

## Twin Falls to Deepwater and Return

This trip follows the former Virginian mainline between Maben and Deepwater including the New River Gorge Bridge at Fayetteville and Thurmond on the C&O. The tour begins at Twin Falls. Turn right/east on WV 97.

### **WV 97 Trestle - V&W Mile Post 2.9 - WV 97**

This 312' trestle spans WV 97 on the abandoned-in-place Virginian & Western (Glen Rogers) branch.

Turn left on WV 54 at Maben.

### **Maben - Mile Post 381.7 - WV 54**

*W.M. Ritter Lumber Company*

The W.M. Ritter Lumber Company, of Columbus, Ohio, operated a sawmill at Maben until the mid Forties and a narrow gauge railroad till the early Thirties. Standard gauge shay locomotives operated over the Virginian to access timber located along the Guyandot River Branch. W. M. Ritter No. 1, a 3-truck shay used at Maben, is now located at the Cass Scenic Railroad in Cass, WV, awaiting rebuilding. Georgia-Pacific later purchased the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company in 1960.

*Winding Gulf Coals, Inc.*

The West Gulf mine of Winding Gulf Coals, Inc. was located west of Maben. The spur serving this mine crossed WV Route 54 and the tipple site is still visible.

Maben is also the location of a passing siding that ends at Virwest, MP 380.4

### **WV 54 bridge - Mile Post 384.9 - WV 54**

The VGN crosses WV 54 and Slab Fork Creek on a deck girder bridge just south of Hotchkiss. Note the stone pier in the creek. Most, but not all VGN piers in water are stone, not concrete.

### **Hotchkiss - Mile Post 385.6 - WV 54**

Hotchkiss was named after an early explorer and surveyor of the area.

### **Slab Fork - Mile Post 387.9 - CR 34**

This former coal camp was home of Slab Fork Coal Company, an early mine on the Virginian Railway. The mine was named after the Slab Fork of the Guyandotte River. There was both a passing siding and a depot at Slab Fork, both of which have been removed.

Grammy award winning singer/songwriter Bill Withers was born at Slab Fork. Withers moved to Beckley after the death of his father in a mining accident. Famous for songs such as "Lean On Me" and "Ain't No Sunshine", Withers was recently (2007) inducted in the inaugural class to the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame.

CR 34 has taken on more traffic recently as the 'Coal Fields Expressway' ends at CR 34 and many of the locals use this new road to travel to Mullens from Beckley now.

### **Slab Fork Trestle - Mile Post 387.8 - CR 34**

Slab Fork Trestle is a large, fourteen section deck girder trestle 613 feet long that spans Slab Fork, CR 34, and the town. The station was located at the west (north) end of the trestle and the station platform extended the full length of the trestle but a good portion has now been removed.

This trestle was made somewhat famous when a picture of the then-new Train Masters were posed on the trestle for a picture that was included on the cover of the 195X annual report. Later it gained a little more notoriety when a picture was included by noted modeler Tony Koester in an article in Model Railroader magazine in the 1990's.

### **Jenny Gap Tunnel - Mile Post 390.8 - WV 54**

Jenny Gap Tunnel is 899 feet long. The South/East portal can be spotted from WV 54 when traveling north. Watch for the tracks to appear to the east of WV 54. The tunnel was built for double track but the second track was never added. This is the location of storage track and Jenny Gap Tunnel. During the steam era eastbound pushers would cut off here and return to Page.

This is the infamous tunnel location where the C&O dug the tunnel but the VGN stole it. That tunnel was a single track tunnel and is now buried under WV 54. This was the site in 1905 of the literal stealing one night of the completed C&O tunnel by competing Deepwater Ry. forces. After a ruling by the Raleigh County Circuit Court against the Deepwater, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruled against the C&O, a case so important that it probably determined the entire future of the Virginian. That original single-track tunnel was replaced in 1914 by the double tracked tunnel currently in use. The second track was never installed in the new tunnel and it remains single track. In fact, the easy grade of WV 54 south of this location is due to the fact it was built on the never-used C&O grade.

### **Lester - Mile Post 392.2 - WV 305/WV 54**

Turn left on WV 305 at Lester. This small town was home to both the Virginian and the C&O. Lester was one of the stations used by Beckley residents to catch VGN passenger trains. In recent years, the town has a local reputation as a speed trap. **Slow down in Lester!**

### **Surveyor - Mile Post 304.7 WV 3/WV 305**

Surveyor was the location of a siding and a storage track. A mine run reported to work at Surveyor until the 1940s, switching mines at Eccles and Glen White.

The C&O line to Lester (now abandoned) crossed the Virginian overhead east of the east switch at Surveyor. Another C&O branch along the Marsh Fork of the Coal River (out of service) crossed the Virginian overhead just west of the west switch at Surveyor.

Trap Hill High School, now closed, was located at Surveyor. Bolt native James Cecil "Little Jimmie" Dickens, member of the Grand Ole Opry and Country Music Hall of Fame, graduated from Trap Hill in 1941.

