

## Twin Falls to Mullens Loop

This trip follows the former Virginian mainline between Twin Falls and Mullens with a return via the Winding Gulf Branch. The tour begins at Twin Falls. Turn right on WV 97 east to Maben.

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

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

Turn right 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

### **Virwest – Mile Post 380.4 – WV Route 54 North**

This is the east end of Maben siding and the junction with the Virginian and Western Branch. The V&W Branch was built in the early Twenties to serve the Raleigh-Wyoming Mining Company mine at Glen Rogers, WV. A water tank was located at Virwest that served both the branch and the mainline.

### **Maben Tunnel - Mile Post 380.3 - WV 54**

Maben tunnel is 199 feet long and the north/west end is still timber lined (2010) and as such has guard rails in that end. Tunnel cannot be seen from WV 54 but is relatively accessible as there is a path down to a popular local "swimmin' hole" between the tunnel and Virwest. The tunnel is single track.

### **Otsego (Cedar Creek) Tunnel - Mile Post 379.2 - WV 54**

Otsego tunnel is 308 feet long. The tunnel was built for double track but the second track was never added. The tunnel can easily be seen to the west of WV54 by the old shopping center at Otsego.

### **Otsego - Mile Post 379.2 - WV 54**

Otsego was the location of mines and tipple belonging to the Oglebay Norton Company.

### **Caloric - Mile Post 378.6 - WV 54**

This one time coal camp was the site of the Smith Pocahontas Coal Company. The mine closed prior to WWII.

### **Harmco – Mile Post 378.1 – WV Route 54 North**

This was the location of mine belonging to the Mullens Smokeless Coal Company. This location had numerous names during the life of the Virginian. These names include Tracoal, Harmco, Nuriva and Norman.

### **Mullens Tunnel - Mile Post 377.9 - WV 54**

The single track Mullens tunnel is 203 feet long and unlined having been cut through rock. The tunnel can easily be seen to the west of WV 54 just north of the first flashing light at Mullens.

Turn right on WV 16 at Mullens, then turn right immediately after crossing the tracks on Moran Avenue.

**Mullens – Milepost 376.7 – WV 16 – Population in 1950 (3,470)**

Mullens was named for early settler Andrew Jackson Mullins. The name is spelled differently due to a mistake when applying for a post office. The city was incorporated in 1912.

Virginian class C-10 caboose No. 307 is on display along the former Virginian next to Rite Aid along Moran Avenue. This St. Louis Car Co. cab was built for use on the Norfolk Division and is home to the Mullens Caboose Museum.

From the caboose museum, you will have to turn left on Moran Avenue, then turn right on WV 16 (Second Street).

The Feller Heritage Center is located on WV 16 (Guyandotte Avenue) on the right side of the road in front of the Mullens Opportunity Center (Former Mullens Grade School). This is a replica of the Ellett station at the Va. Museum of Transportation and is home to a Virginian photo and relic collection.

**Elmore Yard – West end – WV Route 16 South**

The west end of the receiving yard ends at a wye in Mullens. The wye is the location where the Winding Gulf Branch leaves the mainline at Gulf Junction. The Winding Gulf passenger trains made their Mullens station stop on the west leg of the wye. Mullens Shop was located within the wye.

The shop, locally known as the “motor barn,” was used to service the electrics and later diesels. It was demolished in 2011 after last being used by an industrial painting contractor.

**Elmore Yard – WV 16**

Elmore Yard was the Virginian’s main terminal of the New River Division and the dividing point between the third and fourth sub-divisions. The Guyandotte River Branch to Gilbert begins at Elmore. The Winding Gulf Branch leaves Elmore Yard at Gulf Junction near Mullens Shop.

**Optional Itmann** - continue on WV 10 west down the Guyandotte River branch for two miles to Itmann, then return to Mullens.

**Itmann - Guyandotte River Branch - Mile Post 2.0 - WV 16/10**

Itmann was named after Isaac T. Mann, the noted coal financier who lived in Bramwell. Itmann was home to a Pocahontas Coal Company mine. The impressive stone company store/company office building still stands.

Turn around to return to WV16 to go back through Mullens and continue the trip at Gulf Junction below, or follow the second optional side trip to Garwood immediately below..

**Optional - Garwood** - turn left on WV 10 east and follow the mainline for a few miles to see several trestles.

**Tralee – Mile Post 373.9 – WV 10 North**

Former mine operated by the Semet-Solvay Division of Allied Chemical and Dye Corp.

**Deerfield – Mile Post 373.0 – WV 10 North**

American Coal Company was located at Deerfield. The shop buildings are still in existence but the tiple is gone.

**Alpoca – Mile Post 372.0 – WV 10 North**

The name Alpoca was derived from Alpha Pocahontas Coal Co. Both the Alpha Pocahontas Coal Company and the Thermo Pocahontas Coal Company were located at Alpoca. Alpha Pocahontas closed prior to World War II. Later Gaston Coal Company operated mines at Alpoca.

