Grundy Plaza was once an old coal docking site. And in front of the courthouse in Grundy is a bronze statue honoring local miners.



On your way to the Breaks Interstate Park you will pass an active mine and the old Harman Mine sign-the only remnant of the largest mine in Buchanan County during its time. Buchanan County offers one a look at the past and a trip through the present as you travel through this coal mining community.

A side trip up to the top of the mountain showcases a large reclamation site. Portions of this area are being developed into an industrial and commercial area while other sections are being used for parks & recreation, riding rings and trails for both ATV and horseback riding.



SITES IN DICKENSON COUNTY

In Dickenson County, (*see map at end of chapter*) the trail begins at the Breaks Interstate Park, better known as “the Grand Canyon of the South”. There one will have a breathtaking view of the Russell Fork River from the balcony of the Interstate Park dining area. If one continues past the resort on Route 702, one comes to the Clinchfield Overlook where one can view the former Clinchfield Railroad, now a part of CSX, and the site of the old Domus Mine. The loading bind is visible beside the railroad and when the trees are void of leaves, remnants of the coal chute can also be seen.



Coal display at Breaks Interstate Park

As one heads back out of the park, be sure to stop at the Breaks Interstate Park Visitor's Center Museum which has a nice display of coal mining memorabilia and other artifacts from days gone by.

Outside the Park, turn right on Route 80 (Breaks Park Road) and head down the mountain. Just past Cherokee Lane in the hollow to one's left one can see portion of an operating shaft mine. Continuing 4.1 miles brings one to downtown Haysi which offers a few restaurants, stores and a mural on one of the walls depicting the Flood of 1977. There is also an excellent picnic shelter overlooking the river.

CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail



One of the restaurants, a memorial, a mural and a pavilion overlooking the river are a few of the sites one will see while in Haysi

Go straight onto Hwy 63 through the center of town, then straight again onto Route 613 for 1.2 miles. The entrance to the old Splashdam Mine is on the edge of the road to one's right. An explosion in this mine in 1932 killed ten men. The Splash Dam Coal Seam can be seen at road level above and below the mine entry.



A sizeable coal camp once existed just beyond the railroad bridge, but now no trace of Splashdam remains. *Splashdam Mine now sealed.*
Coal loading docks for truck and strip mines could once be seen on both sides of the river as well.



Travel back through Haysi and turn right on Route 80/83 then right again on Route 83 (Dickenson Highway). Upon crossing the Ireland Baker Bridge over the Russell Fork River, one will find the Coal Heritage Trail Museum in one of three cabooses to your right. One can also spend the night at the Red Caboose Inn.

Continuing on Route 83, one soon comes to the town of Clinchco. This was once the largest mining town in Dickenson County. Clinchco was constructed by the Clinchfield Coal Corporation and at its peak of operation contained some 285 houses and had a population of about 3,500 and employed over 1,500 men.

As one comes into the town of Clinchco, one sees the Dickenson County Coal Miners Memorial which lists the names of 309 people who lost their lives in mine related accidents. Crossing the street and behind the second house one can see a bake oven where the Hungarians and Italians made bread. Two smaller beehive ovens are buried nearby.

The only coal company business building still remaining in Clinchco is the old Post Office that one time or another housed a bank, barber shop, company offices, printing press, school rooms, mortuary and a post office. It recently sold in auction. The new owners want to renovate it into a museum.



Traveling from Clinchco to Fremont, you will see the old Fremont railroad depot moved and converted into PSA offices.



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS

Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

Continuing on Hwy 63 south, travelers will pass the entrance to the McClure #1 mines, the site of a large explosion in 1983 which killed 7 miners including the first woman miner killed in the State of Virginia. This mine is not visible from a public highway. The Town of McClure resembles a coal camp but was actually a lumber camp built by the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company, the buildings of which still stand today.



Coal Miners Memorial in Clinchco

Just before one reaches the Town of Trammel, a few residential homes on both sides of the road are all that remains of Haytertown, a small ten man coal operation run by Charlie Hayter in the 1920's.

The Town of Trammel was built by the Virginia Banner Coal Corporation and is the most intact coal camp in Dickenson County. The Coal Company Store, superintendent's home and boarding house still stand but are in desperate need of repair. Coal Camp homes, now privately owned, line both sides of the road.



Trammel Company Store

SITES IN RUSSELL COUNTY

Continuing southward on Hwy 63, one crosses into Russell County. As one heads down the mountain, look for a mine opening and coal seam in the bank on the right of the road.

At the foot of the mountain, turn right onto Route 627 (Lower Bear Wallow Road) which brings one into the Community of Dante.



Dante Coal & Railroad Museum



Dante Dry Cleaners



A few of the miner's homes

Dante is one of the few remaining coal mining camp communities with many of its original buildings still in use. An active group of citizens are working hard to preserve its rich coal history. In the center of the Dante Square one will find the Dante Coal and Railroad Museum, which offers a wide array of memorabilia pertaining to the coal and railroad industry from years past and information about the booming little town it once was.



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

As one gets back on Hwy 63 and looks immediately to their left, they will see the Coal Miner's Memorial which is located on Rt. 63 adjacent to the Dante Volunteer Fire Department.

