

## **Twin Falls to Kellysville and return**

This trip follows the former Virginian mainline between Twin Falls and Kellysville including the Princeton Railroad Museum. We will also follow the former N&W Bluestone Branch from Matoaka to Arista. 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 Rodgers) 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 tiple 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 tiple 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.

**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. built cab was built year 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. 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.

Turn left on WV 10 at the Elmore Yard.

**Elmore Yard – WV 10**

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 Guyandot River Branch to Gilbert begins at Elmore. The Winding Gulf Branch leaves Elmore Yard at Gulf Junction near Mullens Shop.

Before electrification, Elmore Yard was the home of “mine runs” and “hill runs.” Trains from Page and Pemberton passed through Elmore with out changing crews on there way to Princeton. Electrification moved the crew change west from Princeton to Elmore, This move eliminated most of the classification of freight at Princeton and which was moved to Elmore.

The yard consisted of three separate yards, the classification yard, arrival yard and departure yard. The classification yard was built in the early fifties replacing an earlier hump yard.

Operations east of Elmore consisted of Roanoke Runs and Hill Runs. Hill Runs made multiple trips per shift delivering 6000 ton coal trains to Clarks Gap. Roanoke Runs would leave Elmore with a 3000 ton train and fill out to 9000 tons at Clarks Gap and continue east to Roanoke. Hill Run crews also served the mines from Alpoca and east.

**Optional - Itmann** - Continue on WV 16 down the Guyandotte River branch for two miles to Itmann, then return to Mullens.

**Itmann - Guyandotte River branch - Mile Post 2.0 - WV 16**

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

Turn around, go back to Elmore. Turn right on WV 10 to continue.

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

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

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

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

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

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 24, 1927 at Ingleside, WV killing the engineer and fireman of the passenger train.

**Herndon Processing Company – WV 10 South**

The current Herndon mining operation, located west of town, has been inactive since the early 2000s. This tipple 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 South**

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 South**

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 South**

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.

**Garwood – Mile Post 365.4 – WV 10 South**

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 Virginian will not be visible from WV Route 10 between Garwood and Giatto as it crosses Clarks Gap. The track along WV Route 10 between Matoaka and Arista is the Norfolk & Western's Bluestone Branch and the Right Fork of Widemouth Branch (both out of service).

**Mercer/Wyoming County Line – WV 10 South**

The tracks will not be visible for several miles as we cross Herndon (Arista) Mountain.

The county line separating Mercer and Wyoming County is located at the top of the mountain. We leave the drainage of the Guyandotte River and enter the drainage of the Bluestone River.

**Arista – N&W Right Fork of Widemouth Branch – Mile Post 21.2 – WV 10 South**

WV Route 10 crosses (crossing is paved over) the N&W at the foot of Herndon (Arista) Mountain. Arista was the site of Weyanoke Coal & Coke Company's Arista mine.

**Springton – N&W Right Fork of Widemouth Branch – Mile Post 20.0 – WV 10 South**

The former Wenonah Spur crossed WV Route 10 at this point. Semet-Solvay operated a mine at Springton. Company store still stands (2012).

**Hiawatha – N&W Right Fork of Widemouth Branch – Mile Post 19.0 – WV 10 South**

The Ennis Coal Company operated a mine at Hiawatha.

**N&W Right Fork of Widemouth Branch – Mile Post 17.6 – WV 10 South**

WV Route 10 crosses over the N&W at this point. The junction with **Big Branch Spur** is visible from the left side (when driving north) of the bridge.

**Giatto – Mile Post 357.1 – WV 10 South**

WV Route 10 crosses the N&W by bridge at this point.

**Matoaka – Mile Post 356.2 – WV 10 South – Population in 1950 (1,003)**

Matoaka is another name for the Indian princess Pocahontas. The town was incorporated in 1912. The Mercer County town of Matoaka was located on the Virginian mainline and the N&W's Bluestone Branch and was an interchange point between the two roads. The east end of the double track from Elmore once ended near Matoaka at MX Tower. The Virginian depot still exists. This is the second Virginian depot at the site, the first wood structure having burned down. The current concrete block station has the distinction of being the last Virginian depot built.

