Mountaintop Removal Driving Tour
Appalachian Cultural Sensitivity

While taking the mountaintop removal driving tour, you will see many out-of-the-way rural Appalachian communities. Some have been hit hard by poverty. Some have suffered great depopulation. For example, at one time Harlan County, Kentucky had over 100,000 residents. Today much of downtown Harlan is vacant buildings. Harlan County has a fascinating history but not much economic growth. For more information about Harlan, see the trailer for the 1976 Academy Award-winning documentary “Harlan County USA” www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCiVMngILEI Williamson and Logan, West Virginia and the town of Appalachia, Virginia have been similarly depopulated. Some small coal mining towns in Appalachia have vanished completely. What happened?

In the 1950’s, coal was extracted underground by drilling holes in the coal seam, then filling the holes with explosives and blasting the coal into chunks. The coal was then manually shoveled into buggies. It was dirty, dangerous work, but it employed many miners. The miners belonged to the United Mine Workers Union, which gave the workers a voice and helped improve safety conditions.

Then in the 1960’s, coal companies switched to the continuous miner, a machine which rips into the coal seams using a rotating drum studded with sharp teeth. The work of mining could be done much faster and with fewer miners. The number of jobs decreased, and many mining families left the mountains to find work in northern factories, such as Detroit, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Cleveland. This exodus is movingly portrayed in the novel “The Dollmaker” by Harriette Arnow, which was made into a 1984 film starring Jane Fonda.

Then strip mining became more prevalent in the 1960’s, where giant bulldozers and shovels ripped the surface away to access coal seams close to the surface. More people moved away, and the land began to suffer huge gouges and gashes. Mudslides were common as rock and dirt from mining operations came down into valley communities. Residents organized into groups such as the Appalachian Group to Save the Land and People, and finally the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) was passed in 1977 under the Carter Administration, after being vetoed several times by President Gerald Ford. While the SMCRA law required coal companies to reclaim the land after strip mining, some coal companies have avoided this requirement by simply declaring bankruptcy, leaving the taxpayers to clean up the mess. Learn more by watching Appalshop’s documentary film “To Save the Land and People.” http://appalshop.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=221

Worse, SMCRA legitimized the form of mining known as Mountaintop Removal (MTR), in which coal companies blast 600-800 feet off the top of the mountains to reach the coal. The mountaintops are flattened, and the hardwood forests are destroyed permanently. Coal companies use huge rock trucks to dump the excess dirt and rock into mountain streams, which is called a “valley fill.” MTR mining employs few people on the job site.
Mountaintop removal operations are usually non-union jobs. Richmond, Virginia-based Massey Energy, for example, is a renowned union-busting company. Since non-union companies don’t have to negotiate with a union, the company can make bigger profits, sometimes at the expense of worker rights and safety. Appalshop’s stunning film “Mine War on Blackberry Creek” documents the United Mine Workers’ struggle to organize a Massey mine in West Virginia. This 30-minute film can be watched on the web: [http://appalshop.org/film/minewar/stream.html](http://appalshop.org/film/minewar/stream.html)

In his great book “Lost Mountain,” University of Kentucky professor Erik Reece documents the destruction of one mountain in Perry County, Kentucky called Lost Mountain. Reece observes that a crew of only about 20 workers can flatten a mountain in about a year. Over 4 million pounds of ANFO explosives are used every day in Appalachia. ANFO is the same material that Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh used. However, McVeigh used only 4,000 lbs of ANFO.

In other words, every day the equivalent of 1000 Oklahoma City bombs are detonated in Appalachia for mountaintop removal.

Appalachian communities that grew up around underground mining have been depopulated not because the local residents are ignorant or lazy, but because mining companies have mechanized. In 1950, over 120,000 miners were employed in Appalachia. Today, it’s less than 15,000.

The Appalachian people have been, until relatively recent times, self-sufficient, hardy and tough. They grow vegetable gardens in rich bottomland, they can their own produce, and hunt for meat and wild mushrooms. Generations of Appalachian people knew where to find herbal medicines in the mountains, and today herbs like Black Cohosh, Ginseng and Yellowroot are still being harvested by mountaineers. Springtime brings community ramp suppers – ramps are a wild onion or leek that grows in the mountains – black berries in the summer, and deer hunting in the fall.

The University of Pennsylvania’s Dr. Mary Hufford has documented Appalachia’s “seasonal rounds” and the historic reliance by mountain people on the abundance of the mountains. The Library of Congress website “Tending the Commons,” contains photographs, audio recordings and documentation. It is highly recommended and available on line at [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/tending/](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/tending/)
When travelling in Appalachia, it is important to show some sensitivity to Appalachian culture. The people of the mountains have been stereotyped for decades by films like “Deliverance” and TV shows like “The Beverly Hillbillies.” Visit the museums, and learn how mountain music begat Bluegrass music. The Museum of Appalachia in Clinton, Tennessee (just off I75, north of Knoxville) is recommended highly. See www.museumofappalachia.org/

Look beyond the poverty and try to understand the root causes for the poor economy: this region and its people have sacrificed their land, their mountain streams and their health so that the rest of America can have “cheap” electricity. Nearly 50 percent of America’s electricity comes from burning coal. Kentuckians get over 90 percent of their electricity from burning coal. In return, Appalachians have gotten a ruined landscape, frequent flash flooding, and the profits from mining coal have gone out of state to coal companies and land companies.

Land companies, such as Rowland Land Company and Pocahontas Land Company own 75 percent of southern West Virginia. They are based out of state. You can read more in the famous study “Who Owns West Virginia.” See http://www.sludgesafety.org/whoOwnsWV.pdf

The Appalachian people own the land in the valleys and hollows below the mountains. But the land companies own the mountains, and they lease it to coal, oil and gas, and timber companies for resource extraction. It’s hard for the Appalachians to fight back against such powerful, large corporations – especially when politicians like Kentucky’s Sen. Mitch McConnell spend far more time fundraising for political elections than meeting with residents of the mountains.
The Appalachian people have been the focus of much national media attention over the years. In the 1960’s, Harry Caudill’s famous book “Night Comes to the Cumberlands” gained the attention of President John F. Kennedy, who visited impoverished families in Martin County, Kentucky. National media attention followed, with features such as Charles Kuralt’s “Christmas in Appalachia.”

While well-intentioned, the national media presence soon caused some resentment in the hollows. In the images of Appalachian poverty on television, some Appalachians felt like outsiders were making fun of them. In 1968, property owner Hobert Ison shot and killed renowned Canadian filmmaker Hugh O’Conner as O’Conner was taking pictures of a miner sitting on the front porch of his rented cabin in Jeremiah, Kentucky. The Appalshop documentary film “Stranger With a Camera” tells the story, and is highly recommended. See http://appalshop.org/film/stranger/

Safety

Although a recent survey in West Virginia showed that over 60 percent of West Virginians are opposed to mountaintop removal, heavy coal industry advertising and propaganda have led some people in Appalachia to feel that there is a “war on coal” being waged by outsiders.