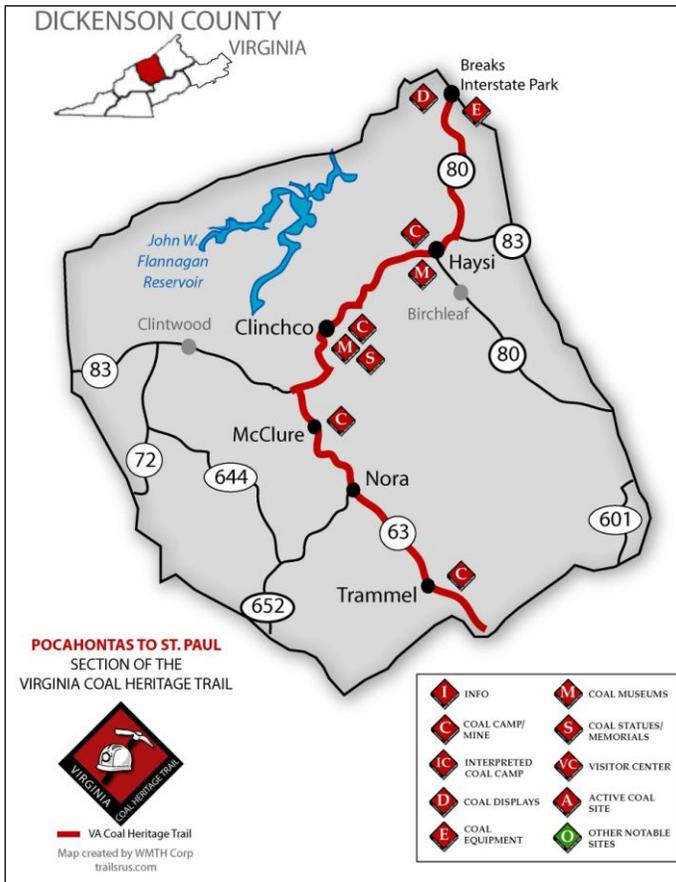
The CSX railroad follows Hwy 63. As one passes a white church with the red roof, look to one's right down in the hollow and one can see the CSX turntable and numerous tracks.



Continuing on Route 63 into St. Paul, a historic railroad community chartered in 1911 has the distinction of lying in both Wise and Russell County. The community offers a variety of restaurants, historic buildings, gas stations, a few shops and a car wash. It also has a rich railroad history.



Make a left turn onto Virginia Route 270 through downtown St. Paul. Continue to the stoplight where one comes to the **St. Paul Loop of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**.

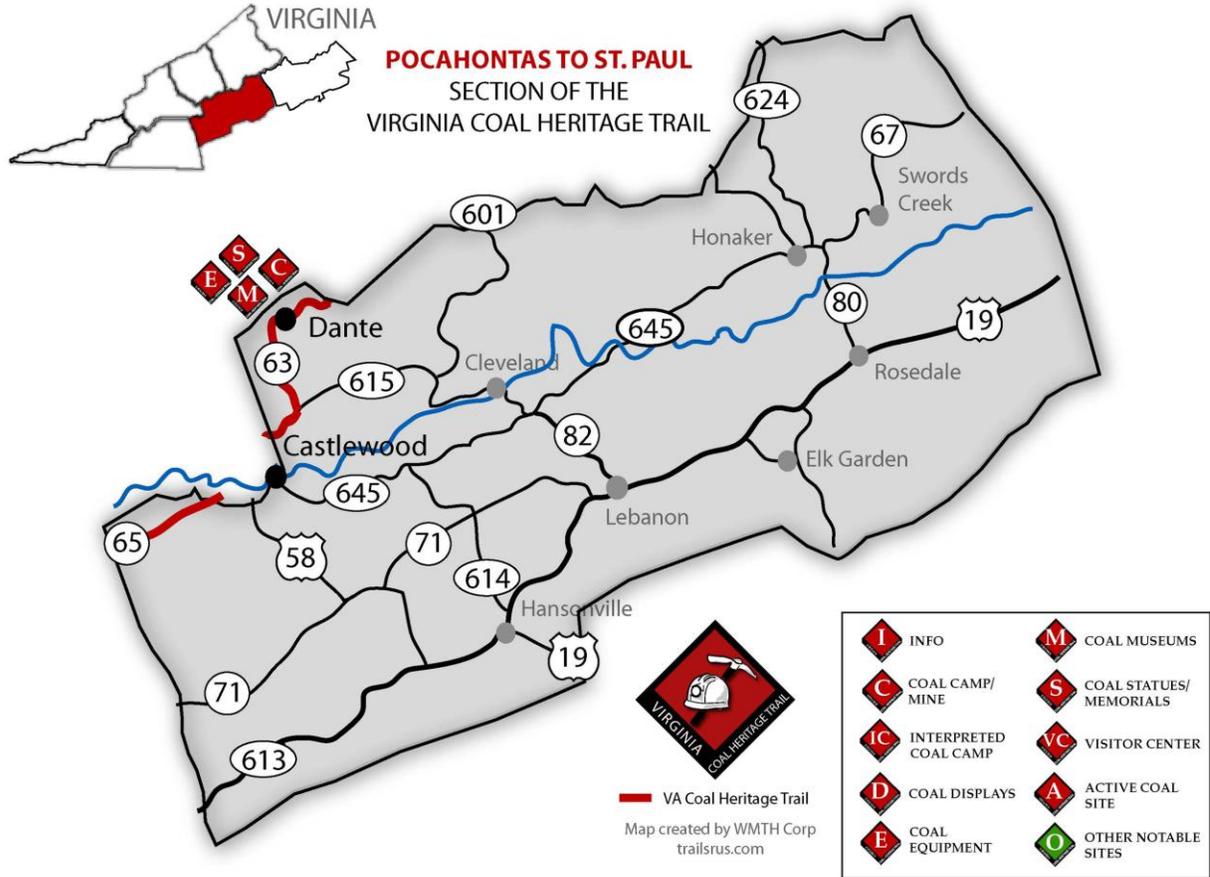


Map of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail through Dickenson County.



CHAPTER IV: HIGHLIGHTS Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail

RUSSELL COUNTY



More information on the sites featured on each of the maps is included in APPENDIX A: Snapshot View of the Byway and in APPENDIX H: Series of Town Meetings.