Matoaka in recent years has also become known as a local speed trap. **Slow down in Matoaka!**

The Virginian will not be visible between Matoaka and Kegley.

Turn right onto US Route 19 North at Shawnee Lake.

**Shawnee Lake - US 19/WV 10**

Shawnee Lake was a recreation location in the last century. The rusted remains of several amusement rides such as a small Ferris wheel can still be seen.

**Bridge over US Route 19 South – Mile Post 345.5.**

This is a deck plate girder bridge over US Route 19. Kegley siding also crosses this bridge.

**Kegley – Mile Post 345.0 – US 19 South**

Kegley is a small unincorporated community and location of a siding. The siding is 6,350' long.

Turn left onto Kegley Trestle Road, CR 19/14, at the Kegley post office.

**Black Lick Creek Trestle – Mile Post 344.4 – Kegley Trestle Road**

This 910' long 18 span bridge is the tallest on the Virginian Railway, 200' above Black Lick Creek and CR 7/1.

Return to US Route 19 on CR 19/14 and turn left.

### **Princeton – Mile Post 340.2 – Population in 1950 (8,279)**

Princeton, county seat of Mercer County, was incorporated in 1874. The city was named for Princeton, New Jersey, where General Hugh Mercer was killed during the Revolutionary War. General Mercer, namesake of Mercer County, was a native of Fredericksburg, VA.<sup>1</sup>

Princeton was headquarters of the Virginian's New River Division and home of the main car and locomotive shops. During World War II, approximately 800 men and women from several surrounding West Virginia and Virginia counties were employed in Princeton Shops. From about 1938 until shortly after the VGN-N&W merger on December 1, 1959, thousands of hopper and other freight cars were built at the shops. With only 35 jobs remaining, Princeton Shops were officially closed about 15 years ago following nearly 90 years of service to VGN, N&W and the current Norfolk Southern railways. This shop was forever the largest business or industry in Princeton's and Mercer County's history, being beaten out in total number of employees after its closing by the Mercer County Board of Education. The second largest ever Princeton industry was the Maiden Form Brassiere Company, also now closed for several years! Sadly, most of the shops buildings are also now gone.

### **Princeton Railroad Museum – 99 Mercer Street – Phone (304) 487-5060 – Call ahead for hours**

The Princeton Railroad Museum is housed in a replica of the original Princeton station/division offices. Many of the items in the museum came from the collection of the late Ken Coleman, a Virginian employee.

The former Railway Express Agency office stands next to the station. It was moved from its original location and is being restored for use as a farm museum.

The newest outdoor display is Virginian class C-10 caboose No. 308. This St. Louis Car Co. built cab was built for use on the New River Division. There are also two motor cars on display outdoors.

Leave Princeton on US 460 east to I-77 South. Get on I-77 south to WV 112 Ingleside exit.

#### **Options -** At this point there are several options:

One, you can take US 460 west to Bluefield and skip the rest of the Virginian tour. When US 460 crosses the N&W tracks on a high bridge, exit immediately after the bridge on WV 19 which follows the tracks and yard through Bluefield. Follow the Bluefield/N&W guide (listed separately).

Two, you can continue on the Virginian travel guide below.

Three - you can take a back road to see Oney Gap Tunnel (not easy to spot). Turn south on WV 27 off of US 460

#### **Oney Gap Tunnel – Mile Post 308.0**

This tunnel through Oney Gap is 1699 feet long. South/east tunnel portal is visible from WV 27 if you know where to look.

Continue on WV 27 to I-77 south - it's the only way to go. Be sure to stop just before the road becomes an entrance ramp to I-77 for a good picture of Rocky Hollow Trestle below.

### **Rocky Hollow Trestle – Mile Post 337.0 – I-77**

Rocky Hollow trestle is a twenty-span viaduct over Rocky Hollow and is 930 feet long. I-77 was built underneath the trestle many years later.

### **Left side of I-77 – Long Branch Trestle – Mile Post 336.0**

On the left side of I-77 the top of Long Branch trestle can barely be seen or not these days. It's more visible in winter. This span is 990 feet long, the longest after the Deepwater bridge.

