

Twin Falls to Bluefield to Iaeger and return

This trip follows the former N&W mainline between Bluefield and Iaeger. Be aware, this area is farther away from Twin Falls and will take longer than expected due to slow traffic, sharp curves, speed limit restrictions, and any stops you may make. The former N&W mainline is busy; expect to see several trains along the way.

Use the Twin Falls to Kellysville railfan guide to reach Bluefield by way of WV 97/WV 54/WV 16/WV 10/US 19/US 460. Take US 460 to I-77 south to US 52 West/Bluefield, exit 1. Take US 52 to the stoplight at the T with US 19 at the yard. Turn left on US 19. There really isn't a much faster way. The listing begins at Bluefield and ends at Iaeger/Auville Yard.

Bluefield Yard– Mile Post N363.3 – US 52/19

Bluefield was one of the two large coal marshalling yards for the N&W (the other being Williamson). NS today has removed many tracks; however, the coaling tower and lubritorium still remain (2012).

Travel south on US 19 into Virginia. Turn right on VA 102 at the stoplight and pass under the tracks.

Note: Gas is cheaper in Virginia than in West Virginia. Be sure to top off your tank!

Yards, VA/WV – Mile Post N370.6 - VA 102

Flat Top Yard was used by the N&W to store coal for fill outs for Bluefield Yard. NS continues to use the yard today. CR 102/5 is a public road that travels along the west side of the yard.

The road winds between VA and WV for the next several miles between Yards and Pocahontas.

Pocahontas Junction – Mile Post - N373.7 - VA 102

The Pocahontas Branch (abandoned) leaves the mainline at Pocahontas Junction. This branch led to the town of Pocahontas and the famous mine there (see below).

Bluestone Junction – Mile Post N374.1- VA 102

The Bluestone Branch (abandoned in place) leaves the mainline at Bluestone Junction. This branch is an empire to itself, with several sub-branches. The location was also home to the electrification power plant. Little can be seen at this location today.

Make a left turn at the Pocahontas cemetery and continue on VA 102 to Pocahontas, VA.

Pocahontas VA – Mile Post PB 1.5 – VA 102

Pocahontas is the location of the first coal mine on the N&W. Frederick Kimball travelled to Pocahontas to see the 18 foot exposed coal seam which resulted in the N&W New River extension being built.

Pocahontas was a thriving town in it's day, complete with an opera house that is still standing (2012). What is not standing anymore is the company store, the last part was taken down in 2012 even as preservationists were attempting to save it.

The Pocahontas mine, closed many years ago, is now an exhibition mine. Follow the signs and take the tour if you have time.

Turn around and return to the Pocahontas cemetery. Angle left just past the cemetery on the hill on the left to WV 120

Coopers, WV – Mile Post 374.5 - WV 120

Coopers was named after John Cooper, the man who built Mill Creek Coal & Coke, one of the earliest mines on the N&W. The company store is still standing (2012) as well as John Cooper's home.

The N&W main crosses WV 120 on the Cooper bridge. This large, heavy structure was built as part of the new Elkhorn tunnel realignment in 1950 that eliminated the old electrified single track tunnel. The bridge also crosses the Bluestone branch (abandoned).

The mainline is not visible for several miles. Instead, WV 120 follows the Bluestone branch (abandoned).

Bramwell, WV –Bluestone Branch (Abandoned in place) Mile Post 3.4 - WV 120

Bramwell was the home of many of the coal barons in the early 1900's. Supposedly in its' heyday it boasted the highest percentage of millionaires of any town in the United States. Look around, you can see many of these huge homes in town, most of which have been well-maintained. Be sure to stop in at the Corner Store if it is open for ice cream or drinks.

Bramwell is also home to a rebuilt station which houses a small museum and several rail cars including a Virginian Caboose.

Continue on WV 120 to US 52. Turn left on US 52 West to cross the mountain. No tracks will be visible, but going up you will be following roughly an abandoned branch to Buckeye, an abandoned mine. Near the top of the mountain is Pinnacle Rock State Park on the right, the smallest state park in WV. A trail leads to the top of the rock which provides a breathtaking panoramic view of the area south. The downward road follows another abandoned branch and the stone foundations of an abandoned tipple can still be seen.