After a century of exploitation by outside coal, oil and gas companies and slick-talking men who bought people’s mineral rights for as little as 25 cents an acre in the 1800’s, there is still some fear and distrust of outsiders, especially those from northern states. Use common sense when taking pictures in Appalachia. Show respect for the people and their land. Don’t trespass.

It is not recommended to drive around the coalfields of Appalachia in a car with out-of-state plates festooned with environmental or peace-type bumper stickers. If you do, you may be harassed. Cover your bumper stickers by placing clear box tape over them, then cover that with duct tape. The tape can be removed afterwards.

You should also exercise great caution around coal trucks. These dirty, dusty monster trucks are often overweight – meaning that it is hard for drivers to stop them quickly - and the coal truck drivers often work long hours. Some coal truck drivers work 14 hours a day: laws regarding interstate trucking do not apply to them. They also have exemptions allowing them to haul up to 120,000 lbs on the narrow, winding back roads that are designated as coal haul roads (while the limit on federal interstate highways is 85,000 lbs.)
Coal companies have lobbied for higher weight limits in order to increase their profits. You can always tell a coal haul road because the pavement will be rutted and broken, and there will be dust on the road signs. Do not pull out in front of coal trucks. Give them plenty of room. If they are tailgating you, find a safe place to pull over and let them pass. Going up a mountain, you will sometimes see coal trucks crawling up the mountain at 5 to 10 mph. Some motorists have been killed crashing into the back end of slow-moving trucks. Be careful! For more information on coal trucks, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHOHXjckSdc and the Appalshop film “Coal Bucket Outlaw.”

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAOIDOTLh4o

If you are not from Appalachia, you will probably not blend in with the local populace, no matter how low-key you try to be. It’s best to just be respectful, smile and be nice. Most Appalachians are friendly, but they may be wary. If you have a flat tire or other minor car trouble, don’t worry. Just raise your hood and a friendly local resident will help you. And the service stations won’t rip you off.

The terrible images of Appalachia from Hollywood movies like “Wrong Turn” have created some fear in the public mind that visitors will be attacked by strange people waving shotguns. This fear is completely unfounded. As long as you don’t behave like a jerk, you will be OK. It’s generally considered polite to give a small wave when passing other cars on country roads. If you have both your hands on the steering wheel, you can give a “finger wave.” If your arm is hanging out the window, flip your hand up to say hi.

Please support the local economy while visiting, especially the locally-owned businesses. Buy from the local farmers’ markets and produce stands. Avoid the chain stores and restaurants – you can go to Cracker Barrel when you get back home. Prices for motels and meals are rock-bottom in Appalachia. If you can find a mom-and-pop diner, please give them your business, and try the beans and cornbread. Visit the local tourist attractions and museums. Tourism can be an important part of the future economy of Appalachia, but right now it is lagging.

Above all, please don’t contribute to the stereotypical images that have plagued this region. Hillbilly jokes etc. are offensive, demeaning and grossly unfair to a region that has long given so much to make America great. The heroes of Appalachia – Test pilot Chuck Yeager, country music stars like Loretta Lynn, Bluegrass pioneers like Ralph Stanley and Bill Monroe – are now being joined by a new breed of heroes like Judy Bonds of Coal River Mountain Watch and Larry Gibson of Kayford Mountain. They are trying to save their land and their home place from destruction. Please help.
Kentucky Mountaintop Removal Driving Tour:
Perry, Knott, Letcher & Harlan Cos.

Starting in Lexington, KY

1. Start from Lexington, heading East on Interstate 64.
2. Go past Winchester
3. Take Exit 98, heading East on the Mountain Parkway
4. Go 43 miles on the Mountain Parkway to the Campton exit
5. Take Exit 43 to KY-15 South
6. Go through Campton and Jackson on KY-15 South. About 18 miles south of the Wal-Mart in Jackson, look for a small sign on the left for the Wendell Ford Airport (the green and white sign shows an airplane). Turn left on the airport road and head 1 mile up the hill. On the way up, you will drive past a large reclaimed valley fill that is covered in Chinese lespedeza, an invasive weed planted by coal companies to help control erosion. This weed has spread along highways throughout eastern Kentucky and is a major threat to the native plants of Kentucky.

