WLG 504

West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

# Mining Historical Treasures

*Andrea Mender, WVU Extension Agent, Fayette County*
*Lesley Woodrum, WVU Extension Agent, Summers County*

## Educational Objectives

1. Increase knowledge about coal and its relevance to West Virginia history.
2. Provide information on key historical landmarks in West Virginia's coal history.
3. Experience interesting places pertaining to coal history.

## Activities

1. Take a field trip. Pick a destination listed or find somewhere closer that represents coal history.
2. Discuss how coal mining or coal heritage has affected you and/or your family.

## West Virginia's coal history

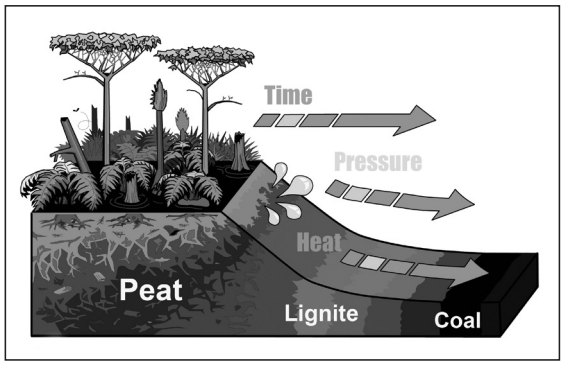
Coal has a long and rich history in West Virginia, which started long before West Virginia was even a state. In 1742, John Peter Salley took a trip across the Allegheny Mountains and discovered coal along a tributary of the Kanawha River, an area now in Boone County, W.Va. This is the first known reference to coal in what is now West Virginia.

Although the presence of coal was discovered in 1742, it wasn't until the mid-1800s that extensive mining began. Coal has been critically important to West Virginia's economy throughout the years. In fact, West Virginia led the nation in coal production from 1927 until 1973. West Virginia's coal industry has not only supported the state economically but also contributed to the American economy – particularly during wartime.

Jefferson and Hardy counties are the only places in West Virginia where coal has not been found.

## What is coal?

Coal isn't just a black rock. It is an organic rock in the same family as petroleum and natural gas. Coal formation is a process that takes several steps over a long period of time.

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- Coal's origins are the remains of plant life that once grew on the surface of the earth in swamps.
- As the plant life decomposed in the swamp waters, sandstone, shale, and limestone were layered on top of peat bogs.
- Through many years, extreme heat and pressure caused the peat to go through chemical and physical changes.
- As more sediment covered the material, the peat eventually turned into rock, which is what we know now as coal.

Coal comes in various forms. Lignite is a soft coal. It has the lowest carbon content and heating value. It is mostly used for generating electricity. Subbituminous coal has less moisture than lignite and is used to produce steam for electricity generation. Reserves are mostly found in the western United States. Anthracite has the lowest moisture and ash content and the highest carbon content, making it the best coal for home-heating. It is found predominantly in Pennsylvania. Bituminous, the type of coal found in West Virginia, contains little moisture and has high heat value. It is used for electricity and to make coke, a coal residue used to produce steel.

Coal is a dark brown to black carbon-rich rock that is mined from mountains or below ground. It is primarily used as a source of energy for heat and electricity, but manufacturers and industries also use coal and coal by-products to make chemicals, cement, paper, ceramics, plastics, medicines, fertilizers, and tar.

There are many places that are important to the coal mining history of West Virginia. Many of these are open to the public and help tell the story of coal. The remainder of this lesson will explore these locations.

## National Coal Heritage Authority and the Coal Heritage Trail

***www.coalheritage.org***

The Coal Heritage Authority includes 13 counties in southern West Virginia. Counties included are Cabell, Wayne, Logan, Mingo, Boone, Wyoming, Summers, Raleigh, Fayette, McDowell, Lincoln, and Mercer. It also includes Paint Creek and Cabin Creek in Kanawha County. The Coal Heritage Trail is located within the National Coal Heritage Area, which covers more than 187 miles. The National Coal Heritage Area Act was passed in 1996 and is based on the national importance of the development of the coal industry in southern West Virginia.

## Northern Appalachian Coal Mining Heritage Association

**22 Coal Country Lane, Fairmont, WV**

***www.orgsites.com/wv/nacmha***

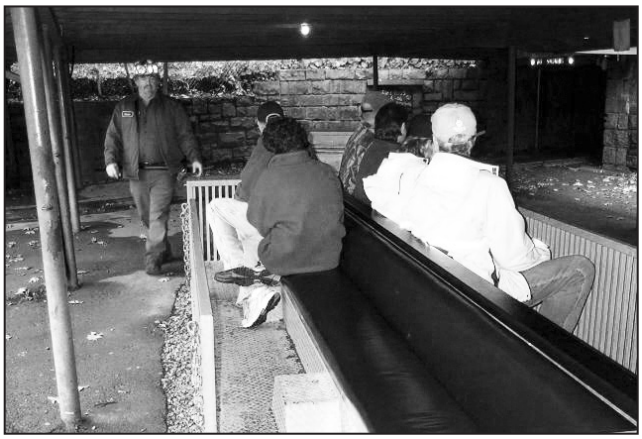
Founded in 2000, the NACMHA educates the public on regional coal history with a focus on Barbour, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia, Preston,

and Taylor counties. NACMHA operates a seasonal interactive coal mining museum in Fairmont, W.Va. adjacent to Coal Country Miniature Golf Course just off of Interstate 79.