Engineer J.L. Weaver was killed at Alpoca on April 13, 1932 when he was knocked from his engine into Barkers Creek. Weaver had been the engineer of the eastbound coal train that struck train No. 3 on May 1927 at Ingleside, WV killing the engineer and fireman of the passenger train.

#### **Herndon Processing Company – WV 10 North**

The current Herndon mining operation, located west of town, has been inactive since the early 2000s. This tippie was originally owned and operated by Eastern Associated Coal Corp. and dates to the 1960s.

#### **Current east end of double track from Elmore – Mile Post 368.3 – WV 10 North**

Norfolk Southern removed the second track between Herndon at Mile Post 368.3 and Algonquin at Mile Post 361.3. The second track was also removed between Weyanoke at Mile Post 358.1 to Matoaka.

#### **Herndon – Mile Post 368.8 – WV 10 North**

Herndon has been both a lumber and coal town. The Keys Fannin Lumber Company began operating in 1906 at Herndon. The company was reorganized as the Guyan Lumber Company in 1911. The company operated a narrow gauge line out of Herndon using Climax locomotives. The operation closed in 1930. The Lamar Colliery Company operated the Herndon mine along with the Lamar mine at Clarks Gap/Algonquin.

There are several low trestles over WV10 and Gooney Otter Creek or Barkers Creek in this area.

#### **Covel – Mile Post 366.4 – WV 10 North**

The Covel Smokeless Coal Company was formed in 1919 with W.P. Tams, Jr. as president. In 1922 the company became part of Gulf Smokeless Coal Co. The mine closed in 1937.

The 738 foot trestle over Covel is 17 spans long and crosses the Left Fork of Gooney Otter Creek. This trestle was also double tracked although the second track has been removed. A good viewing spot is on WV 10 by an electrical panel.

#### **Garwood – Mile Post 365.4 – WV 10 North**

WV 10 crosses under the Virginian's Garwood trestle. This large 16 span curved bridge is 720 feet long and still has catenary poles attached. This trestle was double tracked although the second track has been removed. In fact, the VGN was double tracked up the hill from Elmore to Clark's Gap but the second track was removed years ago.

The tracks are not visible from the road for a good distance over Herndon Mountain. Either turn around and return to WV16 to continue the trip below.

#### **Gulf Junction – Telegraph Office J – Mile Post 0**

This is the beginning of Winding Gulf Branch and connection with the Virginian main line at Mullens. A wye was formed by the branch and the mainline with Winding Gulf passenger trains using the west leg of this wye for the Mullens station stop. Inside the wye was the Mullens Motor Barn, torn down in August and September of 2011. A good view is across the road from the first gas station.

Follow WV 16 North from Mullens.

#### **Black Eagle – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 1.6 – WV 16 North**

Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation once operated at mine at Black Eagle. The bath house, where miners showered and changed clothes after work, still stands.

#### **Corrine – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 1.7 – WV 16 North**

Miller Pocahontas Coal Company was located at Corrine.

### **Allen Junction – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 3.8 – WV 16 North**

This is the location of the junction with the now abandoned Allen Creek Branch that served the mines at Wyco and Lane.

**Optional Wyco** - turn left onto Wyco Hollow Road, CR 12/1, then return to WV 16.

#### **Wyco – Allen Creek Branch**

This former coal camp was located on the Allen Creek branch. The track has been removed but there are houses, two churches, and the superintendent's house remaining. Return to WV Route 16 via Wyco Hollow Road. One church is being restored in 2011.

### **Stephenson (Formerly known as Devils Fork) – Mile Post 5.9 – WV 16 North**

Former coal camp with mine last operated by Consol during N&W era.

### **East Switch of Amigo Siding – Mile Post – WV 16 North**

Engineer J.W. Crotty was killed September 8, 1933 when class TA No. 203 pulling passenger train No. 14 struck extra 726 west at Amigo, WV. Crotty, engineer on No. 203, failed to properly “control the speed of his train when approaching a meeting point.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Amigo – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 7.5 – WV 16 North**

This was a junction with the Stone Coal and Devil's Fork Branches and former location of a depot/telegraph station. The Guyandotte River is formed near Amigo by the combination of the Winding Gulf Creek and Stonecoal Creek. The Raleigh/Wyoming County line is at Amigo and divides the community.

One of the most interesting locations on the Virginian tracks is the bridge over the Guyandotte River on the Stone Coal Branch. The switch for the Devil's Fork Branch was located on the bridge. While the switch and the Devil's Fork Branch have been removed, the switch stand and the bridge alignment still show where the switch was located (2012). The switch stand may have been removed in early 2013..

### **Stone Coal Yard – C&O – WV 16 North**

This yard was used by the C&O to supply empties and collect loads from joint mines on the Virginian's Stone Coal Branch. This yard was not used as an interchange, this took place at Pemberton (MP 23.8).