7. At the top of the hill, bear right at the Y and go back towards a small neighborhood of modest homes and trailers. This neighborhood was built on a reclaimed strip mine, and is often touted by coal companies as an example of reclaimed mine land put to good economic use. Notice the sparse grass and the lack of vegetation – there is no topsoil and the ground is as hard as concrete. It is almost impossible for a tree to grow here, although some non-native trees like Autumn Olive and Black Locust are able to survive for short periods. They die from suffocation - tree roots need oxygen. You can drive along the back side of this neighborhood and see (and hear) an active Mountaintop removal mine site.
8. You can also visit the Wendell Ford Airport by going back to the Y and turning right. The airport was also built on a reclaimed strip mine, and is also cited by coal companies as evidence of economic development created by the flat land of reclaimed surface mining. However, there are no commercial passenger flights from this airport, which is used most often by coal executives inspecting their mine sites from the air.
9. Go back down to the bottom of the hill and turn left on KY-15, heading south.
10. Travel 0.7 miles and then turn right into the Coalfields Industrial Park.
11. Go 1.7 miles on the main industrial park road and look for a coal slurry pond on the left. You can park here and take pictures of the 5-acre pond. This is a good place to take pictures, but for safety, do not walk down to the pond. After mining, coal companies wash the coal at coal preparation plants with a mixture of water and chemicals prior to sending it to the coal-burning power plants. Coal slurry is the mixture of waste water and chemicals left over after the washing process. There are over 500 coal slurry ponds in Appalachia. In October of 2000, a Massey Energy coal slurry pond in Martin County, Kentucky broke through the bottom into an abandoned underground mine, filling the old mine and sending an estimated 300 million gallons of coal slurry into two mountain streams: Wolf Creek and Coldwater Creek. At the time the EPA called it “the worst environmental disaster ever in the southeast United States.” The spill was over 25 times the size of the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska (12 million gallons). The federal fine was only $5000, although the company was required to clean up the mess. The spill and its aftermath are documented in the Appalshop documentary film “Sludge.” See http://appalshop.org/sludge/ and www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB8WQddz8x0
12. Return to the highway, and turn right onto KY-15 South
13. Travel 6.7 miles south on KY-15
14. Take the exit ramp to the eastbound Hal Rogers Parkway (formerly the Daniel Boone Parkway), heading towards Hindman, KY. Hal Rogers is the Republican Congressman for eastern Kentucky, and he has been in office for over 20 years. Rogers is a major recipient of coal industry campaign donations as well as a vocal supporter of mountaintop removal. Rogers’ congressional district is the second-poorest district in the United States, and a March 2009 Gallup survey on ‘happiness and well-being’ ranked Rogers’ congressional district as the unhappiest of the 435 congressional districts in America, followed by the South Bronx. Billions of dollars in resources have been extracted from the region, yet the profits mostly go to stockholders and coal companies located in St. Louis, New York and Richmond, Virginia – not to the residents of eastern Kentucky. Injuries and illness from mining also contribute to the low quality of life, and addiction to pain pills like oxycontin is rampant in the region.
15. From Hazard, travel 7 miles east on the Hal Rogers Parkway
16. Turn left onto KY-476
17. Go 100 feet and turn left again, following the signs for Ary and the UK Home Place Clinic
18. Travel 4.6 miles, going through Ary, and then turn right into the University of Kentucky Home Place Clinic. There are numerous buildings here - drive on the main road towards the main clinic building, an old stone building towards the back (go past the Community Center). Park in front of the clinic, and climb the stone wall and walk up the hill towards the old cemetery. You can see active mining operations here, and parts of the vast mine here, although UK has tried to hide the mining by planting trees around the parking lot. The University of Kentucky is a major supporter of mountaintop removal mining, and has even named their new athletic dormitory for UK basketball players the “Wildcat Coal Lodge.” “Wildcat mining” is an illegal, outlaw form of strip mining: it means mining without proper state and federal permits. After a brouhaha regarding the naming of the new dorm, noted Kentucky author, farmer and poet Wendell Berry removed his collection of personal papers from the university to protest the university’s support for mountaintop removal. Coal operator Joe Craft, of Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Alliance Resource Partners, donated millions of dollars to UK to secure the naming rights for the dorm. The UK Board of Trustees, political appointees (developers, construction company executives and homebuilders), accepted the money despite an angry outcry from UK students and faculty.
19. Return to the Hal Rogers Parkway on KY-476.
20. Drive west on the Hal Rogers Parkway back to Hazard. You will see large reclaimed mine sites on both sides of the highway, sprayed with green hydro-seed. Many of the reclaimed mine sites in Perry County have no economic development whatsoever. On October 19, 2005 the Hazard Wal-Mart was briefly closed when blasting from nearby construction caused 7 rocks to fly through the roof of the building. Three people were injured. Several large buildings in Hazard, including the Holiday Inn have suffered substantial damage because they were built atop old strip mining sites, and the land subsided or sank over time. After mining, it is very difficult to compact the soil properly for building foundations because the soil “swells” - there are air pockets in the soil. As the land gradually settles, it sinks. A federal prison built on top of a valley fill in Martin County, Kentucky, The Big Sandy Federal Penitentiary, has been nicknamed “Sink-Sink” by local residents. The Kinetic Park industrial park along I64 in Huntington, West Virginia, which was created by blasting the top off a mountain, has also been declared unsuitable for building construction: A Huntington city council member said the Kinetic Park land “wouldn’t support a sidewalk.”

21. Native Kentucky elk, which were extirpated by hunting in the 1800’s, have been reintroduced in the region to help promote tourism. The Elk, imported from Wyoming live on reclaimed strip mine sites and have now become a nuisance to eastern Kentucky homeowners, as well as a major danger to motorists. If you want to see elk while in Perry County, go to http://hazardperrytourism.com/wildlife.html
22. At Hazard, take the exit ramp back to KY-15 south.
23. After about 2 miles, go right on KY-15 to take the bypass around Hazard.
24. Go around the Hazard Bypass, then bear right at the bottom to continue on KY-15 South.
25. Travel 15 miles south on KY-15 and cross over Carr Creek Lake.
26. Immediately after crossing the lake, turn left on KY-1231 North. Travel 3.4 miles on KY-1231 North and you will see a huge V-shaped valley fill directly in front of you. Look for a small beige-colored utility shack with a blue roof on the right. Stop and park here in the little gravel pull-off by the shack. The valley fill in front of you was once a small mountain stream surrounded by a dense hardwood forest. Coal companies have buried that stream under 150 feet of mining waste rock and debris. Valley fills are waste dumps.

27. When coal companies remove the mountaintops to access the coal seams, they place the excess mining rock and debris – known as “spoil” or “overburden” – into mountain valleys. This is not the only method for handling the
waste, just the cheapest one for the coal companies, who are trying to maximize their profits. Federal regulators, such as the Army Corps of Engineers have historically allowed the dumping of waste in streams despite the Federal Clean Water Act which states that “The waters of the United States shall not be used for waste disposal.” The Army Corps claims that valley fills cause “minimal impact” to the streams. Federal Judge Charles Haden strongly disagreed in his historic 1999 ruling that valley fills clearly violated the Clean Water Act. Haden’s ruling was later overturned on a technicality. When the coal-friendly Bush Administration came into office in 2000, they changed the definition of the word “fill” in the Clean Water Act to allow the continued dumping of mining waste in streams. Efforts in Congress are ongoing to pass legislation returning the Clean Water Act to its original intent. The bill is called the “Clean Water Protection Act” and has the support of most environmental groups.

28. Turn around and you will see an active mine site that has decapitated a mountain above Carr Creek State Park. Continue on KY-1231 North over the top of the mountain to see a large reclaimed mine site covered in grass, then drive down to the bottom. Make a U-turn at the bottom of the hill and go back to KY-15.

29. If you wish to visit Carr Creek State Park, turn right. There is a picnic area, playground and a sandy beach offering views of a bald-topped mountain that was blasted by coal companies in 2008. This mountaintop, like all of eastern Kentucky, was once home to the world’s most biologically-diverse temperate hardwood forest. University of Cincinnati professor E. Lucy Braun, author of Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America (1950), named it the mixed-mesophytic forest, and it contains rich and valuable stands of hardwoods like ash, oak, maple, beech, walnut and hickory. Coal companies have reclaimed the forests by hydro-seeding to create barren monoculture grasslands full of invasive species. Kentucky 31 Fescue, which is not a native grass, is often used on reclaimed mine sites, yet it causes fescue toxicosis, resulting in abortions for horses and myriad illnesses in cattle. Another plant often used on reclaimed mine sites, Lespedeza Sericea, (Chinese lespedeza), is inedible for wildlife and livestock. For more information about a new effort to reforest the hundreds of thousands of acres of formerly-mined land in Appalachia with native hardwood trees, check out the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, http://arri.osmre.gov/

30. From Carr Creek State Park, continue south on KY-15 to the town of Whitesburg, home of the late author and attorney Harry Caudill. In 1962 Caudill wrote a landmark book about strip mining called “Night Comes to the Cumberlands – A Biography of a Depressed Area.” This great book is often credited with bringing national attention to mining and poverty issues in Appalachia, and helping launch the “War on Poverty” during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. If you wish you can visit the Harry Caudill Public Library in downtown Whitesburg.