## Exhibition Coal Mine

**513 Ewart Avenue, Beckley, WV**
***www.beckley.org/exhibition_coal_mine***

Visitors to the Exhibition Coal Mine ride through the dark passages of a vintage coal mine, and enjoy a guided tour by veteran miners who can provide firsthand accounts of coal mining. General information about the mine, the history of coal mining, and information on mining methods and equipment are all part of the tour. Visitors can also tour the coal camp buildings, including the coal company house, superintendent's home, Pemberton Coal Camp Church, and the Helen Coal Camp School. Also located at the Exhibition Coal Mine is a youth museum and the Mountain Homestead. The Exhibition Coal Mine is open seasonally and is available for group tours and special events. A brisk 58 degrees within the mine, visitors are encouraged to bring a jacket!



## Coal Heritage Museum

**347 Main Street, Madison, WV**
***www.wvcoalmuseum.org***

Boone County boasts being the first place coal was discovered in West Virginia in 1742. This museum seeks to preserve the heritage of the southern West Virginia coalfields through a variety of different things: tools, photographs, oral history, and company records, just to name a few.

## Whipple Company Store and Appalachian Heritage Museum

**7485 Okey L. Patteson Road (Hwy 612), Scarbro, WV**
***www.whipplecompanystore.com***

Built in 1890, it is the only standing company store built by coal baron Justus Collins. The coal camp company store was the center of a coal community. Selling everything from candy to caskets, miners came here to exchange their coal tags for scrip, and women came here to buy the things they needed to run the home. This unique museum is open seasonally and brings the stories of these families to life. Learn about the unique architecture of this building and the history of coal camp life. Kids can take a tour of the simulated coal mine and learn how scrip worked for a miner.

## Scott's Run Miners' Museum

**Osage, WV**
***www.as.wvu.edu/~srsh/tour.html***

Scott's Run was a bustling coal town in the early 1920s. Between 1899 and 1921, coal production in this collection of communities in Monongalia County increased from 57,000 tons to more than 4.4 million tons of coal. Scott's Run was an ethnically diverse community having more than 60 percent of the population foreign-born. By the late 1920s, the coal production once again plummeted. The miners that didn't leave the area were left in poverty and what national observers deemed a "cesspool of human misery."

Most notably for Scott's Run was the attention given by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who made her first trip to the coal camps in the area in 1933 and made efforts to improve living conditions on "The Run." The Scott's Run Miner's Museum exists to celebrate and preserve the history of the coal-boom era in Monongalia County.

## Bramwell

**Bramwell Town Hall, Bramwell, WV**
***www.bramwellwv.com***

Located just north of Bluefield, W.Va., Bramwell is known as the "Town of the Millionaires." Founded in the 1800s, this town was home to the richest and most well-known coal barons. At one time, the Historic Bank of Bramwell was thought to be the wealthiest bank per capita in the country. It is most known for having the largest number of millionaires (19 millionaires at one time) per capita. Bramwell offers self-guided tours, prearranged group tours year-round, and tours of the historic mansions at selected times during the year.

## Matewan

**Matewan, WV**
***www.matewan.com***

Today, the streets of Matewan, located in Mingo County, W.Va., are like any other small coal town in West Virginia – quiet, calm, and relaxing. But on May 19, 1920, it was the site of one of the deadliest shootouts in American history. At the center of this feud was the fight to unionize the southern coalfields. Baldwin-Felts Agency guards came to Matewan to remove striking miners from their homes, and miners, led by town Sherriff

Sid Hatfield and Mayor Testerman, resisted. The ensuing firefight resulted in the deaths of two miners, seven agents, and the mayor. The history of the town is engraved on the outside of a floodwall that protects the town.

## Blair Mountain

**Blair Mountain Heritage Alliance, Blair, WV**
***www.blairmountain.org***

In August 1921, up to 13,000 miners hoping to organize the United Mine Workers in the southern coalfields were led by organizer Bill Blizzard on a march to Logan County. They were met by deputies and mine guards, and for five days they were in a battle for the coalfields. The revolting miners were eventually turned back by gas and pipe bombs dropped by United States Army Air Service. This was the largest labor insurrection in United States history.

## References

*www.teachcoal.org*
*www.transportation.WV.gov*
*www.WVcoalhistory.com*
*www.yourdictionary.com*

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