Coal Mining Heritage Park, 
Montgomery County, Virginia: 
Study, Plan, and Recommendations

Mary B. La Lone, Ed. 
Karen A. Barnes 
Bobbi Jo Burnett 
Rehana G. Durani 
Jacquelin T. Graham 
Melissa E. Lamb 
Daliah G. Macon 
Matthew D. Schrag 
Elaine G. Staab 
Jennifer K. Zelinski

Radford University 
Department of Sociology and Anthropology 
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This project was built upon a partnership developed between the Radford University Applied Anthropology class and a number of partners in the community and region. We want to thank our partners on this project for the opportunity to work with them and their great assistance: the Montgomery County Office of Planning, the Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County, and the state archaeologist from the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office.

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NEED FOR A HERITAGE PARK AT MERRIMAC

The new Huckleberry Trail is a great greenway and recreational asset to Montgomery County. Already, it receives a large amount of daily use. In cultural and historic terms, one of the high points of the trail is that it runs right through the middle of the site of Merrimac, where the county’s largest coal mine and a dynamic mining community once stood. However, as walkers, runners, and bikers pass through the site of Merrimac, they have no way of knowing that they are actually passing through an area of great cultural significance to the New River Valley – that on this site once stood a huge mining tipple, a whole community of miners’ houses, a company store, a hotel, and much more. Nothing currently marks the mining and community sites, or interprets their historical significance to those who pass by. It would be a great addition to the Huckleberry Trail to create a heritage park alongside the trail, where trail users could stop, rest, and contemplate the past. A heritage park could also serve as a focal point for community and family gatherings, and a place where school children could come on field trips to learn about their county’s mining history. In creating a heritage park, the county would be making a statement that the region’s past heritage continues to have meaning.

Interest in the region's mining history and a mining heritage park has been growing. The county planning office and trail supporters recognized the need to add heritage features to the Huckleberry Trail, and in 1996 they started a project to develop interpretive signs along the Huckleberry Trail, including mining-heritage signage for Merrimac. The Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County participated in that project and continues to have a strong interest in having the county's mining story told through signage at Merrimac. The state archaeologist has been working to locate the remains of buildings and other features at Merrimac (Klatka et al. 1999). The county's interest in its mining history has been sparked by numerous newspaper articles and books published on New River Valley mining, including a book by Garland Proco on the Merrimac mines (Freis 1994a-d, 1995b, 1996a-b, 1997, 1998; S. Linkous 1998; Berrier 1997; Price et al. 1994; Proco 1994). Two books of oral histories – *Appalachian Coal Mining Memories* (La Lone 1997) and *Coal Mining Lives* (La Lone 1998) – have been collected from county mining families by Radford University research teams, including many interviews relating to Merrimac. The oral history project was a three-year countywide effort, linking students and community members in an effort that rekindled and focused the county's attention on its mining heritage (La Lone 1999). In recognition of its mining heritage, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors designated an annual Coal Miners Day, which is marked by a yearly celebration organized by the Coal Mining Heritage Association. Finally, of greatest significance, Montgomery County has purchased land along the Huckleberry Trail at the site of Merrimac for a possible park.
Clearly, the interests of many people and groups converge around the development of a historic park at Merrimac. The time and support are right for a Coal Mining Heritage Park in Montgomery County.

THE COAL MINING HERITAGE PARK PROJECT: BACKGROUND AND DESIGN

This report is the result of a semester-long class project for the Fall 1999 “Applied Anthropology” class (ANTH 495) at Radford University. The idea behind the project was to link my university class together with numerous agencies and groups into a partnership. This partnership which would serve both as a “teaching partnership” for educating students and a cooperative effort at community development, a next step toward planning a heritage park at Merrimac. Specifically, I joined forces with Montgomery County’s Planning Office and other county offices, the Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County (CMHA), and the state archaeologist at the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office to create the foundation for this project. We began planning for the class in April 1999, and the students came on board in August.

The project served as an experiential learning component for the Applied Anthropology class. The semester was 15 weeks long, beginning the week of August 23 and ending December 10, 1999. The project was a valuable component to the class since it provided the students an opportunity to actually gain hands-on experience in applying anthropology in a project of cultural heritage value to Montgomery County (an example of what educators call “service learning”). I served as the professor for the class and the project director, organizing and supervising my students’ work, and editing the final consulting report. The students formed a research team charged with studying the potentials for developing the property owned by Montgomery County at Merrimac into a heritage park.

Early in the semester, in cooperation with the participating county and community groups, we set up a series of orientation readings and “orientation sessions” for the student research team. This included tours of the Merrimac site in which members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association, the county planners, and the state archaeologist oriented students to the layout and history of the site and the planning considerations. After this initial orientation period, the student team began their research stage. During this stage the student team: 1) met with members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the mining heritage, gain mining families’ perspectives and feedback to incorporate into plans for a heritage park, and discover what resources the CMHA and mining families might contribute; 2) similarly, they met with members of the Merrimac community to gain public input and visions on how this land might be developed into a heritage park; 3) they worked closely with county planning officials to be educated and gain guidance on the potentials and limitations of development at the Merrimac site from the county’s perspective; 4) they visited living history museums at Explore Park and Beckley to gain visual examples of what might be done on a smaller scale at Merrimac; and 5) they conducted community meetings at Merrimac and developed a survey to gain input on facilities and features desired at the park by the community. Some of these research activities are described at greater length later in this chapter.
About midway through the semester, the research team turned its attention toward developing a set of recommendations for the park. During numerous class “brainstorming” sessions, the team took the information gained through the research process and crafted it into an overall conceptual plan of the park. In addition to the overall plan, we developed recommendations for “phasing” the park development. The phases consist of a series of actions that might be “staged-in” in the development of a heritage park, starting with early activities such as the development of heritage signage, graduating to developments requiring greater resources such as the construction of trails and a community recreation area, followed by the construction of interpretive history structures such as a replicated miner’s house and a museum/visitors center (see Chapter 2). The research team then developed its ideas for potential heritage, environmental, community recreation activities, and park facilities at greater length (see Chapters 3-6). During the last part of the semester, the team was engaged in compiling its research and recommendations into a consulting report for the Montgomery County Planning Office and the Coal Mining Heritage Association. The final draft was completed in December 1999 and edited during January 2000.

As a follow-up to the "Applied Anthropology" class, we formed a “Practicum in Anthropology” class (ANTH 493) for Spring 2000, which is enabling some of the student participants to continue working with the county planning office on selected projects that will help carry the park development forward.

APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AS A GUIDING APPROACH FOR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As mentioned, this study was undertaken as a project for the "Applied Anthropology" class at Radford University. Because of this context, the research team approached the park planning project with anthropological perspectives that we feel are important strengths of our study. We want to discuss the field of applied anthropology briefly for a clear understanding of our approaches, methodology, and recommendations.

Anthropologists are specialists in studying people’s behavior and culture, with expertise both in working with present-day communities and in preserving past cultures. Anthropologists are increasingly working in the public arena, outside of a university setting, in the growing field known as “applied anthropology.” In applied anthropology, anthropologists “apply” their perspectives and methods – put their cultural knowledge and research techniques into practice – to assist communities and groups, often in the regions where they live. Applied anthropologists work in economic development, community planning, heritage preservation, cultural resource management, public policy, and many other areas, putting their community-oriented approaches and methods to work in development for citizens.

The Merrimac park project presented us with an excellent opportunity to put our collective knowledge of Appalachian culture and communities, regional mining history, ethnographic research techniques, and archaeology to work, in order to assist Montgomery County’s efforts in park planning. All participants had studied ethnographic research techniques (interviewing, participant-observation), many had training in archaeology, and some had classes and experience working in Appalachian communities. The professor/project director has a 10-year history of studying and
working with southwest Virginia communities, documenting coal mining oral histories and working on heritage tourism. She also has a background in museum studies that she applied to the park planning. For the three years prior to this park project, the professor and numerous classes of anthropology students had worked with the Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County, and had established a strong bond of rapport while collecting a wealth of oral history documentation on the New River Valley mining way of life (La Lone 1997, 1998). So, this class was especially suited to take on the challenge of studying the possibilities for developing a heritage park at Merrimac.

We brought two special emphases from applied anthropology to the study of this heritage park: 1) concern and knowledge for cultural heritage preservation, and 2) the community-oriented emphasis of applied anthropology.

**Heritage Preservation**

The special significance of Merrimac as a place on the county's landscape, is its key role in the mining history of the New River Valley. It was one of the largest semi-anthracite coal mines in the Valley Coal Field of Virginia. Merrimac has roots going back to the Civil War, when it was the site of a confederate mining colliery (a coal mining operation with housing for the miners). Supposedly, the site became known as Merrimac because the mine supplied coal to fuel the Ironclad Merrimac in its battle with the U.S.S. Monitor during the Civil War. The real heyday of Merrimac was in the early twentieth century, until the mine closed in 1935 (the management shut the mine rather than compromise with labor demands).