Maybeury – Mike Post N378.2 - US 52

The town was named after two of the coal barons, May and Beury. At Maybeury the main line crosses the road. This through truss bridge is at the other end of the new Elkhorn tunnel realignment in 1950 that eliminated the old electrified single track tunnel.

Maybeury is the location where on June 30, 1937, Y-5 No. 2092 pulling westbound train No. 85 fell off the old trestle and exploded in the town below, although no evidence of that disaster remains today. CR 10 and 10/1 turn left at this point and follow the main line towards Elkhorn tunnel although nothing much remains there to see. Maybeury was the home of one Elkhorn Coal and Coke, the company store was torn down in the 1990's. Stay on US 52 West.

Switchback – Mile Post - N380– US 52

Switchback is the location of the old Appalachian Power plant that can be seen in many old photos. The facility is still in existence (2012) but not used. It can still be seen on the north side of the tracks up on the hillside and can be accessed by Power House Road, CR 52/12.

Elkhorn – Mile Post ~N381.2– US 52

Elkhorn is accessed on CR 52/11 and 52/26 from US 52. It is worth a drive down the road to see the Post office on the left, the water company on the right, and the gold-domed now closed Russian Orthodox Church across the tracks. Elkhorn was the home of both Crozier Coal and Coke and also Houston Coal & Coke. Little remains of the mines today.

Upland – Mile Post N382– US 52

Upland was the home of Upland Coal and Coke. Little remains of the mine today.

Powhatan – Mile Post N383.5– US 52

Powhatan, the site of a middle track, was named after the father of Pocahontas. The town was the home of Powhatan Coal & Coke. Little remains of the mine today.

On June 12, 1946, eastbound passenger train No. 26, *The Powhatan Arrow*, derailed at Powhatan. The seven car train pulled by class J No. 604, derailed due to “excessive speed on a curve.” Two employees were killed and twenty-seven people were injured.

Kyle – Mile Post N385- US 52

Kyle was the home of Lynchburg Coal & Coke. Little remains of the mine today.

Northfork - Mile Post - US 52

Northfork is the location where the Northfork Branch (abandoned) left the mainline. This seven mile branch was home to many coal companies (Algoma, Gillian, Greenbrier, Algonquin, Ashland, United Pocahontas to name several but not all). Turn right on CR 17 to access the Northfork Branch although little remains today other than the Ashland company store which was reopened to accommodate four-wheeler tourism a few years ago.

Northfork is also the location of one of O. Winston Link's popular photographs where he stood on the station platform and shot across the tracks. Sadly, nothing remains of the station or the buildings in his picture other than the back walls which are holding up the hillside.

Keystone – Mile Post N387.3 – US 52

Keystone was the location of Keystone Coal & Coke. The preparation plant/tipple is still in operation although no coal is mined at this location. Unfortunately a very tall coal dust fence hides most of the tipple complex. The original stone powerhouse still stood before the fence was put up a few years ago.

Eckman Yard – Mile Post 387.5 – US 52

Eckman Yard was the original west end of electrification on the N&W until it was extended to Iaeger. The yard still remains and has been used for truck loading of coal. The last of the buildings were torn down in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

Eckman– Mile Post N388.3– US 52

Eckman is the location where a short spur to a mine leaves the mainline just past a double crossover. The town was home to Pulaski Iron & Coal and the company office building is still in existence (2012).

Landgraf –Mile Post N389.3 – US 52

Landgraf was the home of Empire Coal & Coke and Vera Pocahontas Coal & Coke. A company store was torn down in the 1990's, but the brick office building on the right side of the road still stands and is a bed and breakfast (2012).

Vivian Bottom – Mile Post N390.8 – US 52

Vivian was home to a Pocahontas Fuel mine that went through several changes of ownership. The company office building still stood a few years ago. Take CR 52/3 down to the town, then turn right at the tracks.

Kimball – Mile Post N391.9 – US 52

Kimball was named after Frederick Kimball, the popular president of the N&W and was the home of King Coal and Coke, Tidewater Coal and Coke, and Houston Coal & Coke.

