



CHAPTER VIII: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – SERIES OF MEETINGS

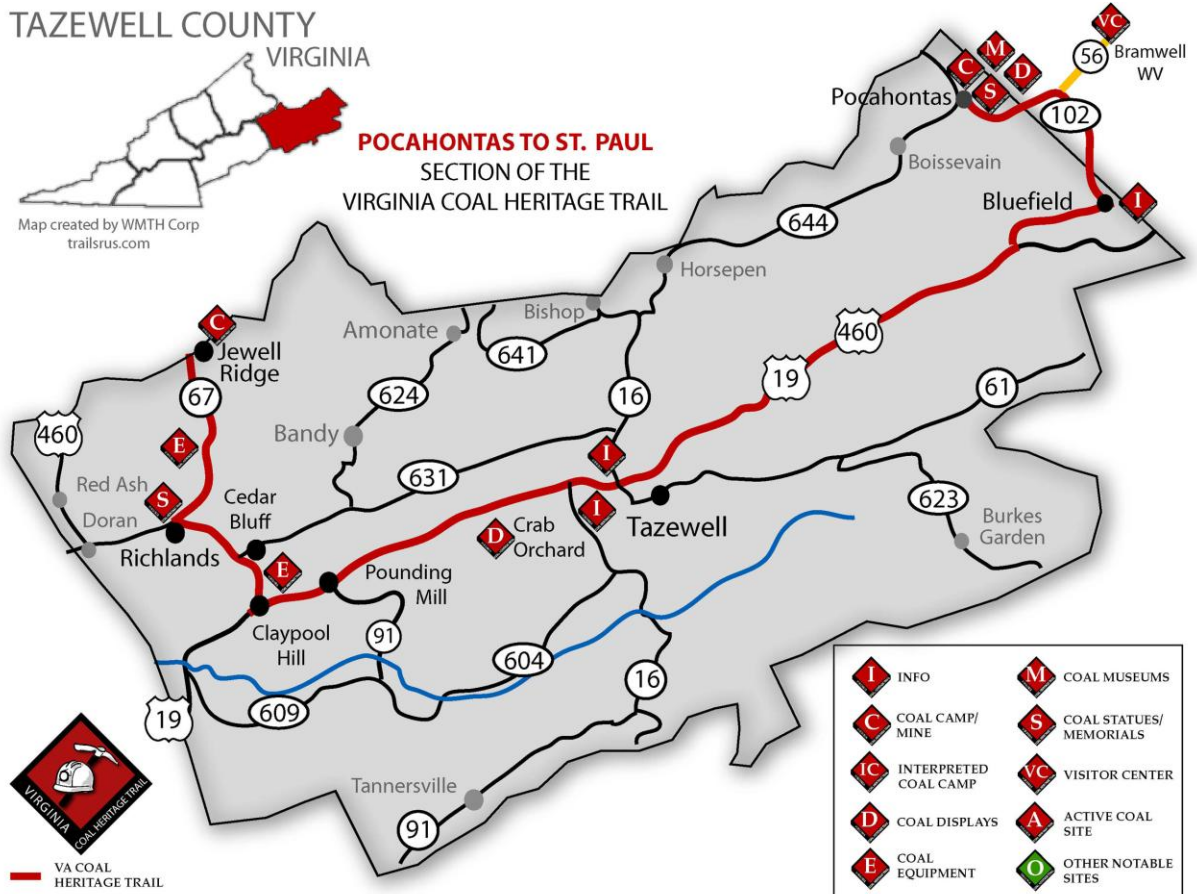
Virginia Coal Heritage Trail Corridor Management Plan Meeting
 in Pocahontas on the Tazewell County portion of the Trail
 October 21st 2010

Attendees:

- *Greg Jones, Town of Pocahontas*
- *Johnny Bell, Town of Pocahontas*
- *Randy Rose, Virginia Tourism Group*
- *Sally Rosh, Center for Christian Action*
- *Thelma Moore, Resident of Pocahontas*
- *James Moore, Resident of Pocahontas*
- *Margie Douglass, Tazewell County Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator*
- *Ginger H. Branton, Executive Director Richlands Area Chamber of Commerce*



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





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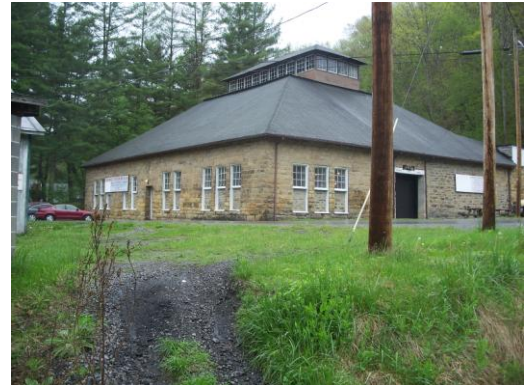
Series of Meetings – Tazewell County Pocahontas Meeting



Those in attendance at the town meeting in Pocahontas talked at length about the historical significance of Pocahontas and its importance as the beginning of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail. Discussions also addressed the fact that Pocahontas was the connector to the Coal Heritage Trail of West Virginia and the site of the only exhibition mine in either state. Pocahontas Mine and Museum is designated a National Historic Landmark and is Virginia's Official Coal Heritage Museum.