During its heyday, the site of Merrimac was alive with activity. The industrial complex included the mine and numerous buildings used to carry out mining operations. The dominant feature was the tipple, a huge structure where coal was sorted and then dumped down into railroad coal cars waiting below. Some of the other industrial structures included hoist houses, a boiler house, fan house, lamp house, wash house, mule barn, and combined shops (blacksmith, sawmill). The mine ran a hotel/boarding house and a commissary, which contained a company store, post office, and payroll offices. Merrimac was also the site of a dynamic mining community. The mine provided some company houses for mining families, located on Bunker Hill, and other miners built houses nearby. During its heyday, the site of Merrimac was alive with industrial sights and sounds, and the sights and sounds of children playing, families working in their gardens, and friends visiting on their front porches.

These are the images of the county's past mining life that the Huckleberry Trail user can no longer view at Merrimac since the people and buildings are now gone. One of the team's primary goals was to solve this problem – to develop ways to make knowledge of the past cultural heritage readily available to trail and park visitors today. Our report shows how tasteful, accurate, historic interpretation can be built into a community-based park in the forms of signage, exhibits, reconstructed buildings, and educational activities, preserving knowledge of the county's mining way of life for future generations of park and trail users.

Our focus on heritage preservation also influenced the way we approached park planning. A central concern in developing the park design was in **preserving the archaeological integrity** of the site. Many of the clues that document Merrimac's past lie
on or just below the surface of the land. Activities that disturb the land, disturb that archaeological documentation. We benefited from multiple discussions with archaeologist Tom Klatka, who shared his knowledge of the site and raised ideas for our consideration. Our team's goal has been to design the park so that today's citizens can enjoy the space and learn about the history, without development that unnecessarily disturbs the archaeological integrity of the site. Our recommendations for the location of trails and park activities are designed to use previous road beds and sections of the property where mine cleanup operations have disturbed the land, and to avoid disturbing land on which the archaeological record needs preserving. We also make suggestions to use archaeology as one of the educational tools at the park (ranging from an archaeology exhibit to archaeology "camps," which could involve the public in future efforts to uncover Merrimac's past). We have worked to strike a good balance between use and protection -- between using Merrimac as a park site for heritage education and community recreation while, at the same time, protecting the valuable archaeological record of mining life at Merrimac.

Planning and Design For the Community, With Community Input and Participation

One of the strongest emphases in applied anthropology is planning and design "for" and "with" communities, providing extensive opportunities for community input and involvement in the development process. Anthropology has an extensive literature documenting the problems that occur when outside groups/agencies attempt to introduce change “to” communities as specialists taking the approach that they “know better” than the people themselves. Too often, designers and planners take this approach, only to find that they have alienated the communities for which they are working (see for example, La Lone 1995; ms.). One of the basic guiding principles of applied anthropology is that people from the community need to be consulted and given meaningful participatory roles from the very beginning of a development project. Therefore this community-oriented approach was a guiding feature of this project.

From the beginning, this project venture was founded on a “partnership” between the class, the county, and the Coal Mining Heritage Association. The partnership quickly extended to include the Merrimac community (via the Merrimac Pentecostal Holiness Church) and, at a wider level, the state archaeologist from the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office. A variety of people from these different partner organizations visited the class early in the semester to orient the research team to the history, archaeology, and planning considerations for development of a park at Merrimac, and continued to advise us throughout the research process. As the project progressed, we searched out and developed ties with other park user-groups from the community, including Friends of the Huckleberry, the principal and teachers from Price’s Fork Elementary School, and park users from Warm Hearth retirement home. Members of these groups served as “resource people,” and were interviewed by the research team during the research “fact-finding” stage of the project. We also made a day-long site visit to Explore Park, and received extensive consultation on considerations for living history park planning from curator Rich Loveland. This shows the network of connections, ranging from community to regional level, supporting this project.
The community-oriented approach guided the research methodology for this project. For the park to be used and embraced by the community, it is critical that community members and potential park/trail users have an active role in voicing ideas, desires, concerns, and solutions for park development. We wanted to provide various forums for gaining community input. Therefore, we structured the project to include: 1) visits to Coal Mining Heritage Association meetings to gain input; 2) a set of two community meetings held in Merrimac for the purpose of gaining community input and discussion; 3) a survey mailed to residents of the Merrimac community and other target groups; and 4) interviewing with key “resource people” from the Coal Mining Heritage Association and the user-groups discussed above. We asked people what they’d like to see at the park, and listened and recorded what people told us.

In particular, two of these research techniques deserve further discussion since they demonstrate the high level of community involvement in generating ideas for the park. The class organized and held two community meetings at the Merrimac Pentecostal Holiness Church Fellowship Hall on October 21 and October 23, 1999. The two Merrimac community meetings were designed specifically to involve the community in the park planning process. To plan the meetings, we first held a joint meeting of representatives from the research team, the county, the mining association, and the Merrimac church to plan the dates and discuss the most effective structure for the meetings. We then consulted with Bobby Parker, Public Relations Director for Montgomery County, and Lori Shepherd, a MIRA community organizer, on strategies for advertising and effectively organizing the meetings. While we borrowed many of their ideas, we also put a distinctly anthropological twist into it, drawing extensively from the anthropological rapport-building techniques that we’ve found effective in Appalachian community contexts (see La Lone ms.). We wanted to create a community meeting atmosphere that felt comfortable to the participants rather than formal. This was particularly important because we wanted community members to open up and generate ideas rather than feel inhibited. We knew we had attained our goal of creating a comfortable Appalachian community meeting environment when one participant described the meeting as having a “church social” feeling. We incorporated music and food into the meeting – good ways to gain a comfortable feeling in Appalachian community contexts. After short introductory informational speeches, we invited the participants to get some food and then join for small-group discussion at one of three interest tables: a table discussing ways to exhibit heritage at the park, a table developing educational ideas for the park, and a table discussing ideas for recreation and facilities desired at the park. As the group discussions got underway, people became quite involved in generating ideas, voicing their concerns, and then discussing solutions to deal with concerns. (Please see Appendix B for the community-generated list of ideas that came from these community meetings.) The meetings were extremely productive in gaining public awareness and creating a community-based set of potential ideas for park development. The input we received during those meetings formed much of the basis of being able to design a park “for” the people, using peoples’ own ideas.

The second technique used to generate community-based input was a written survey. The surveys were mailed to residents living in Merrimac and the immediate vicinity, and to the members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association. Additional
questionnaires were placed in grocery stores, gas stations, and other public locations. Sixty-four questionnaires were completed and returned.

Drawing on anthropological methodology, we designed a short, fairly simple questionnaire based primarily on “open-ended” questions. An open-ended question is one that encourages the respondent to answer at length with original ideas and responses (rather than short “canned” responses). The use of open-ended questions is a preferred anthropological technique for gaining input because it allows for people to come up with their own ideas. We considered this most appropriate, since the idea was to hear what people themselves had to say about the possibility of a heritage park. (Please see the Appendix for questionnaire responses.) The responses largely emphasized the importance of making park visitors aware of the mining history, both at the site and in the New River Valley, especially through the use of informational heritage signage. Other responses emphasized the desire to see educational activities at the park and basic facilities for park and trail-user comfort.

In addition, to gain some statistical information on potential features for the park that the research team felt important, we included a checklist of possible facilities on the questionnaire and asked respondents to check all the features that they would like to see at the park. Figure 1.1 provides a summary of the responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF PARK FACILITY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONSES (n=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restrooms</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic shelters</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic tables</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical signs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining museum</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water fountains</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information center</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail benches</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped accessible trails</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking trails</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature trails</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassy areas</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructed buildings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature signs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational activities</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pavilion/amphitheater</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1 Summary of survey responses about types of park facilities desired.

The research team’s fact-finding activities included a literature survey of books and articles on park planning and design (Espeseth 1982; Fogg 1975; Hultsman et al. 1997; Marcus et al. 1998; Molnar 1986; Sharpe 1983), historical research on the mining way of life at Merrimac and the New River Valley (Proco 1994, Freis 1995, La Lone
1997, 1998), archaeological and geological research on Merrimac (Klatka et al. 1999, Whisonant 2000), and heritage preservation issues related to industrial sites (Copps and Abberger 1994; Dyen and Muller 1994; Herman 1994; Noble and Spude 1992). The fact-finding research activities also included conducting interviews with numerous “resource people” to gather needed information, perspectives, and ideas. For information and recommendations relating to the archaeological considerations for situating a park on the site of Merrimac, we consulted with Tom Klatka, state archaeologist at the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office, and Dr. Cliff Boyd, archaeologist in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Radford University. To better understand park development and maintenance possibilities and limitations in Montgomery County, we consulted with Tom Bain and Steve Phillips. For advise on planning considerations for living history parks, we consulted with Rich Loveland, curator of interpretive history at Explore Park. To acquire heritage information about the coal mines and mining families, as well as possible resources for developing mining signage and exhibits, we consulted with Fred Lawson, Hazel Hodge, Esther Jones, Alex Linkous, Lee Linkous, Sam Huff, and other members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association. For detailed information on the environmental features at the Merrimac park site, we consulted with Meghan Dorsett who is conducting an environmental survey of the site. We identified a variety of potential park user groups such as school teachers, Huckleberry Trail users, and Warm Hearth. This research, along with the community input, forms the basis for the discussion and recommendations in the following chapters.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is divided into three sections. In the first section, this first chapter has discussed the need for a park, plus the park project design, methodology, and emphases. Chapter 2 presents our overall plan for the Coal Mining Heritage Park at Merrimac, and suggested phasing for park development.

