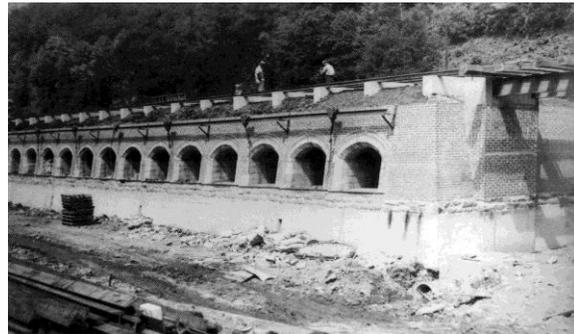




CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES
Coal Camps

Another unique feature of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail that sets it apart from other roads is its rich coal heritage evident in the amazing number of coal camps which once existed along the route, and the many historic structures that still remain. What many people do not realize is these “coal camps” were small cities into themselves. Most had running water, telephones and electricity long before others. They had shoe shops and clothing stores, restaurants and theaters, large hotels and ice cream shops.

Below is a brief history of a few of the coal camps one will pass. Nearly all had schools, many had public transportation, and some had golf courses and skating rinks. These were not “camps” at all but thriving small metropolis in the mountains of Southwest Virginia. Sharing this information with others through websites, publications, and interpretive signs at some of the sites will help those driving the route to better understand and appreciate the rich history and culture of these communities.



Tom’s Creek (photos above) See *Chapter IX on Oral History for more on Tom’s Creek*. Toms Creek is located in the foothills of the Cumberland Plateaus, two miles north of Coeburn, VA. It is snuggled in a cove of mountains refreshed by a small stream. The community was built along both sides of the creek. Carter’s property consisted of thousands of acres in timber and coal. Tom’s Creek had Thelma Store and the Virginia Iron, Coal, and Coke Commissary. The company houses were large and nicely painted with large garden plots.

In 1902, Carter organized The Virginia Iron, Coal and Coke Company and built over 800 coke ovens. Carter’s company was diverse in the types of people it had working for them. Some were Italian immigrants, Hungarian immigrants, blacks from Georgia and South Carolina. There was a huge company store that contained a butcher shop, a dry goods department, grocery department, and a furniture department. The store had a delivery service, at first using horses and wagons and later by truck. The hospital was a huge red bricked two-story building along with a doctor’s office that could make house calls. Theater, post office, machine shop, electric shop, supply house, boarding house and a large stable was also located here.



A few of the buildings still remain.



CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES

Coal Camps

Imboden

Imboden was named after Confederate General John D. Imboden. In 1902 activity in the area increased and by late 1903 a mine was opened and a colliery and town constructed. The building of a two mile long rail line connected the town via the Louisville & Nashville Railroad to Appalachia. With 2 mines open and 325 coke ovens firing, coal production began in earnest in late 1903. Throughout the 1920s, the mine employed a steady stream of workers. Imboden Coal Camp #5 was opened in 1944. Historically the upper part of town served mine number two and the coke ovens and the lower portion served the longer lasting mine number one. The church remains as the focal point for the remaining community.



Appalachia (photos above) *See Chapter IX on Oral History for more on Appalachia*

The Town of Appalachia is considered to be an intact "era town" of the late 1800s-early 1900s. It was once the center of a booming coal mining culture and served as the hub of eight coal camps just outside of town. Many of the coal camps remain as well as much of the coal mining equipment. Appalachia was considered home to the L & N Depot, Appalachian Bank, Adams Hotel, R.N. Cornett Store, and the Three Corner Hotel in the early 1900's.



Nearly all the buildings in the downtown area still stand today including old Five & Dime store that made it into *Ripley's Believe it or Not* plus both the passenger and freight depots and many other structures from that era. Today, the Louis E. Henegar Miners Memorial Park is dedicated to a local mining historian and the numerous coal miners in the community. Many examples of underground equipment used in mining today can be seen here.



Exeter (see above)

Exeter was built and opened for mining in late 1917. The town was originally known for its timber industry and sawmill. Exeter was built as a model community with detailed landscaping and community planning to place neat rows of homes in the hollow along with plenty of room for public buildings. Exeter had a company store, post office, theater, two hotels, a doctor's office, elementary school, theater, and churches. There were also boy scouts, girl scouts, skating and community dances. Many of the homes seen above still exist today and are now privately owned.

Dorchester (photo right – school)

There was a 6-room building erected in 1923 to make a hospital, but they ended up not needing it so it became a school. Their baseball team was very popular and hundreds, sometimes thousands of people came to watch. The post office was established in 1895. Electricity was provided by the Norton Coal Company until 1914-1915 when a power plant was built to furnish power for Dorchester.