Recommendations for the Exhibition Mine Museum:

- Redo the Exhibition Mine Museum with more modern interactive displays and better lighting. Include information and displays on both railroad and coal.
- Use this site as the primary staging area for the byway.
- Expand the displays to include information about the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail
 - Each county could develop their own displays that best reflects the byway offerings and unique features a visitor will find when traveling through that particular county.
 - Displays could be designed in such a way as to be movable. *During the months of January – February when tourism tends to be the slowest due to inclement weather, the displays could be set up at Travel Shows and high traffic areas to create greater awareness and promote increased visitation during Spring, Summer and Fall.*
- Include an extensive gift shop that sells t-shirts, signage, miner hats, and other coal and railroad memorabilia.
- Also recommend a small café be added that offers refreshments, small sandwiches, salads and desserts.
- Cleanliness throughout the buildings and in particularly the restrooms has been noted as “very important” to travelers when surveyed as to overall satisfaction at an attraction.
- Offer an RV park and camping area nearby and easy turn radius for large commercial buses and RV campers both at the campsite and the museum.



Recommendations for the Pocahontas Company Store:

- The Company Store would serve as the primary staging area for downtown Pocahontas.
- Brochures, information and displays should focus on the history of Pocahontas, the first coal camp and how it rose to national prominence in the late 1880's during the coal boom.
- Both walking and driving tours would start from this location.



Pocahontas Company Store

It is also strongly recommended that a downtown historic walking tour be developed which starts at the Pocahontas Company Store. *For more on this, see Chapter VII: Addressing the Issues on developing walking and driving tours.*



Some of the recommended sites include, but are not limited to:

- Company Store (being resurrected – See *Hill Studio Concept Plans*)
- Company Office Building (now a college)
- Company Hospital
- Superintendent’s Home
- A number of company houses
- Cricket Saloon
- Churches
- Butt & Co Coffins where hundreds of caskets were made after a major mining accident although none of the caskets were ever used....Just one of the many stories.

Just a few of the sites to include on the downtown walking tour



Company Store



Pocahontas Fuel Company Building



Cricket Saloon



Butt's Coffins

The courthouse is actually located below the Opera house which once attracted famous performers from all over the world.

- There are also discussions of possibly including a tour of the jail which is located in the basement of the building.

A downtown driving tour was also suggested using 1920's vintage cars and horse-drawn carriages. The passing of a law to allow golf carts on city streets opens the opportunity to offer this mode of transportation as well. A wagon ride was also suggested as it was noted that Pocahontas once had a number of stables.



Opera House & City Hall



Vintage Car Driving Tour is recommended

The proposed passenger train connecting Pocahontas to Bramwell was addressed as well as some alternative transportation opportunities such as a trolley to connect the two towns together until the railroad track is replaced and the route reopened.



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The trolleys could also be used as part of a driving tour for Pocahontas which includes the Exhibition Mine, the Mosque, the murals at the Catholic Church and the cemetery as well as the downtown area.



Interesting side note about the Pocahontas Cemetery:

- Nearly 90% of those in the cemetery are foreigners.
- The Pocahontas cemetery also made it into “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” for having more people buried in the cemetery than lived in the town.

Recommendations:

Pocahontas has the potential to once again become a “destination” location due to its rich heritage, the exhibition mine, and the historic significance of the community. But to reach its true potential and, once again, become an economically viable town, it has to provide visitor amenities such as lodging, restaurants and shopping opportunities. An effort is underway to develop cabins in an area behind the depot. There is also a 10 to 12 lot trailer park currently in the process of shutting down that could possibly be converted into an RV park for visitors.

There are also plans to establish Pocahontas as a trailhead for numerous ATV trails as part of the Spearhead Trails initiative. Already the downtown area allows both ATV’s and golf carts on their streets and trails are in the process of being developed that will eventually connect with West Virginia’s Hatfield & McCoy Trails. The high school is being converted into lodging for the trails and those visiting Pocahontas and the downstairs may become shops, offices, a restaurant and possibly turn the school auditorium into a theater.

(See <http://www.trailsrus.com/swvirginia/> for more on this.)

There are numerous historic buildings and homes in which a few of the rooms could be converted into bed & breakfasts. It was also suggested that a few of the churches could become hostels, providing additional lodging for scout groups, senior citizens and others.

First, and foremost, Pocahontas must focus on making itself visitor-ready both in what it offers and how it presents itself to those coming to the area.*

Resources:

- A CD on the oral history which includes an interview with Edna Drosick on Pocahontas
- David Hill with Hill Studio, 120 West Campbell Avenue SW, Roanoke, Virginia 24011 (540)342-5263, hillstudio@hillstudio.com
- Greg Jones, Pocahontas Town Manager, (276)945-9522, pocahontasva@comcast.net

**Please note: Hills Studio has recently conducted an in-depth analysis of downtown Pocahontas which includes recommendations for many of the historic structures. It is strongly suggested, as funds become available, as many of these improvements be made which will make the community much more “visitor-ready” and help to bring Pocahontas back to its original grandeur.*

Signage was also discussed for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail and how best to have it coordinate with the signage being used in West Virginia but at the same time, set it apart. The consultant is recommending using the same diamond shape as West Virginia but selecting a different symbol and color scheme.

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- Coal Heritage Trail of West Virginia's color scheme is a yellowish orange color. The color scheme recommended for the Virginia's Coal Heritage Trail is red, black and white.
- Two symbol examples were provided and all seemed to agree the miner's helmet and pick provided a very clean, recognizable logo.



Two concepts for Virginia's Coal Heritage Trail logo



West Virginia's Coal Heritage Trail Logo

For more on uniform signage and creating a recognizable logo, see Chapter X: Walking/Driving Tours and Chapter Y: Marketing the Trail.

Side note:

The first Piggly Wiggly store in Virginia was opened in Wise, the second in Norton and the third near Haysi. Pocahontas and St. Paul also once had a Piggly Wiggly. It might be an interesting side story to find the locations of all the Piggly Wiggly's along the route and provide a little history about the first "self-service" grocery that originally started in Memphis Tennessee in 1919 but quickly grew to eventually having over 2,660 stores with annual sales of over \$180,000 million until, fearing a monopoly, the company was divided and sold to regional chains such as Safeway and Kroger.