The middle section of the report goes into greater detail on specific aspects of the park. Chapter 3 focuses on the heritage aspects. It develops ideas for signage, exhibits, reconstructed buildings, a museum/visitors center, and suggestions for heritage-based educational activities. Chapter 4 discusses park facilities and conveniences that will make the park user-friendly. This includes restrooms, drinking fountains, trail benches and picnic tables, parking and security, as well as discussion of some of the recommended structures for the park. Chapter 5 focuses on the development of community recreation and trails. It describes a plan for a community recreation area on the east side of the park that will include picnic shelters, a playground, and an open-air pavilion for community activities such as music and storytelling. The chapter also describes our recommendations for a system of low-impact trails within the park. And Chapter 6 describes the park's environment and develops ideas for nature-based signage and educational activities at the park.

In the final section, Chapter 7 will conclude our report with a set of overall recommendations for proceeding with park development based on our study of the place, community, needs, and possibilities.
CONCLUSION

Montgomery County has an opportunity to make a significant step – to create the county's first heritage park. Interest in the county's mining heritage is strong. Support from the community for a Coal Mining Heritage Park is strong. This project to study and plan for the park came together and has developed as a broad-based partnership which, in itself, demonstrates the multiple levels of interest and support for the Merrimac park endeavor. As we enter a new century, with growth so rapidly bringing change to the county's landscape and ways of life, it is a good time to create a park along the Huckleberry Trail where people can come for recreation, family outings, and to reflect on and celebrate the county's nineteenth and twentieth century mining heritage.
Chapter 2

THE PARK PLAN AND SUGGESTED PHASING

By Mary B. La Lone

This chapter presents ideas for a park design and phasing recommendations for a Coal Mining Heritage Park on the 17-acre property at Merrimac owned by Montgomery County. The Huckleberry Trail runs the full length of the park, with park land lying on both sides of the trail.

THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The conceptual plan lays out a model for park design at Merrimac. This plan is shown in Figure 2.1. The model was developed based on our research of the site itself, its history, citizen input through the community meetings and survey, and brainstorming sessions with specialists and representatives of park user groups.

There are three entrances into the park – two entrances into the park for walkers and bikers of the Huckleberry Trail coming from the west, Blacksburg side and the east, Christiansburg side, and a main entrance off of Merrimac Road for visitors who will be driving to the park. We expect that a large number of park visitors will wish to drive to the park. This includes people who are using the park as their starting point for a walk along the Huckleberry Trail, visitors who are coming specifically to visit the park as a destination for family and community outings, and school groups who are coming to the park for heritage-based and environmental-based educational activities. The park needs a parking lot of sufficient size to accommodate cars and school buses, and to enable these vehicles to turn around. The present access road into the park does not provide room for park visitor parking. However, an adjoining site, currently used as a Consolidated Waste Site, would be an excellent location for visitor parking. We recommend converting the current Consolidated Waste Site into a parking lot for the Coal Mining Heritage Park for a number of reasons: it is already leveled and graded; it is of sufficient size to handle parking for the park; its location is away from and above the sight lines of Huckleberry Trail users, so it would not be an intrusive parking lot; and its location provides good access to the “Community Recreation Area” planned for the park so that elderly visitors will not have far to walk. Another recommendation is to place good welcoming signage and landscaping at the east entrances to the Coal Mining Heritage Park, those in sight of Merrimac Road, so that people can easily locate the park and will feel invited in. In the plan, we created “Merrimac Junction” as a welcoming station on the east side for two reasons: it creates an attractive landscaped entry to the park and it disguises an unattractive row of exposed metal drainage pipes currently visible at the entry to the park. Further discussion of the parking lot and welcoming signage appear in the body of this report.
Three Integrated Themes in the Park Plan: Heritage, Community, and Environment

The park design for Merrimac incorporates three integrated themes: heritage, community, and environment. These themes emerged as central emphases during the three months of discussions and interaction with the community.

The park provides a great opportunity for county heritage preservation and education. Coal mining clearly was an important part of Montgomery County’s history. What makes the Merrimac site so unique is that it was the actual location of a once-booming coal mine and mining community. As the county progresses into the 21st century, it can recognize and honor its mining heritage through this park. The Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County, area school teachers and principals, and Huckleberry Trail users are among the county citizens who expressed interest in seeing heritage-based education at the park.

The heritage theme is incorporated throughout the park design. Signage will inform and educate visitors of the county’s mining history. The sites of former mining buildings and miners houses will be identified in ways that educate visitors and that promote historical and archaeological appreciation. A miner’s house can be reconstructed and furnished to give visitors a more tangible three-dimensional look back in time, and a mining museum can serve as the focal point for the park and its educational activities. The heritage theme spans the park layout. As visitors walk along the Huckleberry Trail, signs will identify the historic locations of Bunker Hill, the tipple, the hotel and commissary – drawing visitors along from one end of the park to the other end. The “Tipple Heritage Area,” located in the middle of the park, will serve as an initial visitors information center, with exhibits of mining equipment and kiosk-style signage under a covered display area. This area will serve as a central meeting point for school and community groups to start a heritage tour of the park. In addition, low-impact side trails, on either side of the Huckleberry Trail, will take visitors to other points of heritage interest at the park. The “Mule Trail” and “Drift Mouth Trail” will take them by some of the industrial buildings and the mine entrance. The “Miner’s House Trail” will take them from the reconstructed miner’s house up to examine the archaeological remains of an actual miner’s house. The “Bunker Hill Trail” will take visitors past the hoist house sites, up toward the area known as Bunker Hill, where many of the mining families lived, and will enable visitors to view the entire park from a scenic overlook. The “Merrimac Loop Trail” provides an ADA accessible loop around the park. Benches placed along these trails will allow visitors to rest while contemplating the historic settings.

Community recreation is a second theme in the park design. People expressed interest in having a portion of the park be a place where parents could take their children to play, families could hold family reunions, and community events could be held on an open-air stage during the summer months. We incorporated a “Community Recreation Area” into the design, on the east end of the park. This section of the park is selected because it is the only part of the park providing a large, open space and, since the area has already undergone disturbance, developing and containing the Community Recreation Area in this section should not threaten the archaeological integrity of the park. It is located near Merrimac Road and it provides easy access to both the Huckleberry Trail and the parking lot. The Community Recreation Area has two picnic shelters, a
playground, and a grassy area on which community families could spread blankets to sit and listen to music, storytelling, or other events occurring on the open-air stage of the “Front Porch Pavilion.” The picnic shelters can be built to provide some of the park facilities highly requested by the community and Huckleberry Trail users: attached restrooms, water fountains, and picnic tables. Parents can sit in the shelters to watch their children playing at the nearby playground, families can eat their lunches at the shelters, and Huckleberry Trail users will be able to take cover from rainstorms under the shelters. All of the structures in the Community Recreation Area, as throughout the park, would be built in a rustic manner in keeping with the heritage theme of the park.

A third theme of the park is environmental education. Interest in the environment comes directly from the community. During the community meetings, exciting discussions occurred about the potentials for developing nature-based educational activities at the park. Teachers and parents brainstormed a wide range of ideas for using the park as a location for teaching children about plants and wildlife. It is clear that school teachers and their classes will form a larger user group for the park, and that area schools will be willing to work cooperatively with the county in developing nature-based educational activities. People also expressed interest in protecting the environment and in having activities that focus on identification of wildflowers, birds, and plants in the park. This theme of environment is incorporated in the park design by having signage along the park’s low-impact trails to help visitors identify native and introduced plants, and by recommending that trail benches be situated so that visitors can rest and enjoy the wildflowers and natural features of the park. The “Wetlands Conservation Area” at the west end of the park provides an area specifically for nature education. A structure will be placed in this area, close to the creek (we hope it can be arranged for this structure to be a caboose like one used on the old Huckleberry Train). The inside of this structure can be converted into a classroom for nature education, and will provide a location where educational materials can be stored in a locked structure. So, while the east end of the park will provide a playground area for children (directing louder play activities toward that end of the park), the east end of the park will provide a “Wetland Conservation Area,” where the environment along the creek will be protected and where classes and community groups can come for more serious nature education.

These three themes – heritage, community recreation, and environment – are incorporated into the plan graphically presented in Figure 2.1.

**SUGGESTED PHASING**

The conceptual plan presents a model for a total park design at Merrimac. Of course, the full plan cannot be put in place overnight. Instead, the park will need to be developed in a series of stages. Some things can be put in place fairly easily to launch the park, other features may follow as joint county-community efforts, and yet other features will require more extensive fund raising. To make the plan realistic, we have developed a set of recommendations for phasing the development of the Coal Mining Heritage Park. The premise behind the phasing is to identify things that could be done early with limited resources to establish the park and a community base of support, then to follow with successive stages requiring greater commitments of resources from the county and community groups.
Phase One

Phase One contains two different types of activities that should take place early in the park development: 1) initial planning activities that need to be undertaken; and 2) some things that could be done soon to launch the park and establish its presence.