31. When you first arrive in Whitesburg, you will see a Wendy’s and a Super-8 Motel on your left. Continue straight if you want to go into downtown Whitesburg, home of the Summit City Café and the Courthouse Café (both have excellent food), as well as Appalshop, the independent media center located at 91 Madison Ave. in downtown Whitesburg which has been documenting Appalachian culture since 1970. Appalshop has created a huge catalog of wonderful documentary films on Appalachia, mining, mountain music and culture. Most Appalshop films are available on DVD for about $25. For more information visit www.appalshop.org Appalshop’s excellent community-run radio station WMMT-FM 88.7 is highly recommended as you drive through the mountains.

32. From downtown Whitesburg, go back to the Wendy’s and then take the KY-15 south bypass around town to McDonalds.

33. At McDonald’s turn right to take US 119 south, and drive 4 miles to the top of Pine Mountain. There are several roadside pull-offs along US 119 with scenic mountain views, but the best views (and sunsets) are available from Tower Road, located on top of the mountain across from the Pine Mountain State Park lot. Tower Road is a steep, narrow gravel road and may be a challenge for cars with low clearance. Tower Road dead ends and there are several places to turn around. Go back to US 119.
34. The Little Shepherd Trail, KY 1679, is located across US 119 from Tower Road. The Little Shepherd Trail is a 38-mile long winding narrow road that follows the top of the ridge of Pine Mountain. It is beautiful and scenic and densely forested but unfortunately does not offer many views of the mountains. If you want to check it out, it is about 15 miles on the Little Shepherd Trail from US 119 to Kingdom Come State Park, where bears are often seen. Camping and hiking are available at Kingdom Come State Park.

www.kingdomcome.org/kcsp/index.html

35. From US 119 and the Little Shepherd Trail, continue down the mountain on US 119 South. There is a good view of an active mountaintop removal site on Black Mountain as you drive down Pine Mountain. Near the bottom, watch for signs to Bad Branch Falls. If you wish to visit the Falls (highly recommended) and see a very dramatic view of MTR, turn left on KY-932 and drive 1.7 miles and look for the Bad Branch Falls parking lot on the left. Park here. It is about a one-mile hike to the falls, moderate difficulty and an uphill climb. Bad Branch has the best water quality of any stream in Kentucky, because there is no mining or logging above the falls.

36. If you wish to see a very dramatic view of mountaintop removal in this area, continue on KY-932 for 3 miles and cross into Virginia. Go another 1.4 miles past the state line, and at the B&J Grocery (closed) continue straight on VA-707. Travel 0.7 miles past the B&J Grocery and you will see an old metal gate on your right. Turn right through the gate and take an immediate left. Park here. Walk uphill for 0.2 miles to a large blue water tank. There is an amazing, horrible view of mountaintop removal here. If the gate is closed, you can continue on VA 707 for another 0.6 miles and there is a pull-off in a hairpin turn that also has a good view of mountaintop removal. Watch for the white picket fence, and a home in the valley with lots of flowers. You can park here and take pictures.
37. Return to US 119, going back past **Bad Branch**.
38. At US 119, turn left to continue south on US 119 for about 1 mile. Turn left on KY 806 at **Maggards Store** to see artist Jeff Chapman-Crane’s amazing sculpture about mountaintop removal called “**The Agony of Gaia**.” The **Valley of the Winds** studio is on KY-806, located on the right about 1.5 miles from US 119 in **Eolia**. Call first (606) 633-8652.

39. Another terrific area attraction is the **Oven Fork Mercantile** store, located on US 119 just south of Maggards store. Recommended.
40. Continue on US 119 South. The memorial for the **Scotia Mine** disaster is on your left a few miles past the Oven Fork Mercantile store. On March 11, 1976, a coal dust and gas explosion killed 15 miners working underground. Two days later, another explosion killed 11 rescue workers, including three federal safety inspectors. Mine disasters – such as the April 2010 Upper Big Branch disaster at Massey Energy’s Performance Coal Mine in **Montcoal, West Virginia**, continue to haunt the region, despite improved mine safety regulations. Underground miners continue to acquire black lung from breathing coal dust. Over 100,000 miners have died in the United States from roof falls, explosions and black lung in the past 100 years.
41. If you want to see the **Kentucky Coal Mining Museum** in **Benham**, take the **Cumberland** KY-160 exit off US 119. The exit is located 13 miles south of **Eolia**. Take KY-160 and follow the signs through **Cumberland** and **Benham** to the museum. The museum (recommended) offers displays, guided tours and a guided underground mine tour at US Steel’s old **Portal #31** (call first to make appointment (606) 848-1530). Lodging is available nearby at the School House Inn in **Benham**. [http://www.kingdomcome.org/inn/](http://www.kingdomcome.org/inn/)
42. Also worth visiting is the old company town of **Lynch**, located a short distance past **Benham** on KY 160. **Lynch** is a historically black community and there are many interesting old abandoned coal company and community buildings here, including the “**Lynch Colored School**” on your left. Like most coal mining towns in Kentucky, **Lynch** depopulated when mining companies switched from “drill-and-shoot” mining to the continuous miner machines, which did the work of mining with far fewer miners. The depopulation has accelerated since the 1970’s as coal companies have started using mountaintop removal as the preferred way to extract coal. Mountaintop removal employs very few workers, but instead uses huge machines like draglines (earth moving cranes) and giant bulldozers that do the work of hundreds of miners.
43. Continue on KY-160 through Lynch to go to the top of Black Mountain, the highest mountain peak in Kentucky. At the top of the mountain, just before you cross into Virginia, look for a small paved road on the right and an old metal sign that says “FAA En Route Radar.” Turn right here and drive 1.3 miles on this small paved road. Go past the gigantic “golf ball” radar facility. About 0.1 miles past the golf ball, look for a gravel road on your left going up the hill. Park here and walk up the gravel road leading to some radio towers and an abandoned old fire tower. There is a small plaque here to identify the highest point in the state of Kentucky at 4,139 feet. To see mountaintop removal on Black Mountain, continue on route 160 down into Virginia. There are amazing views all the way up and down the mountain.

44. At this point, you can return to Lexington by turning around and taking KY-160 back through Lynch, Benham and Cumberland to US 119 south. Take US 119 past the historic mining city of Harlan (keep right at Harlan to remain on US 119 south) to Pineville, then turn right at the T intersection on US 25 E, which takes you through Barbourville back to Interstate 75. To learn more about Harlan’s history and the story of the United Mine Workers Union to organize and get safe working conditions, check out the Academy Award-winning documentary “Harlan County, USA” and the book “Growing Up Hard in Harlan County” by G.C. Jones. A classic book about growing up in eastern Kentucky is “River of Earth” by James Still. Both are available at the Benham Museum.