### **Eccles - Mile Post 399.1 - WV 3**

This was the location of the Eccles mines which lasted for most of the life of the Virginian and into the N&W era. Eccles, a shaft mine, was owned by Eastern Gas & Fuel Associates in the late Forties, loaded to both the Virginian and the C&O. The current Eccles mine loads only to CSX.

### **Harper - Mile Post 400.6 - WV 3**

The small community of Harper bordered on the west the coal camp at Eccles. The depot at Harper was convenient for passengers from Beckley using Virginian passenger trains.

Turn left on CR 11 at Harper.

### **Sugar Camp Trestle - VGN - Milepost 401.7**

The Sugar Camp trestle is 570 feet long yet can barely be seen today to the west of CR 11 as the trees have grown a lot in the intervening years.

### **Sweeneyburg Trestle - VGN - Milepost 403.3**

The Sweeneyburg trestle is 750 feet long and can easily be seen from the road that passes under it. In fact, two roads pass under the trestle, the second being CR 11.

Continue on CR 7 in Raleigh County to CR 23 in Fayette County. It's really the same road but turn left on WV 23 just past the I-77 underpass and proceed through Pax and get on I-77 north. Get off at the next exit, Mossy WV 612.. This short trip does take you through a toll booth.

Alternative - stay on WV 23 through Mossy to avoid tolls. This is a narrow road.

No matter which route you take to get to WV 612, take WV 612 east towards Oak Hill to continue.

**Paint Creek Trestle - VGN - Milepost 414.5**

The Paint Creek trestle is 513' long and spans Little Paint Creek and WV 612. The best viewing spot is found by turning on CR 15/2 and parking in the church parking lot and walking up into the field above the church.

For the brave of heart, continue 2 miles on gravel CR 15/2.

**Braggs Fork Trestle - VGN- Milepost 416.0**

The Braggs Fork trestle is 588' long and spans Braggs Fork and CR 15/2. This is another trestle that the trees have grown a lot in the intervening years to make pictures difficult.

Either continue up the hill on gravel CR 15/2 or turn around and return the other (flat) way to WV 612. Either way turn left (east) on WV 612 to continue.

The main line continues over Silver Gap and is not accessible at this point.

Continue on WV 612 east.

**Carlisle - White Oak Branch (Abandoned)**

Carlisle is the location of the New River Carlisle/Oakwood company store. It has been a carpet store and is now a private residence, please respect the privacy of the owners when taking pictures.

**Whipple - C&O branch (Abandoned)**

Whipple is the location of the Whipple Company Store where we will stop for a tour and lunch during the convention. The mine was located on a C&O branch that the Virginian served through the White Oak Railway. This store is one of the company stores that you can actually tour and is a must-see destination. Please mention the N&WHS convention when you are there!

Turn left at the store and continue to WV 15, turn left, and then subsequently turn left on WV 61 north. This is the town of Oak Hill. Both will be left turns at stop lights. Continue on WV 61 to Oak Hill Junction (VGN – Milepost 417.7). Turn left just past the abandoned White Oak tracks (Now a paved rail-to-trail) on CR 61/28 and proceed to the Oak Hill Station.

**Oak Hill Depot - White Oak Branch ~MP 1.7**

The Oak Hill depot is on the Oak Hill Branch (abandoned) which used to be the White Oak Railway. Former joint VGN/C&O depot located on the White Oak Branch. The station, first built for the White Oak Ry., is now owned by the White Oak Chapter of the NRHS and is painted VGN orange and white.

Return to WV 61 and turn right/north, which essentially follows the VGN main all the way to Deepwater from here.

**Ingram Branch – VGN – Milepost 422.9 – Mary Francis Coal Co. – Mary Francis #2**

The mine was located on the Ingram Branch of Loop Creek.

**Hamilton – VGN – Milepost 423.4 – WV Route 61**

Hamilton was a passing siding that has since been removed.

**Kincaid – WV Route 61**

Former junction with spur to Stahl.

**Stahl – VGN – Eastern Gas and Fuel Associates – Powellton No. 6**

A spur along Johnson Branch of Loop Creek served the mine.

**Page – VGN – Milepost 426.8 – Page Mining Company – WV Route 61**

Page, named for Col. William Page who was an early coal operator and helped plan the Virginian Railway. This was the western terminal of the Virginian and served as home of mine runs and pusher crews. A locomotive shop and beanery were located at Page.

A new mine is now in operation at Page. This was just opened a few years ago.

**Beards Fork Junction – VGN – Milepost 430.3 – WV Route 61**

Junction with Beards Fork Branch (now abandoned).

**Optional - Beards Fork** Turn left on CR 61/5.

**Beards Fork – VGN – Eastern Gas and Fuel Associates**

The Beards Fork Branch is approximately 3.1 miles long with a maximum 3.48% grade. Very steep, but loads ran downhill, only empties had to fight the grade. Mainline trains Nos. 5 and 6 once provided passenger service.