Phase One
• Initial planning activities:
  o Funding search.
    ▪ Grant-writing.
    ▪ Assessing community resources (e.g. potential contributions of labor).
  o Conducting surveys (needed for park development).
    ▪ Archaeological survey on the north side of the Huckleberry Trail.
    ▪ Environmental/vegetation survey.
    ▪ Safety survey(s) to determine appropriate treatment of the mine entrance and related safety concerns.
  o Develop a park maintenance plan: to include systematic trash removal and maintenance of grass/trails/structures/restrooms as developed.
  o Address security concerns for the Coal Mining Heritage Park in coordination with the county Sheriff’s office: develop a systematic plan for daily patrols of the park.
  o Consideration about expanding the current park boundaries in order to protect and preserve the historic site of Merrimac (by bringing Bunker Hill and the hotel site within the park) and to create a buffer zone between the park and housing developments (current or future; especially along the northern edge of the park).

• Things recommended to be done soon to launch the park and establish its presence:
  o Develop a parking lot for the Coal Mining Heritage Park by moving the Consolidated Waste Site and converting that site into a parking lot.
  o Close the current access road between the park parking lot and the Huckleberry Trail. Designate it as the upper section of the Merrimac Loop Trail. (Later, in Phase Two, it will be recommended that the whole Merrimac Loop Trail be made ADA accessible.)
  o Clean up and remove trash from the park site, perhaps as a coordinated effort with community/church/civic/school groups (except for the mine entrance itself).
  o Establish the park presence by:
    ▪ Placing welcoming signage at the three entrances to the park: from the parking lot, and from the two directions that walkers enter the park on the Huckleberry Trail (welcoming signs, plus information such as park hours). Including:
      • Developing the “Merrimac Junction” entrance feature at Merrimac Road: consisting of a Coal Mining Heritage Park welcoming sign, deck-style seating designed to conceal the currently exposed drainage pipes, and some landscaping (e.g. shrubbery), to create an inviting entry from Merrimac Road.
Developing the “Tipple Heritage Area” as an initial visitors information area and heritage focal point. Features to develop include:

- Kiosk-style signage to include:
  - Map of mines in the NRV; text on the importance of mining in the region.
  - Historic map of Merrimac circa 1937; accompanying text on the Merrimac mine and community.
  - Text and photos of the tipple and surrounding mine buildings that once stood at the site.
  - Visitor information.
  - Information on future park development plans (things to come) to keep the public informed and interested.

- An exhibit of mining equipment and explanatory signage.
  - The currently existing hoist.
  - Other relatively non-destructible pieces of equipment acquired through donations: for example, coal cars and track.

- Construction of the “Heritage Bridge,” a covered and railed bridge using the concrete foundations of the tipple as its base. The structure functions to make the tipple foundation site safe for children, as an observation platform, and as an initial information center focal point for the park (to be incorporated into the Mule Trail in a later phase). Possibly built as a county-community cooperative effort.

- Placing heritage signage along the Huckleberry Trail to identify additional key features of the historic Merrimac site, especially the hotel, commissary, and Bunker Hill.

- Placing benches along the Huckleberry Trail at the Tipple Heritage Area and elsewhere (near signage) so that trail users can stop and rest. Similarly, place trash cans nearby.

Phase Two

Phase Two contains two activities: 1) development of the park infrastructure; and 2) development of the “Community Recreation Area.” Based on our discussions with Steve Phillips and Tom Bain (the county's Directors of Facilities and Recreation), we recognized that laying the groundwork of the park infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity, security) is something that needs to be done early in park development. We feel that development of the Community Recreation Area (with picnic shelters and areas for play and community events) is also something that needs to be done quite early in order to create a park landscape that will draw the community in to use the park.

Phase Two

- Development of park infrastructure.
  - Place water and sewage lines for drinking fountains and restrooms (which will be located initially at the picnic shelters; later at the museum).
  - Place electric lines and establish lighting (for a line of service linking the main areas of the park including the parking lot, future museum, pavilion and picnic
shelters, Tipple Heritage Area, to the reconstructed miner’s house and the nature education structure at the west end of the park.

- Installation of park security systems. Recommended:
  - All-night lighting: for the parking lot, structures, trails, exhibit and recreation areas (planning for future building also).
  - Alarm systems for structures (motion and infrared detection), tied into the county Sheriff’s office.
  - Emergency call boxes (on the Huckleberry Trail and in parking lot).

- Create the Merrimac Loop Trail as an ADA accessible loop going around most of the park property. Do this by grading and paving the upper portion (the old access road) from the parking lot down to where it links with the Huckleberry Trail and, on the eastern side, building the ADA accessible bridge over Lick Creek between the Huckleberry Trail and the Community Recreation Area to complete the loop back up to the parking lot.

- Development of the “Community Recreation Area.”
  - Establishing a Community Recreation Area landscape, involving:
    - Clearing the brush from this area.
    - Planting grass at the pavilion and picnic shelter sites.
    - Development of natural vegetation sites along the creek and along the margins of the pavilion/picnic area (based on the vegetation survey).
      - With explanatory signage and accompanying development of school/community educational activities focused on these vegetation areas.
  - Construction of the pavilion, which will provide a focal point for entertainment and community events at the park. The pavilion features a stage and has the capacity for accommodating public address/music sound systems and stage lighting.
  - Construction of two picnic shelters, with attached restrooms and drinking fountains. At least two shelters are recommended, to accommodate multiple family reunions or community activities during the summer months.
  - Construction of a playground near the picnic shelters.

- Mark the end of Phase Two, emphasizing the opening of the pavilion/picnic area for the public, by organizing a summer music/storytelling/event series that will draw the community to the park (organized in cooperative sponsorship with community church/heritage/civic organizations).

**Phase Three**

Phase Three targets park development on the south side of the Huckleberry Trail: development of the low-impact trail system (Mule Trail, Drift Mouth Trail, and Nature Trail), and development of heritage and environmental features associated with those trails on the south side of the Huckleberry Trail. The south side contains the historic industrial mine buildings that will be of special interest to visitors, and development of
the south side trails will link the historic industrial area to the Community Recreation Area and the Tipple Heritage Area.

Phase Three

  - Heritage and environmental points of interest are marked along the trails, and keyed to a trail flyer which explains the mine’s industrial sites (e.g. the boiler, shops, mine entrance) and plants in the landscape.
  - Trail benches are situated along the low-impact trail system.
- Clean up and development of the mine entrance (in accordance with safety regulations), with the possibility of capping the mine in a manner allowing visitors to see a short entryway.
- Locating the Huckleberry Caboose (across the Huckleberry Trail from the hotel/commissary sites), and outfitting it to be an educational classroom. These activities could be done in cooperation with the railroad club donating the caboose and with community school teachers.
- Develop programs to involve target user groups to co-sponsor educational and community activities at Coal Miners Park. These activities help develop a sense of ownership and support for the park among community groups, and help develop volunteer-supported activities leading to further park development.
  - User groups would include: schools (e.g. field trips), church fellowship and youth groups, Coal Mining Heritage Association and other heritage interest groups (e.g. railroad, civil war), seniors, recreational groups, special interest environmental groups (e.g. possibilities might focus on bird watching, wildflowers, horticulture, among others).

Phase Four

Phase Four targets park development on the north side of the Huckleberry Trail: development of the trail system (Bunker Hill Trail and Miner’s House Trail) and development of heritage features associated with those trails.

Phase Four

- Development of higher-challenge trails on the northern side of the Huckleberry Trail.
  - The Bunker Hill Trail going up past the lower houses toward Bunker Hill and ending at a scenic overlook point (and continuing along the tram road on Bunker Hill, if additional Bunker Hill land is purchased by the county for incorporation into Coal Mining Heritage Park). Features include:
    - Heritage signage about mining family life in the Bunker Hill community, and identifying specific houses along the way.
    - A scenic overlook that allows park visitors to look down over the entire park.
  - The Miner’s House Trail leading from the Huckleberry Trail up to the archaeological ruins of an actual house site (# 12 on the Kennedy/Lawson
circa 1937 map; the trail follows the old driveway) that would be featured as an archaeological education site. Development of the house site, including:

- Development of a platform structure over the house site, which would protect the archaeological site yet allow visitors to view the house remains.
- Signage focused on archaeological education, as well as the heritage.
- Clearing the area around the house, and marking out the locations of the garden and outbuildings; signage explaining about the daily livelihood activities of mining families living in houses such as this one.
- Development of outdoor education activities for school and university classes focused on learning about archaeology.

**Phase Five**

Phase Five focuses on construction of a first heritage-based building, a replica of a miner’s house that would be authentically furnished and used for interpretive history exhibits and educational activities.