45. Go North on I75 back to Lexington.

Kentucky Mountaintop Removal Tour – Pike County

2. 12 miles south of Pikeville, turn right on KY 1460 (Virgie Rd.)
3. Drive 0.7 miles to see an active mountaintop removal mine on the right
4. Return to US 23 and turn left onto US 23 North, and go back to Pikeville
5. Continue north on US 23 through Pikeville.
6. At the Pikeville Wal-Mart turn right on US 119 North heading towards Williamson, West Virginia. Drive about 7 miles.
7. About 1 mile past the Bent Branch exit off US 119, look for a sign on the right that says EQT and a small access road leading to a vacant industrial park. Drive down this short road and park for a good view of an active mountaintop removal mine. If you come to the Meta exit, you have missed the turn off.

8. Return to US 119 North and drive towards Williamson to the community of Belfry. Across from the Belfry Public Library is the regional headquarters for Massey Energy, where Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship infamously attacked an ABC News cameraman who was attempting to question Blankenship about his relationship with West Virginia Supreme Court Judge Elliott “Spike” Maynard. Blankenship and Maynard went on vacation together to the French Riviera – with their girlfriends – shortly before Judge Maynard voted to overturn a $50 million judgment against Massey for fraud. The case was brought by a small coal operator, Hugh Caperton, who had to lay off 150 employees when Massey drove them out of business. See the ABC News report and video of the attack at www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4Ym8qqR5vU The Massey-Caperton case is described in detail in the book “Coal River” by Michael Shnayerson.

9. Belfry, Kentucky was severely flooded in the spring of 2009. Mountaintop removal increases both the frequency and severity of flooding, because the mined land is compacted by bulldozers and heavy equipment until it is as hard as concrete. Water runs off the flattened mountains like a parking lot. The water runs into the communities in the valleys or “hollows” below, causing flash flooding during heavy rainstorms.
10. Additionally, all of the trees are removed by mountaintop removal mining. In a healthy mature forest, trees will soak up 75 percent of the rainfall. But grasses and dirt don’t soak up rainfall as well as trees, so when the land is deforested, flash flooding is increased. These problems are often seen in countries like Haiti and the Philippines where mudslides roar down off deforested mountains and bury entire communities. Severe flash flooding has become a yearly event in **Pike County – Zebulon** has been almost destroyed in the July 2010 floods – yet the mainstream media generally fails to identify resource extraction – mining, logging and gas exploration – as the cause. For a video about the 2010 floods in Pike County see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WYJ24xFyk4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WYJ24xFyk4) For pictures of the 2009 flooding in Belfry and nearby Gilbert WV see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuL3DihlajM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuL3DihlajM)

11. Return to **Pikeville**.

12. End of Tour.
West Virginia Mountaintop Removal Driving Tour

1. Begin in **Williamson, West Virginia**. This depressed older mining town on the **Tug Fork River** is interesting: The **Chamber of Commerce** in downtown **Williamson** is made out of blocks of coal. It is located on 2nd Ave, next to the **Mingo County Courthouse**. For a visit, call 304-235-524. The mammoth **Williamson Rail Yard** is close to town, and is a staging area for railroads carrying coal out of the southern West Virginia mountains. High above the rail yards, you can see the opulent mountaintop home of Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship. Blankenship’s home is actually located across the river in Kentucky off KY Highway 292, but is clearly visible from the West Virginia community of **Rawl**, whose residents have suffered contaminated drinking water when their well water was polluted by the underground injection of coal slurry.

2. To visit the historic town of **Matewan**, take US 52 south out of **Williamson** for 2 miles, then turn right on WV-49 South. It’s about 10 miles on WV-49 to **Matewan**. Here you can see the home of the great 1987 John Sayles film **“Matewan,”** about the events leading up to the 1920 “Matewan Massacre,” when coal companies attempted to thwart union organizing by importing blacks and Italians to break the union. The classic ‘union meeting’ scene from “Matewan” featuring James Earl Jones and Chris Cooper is highly recommended – see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwEMJvDEFy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwEMJvDEFy4)

3. Later, the coal company hired gun thugs from the Baldwin-Felts detective agency to prevent miners from organizing a union. Tensions led to a shootout on the main street of **Matewan**, in which Mayor Cabell Testerman was killed. Police Chief Sid Hatfield, who sided with the miners, survived but was later gunned down on the steps of the courthouse in **Welch, West Virginia**.

4. If you want to see a golf course built on a reclaimed mountaintop removal mine, you can visit the **Twisted Gun Golf Course**, [www.twistedgungc.com/](http://www.twistedgungc.com/). Here are directions: Return to US 52 then follow US 52 South across **Horsepen Mountain**. Continue to follow US 52 for approx. 6 miles after passing the intersection with State Route 44; Turn right on...
to Gilbert Creek Road/Isaban Mountain Rd. (CR-13). Follow Gilbert Creek Rd approx. 2 miles and turn right onto Right Fork of Ben’s Creek Rd (CR-10). There is also active mining visible in this area near Wharncliff.


6. After 1 mile you will see a large Massey mountaintop removal surface mine on your left. Massey has tried to hide this mine from the public by allowing trees to grow along the roadside. Continue on this road for another 1.5 miles and bear right at the Y. You will now drive through a large area of reclaimed mining, with some cows off in the distance.
7. Although this may appear to be merely a pasture, similar to one you might see in Montana or Wyoming, this is all a former mine site. The large V-shaped valley fills and small hills were once mountain streams surrounded by a dense hardwood forest. Coal companies have buried these streams under mining waste rock and debris, and sculpted the land using bulldozers into rolling hills. This mountaintop, like all of West Virginia, was once home to the world’s most biologically-diverse temperate hardwood forest. University of Cincinnati professor E. Lucy Braun, author of Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America (1950), named it the mixed-mesophytic forest, and it contains rich and valuable stands of hardwoods like ash, oak, maple, beech, walnut and hickory. Coal companies have reclaimed the forests by hydro-seeding to create barren monoculture grasslands full of invasive species. Kentucky 31 Fescue, which is not a native grass, is often used on reclaimed mine sites, yet it causes fescue toxicosis, resulting in abortions for horses and myriad illnesses in cattle. Another plant often used on reclaimed mine sites, Lespedeza Sericea, (Chinese lespedeza), is inedible for livestock and wildlife. Many of the trees you see in this area are autumn olive, a non-native species. Notice that the trees are planted along the road to prevent visitors from seeing the vast acres of barren land behind the line of trees. For more information about a new effort to reforest the hundreds of thousands of acres of formerly-mined land in Appalachia with hardwood trees, check out the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, www.arri.osmrc.org

8. Continue on 22 Mine road to the large wood products plant. James “Buck” Harless is a well-known timber and mining executive and has had a seat on the Massey Energy Board of Directors. He is known for his contributions to Republican candidates and for his support for President George W. Bush. Harless is a Bush “Pioneer,” credited with raising $100,000 for the former President, who nicknamed him “Big Buck.”

