

# COAL MINING

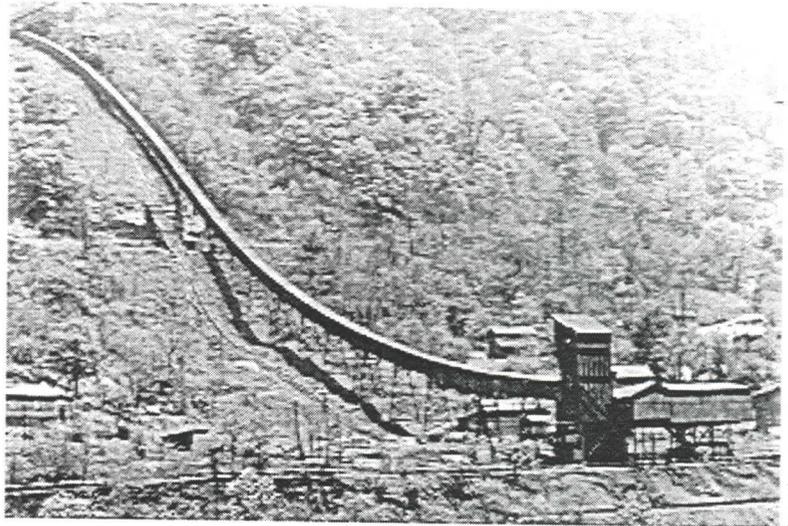
## Coal Mining within New River Gorge

### Overview

Coal was formed millions of years ago by layers of decaying plants in ancient swamps. Sediments were deposited over the layers of plants and compressed. The end result is the fossil fuel we know as coal.

Coal had been discovered in West Virginia as early as 1742, but methods of extracting the fuel and then transporting it did not come until later. West Virginia's history is primarily the story of coal mining, especially from 1870 to 1945. Nearly 10 billion tons of coal were extracted from these seams. Almost two-thirds of the land in this state contains coal seams. From 1890 to 1930, the number of people employed in this industry and the amount of money invested equaled that of all other industries combined in West Virginia. The New River coal field played an important role in the rapid growth and productivity of this business.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway was completed through the gorge in 1873. This provided the much needed transportation connection between the James River (near Richmond, Virginia) and the Ohio River (near Cincinnati, Ohio). Fire Creek, Red Ash, Rush Run, and Kaymoor are just a few of the early towns in the New River Gorge. These towns and many others were built solely for getting coal from below the earth's surface. This coal fueled the industrial revolution of the United States. The first coal shipped from the gorge was from Quinnimont by Joseph Beury. By 1880, companies such as Pennsylvania and Virginia Iron and Coal Company at Quinnimont, the Fayette Coal and Coke Company at Stone Cliff, the Fire Creek Coal and Coke Company at Fire Creek, and the Longdale Iron Company at Sewell were becoming quite successful.



Nuttallburg Tipple

In 1888, Fayette County produced 1,522,450 tons of coal. It was the first West Virginia county to exceed one million tons per year. Other evidence of rapid growth is described in a 1903 geological report, *New River and Kanawha Coal Field*. It showed that there were 56 mines in operation along the C&O west of Prince Station. These mines, together with others in Fayette and Kanawha counties, were producing nearly one-third of all coal mined in the state. Coal was processed into coke and sent to the iron furnaces of Virginia. Coal was shipped to the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company in Covington, Virginia, and to Norfolk to power naval vessels; coal supplied bunkering depots in the Caribbean Islands, and it was shipped throughout the country for use as a source of fuel for homes.



Mining jobs were challenging and required hard work. The shifts were long and the conditions dangerous. At the turn of the century, most mines did not use machinery. The company provided hand tools (which were deducted from the miners' pay) to complete the task. The company also provided housing, doctors, schools, churches, and stores to assist the miners and their families. Payment for rent and doctor visits also were deducted from miners' wages.

The coal company town and the services it offered played an important role in the story of New River Gorge. The layout of mining camp communities was determined by the landscape and the location of coal seams. Typically, there was not enough room to house all the employees in one place, so most towns were put on top of the gorge, as well as on the bottom. They towns were usually connected by a mountain haulage, a cable car that traveled between the top and the bottom of the gorge. Once residents were at the bottom, the train provided transportation to the outside world, as well as to their neighbors along the river.

Kaymoor was one of dozens of mining towns. It was typical of most mining communities. In 1933, Kaymoor contained 131 company dwellings, which housed 560 people. Of this number, 140 were employed by the mine. Electricity was provided to 78 houses for \$2 a month. All homes were heated by coal in fireplaces or potbelly stoves. Some of the dwellings even had running water. The remainder obtained water from nearby springs, pumps, or hydrants.



National Park Service Photo

*Miners at Nuttallburg Mine*

Obtaining goods was another service offered by the company at the company store. A miner would be advanced company scrip (a form of money to be used at the store) to get the necessary tools for working or food for his family. The company store sold food, clothing, dry goods, drugs, house furniture and furnishings, miners' supplies and hardware, tobacco, candy, drinks, and other

miscellaneous items. Mail order houses such as Sears and Montgomery Ward provided some competition.

The nation's economy affected the mining economy. There were hard times during the Depression years. World War II induced a spurt of growth, but in the years following, the industry declined rapidly. For example, in 1940 Kaymoor produced 700,000 tons of coal; in 1960, as the seam worked out, the mine only produced 10,515 tons. Over time, automobiles replaced trains as the primary form of transportation. As the mines closed, people moved outside of the gorge for work. The towns were abandoned, and nature started reclaiming the land.

Former residents still visit New River Gorge in an attempt to locate the towns where they once lived. Most of these towns have disappeared under thick vegetation or no longer exist. It is from these people that the National Park Service has obtained the history of mining in the gorge. These former residents have donated their time to be interviewed, their knowledge and memories, and even their photographs and tools. They remember how coal from the New River Gorge helped fuel the United States. They also remember what it was like working in a coal mine or what it was like growing up in a coal camp. Part of New River Gorge National River's mission is to help preserve this history and to share it with others.