**Phase Five**

- Construction of a replicated miner’s house along the Huckleberry Trail, near the site of the former commissary.
  - Replicated in a historically accurate manner.
  - Designed with a sophisticated security system to protect it from vandalism (possibly partially funded by donations from building contractors and building supply firms).
  - Furnished to look like the inside of a miner’s house (carried out in cooperation with the Coal Mining Heritage Association and local universities, with consultation by the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office and Explore Park).
  - Could be staffed with volunteer interpreters (volunteers from the Coal Mining Heritage Association, Merrimac community and church, schools, etc.), dressed as members of a miner’s family, and interpreting the stories and way of life of the New River Valley mining families.

**Phase Six**

Phase Six continues the park development by adding a combined Mining Museum and Visitors Center, which would provide the park with a focal point – a structure where visitors would first enter to get an orientation to the park and heritage, an indoor site for educational activities, and a center where materials on the county’s mining heritage will be collected, preserved, and accessible for learning.
Phase Six

- Construction of a combined Mining Heritage Museum and Visitor’s Center. Recommended that this be undertaken as a cooperative venture between the county and the Coal Mining Heritage Association, with academic direction and assistance (faculty and students) in developing the museum and its exhibits from Radford University’s Anthropology Program. Greater discussion of the museum appears in Chapters 3 and 4.

Phase Seven

At this point in the park development, when the park presence and community support are well established, consideration can be given to constructing additional heritage structures at the park. Specific developments will depend on the types of community interest expressed at that time and the availability of funds from grants and/or private donations. Some possibilities are briefly listed below and are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Phase Seven

- Consideration of possibilities for additional heritage structures at Coal Mining Heritage Park. Some of the possibilities are:
  - Rebuilding an authentic New River Valley mining house (a cooperative endeavor with the Coal Mining Heritage Association)
  - Other possibilities: replication of the commissary, tipple, and other buildings originally at the Merrimac Mine
Chapter 3

COAL MINING HERITAGE PARK: HERITAGE PRESERVATION FOR THE FUTURE

By Matthew D. Schrag, Elaine G. Staab, Bobbi Jo Burnett, and Mary B. La Lone

Montgomery County is presented with an important opportunity to preserve and call attention to its coal mining heritage through the creation of a heritage park at Merrimac, the former site of one of the largest mines and mining communities in the region. This heritage park will be the first of its kind in Montgomery County and will provide many people an opportunity to view and study a portion of history that was so vital to the area. The Huckleberry Trail laid the "tracks" for the advent of this park, and community support has shown that the current trend of interest in a Coal Mining Heritage Park will continue.

The landscape of the region has changed over time from a predominantly rural setting of farms and coal mining communities, to an urbanizing setting with highways and shopping malls criss-crossing the region. With endeavors to progress into the 21st Century, the history that put Montgomery County on the map is vanishing more and more with each passing year. With definite ties as far back as the Civil War, and most likely the Revolutionary War, coal mining in the New River Valley has a rich history that needs to be told. The park will commemorate and present the history of coal mining throughout the entire county and New River Valley. Although situated at Merrimac, the park will give recognition to all of the mines and mining communities in the region.

The county has witnessed a growing interest in preserving and commemorating its coal mining history (as described in Chapter 1). Following a series of Roanoke Times articles in 1994 on the region's mining history (Freis 1994a-d), the families of former miners came together to form the Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County. In its first year, the CMHA built a commemorative monument and worked with the county Board of Supervisors to establish an annual Coal Mining Heritage Day. Momentum for mining heritage preservation has been growing since then. As part of this heritage effort, Dr. La Lone and Radford University students worked with the CMHA to create a two-volume record of mining family oral histories (La Lone 1997, 1998, 1999). The work from that oral history project provides extensive documentation of the region's mining life that can form the basis for signage, exhibits, and other heritage-based educational activities. Our work with the Montgomery County Planning Office and the CMHA on this park project is a logical "applied" extension of the heritage preservation effort. The CMHA also played a strong role in efforts to draft the text for signage for the Huckleberry Trail (Huckleberry Trail Exhibit Design Project 1996). The drafts of those signs, written with community input, are incorporated into our signage ideas discussed below. The Montgomery County families of the CMHA form a strong constituent for the development of a mining heritage park. They will provide the heritage knowledge and community energy for this park. They are joined by others with an interest in learning about and teaching about the region's heritage – area school teachers, other heritage groups, residents of the Merrimac community, and many interested trail users.
The research team derived many of its heritage ideas for the park from former mining families and other county citizens. Through the community meetings held at Merrimac in October 1999 and the surveys mailed to residents, we collected ideas from the community on how best to present this extraordinary history for future generations to understand. Many members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association helped with ideas and information. Interviews with Fred Lawson, Alex Linkous, Lee Linkous, Sam Huff, Hazel Hodge, Esther Jones, and Jimmie Price provided much of the information on mining and family life used in this chapter. Additional information came from the interviews in Appalachian Mining Memories and Coal Mining Lives (La Lone 1997, 1998), and from Merrimac Mines (Proco 1994).

Interest in having heritage features in the Merrimac park is quite strong. In the survey responses, two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they wanted historical signs. Two-thirds also indicated their desire to see a mining museum as part of the park. The survey written responses, and the interests and wishes elicited from people during community meetings, also demonstrate that people have extensive interest in making mining heritage a featured theme at the park (see the Appendices for this community input).

We combined the ideas generated from the community with our own research of relatively small-sized interpretive history parks (Explore Park and the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine), to arrive at a set of potential ideas for heritage-based exhibition and education at the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Our ideas for preserving the coal mining heritage range from simple informative signposts to a reconstructed miner’s house displayed in all its glory as it once stood many years ago. The following pages will give the reader a good overview of what we envision for an integrated heritage park. We provide extensive discussion of potential heritage signs and their placement in the park, walking trails developed for heritage learning, construction of historic buildings, and construction of a museum/visitors center. A section on phasing has been included following the detailed descriptions to give an idea of what should occur and when. This chapter will attempt to synthesize these ideas into a working model for the heritage-based aspects of the park at Merrimac.

**SIGNAGE**

Signs will be an integral part of portraying the history to the park visitors. During the initial phases of park planning and construction, a few signs (as well as some other types of development addressed in other chapters) will be needed to let the public know that the park is progressing and not just being put on the back burner. Several positive consequences will emerge from adding just a few of these signs as soon as possible. One, the public will begin learning about the heritage that made this area what it is. Two, signage will generate interest in the park even more so than it is now. Those who do not know about the history will be exposed to it and hopefully will be inspired to learn more. Three, signage is a relatively low-cost and effective way to start park development, which will keep initial county expenditure to a minimum.

This section presents some ideas for heritage signs and their placement within the park. Figure 3.1 is a map of the park showing the locations of these signs.
Several of the signs proposed here were written by a community group of miners and researchers organized to develop signs for the Huckleberry Trail as part of the 1996 Huckleberry Trail Exhibit Design Project funded by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. These signs will be referenced below an asterisk and the citation “Huckleberry Trail Design Project.” Three of these signs have been mocked up and presented in this chapter to give a visual idea of what the signs could look like. Some minor modifications have been made with regards to the verbiage of these signs.

There should be signs welcoming both the people enjoying the Huckleberry Trail and those specifically visiting to enjoy the park. These signs should be placed at the eastern and western entrances to the park and the park entrance at the parking lot access trail. A title needs to be centered at the top as in the following example.

WELCOME TO THE COAL MINING HERITAGE PARK

An Integrated Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Heritage Facility.

Below this should be a brief statement about coal mining in the area

Coal mining was a way of life in the New River Valley for almost two centuries, dating back to before the Civil War and continuing in dominance until the 1950s. Coal was used to power the machines that would transform the face of America and was the largest non-agricultural employer in the NRV until the building of the Radford Arsenal in 1939-40. What once were small villages exploded into large-scale mining communities. Some communities such as Merrimac, in addition to all of the mining facilities, came complete with a hotel, community store, church, and houses for the residents and visitors.

(From LaLone 1998)

Also at the park entrance at Merrimac Road, during the initial phases of the project, a sign should provide the current Huckleberry Trail users with the basic plans for the park. A sign should inform them that work on the site has started and tell them of some of the features to be incorporated over time. Something simple will work well to inform people of the upcoming plans as well as offer a means to contact someone for more information or to donate to the project. This sign should also provide a space where upcoming events in the park, volunteer days, funding needs, or successes could be posted and changed as needed. This will give people up-to-date information about what is happening and what is needed in the park.

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE PARK

This park is an outdoor facility for heritage preservation, recreation, and education. Multiple trails will take you on a tour of the historic landscape highlighting some of the important sites. A pavilion for outdoor activities will be erected as well as a playground for community children. In addition, several outdoor education activity areas will be designated where visitors can learn about the environment and history of the area. Your support and questions are welcomed. For more information on the Coal Mining Heritage Park call XXX-XXXX.
After entering the park, additional signs would provide heritage information. As you continue walking down the Huckleberry Trail, a sign should be placed on the right hand side of the trail facing what was known as Bunker Hill. Bunker Hill is where the mining company built a number of company houses for miners and their families. This sign will give information to the reader about the area of Merrimac where many of the mining families lived – where they grew crops, played, laughed, and visited with one another. The sign that should be placed here will inform the visitor of some of the history of Bunker Hill and the daily lives of mining families. In addition to text, we recommend that the sign show photos of an actual Merrimac miner's house (e.g. Robert Lawson's house; see Figure 3.6 below).