9. To the right of the wood plant is the site of the Labor Day 2009 Massey “Friends of America” Rally, which featured Massey CEO Don Blankenship wearing an American flag shirt and ball cap, and also featured Detroit rocker Ted Nugent playing “The Star Spangled Banner” on electric guitar, Fox News commentator Sean Hannity, plus Hank Williams, Jr., and British global-warming denier Lord Christopher Monckton. The rally took place less than a year prior to the Upper Big Branch mining disaster, in which 29 Massey miners were killed in an underground explosion. For undercover video of the Massey event see www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdU1PV8qAyY

10. Return to US 119 and drive north for 27 miles to the 49.0 mile marker.
11. Turn left on Upper Mud River Rd (also known as County Rd 10 or CR 10)
12. About 6.5 miles from US 119, the road turns to dirt. You may see mining trucks or equipment. Proceed with caution. This is a public road.
13. After about 2 more miles you will come to a 4-way intersection, with mining equipment and conveyors to your left and right. This is the famous Hobet 21 mine operated by Patriot Coal, one of the largest mountaintop removal mines in Appalachia. Continue straight through the intersection, with caution. After another two miles, you will see a small white farm house on the left, surrounded by mining operations. A long-time observer of mountaintop removal in West Virginia writes: “When I first visited this area in 1995 there were two wonderful little towns with neat clean homes along both sides of the road. All are gone now …”
14. Continue on this road to see much of the ongoing expansion of Hobet on the right and beyond Berry Branch. Find a safe place to turn around, and head back to US 119. Please do not disturb the few local residents who have remained in this area – they have suffered greatly while the land around them is destroyed. To watch a short video depicting how the Hobet 21 mine has grown since 1984, go to: http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/03/100311-mountaintop-mining-west-virginia/

15. Drive north on US 119 to Charleston, West Virginia, the state capitol.

**Directions to Kayford Mountain from Charleston, West Virginia**

Kayford Mountain is the most famous and probably the best place to see mountaintop removal in West Virginia. Over the past decade, thousands of people have come to Kayford to see the destruction of these Appalachian Mountains and to meet the famous “Keeper of the Mountains,” Larry Gibson. Larry grew up on this mountain – his father was an underground miner - and Larry came back from Ohio in the 1980’s to retire. He has been fighting to save his land for over 20 years.
There are numerous annual gatherings, music festivals and potlucks on this mountain that are free and open to the public – a July 4 celebration, the Changing of the Leaves Festival, and several more. For more information, go to www.mountainkeeper.org

For a guided tour, contact “Mountain Keeper” Larry Gibson at (304) 542-1134. Larry has been featured in countless documentary films, books and magazine articles, including international attention from the BBC and Australian Broadcasting. He has also been featured by CNN, ABC Nightline, 20-20, the New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune and many more. He has spoken on countless college campuses about saving Kayford Mountain. Donations to Larry’s Keeper of the Mountains foundation are always gratefully appreciated.

1. From **Charleston**, go east on Interstate 64 – after crossing the **Kanawha River**, keep in the right lanes following signs to **Beckley** (don’t go to **Morgantown**). I 64 east joins with I 77 south.
2. Drive about 20 miles on I64 East and go through a toll booth (fare is $2)
3. Immediately after the toll booth, take Exit 79, the **Sharon-Cabin Creek** exit.
4. At the bottom of the exit ramp, turn right.
5. Go about 100 yards to a T intersection and turn left onto Cabin Creek Rd.
6. Go 7.5 miles on Cabin Creek Rd. to the "Y" at **Leewood** ("Jesus Saves” sign) and bear right.
7. Go about 4 more miles (road turns to gravel – **this is a public road, keep going** - don’t be frightened by the coal trucks but give them plenty of room) and come to a large open area of blacktop and dirt.
8. At the left hand corner, take the one-lane bridge across the creek.
9. Travel another 1.5 miles and bear **RIGHT** on the road, following the guardrail up the mountain. You may see large mining machinery and huge trucks on this road. This is a public road, and it is OK to be here. Proceed with caution.
10. At the top, there is a white rock and a fork in the road. Bear **Right** and continue on for 0.1 miles to the **Stanley Heirs Park** on the left. Park here.
11. You can walk from here through a small community of homes and walk through a iron gate and see mountaintop removal surrounding the mountain
12. Check with local residents on Kayford about the condition of the dirt road before going down the Clear Fork side. If the road is bad, you should drive back the way you came to Charleston. If the road is passable, exit the Stanley Heirs parking lot and turn left. You will now drive 1.5 miles down the other side of Kayford Mountain – this is a narrow, rough and somewhat scary dirt mountain road – and at the bottom turn right onto the highway.

13. Drive 8 miles on Clear Fork Rd. to a T intersection. There is a gas station on your right.

14. Turn right on WV-3 and go into downtown Whitesville, the home of Coal River Mountain Watch at 38835 Coal River Rd (there is a large mountain mural on the side of the building). Coal River Mountain Watch is a local citizens’ group organizing residents against mountaintop removal, and they have been incredibly successful in making mountaintop removal into a national issue. Whitesville was once a thriving city, with streets full of people, plus theaters and bowling alleys. But like most coal mining towns in West Virginia, Whitesville depopulated when mining companies switched from “drill-and-shoot” mining to the continuous miner machines, which did the work of mining with far fewer miners. Many families left the region to find work in northern factories. The depopulation of southern West Virginia has greatly accelerated as coal companies have started using mountaintop removal as the preferred way to extract coal. Mountaintop removal employs very few workers, but instead uses huge machines like draglines and giant bulldozers. All along WV-3 – the famous “Coal River Valley” you will see large mining operations, with huge conveyor belts running across the highway.

15. About 5 miles south of Whitesville on WV-3 is the Massey Energy Upper Big Branch Mine, where on April 5, 2010, an explosion in the underground mine killed 29 miners. The cause of the blast is still under investigation, but the mine had been cited for hundreds of safety violation prior to the blast. You can see many memorials and tributes to the miners, whose deaths have hit the community hard.

16. About 8 miles south of Whitesville on WV-3 is the Marsh Fork Elementary School, where hundreds of people – including actress Daryl Hannah and NASA Climatologist Dr. James Hansen have protested against Massey Energy’s construction of a 2.8 billion-gallon coal slurry lake above the school. There is also a coal preparation plant next to the school, which is attended by 250 children grades K-5. After 5 years of citizen protests, West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin finally relented and agreed to provide funding so that the school children could have a new school in a safe location. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsrutvO6I8

17. From Whitesville, head North on WV-3 for 3 miles to the town of Sylvester. Look for the large white fabric dome on your left, about the size of an indoor football stadium. This fabric dome was installed by Massey Energy after they were sued by local citizens concerned about the amount of dust being generated by a coal preparation
plant, Massey’s Elk Run facility. One Sylvester resident’s home depreciated from over $100,000 in value to only $15,000, due to the dirty coal dust in the air. As you drive through Sylvester, and all along the Coal River, notice the amount of dust on window panes and signs. This dust, which is a human health hazard, comes from coal trucks and coal preparation plants. The dust, along with contaminated well water and the stress of living in a ruined landscape has lowered life expectancy in the coalfields of southern West Virginia.