Turn around, return to WV 61 and turn right to continue.

**Robson Tunnel – VGN - Milepost 429.9**

The VGN main passes through Robson tunnel which is 277' long just before it crosses WV 61 and Loop Creek

**Robson –VGN – Milepost 430.8 – WV Route 61**

Robson was originally located on the Loup Creek and Deepwater Railway, a predecessor of the Virginian Railway. This line was built to serve a sawmill at Robson.

**Deepwater – VGN/C&O – Vaco Branch – WV Route 61**

Deepwater was the western end of the VGN mainline till 1931 and connection with the C&O. The first mile of the western end of the original mainline was renamed the Vaco Branch after construction of the Kanawha River bridge. The Vaco branch now is used only for interchange with the ex-C&O tracks while the new mainline passes through a tunnel and over several bridges at Deepwater:

**Deepwater Tunnel** - 492 feet long

WV 61 bridge - one deck girder section

C&O bridge - one deck girder section

Kanawha River bridge/trestle at MP 434.8 - 1821 feet long - longest on the VGN main line.

Continue on WV 61 north/west to Montgomery.

**Montgomery – C&O - WV 61**

Montgomery, located on the Fayette / Kanawha County line, is the home of West Virginia University Institute of Technology.

At Montgomery, cross over the Kanawha River to US 60. Turn east on US 60.

**Smithers – NYC – US 60**

Smithers was named for James Smithers, an early settler. This Fayette County community is located across the Kanawha River from Montgomery.

Before the construction of a wye at Dickinson, Elmore/Dickinson crews would turn their mallets on the wye at Smithers. This was normally done while northbound to Dickinson, if time allowed. The Dickinson turntable was not long enough to hold the VGN mallets.

### **DB Tower – NYC/VGN – Milepost 435 – US 60**

Located 435 miles from Norfolk, DB Tower is the western end of the VGN mainline and connection with the NYC. The NYC connection was officially placed in service on March 15, 1931, when passenger train No. 5 crossed the bridge on its way to Charleston.

### **Gauley Bridge - US 60**

Gauley Bridge is where the New and Gauley Rivers form the Kanawha River. It also served as an interchange between the NYC and C&O. The Nicholas, Fayette and Greenbrier Railroad, jointly operated by the C&O and NYC, was located about 10 miles upstream from Gauley Bridge at Swiss Junction.

At the far east end of town is a bridge over the New River that provided access to the C&O.

### **Hawks Nest - US 60**

Hawks Nest State Park, which dates to the thirties, overlooks the New River Gorge. The park includes a lodge and tram to the canyon floor. It is also the location of a famous engineering project where the water from the New River was diverted through a several mile long tunnel to increase water flow for an electrical power. The water diversion tunnel entrance can be seen from the scenic overlook at the top of the hill. Park in the lot across the road from the gift shop. Just past this point the C&O crosses the New River and has tracks on both sides of the river.

Continue on US 60 to US 19. Take US 19 south.

### **New River Gorge National River - Fayetteville - US 19**

US 19 crosses the New River over the famous New River Gorge Bridge at Fayetteville. A good view of the bridge can be had by stopping at the northeast end of the bridge at the Visitor Center and hiking down a trail. A truly spectacular bridge, this is the one that one day a year (bridge day) they allow people to jump off of with parachutes.

Continue south on US 19 to Oak Hill. Turn off US 19 just south of town on WV 16 east/south. Continue on WV 16 to Glen Jean. Turn left on CR 25.

### **Glen Jean - WV 16**

Glen Jean is the location of a famous bank which still stands. It now belongs to the National Park Service.

### **C&O (R.J. Corman) - Glen Jean to Thurmond**

The former C&O Loup Creek Sub-Division, now operated by R.J. Corman, follows CR 25 to Thurmond. The picturesque line serves a mine at Pax.

### **Thurmond - C&O**

Thurmond is part of the New River Gorge National River. The National Park Service has restored the depot and stabilized other buildings in town. It is one of the magical places in railroad history even if it is on a different railroad.

Thurmond played the part of the Norfolk and Western community of Matewan in the 1987 John Sayles film "Matewan." The film was based on the famed "Matewan Massacre" involving Baldwin-Felts detectives that were evicting striking miners from their company owned homes.

Return to WV 16, turn left, proceed to US 19 access and continue south to I-77. There is a toll booth to get on/off the expressway at this point. Travelling through Beckley avoids the toll but it is a minimal amount.

Exit I-77 at the WV 16 Sophia exit. Travel down WV 16. You have three(!) choices at this point. One would be to exit onto WV 54 and go though Lester (remember to slow down!) to Maben and turn right on WV 97 to return to Twin Falls as described in the directions to Twin Falls on the website. This way follows the main line from Lester to Maben. Option two is longer, follow the Twin Falls to Mullens loop guide from Sophia down the Winding Gulf branch to Mullens and back to Twin Falls (listed separately).