### BUNKER HILL

The mining company provided company houses for some of its mining families. Many of the dwellings for the miners and their families were concentrated on the hill in front of you, called Bunker Hill. It was named Bunker Hill because of the number of mine bunkers that had been dug into the coal outcrop. Much of the timber and brush had been cleared during Merrimac’s mining years to provide wood to build many of the houses and mining structures. Sixteen company houses were aligned on the hillside. This provided the miners with easy access to the mines and a place for their families to till gardens, raise livestock, and carry out a variety of other daily activities. Most of these houses had no running water or indoor plumbing. They relied on springs for water and had outdoor "johnnie houses."

This area was the center of life outside of the mines. Many families lived here, and gardened nearby. Cows were left to roam free and eat vegetation wherever they could find it, which kept much of the undergrowth to a minimum. Children ran about playing and women sat on the porches preparing food just to name some of the activities. Friendships were cemented between the families as they lived their lives in the ‘neighborhood’ of Bunker Hill. Life happened on the mountain. The families socialized at each other’s houses and would help each other throughout their daily routines.

The picture of the house on this sign once sat right in front of you on the base of the hill. The timber was cut locally and the structures were built by the families.

(Based in part on Proco 1994 and in part on interviews)

The county does not presently own most of Bunker Hill. Currently, only two of the sixteen Bunker Hill house sites are on county land. It is recommended that this land be purchased in its entirety to further preserve the historic integrity of the landscape.

Bunker Hill's history may date back to the Civil War. Bunker Hill is thought to be the site of the Confederate colliery located at Merrimac during the Civil War. The colliery is presumed to be located on Bunker Hill based on information given on the Confederate government map of Montgomery County by Lt. Dwight drafted in 1864. The civil war heritage could provide the subject for a second sign at this location. Associated with this sign would be pictures from the Civil War and the 1864 map by Lt. Dwight or Jeremy Francis Gilmer’s Confederate Engineer Map showing the location of the colliery and other structures of military importance.

### CONFEDERATE COAL MINING

It is presumed that the Confederate ‘Government Colliery’ was located on Bunker Hill before large-scale mining operations moved in. This was a Confederate owned and operated mine during the Civil War to provide coal for the South. It is said that Union
Further down the trail, prior to reaching the Tipple Heritage Area, it is recommended that another sign be placed on the left side of the trail informing the reader of the early history of mining in Merrimac. Associated on the sign should be appropriate pictures about the early mining history: a photograph of families hauling coal in wagons for the first paragraph and a picture of the *Merrimac* for the second paragraph.

**A COMMUNITY'S ROOTS**  
*Early History of Mining in Merrimac*

Price and Brush Mountains were settled in the mid-1700s by Scotch-Irish and German immigrants who proceeded to mine the available coal deposits using pit-mining techniques. Coal was required at that time for a variety of tasks including blacksmithing, millwrighting, and stonecutting. By 1840, Montgomery County coal gained such a reputation for heating that families from surrounding territories sent wagons to get their supply. Upon completion of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad through Cambria (located north of Christiansburg) in 1855, the coal was hauled to Cambria, loaded in rail cars, and shipped to eastern towns and cities.

In 1861, mining activity on Price Mountain ceased due to the outbreak of the Civil War. After Federal forces reduced the tonnage from the Richmond Coal fields, the Confederate government re-opened the Montgomery County mines. The Coal was hauled by wagon from the mines to Buchanan where it was then shipped down the James River for the Confederate forces. The community of Merrimac later received its name because coal from Price Mountain mines was reportedly used by the rebel ironclad, the *Merrimac* (or *Virginia*) in its famous battle with the *Monitor* in Hampton Roads in 1862.

(Proco 1994)

Continuing on the Huckleberry Trail will bring you to the central industrial area surrounding the tipple. This was the central focus of mining after the Civil War. A multitude of structures existed here each providing its specific functioning to the overall mining operation. We have labeled this area of the park the "Tipple Heritage Area." This area's main focus will be heritage preservation by presenting the visitor with an array of signs and artifacts to view and examine. This area seems to be a natural gathering point for former miners as well as some of the Huckleberry Trail users. It is directly off of the Huckleberry Trail, is a flat, open area, and has several structural pieces of historic value still remaining. The "Tipple Heritage Area" is a logical focal point during the initial stages of the park.
One of the major features for this area would be signage. We envision four signs at the Tipple Heritage Area, which we have described in more detail below. Several of the larger kiosk-style signs of the park should be located here. One should be a diagram and map of the New River Valley area highlighting all of the mines in the region. It is important to highlight all of the mines in the NRV for several reasons. First, although the park is located at Merrimac, it is intended to be a countywide and regional coal mining
park. We need to give recognition to all of the miners and their families that worked and lived here in the NRV and elsewhere in southwest Virginia. All need to feel welcome and not left out. Second, there were so many mines in the area and they all functioned together as a composite economic base for the region. This region would not be what it is today had it not been for all of the mines, not just Merrimac. Merrimac is simply a representative example of the larger picture.

We recommend that this sign feature three maps. The first map should name and identify each of the mines in the NRV with certain roads and other features in order to identify the mines’ locations in reference to commonly known landmarks. This map could be made in conjunction with the research that Jimmy Lee Price has conducted and gathered about mining in the New River Valley. He has researched the locations of many of these mines. Also on this sign should be a topographic map of Merrimac, circa 1937, identifying all of the mining structures by name. This map has already been drafted by Scott Kennedy, a former graduate student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, in conjunction with former miner Fred Lawson and the Coal Mining Heritage Association (See Figure 3.2). Below this should be a final map depicting the park, as it will be when completed, with all of the other trails, signs, and other features noted (the map of the park in Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2). This entire sign would only require a title and brief description of what it shows. A possible title might be ‘Coal Mining in the New River Valley’. Under the regional map should be a caption that reads ‘Regional Map Showing All Mining Operations in the New River Valley’. Under the Merrimac map should be ‘Map of 1937 Merrimac Community Depicting All Structures’. Under the park map should be a caption that reads “Coal Mining Heritage Park Today.”

Next to this sign should be another sign with several photographs to show people actual pictures of what mining was like. One of the photos should be one of the more striking photographs – a group of miners standing in a line in front of the tipple with the caption ‘A group of miners and mine officials at the tipple, 1922’ (see Figure 3.3).
The other photograph should be an overview shot of the industrial site, with each structure given a number and its corresponding title below the photo. Also on the photo should be a ‘You Are Here’ arrow to give the viewer a visual cue as to what the area looked like that he/she is standing on.

Attached to this sign should be a place for pamphlets. These pamphlets would be something that those enjoying the park could carry around with them and would give them another map of the park with all of its activities expressed on it in more detail. Also in the pamphlet should be the numerically coded mining structures with descriptions of what they were used for. The numbered photograph and pamphlets should correspond to and be used in conjunction with numbered posts placed at each of the identified industrial sites (discussed later).

By walking the trails throughout the park the visitor can match the numbered posts with the numbered descriptions in the pamphlet to identify historic sites and learn about what went on at the place that they are standing. By doing so, the visitor gets a sense of reality to the area. It gives it a little more life and also reduces cost to the county and visual clutter to the visitor by reducing the number of larger informational signs dotting the landscape.

Another focus of the ‘Tipple Heritage Area’ should be the ‘Heritage Bridge’. This would be a covered structure spanning the two remaining concrete foundations that straddle Lick Creek. It would provide two other kiosk style signs that could present a pictorial collage of coal mining with captions and other relevant park information.
Another feature at this site could be listening boxes that provide recorded interviews with some of the members of the mining families that give an oral discussion about work and activities at the site of the tipple. This provides the visitor with more than just visual stimulation. They would be able to hear the depth of the voices and stories told.

The ‘Heritage Bridge’ would also provide one of the bridges over Lick Creek connecting the north and south sides of the park. This junction will provide access to the mineshaft, low-impact trails on the south side, and the recreation area and pavilion. Concern should be taken with how this structure is constructed so as to maintain a sense of heritage. One might consider using construction techniques utilized during the mining days with assistance from community groups or other volunteers. It needs to look like it belonged at the site when the mines were in operation.

Also at the ‘Tipple Heritage Area’ near the remaining concrete foundation associated with the tipple, should be a sign about the tipple itself. The background photograph described in the text below is the oldest photograph taken of the industrial area. The photograph appears in Garland Proco’s book (pages 32-33) and can be obtained through the publication Mineral Resources of Virginia for use on the sign. The suggested text for the sign "Loading the Cars: The Tipple at the Merrimac Mine" follows.