Sylvester WV showing the “dome” over Massey’s Elk Run Plant – and Sylvester resident Pauline Canterberry

A 2008 study found that McDowell, Logan and Mingo Counties in southern West Virginia have some of the lowest life expectancies for women in America. Out of 3100 counties, McDowell had the 10th lowest life expectancy, Mingo had the 15th, and Logan had the 16th lowest life expectancy. Dr. Michael Hendryx of West Virginia University did a 2008 study which concluded that residents of coal-mining communities “are at an increased risk of developing chronic heart, lung and kidney diseases.” Coal dust – especially the fine particles less than 2.5 microns, contributes to cardiovascular disease.

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19. From Sylvester, continue North on WV 3 to Racine for 16 miles. There is a very dangerous 3-way intersection here, proceed with caution.

20. Bear right onto WV-94 at the 3-way intersection
21. Drive 10 miles north on WV-94 through Hernshaw to I64.

22. Take I64 West back to Charleston.
Virginia Mountaintop Removal Tour

There are four counties in Virginia that have mountaintop removal, and a few spots have an excellent/horrible view. **Wise County** in particular has been heavily mined. The others are **Dickenson, Buchanan and Lee Counties**.

1. Start in **Norton VA**, on US 23 (Obie Cantrell Highway) at the 44.8 mile marker (MM). **Norton** is located about 20 miles south of the Kentucky border.
2. IMPORTANT! Set your odometer to 0.0 here
3. Coming from the south, turn left onto US 23 Business/Esserville Rd at stop light (coming from the north, turn right)
4. Travel 0.4 miles, cross railroad tracks and turn right onto Guest River Rd.
5. At 6.2 miles you can see a glimpse of Mountaintop Removal (MTR) on the left
6. At 8.7 miles there is a large coal processing plant on the right. There is also a coal slurry impoundment surrounded by a high earthen dam, but you cannot actually see the slurry from the road. After mining, coal companies wash the coal at coal preparation plants with a mixture of water and chemicals prior to sending it to the coal-burning power plants. Coal slurry is the mixture of waste water and chemicals left over after the washing process. There are over 500 coal slurry ponds in Appalachia. In October of 2000, a Massey Energy coal slurry pond in **Martin County, Kentucky** broke through the bottom, sending an estimated 300 million gallons of coal slurry into an abandoned underground mine that was only 15 feet beneath the bottom of the lake of sludge. The old mine instantly filled up with slurry, then the slurry burst out of the old mine openings into two streams: **Wolf Creek and Coldwater Creek**. At the time the EPA called it “the worst environmental disaster ever in the southeast United States.” The spill was over 25 times the size of the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska (12 million gallons). The Appalshop documentary “Sludge” tells the story of the spill and its aftermath. See also [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB8WQddz8x0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB8WQddz8x0)

7. At 10.5 miles, look for a small gravel pull-off on your left and an iron gate. Park here and walk a short distance up the gravel road. Here you will see one of the best and most extensive views of mountaintop removal anywhere in the United States. This is an excellent viewpoint that shows active mining and a large reclaimed area. It looks like a giant monster has come down and taken a bite out of the mountain. This mountain sits at the headwaters of three river systems. This mountaintop, like all of Appalachia, was once home to the world’s most biologically-diverse temperate hardwood forest. University of Cincinnati professor E. Lucy Braun, author of *Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America* (1950), named it the mixed-mesophytic forest, and it contains rich and valuable stands of hardwoods like ash, oak, maple, beech, walnut and hickory. Coal companies have reclaimed the forests by hydro-seeding to create barren monoculture grasslands full of invasive species that are inedible. Kentucky 31 Fescue, which is not a native grass, is often used on reclaimed mine sites, yet it causes fescue toxicosis, resulting in abortions for horses and myriad illnesses in cattle. Another plant often used on reclaimed mine sites, *Lespedeza Sericea*, (Chinese lespedeza), is inedible for wildlife and livestock. For more information about a new effort to reforest the hundreds of thousands of acres of formerly-mined land in Appalachia with hardwood trees, check out the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, [www.osmre.arri.org](http://www.osmre.arri.org)
8. Continue on Guest River Rd. You will next drive through a reclaimed area with a pull-off and more good views.
9. At 12.8 miles, look to your right at the small stream drainage along the roadside. When this area was scouted in July 2010, the stream was bright orange – an indication of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD). AMD occurs when iron pyrite, which is composed of iron and sulfur, comes in contact with water. Iron pyrite is often found near coal seams, and the mining dredges the pyrite up to the surface. The water mixed with sulfur creates sulfuric acid. The acidic water is then able to dissolve dangerous heavy metals such as cadmium, lead, arsenic etc. and carry them in solution downstream to city water intakes, where the heavy metals must be removed by the water company. The coal companies don’t pay to clean up the drinking water – the city residents pay for it on their water bill! If the heavy metals are not removed, they can cause serious health effects including liver and kidney damage, cancer etc. The orange color of the water comes from dissolved iron oxide – also known as rust.

10. At 12.9 miles, bear right at the Colonial Baptist Church (old block building).
11. Check out the historic old Dewey School (white building on left)

12. At 15.0, bear right onto VA 671.
13. At 19.0, continue straight at Stop sign across US 23 – with caution - to remain on VA 671.
14. At 19.6, turn right on VA-83, Main Street
15. At 20.3 turn left on VA-83 towards Clintwood
16. At 22.1 there is a view of MTR on the right
17. At 23.4 there are valley fills on the right and left. Valley fills are waste dumps. When coal companies remove the mountaintops to access the coal seams, they place the excess mining rock and debris – known as “spoil” or “overburden” – into mountain valleys. This is not the only method for handling the waste, just the cheapest one for the coal companies, who are trying to maximize their profits. Federal regulators, such as the Army Corps of Engineers have historically allowed the dumping of waste in streams despite the Federal Clean Water Act which
states that “The waters of the United States shall not be used for waste disposal.” The Army Corps claims that valley fills cause “minimal impact” to the streams. Federal Judge Charles Haden strongly disagreed in his historic 1999 ruling that valley fills clearly violated the Clean Water Act. Haden’s ruling was later overturned on a technicality. When the coal-friendly Bush Administration came into office in 2000, they changed the definition of the word “fill” in the Clean Water Act to allow the continued dumping of mining waste. Efforts in Congress are still ongoing to pass legislation returning the Clean Water Act to its original intent.