### **Helen – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 10.7 – WV 16 North**

This former mining town was owned and operated by East Gulf Coal Company and later by Eastern Gas and Fuel Associates. Helen, WV was named after the daughter of G.W. Stevens, president of the C&O Ry.<sup>2</sup>

### **Ury (Cooktown) – Winding Gulf Branch – WV 16 North**

Ury, WV was named after landowner Uriah Cook.<sup>3</sup>

### **Tams – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 12.9 – WV 16 North**

This is a former mining town operated by Gulf Smokeless Coal Company. The town was named after coal operator W.P. Tams. The first car of coal was loaded at Tams on October 1, 1909, the date the Virginian reached town. The tipple was not finished until April 1910.<sup>4</sup> Gulf Smokeless Coal Co. was later sold to Winding Gulf Coals, Inc.

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<sup>1</sup> ICC Report No. 1854, January 12, 1934, Interstate Commerce Commission, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Tams, W.P., Jr., *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia, A Brief History*, West Virginia University Press, Morgantown, WV, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Tams, W.P., Jr., *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia, A Brief History*, West Virginia University Press, Morgantown, WV, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Tams, W.P., Jr., *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia, A Brief History*, West Virginia University Press, Morgantown, WV, 1963.

As a side note, W. P. Tams was a noted coal baron and in later life wrote *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia, A Brief History*, which is available in paperback. A very good first-hand account of coal mining in the coalfields that corresponded well with the years the Virginian existed. Highly recommended.

Turn Right from WV 16 North onto McAlpin Road, CR 30. Follow McAlpin Road to Sophia.

**Slab Fork No. 10 – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 13 – McAlpin Road (CR 30)**

Slab Fork Coal Company owned and operated the mine here. Slab Fork Coal Co. also had operations at Slab Fork, WV on the Virginian mainline which is located just over the ridge to the west of this location.

**Stotesbury – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 14.6 – McAlpin Road**

Stotesbury, WV was named by E.E. White after Edward T. Stotesbury who was president of the Beaver Coal Company.<sup>5</sup> Homes and a church still remain from coal camp.

*Mark Twain High School* was located just to the right of the road. All that remains today are the steps and a historical marker. MTHS's most famous graduate was Robert C. Byrd, longtime US senator from West Virginia.

**MacAlpin – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 15.7 – McAlpin Road**

Former coal camp. Until recent years there was fish hatchery at MacAlpin that is using water from abandoned mines. It is now closed.

**Woodbay – Winding Gulf Branch – Telegraph Office WD – Mile Post 16.0 – McAlpin Road**

Turn Right onto WV 16 North at Sophia.

**Sophia Tunnel – Winding Gulf Branch – Mile Post 20.8**

This concrete lined tunnel is 475.7 feet long. The west end of Sophia Tunnel is visible in Sophia.

**Sophia – Telegraph Office SO – Mile Post 21.1 – WV 16 North**

The Town of Sophia was named after early settler Sophia McGinnis. A former Southern caboose is on display at Sophia.

**OPTIONAL – Pemberton – VGN/C&O Crossing and interchange – Mile Post 23.7**

Go straight through the stoplight in Sophia on CR 16/14 and WV 29.

**Pemberton Winding Gulf Branch - Mile Post 23.7**

Pemberton is the location of the C&O interchange and a diamond where the two lines crossed. Today this location has taken on new significance with the construction of a new mine on the C&O line just east of the diamond. The Winding Gulf branch continued east and south from Pemberton to the end of the line at Willabet, passing several other notable coal mine locations such as McVey, Sullivan, Bowyer, Jonben, Sterling, Withby, Fireco. Continue down CR 29, 38, 40, and 44 to access these locations. A WV county highway map is almost a requirement to negotiate the aptly named Winding Gulf area.

Return to Sophia by way of WV 29 and CR 16/14.

At the stoplight, turn right on WV 16 north/east. Continue on WV 16 to WV 54. Turn left on WV 54.

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

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Turn right to stay on WV 54 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!**

#### **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 in the opposite direction. 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.

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

This former coal camp was home of Slab Fork Coal Company, the first smokeless coal 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 trainmasters were posed on the trestle for a picture that was included on the cover of the 1954 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.

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

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

#### **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.

Turn right on WV97 at Maben and continue on WV97 about a quarter of a mile past the Exxon Station where you will come to a STOP sign. Turn left onto Bear Hole Road. It is 4.1 miles to Twin Falls Lodge.

## End of Tour

<sup>1</sup> ICC Report No. 1854, January 12, 1934, Interstate Commerce Commission, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Tams, W.P., Jr., *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia, A Brief History*, West Virginia University Press, Morgantown, WV, 1963.

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<sup>5</sup> Tams, W.P., Jr., *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia, A Brief History*, West Virginia University Press, Morgantown, WV, 1963.

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TRM/SS

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