**LOADING THE CARS**

**The Tipple at the Merrimac Mine**

Once the handloading process was completed in the mine, a load of coal was brought to the top of the tipple; along a conveyor, impurities were removed, and the coal was graded by shaking screens and sorted into bins according to size. From there, the coal was loaded into railroad cars that entered the tipple in between the two concrete walls you see here for shipment to Cambria and beyond. Coal from other nearby mines was brought to the tipple for processing as well. The four-story tipple was constructed in 1903. It had a capacity of 500 tons per day and produced a monthly average of 4,000 tons of coal.

The background image is the oldest photograph of the Merrimac Mine physical plant, taken in 1904. At the extreme left of the photo, note the following: the first Huckleberry engine near the watering tower, the boiler house, and the steam lines extending from it. The building in the center of the photograph is the tipple. The mine entrance is near the base of the mountain behind the tipple. In the right half of the photo, note the conveyor line for hauling slate over the hill to the dump area. The small building to the right of the conveyor is the fan house, housing the suction fan that removed explosive gasses from the mine. Lick Creek can be seen on the right side of the photo.

(*Huckleberry Trail Design Project)
Another sign in the ‘Tipple Heritage Area’ would describe the mining operation and be located in front of an exhibit of a pair of the iron coal cars used in mining operations. The Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County has indicated that it might be able to arrange for the donation of the coal cars for this exhibit. In the exhibit, the cars would rest on the tracks that they would have ridden on and be associated with the hoist mechanism used to haul the cars from the mine that is already on site. These artifacts could be arranged to look like the hoist is hauling the cars. A mockup of this sign has already been made as part of the Huckleberry Trail Design Project (see Figure 3.4).

### TEN TONS PER DAY

**Working the Valley Coal Fields**

Miners used the “room and pillar” method to mine coal as deep as one mile underground. The seams of coal were up to seven feet wide and sloped between 23 and 45 degrees downhill into the mountain. The central shaft followed the seam and was called the “slope”. “Entries” were cut into the coal seam to the left and right at about 200-foot intervals. Entries led into “rooms” from which the coal was blasted. A deep hole of six feet or more would be bored by hand into the seam, packed with black powder and fuse, and blasted. As the rooms were enlarged by removal of coal, they were supported by pillars of coal and wood timbers.

The miners would chip the loosened coal with a pick and load it into a coal car like the one you see here to be pulled along a track by mules to the slope of the mine. The cars were then pulled up the slope to the tipple using a gasoline powered hoist like the one attached to the cars you see, repeating this process until up to ten tons per day per person had been loaded.

This handloading process was used at the Merrimac Mine and other mines in Montgomery County until they closed, unlike the larger mines in Appalachia that used more mechanized methods. The seam mined at Merrimac Mine extended toward the Montgomery Regional Hospital and the Corning Plant.

(*Huckleberry Trail Design Project)
Figure 3.4 Sample mockup of the "Ten Tons Per Day" sign created by the Huckleberry Trail Design Project.
Continuing down the Huckleberry Trail towards the west, leaving the ‘Tipple Heritage Area’, the visitor will come upon another sign located just off of the Huckleberry Trail. This sign would describe the Huckleberry Railroad’s association with the mining operations at Merrimac. This sign should also be associated with a set of railroad tracks and railroad ties that should be laid in front of the sign so that the person who is reading the sign would be standing on the tracks.

**PULLING THE LOAD**  
**Huckleberry Steam Locomotives**

The Virginia Anthracite Coal and Railway Company began operation of the Huckleberry line in 1904 with two steam locomotives. No. 1 was mostly used at the mines for switching while No. 2, the Merrimac, hauled the trains. It was a “Camelback” design in which the cab for the engineer straddled the middle of the boiler while the fireman had his own cab at the rear. This type of locomotive was designed to burn the local anthracite coal, but had the unfortunate habit of stalling on steep grades.

The Norfolk & Western locomotive most identified with the Huckleberry was the class M. This “Twelve-Wheeler” type was designed as a road freight engine. They proved a good match for the line’s light rails, steep grades, and tight curves. When necessary, two or three class Ms together could pull longer passenger trains. Class Ms served faithfully on the Huckleberry for over 40 years. They were finally replaced by diesel locomotives in 1958.

(*Huckleberry Trail Design Project)

Continuing down the Huckleberry, the visitor will arrive at the site for our replicated miner’s house (discussed later in this chapter). There should be a sign at this site about mining life and the houses associated with it. This sign should have a small map of the Merrimac area highlighting the houses and several pictures of them as well as activities that went on around the house.

**FOUR ROOMS AND A PORCH**  
**The Miner’s Self-Sufficient Life**

All of the original seventy-seven company houses provided at Merrimac by the Virginia Anthracite Coal and Railway Company had the same basic configuration. Many of these yellow cabins with white trim were located on Bunker Hill - on the west side of the wide ravine created by Lick Creek, opposite the tipple, railroad spur, and mine shaft. The board and batten, single-story structures averaged four rooms and a front porch. Wood and coal stoves provided heat to the living room and kitchen, while the bedroom remained unheated. Kerosene lamps provided all the light for the house. Rent for these accommodations ranged from $6 - $12 per month, except during seasonal summer mine shutdowns when the rent was waived altogether.

By necessity, the industrious miners were required to be largely self-sufficient throughout their lives. Due to the seasonal demands of coal consumption, miners found themselves without steady employment during the warmer months. They used this time instead to work their gardens, raise livestock, hunt, cut firewood, and gather wild fruits including, of course, the plentiful huckleberries. The surplus produced from these activities was preserved and canned to provide the family with food throughout the year.

(*Huckleberry Trail Design Project)
Just a few yards down the trail from the house should be a sign discussing the other non-residential, non-industrial structures such as the commissary and hotel. The sign would be located near the actual site of these buildings. Associated on this sign should be pictures of each of the mentioned building as well as a picture of Merrimac scrip.

THE MINERS’ TOWN
More Than a Collection of Buildings

The mining community in Merrimac, much like any other community, consisted of more than the living accommodations of its workers and their places of employment. Due primarily to a lack of refrigeration in their homes, a trip to the commissary, or company store, was a central part of the everyday life of the miners and their families. The commissary supplied the community with all of its staples and general merchandise, as well as serving as its post office and train station, where passengers and freight were discharged.

Another integral part of the Merrimac community was the Hotel Building. This structure provided temporary residences for new miners and visitors as well as serving as a boarding house for the single miners. A well-equipped schoolhouse was also provided, offering the mining community’s children up to an 8th grade education.

The core of Merrimac community life was, and still remains, the church. The Pentecostal Holiness Church was one of the earliest churches serving the Merrimac miners. Started with the efforts of Sister Laura Hylton and Sister Nancy Harmon in 1919, and built by the miners in the congregation, the church served not only as a center for regular religious ceremonies, but also provided emotional and material refuge when hardship and tragedy visited the members of the community.

(*Huckleberry Trail Design Project)

The signage associated with this park will be an integral and necessary aspect of it. They will educate and inform park visitors who may or may not already know about the region’s history. However, along with the educational signs should be trails designed to take people on a walking tour of the historic landscape. These trails will allow visitors to explore the area and view many of the historic sites as they are today. The following section briefly discusses these trails with regards to the historic applications but will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

TRAILS AND RELATED HERITAGE FEATURES

Located in the park should also be a network of ADA accessible and low-impact trails that will take the visitor on a tour of the historical sites not located on or near the Huckleberry Trail. These trails will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter 5. This section discusses the historical need for their construction. These trails are what will take the visitor "off the beaten path" and give them an opportunity to see some of the smaller sites in the area. While smaller and maybe less impressive than the tipple and the hotel and the commissary, these sites played an integral role in the functioning of the mines and the lives of the people.
One set of trails, the Drift Mouth Trail and the Mule Trail, would take the visitor on a tour of the floodplain on the south side of the Huckleberry Trail. These trails would highlight the sites that were part of the mine's industrial complex: the fan house, powder/dynamite building, tipple, mine opening, old washhouse, shops (blacksmith, sawmill), lamp house, boiler building, wash/change house, and the mule barn. Each of these sites, with the exception of the mine opening, should be marked by one of the numbered posts that corresponds with the pamphlet descriptions. The mine opening should have an additional informational sign associated with it. This sign, "All in a Day's Work," has been mocked up as part of the Huckleberry Trail Design Project (see Figure 3.5). It should be located at the mouth of the mine.

ALL IN A DAY’S WORK
Working Environment in the Mine

The environment inside the mine was filled with many potential dangers and great care was taken to prevent accidents and injuries. One unhealthy but inevitable environmental component was the coal dust that was released into the mine with each blast and inhaled by the miners, leading eventually to black lung and other respiratory diseases. In an effort to rid the mine of explosive methane gas, a shaft would be opened parallel to the shaft being worked and an electric fan was used to draw air and gasses out. Incoming water was pumped nightly and discharged into Lick Creek to prevent flooding in the mines below the water table. Unfortunately, despite these preventative efforts, accidents did occur.

Miners might be injured or killed by rock falls or explosions. One such incident was the Brumfield Mine explosion of December 28, 1938, considered the worst of any explosion at the Merrimac mines. Occurring so deep in the mine that the blast was not heard from outside, this explosion killed four of the sixteen men who were in the mine that day and injured three others. One of the injured, James Lawson, heroically crawled 1700 feet out of the pitch black mine to report the accident and seek help, despite his burns and temporary blindness.

