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EXPLORE VIRGINIA'S COAL COUNTRY ALONG NEW BYWAY

Virginia Coal Heritage Trail offers unique cultural experience

SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA – More than 300 miles of scenic roadways meander through the heart of Virginia's coalfield region, offering travelers glimpses of a culture shaped more than a century ago when commercial coal mining in the commonwealth first began. These picturesque miles stretch through seven counties and recently were designated by the Virginia General Assembly as the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, an official Virginia Byway.

Motorists can view elaborate century-old architecture in Pocahontas and experience Dante, an early 1900s coal company town. Today's modern coal-mining operations are on display through Buchanan County and on railroad trestles that carry coal-filled trains through the mountainous territory of the region. For those who want a true Virginia coal heritage experience, visitors can venture underground into the Pocahontas Exhibition Coal Mine, visit Natural Tunnel State Park where coal is still transported by train through a tunnel formed naturally more than a million years ago, and stay in the "Red Caboose" at the Red Caboose Inn in [Haysi](#).

"The heritage and culture of the Coalfields is a wonderful aspect of Virginia's history, and by designating these routes as a byway, we encourage those who want to explore the area at a more leisurely pace," said Governor Timothy M. Kaine. "Byway routes are specially marked on state and scenic maps for easy trip planning and are part of a coordinated promotional strategy for Virginia tourism."

The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail features many points of interest, including several museums. Among them are:

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- Southwest Virginia Museum, Big Stone Gap
- Historic Crab Orchard Museum, Tazewell
- Dennis E. Reedy Railroad and Coalmining Museum, Clinchco

Visits to one of multiple coal mining memorials – such as in Richlands, Dante and Clinchco – serve as somber reminders of the industry’s dangers, while paying tribute to dedicated workers.

“This trail is a significant example of our tourism development effort in Southwest Virginia,” said Alisa Bailey, president and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corp. “Our team has been working closely with the communities in the region to grow tourism’s footprint, thereby bringing in more tourism dollars.”

The trail winds through portions of Tazewell, Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, Scott, Lee and Wise counties and the city of Norton. Its designation as a byway was sought by local and state officials. A Virginia Byway is a particularly scenic route or one with high cultural value that gives travelers access to areas of scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, natural or archaeological significance. There are approximately 3,000 miles of Virginia Byways.

To see a map of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail in Southwestern Virginia, go to http://www.virginiadot.org/news/resources/coal_heritage_trail_route0707.pdf. For a list of routes included on the trail, go to http://www.virginiadot.org/news/resources/coal_heritage_trail_list0707.pdf

Information about the trail is also featured on www.Virginia.org/CoalHeritageTrail.

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