



## **CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES** **Abandoned Mine Lands and Mine Land Reclamation**

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In addition to the cultural and historic significance coal has played in Southwest Virginia, mining activities have had a dramatic impact on the landscape and environment of the region. There are many opportunities for travelers on the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail to view the environmental legacy of coal, and what is being done by government agencies, non-profit organizations and businesses in the community to restore and reclaim abandoned mine lands (AML).

Abandoned mine lands are sites that were impacted by mining conducted prior to August 3, 1977 and on which there is no continuing responsibility for reclamation. Areas mined after August 3, 1977 have been reclaimed to effective standards under Virginia laws and regulations. The reclamation of abandoned coal mine lands is funded through reclamation fees paid by the coal industry on coal produced after September 30, 1977. Without the reclamation fees paid by the industry, most of the reclamation would never have been accomplished.

Besides providing an opportunity for visitors to learn more about the important work being done to reclaim mine lands, these sites also highlight many of the intrinsic qualities necessary for the Scenic Byway status by providing insight into man's interactions with the landscape in far Southwestern Virginia. Each of these sites contains some element of the archeological, historic, and natural value of the region.

Most importantly, visitors should also be made aware of the hazards posed by abandoned mines and be aware that most abandoned mine lands are on private property and should only be viewed from pull-outs on VADOT right of way.

An important note on Safety from the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy:

***DMME strongly discourages visitation to abandoned mine land sites as they represent adverse impacts to human health, safety and the environment and pose danger to visitors: STAY OUT STAY ALIVE; for any signage to explain a reclaimed site, this would be the most important statement that could be made; DMME could provide STAY OUT STAY ALIVE flyers that could be laminated and put under glass or plastic.***

#### **Potential AML Sites to along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

The following sites have been suggested by the DMME as potential sites for visitors to view and may be suitable for interpretive signage. Development of any signage or viewing area should be accompanied by appropriate safety and trespassing warning. If desired, pre-reclamation photos are available from the DMME.

1. **Acid mine drainage treatment sites on Ely Creek, along Rt. 765 and just off Route 421 in Lee County.** DMME and partnering agencies have installed passive treatment systems to prevent acid mine drainage from contaminating streams; the treatment systems raise the pH of mine drainage and allows metals



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to drop out into wetlands; the discharges meet strict parameters for discharges from active mines.

#### Ely Creek Acid Mine Drainage Project in Lee County.



*Before*



*After*

*A SUCCESS STORY: The site above was once Virginia's most severe impact of acid mine drainage. After project completion, discharge from the system meets the strict limits for discharges from active mining operations.*

- Wilson Bench Highwall Elimination and good reforestation with native hardwood species.** This site is located northeast of Keokee in Lee County and off Rt. 606. Here, a company has taken second cuts on abandoned mine lands and reclaimed the areas to current, effective standards. The company also used excess soil and rock to backfill abandoned mine land that otherwise would never have been reclaimed,
- Coeburn Sedimentation Project along Front Street in Coeburn.** Sediment eroded from abandoned mines had filled the stream channel and increased the likelihood of flooding; the sediment also adversely impacted aquatic habitat in the Guest and Clinch Rivers. DMME removed the sediment and added habitat structures for aquatic species (pictures would be needed to visualize the impacted stream),
- A bat gate mine seal along Rt. 63 near Dante.** DMME permanently sealed an opening into an abandoned mine to prevent human entry, but to allow bats access to the abandoned workings for habitat; the bat gate is directly adjacent to a pull-out off Rt. 63

In addition to these sites, the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable is working on reclamation of a tipple site located between Pennington Gap and St. Charles off of Highway 606 near the intersection of Hwy 606 & 421. Once completed the proposed site will be open to the public, have educational tools, an outdoor classroom and would be an excellent attraction along the Coal Heritage Trail. The project will potentially be finished in the next few years.

*\*This chapter was prepared by OSM/VISTA Christopher Clark of the Appalachian Coal Country Teams with technical advice from Richard Davis of the DMME and Carol Doss of the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable.*