Carswell – Carswell Branch (Abandoned) - US 52

Carswell was the location of a short spur up Carswell Hollow to a mine. The company office still stands on US 52 and was most recently the police station. Turn on CR 52/6 and 52/4 to see the building with three boxcar ends on the wall.

Huger – Mile Post N395.6 – US 52

US 52 crosses over the main line as it passes through twin tunnels at Superior.

Maitland – Mile Post N396.7 – US 52

Maitland was the home of one of the Houston Collieries mines.

Welch – Mile Post 398.1 – US 52

Welch is the county seat of McDowell County. The county courthouse is the location that Sid Hatfield was gunned down for his part in the Matewan Massacre.

The N&W mainline tracks pass through the 'freight tunnel'. The passenger track passed through the town but is abandoned. The original station was located where the library is today. The old station burned down years ago, interestingly the fire department burned in the same fire.

Tug Fork Jct. – Mile Post 399.7 – US 52

The Tug Fork Branch leaves the mainline at Welch and head south. This was a large branch that primarily served the huge US Steel facility in Gary along with other mines.

As the tracks take a short cut through the freight tunnel, it is not possible to follow the tracks. Continue on US 52 to Business/Alt US 52 through Welch. Turn right on WV 16 North, then go straight on CR 7 at the Hospital.

Note: Welch is a point where you could turn north on WV 16 to reach Pineville and Mullens on the ex-Virginian tracks. Continuing on WV 16 north provides a more direct route to return to Twin Falls. Take WV 16 to Pineville, turn left on WV 10 then turn right on WV 97. Turn right into Twin Falls.

The other option is to continue following the N&W tracks and make the much longer Jaeger-Gilbert loop

Hemphill – Mile Post N400 – CR 7

Hemphill was the location of the Solvay Collieries/Kingston Pocahontas mine. Little remains of the mine but it can be accessed by CR 7/33. The mainline tracks pass through two tunnels and a bridge in between at this location.

Capels – Mile Post N402.8 - CR 7

Capels was the location of the Central Pocahontas/New River and Pocahontas mine. Little remains today

Farm – Mile Post N401.1 – CR 7

Farm is the location of a middle track where pushers are often added to eastbound trains. It is also the location of one of the few remaining coaling towers.

This was once the location of the McDowell County poor farm, hence the name Farm.

Mohegen – Mile Post 403.1 – CR 7

Mohegen was the location of Welch Pocahontas and Monarch Smokeless Coal. Little remains today.

Davy – Mile Post N406.7 – CR 7

Davy was the location of the Superior Pocahontas mine. Little remains today.

Twin Branch Mile Post N307.6 – CR 7

Twin Branch was the location of Fordson Coal owned by Ford. When unionization was imminent, Ford closed the mine and sold everything including the houses. Nothing remains today.

CR 7 passes through an old N&W single track tunnel at Twin Branch while the mainline passes through a double track tunnel.

Marytown – Mile Post N408.7 – CR 7

Marytown was the location of the Solvay Collieries/Kingston Pocahontas mine. Little remains of the mine.

Hensley (Claren) –Mile Post N410.3 - CR 7

Hensley was the location of JB&B (Jewell, Bigalow, & Brooks) Coal Company. Little remains of the mine.

Big Sandy – Mile Post N411.3– CR 7

Big Sandy was the location of the Solvay Collieries/Kingston Pocahontas and Hampton Roads Collieries. Little remains today.

Roderfield – Mile Post 412.6 – CR 7

Roderfield is the location of two tunnels with double crossovers in between at the location of the old station (gone). It was the home of Silver Creek Mining, Baldwin Pocahontas, and Lynwin Pocahontas Coal mines. Not sure if these were one, two, or three different mines.

Roderfield is the location where the Spice Creek Branch leaves the mainline. This branch is used infrequently when a small mine is operating nowadays.

CR 7 ends at US 52. You have a choice here. Should you decide to end your tour and return, turn left on US 52 (East) and you will have a quicker return to Welch. If you decide to continue on the tour, turn right (West) to continue to follow the mainline. US 52 follows the Spice Creek branch, which serves a small truck loader tipple that operates infrequently.