Dorchester School House

Blackwood

The town got its name from a coal town situated near Pottsville, Pennsylvania. The land was originally owned by Calvin Pardee with incredible coal and coke potential. Pardee ordered coke ovens built and mine openings dug. The Blackwood Company began shipping coal and coke. Unfortunately, the coal had high sulfur content in comparison to the Stonega Coal. The mines eventually closed. The small community still exists and due to recent mining, the drive through offers visitors a view into modern coal industry.





CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES

Coal Camps

Blackwood Today



One of the homes still remaining.



Old structures are located next to new mining operations.



Derby (photo right)

The town was built to serve as a model community to help stem the growing trend of unionism. After the bitter battles being fought in West Virginia and Kentucky to organize in labor unions, the Stonega Company went out of their way to provide their employees with exceptional living conditions. When completed in 1923, the town of Derby consisted of the typical public buildings along with 100 houses and three mines. Most of the



houses were two story, separated in the middle, made with tile on the exterior and housed two families. Though the town struggled during the Depression, it never totally closed and for the most part the seams remained open and productive on a large scale. In 1934, an explosion of methane gas killed 17 local miners and injured dozens more.. The initial blast trapped several miners inside but they later escaped by themselves. Derby today is one of the best examples of coal town architecture. Many of the original houses remain along with some of the public buildings. In 2004, Derby was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



A few photos of Derby today



Keokee – Lee County (photo above – first Keokee Camp)

Was originally known as Crab Orchard. Initial plans for the town were laid by Charles Perin, a trained mining engineer and former employee of Carnegie Steel. His earlier work had been done in Russian and India where he was known as an innovator in the steel industry. He organized the Keokee Coal & Coke Company and named it after his wife. He then built a town that differed dramatically from the traditional coal town architecture. Public buildings were scattered rather than placed together. The homes were single family cottages sprinkled along the road giving them a sense of privacy and individualism. There was also a depot, commissary, power plant, school, churches, golf course and other establishments. Three mines ran at the same time and this allowed him to experiment with technology. The Keokee operations ran smoothly and profitably until the decline of the coal business.

For the next 20 years, small mines dotted the landscape, then in 1947 the Stonega Company returned to the area and rebuilt the town. The town saw a “second” town emerge that was more advanced than anything previously built on such a scale. The houses had electricity, indoor plumbing, telephone service and attached garages. Rather than renting, the company offered some of the structures for sale to employees who could finance them through payroll deduction. Keokee remains a well preserved mining community. One can still see the old commissary which has now been converted into a gymnasium, the old power plant and the church in the woods along with a few of the 1947 miner homes.

A few of the buildings still remaining in Keokee



The old Company Store is now a gymnasium



The Power Plant was later converted into a theater.



CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES

Coal Camps

Pardee

Pardee grew during the peak of the region's coke production. Based on access to a very clean coal seam of over ten feet, the town became profitable very quickly and grew in size. Up until the 1910s Pardee was one of the most isolated of the region's coal communities. The town was equipped with more than a hundred four room duplex style houses separated by an interior wall and a shared front porch. The town suffered through the Depression but rebounded during WWII. It went into slow decline in the 1960s and 1970s. The town did enjoy a brief resurgence in the 1980s with the filming and release of *Coal Miner's Daughter*. Some years after the movie, the town was completely destroyed and the landscape is completely dedicated to mining.



Pardee was used as the town in the filming of "Coal Miner's Daughter".

Clinchco

Although Clinchco did not become incorporated in 1990, the town's history began over a century before. In an article found at www.dickensoncounty.net/clinchhist.html, the first industry in Clinchco was Sykes Mill, a water powered grist mill started in the late 1800's. *(Photos from website)*



In 1915, the Clinchfield Railroad was built connecting Spartanburg South Carolina to Elkhorn City Kentucky. The railroad established a flagstop at Clinchco (at the time known as Moss) and the town began to grow. A post office was established in 1917 and the town was officially "*named Clinchco in honor of the Clinchfield Coal Corporation which had begun mining operations in the town and had made their first shipments of coal from Clinchco in that year*".



The community was small having only 18 residents in 1913 but quickly began to grow when the railroad came through providing a means to transport the coal out of the mountains. By 1918, the coal company built 285 homes, 10 seven-room apartments, and other buildings including a church, school, theatre, doctor's office, barber shop, confectionery, drug store, four boarding houses and a company store called a commissary that

included a grocery and meat departments, a hardware section and a ladies shop.

"In its heyday, the town of Clinchco was known as a "boom" town, reminiscent of the gold rush towns of the west that sprang up practically overnight. But in 1952 and 1954, Clinchfield closed their mines in Clinchco. They sold off the company houses to individuals, and closed some other businesses. People began to leave the area in search of jobs, many headed north settling in Ohio and Michigan".

For more descriptions on coal camps, go to Chapter IX on Oral and Written History.