Valley Fill in White Oak Hollow, West Virginia

18. At 29.3 Turn right in Clintwood to stay on VA-83 towards Haysi. If you wish to visit the Ralph Stanley Museum in downtown Clintwood, go left instead of right, and the museum will be on your left. It is a large building, hard to miss. [http://www.ralphstanleymuseum.com/](http://www.ralphstanleymuseum.com/)

Bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley

19. At 35.8 (Fremont) turn right on VA 63 South towards St. Paul
20. At 53.5 the Dante Miners Memorial is on your left in front of the Fire Station
21. At 60.4 turn right on Alt 58 West towards Norton
22. At 61.7 you will see the huge new Dominion coal-burning power plant on your right. Construction of this plant has been bitterly opposed by concerned citizens and regional environmentalist groups, and St. Paul was the scene of a lock-down direct-action protest.
23. Behind the power plant (up on the hill behind an earthen embankment) is a storage facility for coal ash. Coal ash is what’s left over after burning coal – like the ashes in a fireplace. It is a waste product with no commercial value, and about 130 million tons of coal ash are generated each year. It is often stored in mountainous piles. In December of 2008, the earthen wall surrounding a 65-foot high toxic coal ash impoundment next to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) coal-burning power plant in Kingston TN (located on Interstate 40 between Knoxville and Nashville) suddenly failed, sending over 1 billion gallons of coal ash into the Clinch and Emory Rivers, tributaries of the Tennessee River, which is the drinking water supply for Chattanooga. TVA is currently engaged in a multi-year cleanup of the spill. Shortly after the spill, TVA spokesmen said it would take “6 to 8 weeks” to clean up the spill. They now admit it will be impossible to ever fully remove the toxins from the water, despite a cleanup estimated to cost over a billion dollars. Environmental activists attempting to take photos of the spill have been detained and threatened with arrest by TVA security. See amazing video of the TVA disaster [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGmVCABMRRO](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGmVCABMRRO) and TVA security harassment of citizens following the Dec 22, 2008 spill in Kingston Tennessee here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Flo5HXvqHsw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Flo5HXvqHsw)

24. At 67.1 look for the high train trestle on your right. Coal trains carry about 100 tons of coal in each car (200,000 lbs), and many coal trains have 100 cars or more. This coal is shipped to coal-burning power plants in many other states.

25. Along the Ohio River through Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia there is a coal-burning power plant about every 15 miles. The concentration of power plants and the bowl shape of the river valley means that air pollution concentrates along the same corridor where millions of people live and breathe, in cities like Cincinnati, Louisville, Huntington and Evansville. Heart disease is exacerbated by the fine particles of coal
soot (measuring less than 2.5 microns in diameter – a human hair is about 40 microns) that pass through the lining of the lungs and irritate the walls of human arteries. The Ohio River valley is sometimes called “Coronary Valley” by epidemiologists. Air pollution from coal plants also contributes to high rates of asthma and lung cancer.

26. At 80.5 you will return to US 23 at Norton.
27. Turn left to go south on US 23.
28. At 93, take Exit 1, the Big Stone Gap/Appalachia exit, then left at the bottom of the exit ramp on Gilley Ave. following the signs to Appalachia.
29. If you wish to visit the Southwest Virginia Museum in Big Stone Gap, follow the signs to the museum located on top of the hill, otherwise in downtown Big Stone Gap, turn right on East 5th Street and follow the signs to Appalachia.
30. Go past the three large coal silos on your left
31. Watch for a Dollar General Store and Appco gas station on your right.
32. At the Appco station, turn left on VA-160 west, North Inman Street
33. Drive through the small community of Inman, Virginia. Here in August of 2004, a coal company bulldozer accidentally pushed a boulder off the side of a mine road as they were illegally widening the road in the middle of the night. They did not have the proper permits to do this work. The boulder rolled down the mountain and crashed through the back of a home occupied by the Davidson family. The boulder landed on a 3-year-old boy named Jeremy Davidson, who was crushed and killed as he slept in his bed. The family has moved away and the house was torn down to cover up the tragedy. The coal company was fined the maximum amount allowed under Virginia law: $15,000. Local residents organized a march in Appalachia after the tragedy, and a multi-state citizens’ group called Mountain Justice was formed to fight mountaintop removal. For more information about the citizens’ movement to end mountaintop removal, see www.mountainjustice.org
34. Continue on VA-160 up to the top of Black Mountain. There are many good view points to see mountaintop removal along this road.
35. At the top of the mountain, just before you cross into Kentucky, at the sign that says “Crossing Black Mountain” you will see a small gravel road to your right. If you are feeling adventurous, and there has not been a recent heavy rain, turn right here and proceed 0.5 miles down the dirt road to a small white shack. Keep going - the road bears to the left.
36. 0.7 miles past the shack, there is a major power line that crosses the road. The power line poles are rust-colored. Park here (don’t block the road) and walk up the hill following the wires. After a 100-yard uphill walk, there is an excellent aerial view of a large mountaintop removal site – the same mine that caused the death of Jeremy Davidson.
37. Go back to the highway.
38. If you wish, turn right and you can proceed down the mountain into Kentucky and see the historic coal company town of Lynch, with many interesting and historic old buildings including the “Lynch Colored School.” Continue a few miles further to Benham to visit the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum and the School House Inn. Both are recommended. See www.kingdomcome.org/museum/
39. Retrace your trip back down Black Mountain to Appalachia, Virginia and you will see new vantage points all the way down. This is a great place to see mountaintop removal.
40. If you wish to see the interesting old town of Appalachia, turn left at the Appco. Some of the abandoned buildings downtown have old photos in the front windows portraying the town of Appalachia in its heyday – the streets were full of people and cars. This was the era of underground mining, which employed tens of thousands of people. Today, Appalachia is nearly deserted.

Tennessee

To see mountaintop removal mining in Tennessee, contact United Mountain Defense for a guided tour at (865)689-2778, email unitedmountaindefense@yahoo.com

You can also visit the site of the December 2008 TVA coal ash disaster and see some of the ongoing clean-up efforts. Kingston, TN is located about 40 miles west of Knoxville, Tennessee (Kingston is about 140 miles east of Nashville TN). You can easily see the smokestacks of TVA’s Kingston Fossil Plant from Interstate 40. The area most affected by the disaster is Swan Pond Road. To see videos and news coverage from the disaster, go to:

- NBC News Coverage:  www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXM_mezFLak
- PBS NewsHour:  www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1MnezGa8QE
- Amazing aerial footage of the disaster:  www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGmVCABMRoQ
Appendix: Google Maps Satellite Views of Mountaintop Removal

Guest River Rd. near Dewey VA. Note how trees are planted only along the side of the road, which is highlighted in yellow. This is an attempt to hide the mining from passing motorists.

Large active mountaintop removal mining operation along US 23 near Virgie, KY in Pike County.
Larry Gibson’s beloved Kayford Mountain, surrounded like an island in an ocean of mining.

Meta, KY in Pike County – the site of severe flash floods in July, 2010