Clear Fork Junction – Mile Post N416.9– US 52

This is the location of the junction with the now abandoned Clear Fork Branch that served the mines at Coalwood and Six, made famous by the Rocket Boys/October Sky book/movie. It is not possible to access these locations from US 52 at this point. Instead, access is south on WV 16 off US 52 out of Welch and not covered here.

Iaeger – Mile Post N422.3 – US 52

Iaeger was nominally the location of Virginia Red Ash Pocahontas, Ideal Red Ash Pocahontas, and Little War Creek Coal. Not sure if these were one, two, or three different mines but would guess two.

Iaeger was the location of O. Winston Link's most famous picture at the Iaeger drive-in. Unfortunately, the drive-in is long gone and this location has been drastically altered to the point it is hardly recognizable today.

Turn left on WV 80 south at Iaeger.

Auville Yard– Dry Fork Branch Mile Post 0.3 – WV 80

Auville yard is the location of one of the remaining coaling towers on the N&W tracks. There is a wye here for turning trains, the yard is actually on the Dry Fork Branch which provides a cut-off to the Clinch Valley District in Virginia and more importantly provided access to many mines, some of which are still active today.

Auville Yard was the end of the electrification after it was extended from Eckman.

The mainline listing now ends as the mainline leaves US 52 for a very long stretch and when it rejoins the main, it would be better covered by a Williamson convention railfan point. At this point there are several options. Option one would be to return to Welch and turn left on WV 16 to Pineville. Really the best option, number two, would be to continue on US 52 East toward Gilbert and turn right there on WV Route 97 East and follow the ex-Virginian Guyandot River branch to Pineville and Twin Falls. Option three would be to continue south on WV 80. The towns and mines on the Dry Fork Branch will not be listed here.

Note: Continuing on the Dry Fork Branch will add many hours to your trip. You're between one or two hours away from Twin Falls at Iaeger the way it is.

The travelogue will assume Option two. Option one is just a reverse of this travelogue, option three is not covered, so option two follows.

Return to US 52 and turn left(west). Continue on US 52 to Gilbert.

Gilbert – MP 41.1 Guyandot River Branch – US Route 52

The Town of Gilbert was served by the Chesapeake and Ohio, Norfolk and Western, and Virginian Railways.

At Gilbert turn around and travel back US 52 to Justice.

Justice – MP 39.5 Guyandot River Branch – US Route 52

Turn left on WV 97.

Baileysville – MP 26.0 – WV Route 97The Guyandot Branch from Baileysville to near Gilbert Yard was relocated during the early seventies because of construction of the R. D. Bailey Lake.

Wyoming – MP 18.7 – WV Route 97This mine was opened by W.M. Ritter Lumber Co. subsidiary Red Jacket Coal Corp. in the thirties. It is located on a short spur from the main at Mada. Company houses and store remain from this coal camp.

Marianna – MP 21.1 – WV Route 97The Marianna Smokeless Coal Company obtained a lease from the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company to mine coal in the Sewell seam. The first car of coal was loaded October 1, 1940. The mine was purchased by Island Creek Coal Company in 1963 and closed. The tipple, now demolished, was later used by the Robinson-Phillips Coal Company to replace their Douglas tipple which was closed by construction of the R.D. Bailey Lake.

Alpha Natural Resources, formerly Massey Energy, is building a new tipple at Marianna.

Kepler - Mile Post 16.0 – Guyandot River Branch - WV Route 97The Kepler Processing Company, Inc. operates a tipple about four miles downstream of Pineville. This mine was built after the Virginian merger during the N&W era on the site of an earlier Boy Scout camp.

Pineville – MP 12.4 Guyandot River BranchThe Town of Pineville was incorporated in 1907 and is the site of the Wyoming County courthouse. The Virginian freight house still stands in Pineville and is located at the road crossing near the city park/pool (2012).

Turn left in Pineville to stay on WV 97.

Saulsville – WV Route 97

Turn Right into Twin Falls.