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<sup>1</sup> *West Virginia Blue Book 1953*, Page 668, State of West Virginia, Charleston, WV, 1953.

Travel I-77 south one exit to WV 112 Ingleside exit.

At the end of the WV 27 Ingleside exit turn right and go under I-77.

The VGN passes through several tunnels and trestles as it descends the ridge to the left. They are high on the hillside above WV 112 and impossible to spot.

### **Ingleside – Mile Post 335.2**

There was once a 93 car siding located at Ingleside. At this point the VGN is high on the Christian Ridge hillside and difficult to see.

### **Wreck of No. 3 – May 24, 1927 – Approximately Mile Post 335.5**

Passenger train No. 3 with class PA No. 212 and five cars struck extra class EL-3A No. 103 East with ninety cars of coal and a caboose west of Ingleside Tunnel on May 24, 1927. Both the engineer and fireman of No. 3 were killed in the accident. The cause of the head-end collision was the failure of the crew of No. 3 to obey a meet order.<sup>2</sup>

**Optional - Harmon Branch Trestle** For the intrepid, turn right on CR 38/4 to climb up to the VGN tracks, then return to WV 112.

### **Harmon Branch Trestle – Mile Post 333.8**

Harmon Branch Trestle is 730' long and goes over Harmon branch and CD 38/4.

Turn around, return to WV 112 on CR 38/4.

### **Oakvale – Mile Post 329.8 – WV 112**

Oakvale, once known as “Frenchville”, was named after the oak trees that grew in the valley. The town was incorporated in 1907.<sup>3</sup> The Virginian is gradually climbing Kellysville Mountain grade westbound toward Oney Gap and Princeton, location of The Virginian's only major shops.

Two-track N&W is on the valley floor and follows the East River -- beside the mountain for which it was named -- toward Bluefield, highest point above sea level on the original N&W mainline. The VGN begins to climb out of the valley at this point but is still only 20-30 feet above the road.

Both N&W and VGN had passenger stops here -- and the N&W station still stands, used by maintenance-of-way forces.

### **Bridge - Mile Post 331.6 - WV 112**

This seven span viaduct is 264' long and crosses WV 112 and Payne or Hales Branch. A former Nickel Plate bay window caboose is on display at the bridge.

### **Bridge – Mile Post 329.5 – CR 460/8**

This fifteen span viaduct is 677 feet long and crosses CR 460/8 and the East River.

### **Kellysville – Mile Post 327.8 – Old US 460 (now CR 460/8)**

This is the connection between the former Virginian and Norfolk and Western Rys. The Virginian has been abandoned from Kellysville to east of Narrows from Kellysville to east of Narrows since 1968 and much of the former VGN right-of-way is now US Route 460. Kellysville was originally named "East River Yard" by Deepwater Railway construction and train crews and was also once home to the Kelly Axe Co., which manufactured axe handles before relocating to Charleston, WV, several years later.

Turn left from CR 460/8 (Old US Route 460) onto US 460.

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<sup>2</sup> ICC Report No. 1339, Interstate Commerce Commission, Washington, DC, June 24, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> *West Virginia Blue Book 1953*, Page 665, State of West Virginia, Charleston, WV, 1953.

## End of Tour

Travel US 460 to I-77. At this point you have several choices. One, you can retrace your route back to Twin Falls by way of US 460/US 19/WV10/WV16/WV54/WV97. Two, you can take US 460 to Bluefield. When US 460 crosses the N&W tracks on a high bridge, exit immediately after the bridge on WV 19 which follows the tracks and yard through Bluefield. Follow the Bluefield/N&W travelogue (listed separately). A final option would be to get on I-77 north to WV 16 and follow the directions to Twin Falls (WV16 to WV54 to WV 97).

## Sources

*West Virginia Blue Book 1953*, J. Howard Myers, Clerk of the Senate, State of West Virginia, 1953.

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*They Died in the Darkness*, Lacy A. Dillon, McClain Publishing Company, 1976.

*Riding That New River Train*, Eugene L. Huddleston, Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Society, Inc., 1989.

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