(*Huckleberry Trail Design Project)
Figure 3.5 Sample mockup of the “All in a Day’s Work” sign created by the Huckleberry Trail Design Project.
Located with this sign should be a listening station. This would have changeable tapes that play the voices of former miners, in their own words, speaking about working in the mine and other industrial sounds of interest. These could be changed bi-annually to continue people’s interest.

Another side trail, the Miner’s House Trail, would break from the Huckleberry Trail near the commissary (and future site of a Reconstructed Miner’s House) to take the visitor up the northwest slope to the ruins of one of the actual former houses (see Figure 3.1), which should also be marked with a numbered post. The archaeological destination will highlight one of the structures as it is today. A residence has collapsed in on itself, but is well enough preserved to be a site of much archaeological interest. This site would be featured as an archaeological learning exhibit, providing an opportunity to teach people (both children and adults) about archaeology and how to protect these sites. The archaeological exhibit area would serve as a tool for discussing archaeological preservation and interpretation, and should have explanatory signage. This site holds information relating to the social integration of the Merrimac community as well as typical household routines and a host of other information. Since the site needs to be protected from being destroyed by people walking through it, a walkway might be constructed around the site giving people an opportunity to see the site with minimal disturbance. Behind the house, markers could indicate where the residential garden and outbuildings were located. A barrier of natural brush could be erected around the site to keep visitors within the exhibit area, and prevent them from disturbing other areas of potential archaeological value.

The Bunker Hill Trail will also climb the northern slope, going from the Tipple Heritage Area up past the hoist houses, and will ascend toward a scenic overlook. Visitors will be able to look out over the whole industrial site, and signage will help them identify features in the industrial setting below. Other signage will point out the location of some of the houses on Bunker Hill (at present, most of those sites lie outside the park boundaries, but the visitor can view Bunker Hill from the overlook).

The trails that will provide access to the historic sites are an essential aspect of the park. They will give people the opportunity to see the historic landscape as it stands today. They will be immersed in nature and will be able to absorb the history of the land to ponder what once was and what might be in the future. But, the park needs more than trails to complete this thought for the visitors. Other aspects of the park should include reconstructed buildings and a museum. These additions to the park will give the visitors a full and as-complete-as-possible picture of mining life in the New River Valley. They will be able to see what things really looked like.

REPLICATED MINER’S HOUSE

After trails and heritage signs have been established at the park, we recommend the next step be to construct a replicated miner’s house. We recommend constructing a replicated house as a first step, rather than reconstructing an authentic building. One reason is concern for the building’s security against vandalism. Of course, we highly recommend that a high quality security system be installed at the building, as well as throughout the park, to prevent vandalism (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of security recommendations). However, should vandalism occur to a replicated building, it would
be less of a heritage loss than if it were an authentic structure and the effects on future plans to develop the park would be less devastating. Instead, it would be best if the first structure to be built were a replicated model of a miner’s house.

The construction of a replica miner’s house would provide an exciting exhibit portraying the mining heritage, and could be a site for interpretive reenactment of the mining lifestyle. This addition to the park would be a big “plus” in that it would spark public interest for the park. It would serve as a drawing feature, and a focus for heritage education, much like the exhibits at heritage parks such as Explore Park and the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine. The construction of the miner’s house could be undertaken as a joint effort between the county and community, thus giving the community a vested interest in the development of the park. Later, with continuing support and community involvement, other heritage structures could be added to the park.

In its heyday, when the Merrimac Mine was in operation, a number of miner’s houses surrounded the mine. Similarly, miner’s houses were located near mines throughout the New River Valley. New River Valley mining families can serve as valuable resources, providing the knowledge about house construction and layout that would enable a replica miner’s house to be built and furnished. With the help of some of the members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association, we will describe two houses from the New River Valley that might serve as models to replicate a miner’s house at the Merrimac park.

The first house is described by Merrimac miner Fred Lawson. It is the house at Merrimac in which his brother, Robert Lawson, grew up. This house was originally located at the base of Bunker Hill. It is identified as feature number 29 on the historic map of Merrimac, circa 1937, drawn by Scott Kennedy and Fred Lawson. Below is a description of this house.

It was a T-shaped four-room house. The kitchen was through the front door, a living room was located in the middle, and 2 bedrooms were in the back. A porch ran along the front of the house. Eight to ten-foot boards raised it up in the front and in the back it sat on a hill, which was Bunker Hill (Lawson 10/12/99).

Figure 3.6  Photo of Merrimac miner’s house (feature number 29). Courtesy of Fred Lawson.
The second coal miner’s house that could serve as a model is one from the Coal Bank Hollow section of Montgomery County. This house was still standing until 1996, when the Coal Mining Heritage Association saved it from being burnt down by having it dismantled and stored. The house is described below by Hazel Hodge. She grew up in this house and gives a very clear description. Again, this information could be used in replicating a miner’s house for the Coal Mining Heritage Park.

It was called the “little brown house” and was located on Coal Bank Hollow Road on Brush Mountain. It was a simple three-room house where 7 people lived. The 3 rooms were a kitchen, a living room/bedroom, and another bedroom. The kitchen contained a coal and wood cook stove, a table with benches, a side table, a bucket with a dipper, old-timey kitchen cabinets, and a round washing tub. The living room/bedroom had a baby bed, a couch that was also a bed, straight-back chairs, a rocking chair, and a pot-bellied stove. The other bedroom had a big bed, a half bed, hooks to hang clothes on, and a dresser. All the room were lighted by kerosene lamps. It was a simple house, the house of a coal miner. It was designed by a system known as “tongue and groove”, which is one-inch boards hooked together. Outside was a smokehouse and an out house. There was also a small garden where vegetables were grown and a pen where they raised hogs (Hodge 10/18/99).

Figure 3.7 Photo of the “little brown house” described above; courtesy of Hazel Hodge.

The best location for a replicated miners house at Merrimac would be next to the Huckleberry Trail, near where the commissary once stood. (See the map of the park conceptual plan in Chapter 2.) We believe this is a good location for three reasons. One important reason is its accessibility by being located right on the Huckleberry Trail. As
trail users passing through the park, this would provide an interesting stopping point, or a
destination in and of itself. The second reason is security, since this is an open and
visible area through which trail users frequently pass. A third reason, is that it provides a
heritage feature at the west end of the park, something to balance with the Bunker Hill
area on the east end and the Tipple Area in the middle of the park. Visitors and trail users
can be drawn along the full length of the Huckleberry Trail within the park boundaries,
learning about the mining heritage along the way.

Garden

Many people have also suggested designing a garden next to the house. In the
mining village nearly everyone had a garden plot where they grew their own fruits and
vegetables. Gardening was an important part of their culture. Esther Jones, who tended to
her garden at Wake Forest describes gardening.

We grew tomatoes, beans, onions, peppers, corn, peas, carrots,
and any vegetable you can think of. We used a horse and plow. We
would plow it and then had to brake up the clots. We also had
grapes, peaches, plums, cherries, and apples. People would come by
and we would sell it to them. We canned about 200 jars a year
(Jones 11/15/99).

Structures Surrounding The House

Esther Jones also listed other structures that surrounded the house. These include:
- smokehouse               - woodhouse
- corn crib                     - outhouse
- coal house                  - shed
- barn

Perhaps one or two of these structures such as the smoke house and an outhouse
could be made next to the garden. After all, many of these things were utilized by a miner
and his family and would help to portray their lives.

Furnishing A House

In regards to the house itself, another possibility is that we furnish the inside.
Then, visitors would be able to see what a coal miner’s house contained and understand
what it was like to live in the mines. Several members of the Coal Mining Heritage
Association are willing to donate items to furnish a house. Here is a list of a few of the
things the Association has to offer.

- wood stove                 - old-timey kitchen cabinets
- curtains                      - place cloths and place settings
- quilts                           - chairs
- dishes                        - washtub
- sheets                        - sewing table and machine
- washboards - iron
- canning funnel - mason jars to store fruits and vegetables
- potato masher - eggbeater
- dinner bell - butter printer and paddle
- strainer and crock - dresses and aprons

Figures 3.8 and 3.9 are two photographs of the inside of a coal miner’s house that were taken at the Coal Miners Exhibition in Beckley, West Virginia. This gives you an idea of what a furnished coal miner’s house looks like. The woman pictured in Figure 3.9 was a coal miner’s wife and serves as a guide inside the house. Many women who are members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association such as Esther Jones or Hazel Hodge, just to name a few, would be happy to do this. Besides educating the public on coal mining, a volunteer inside would help to monitor and protect the building.

Figure 3.8  The furnished inside of a miner’s house, Exhibition Coal Mine, Beckley, West Virginia.

Figure 3.9  The furnished inside of a miner’s house, Exhibition Coal Mine, Beckley, West Virginia.
MUSEUM/VISITORS CENTER

After a coal miner’s house is built and the park is underway we recommend creating a combined Museum and Visitors Center. A mining museum would provide an excellent way to educate the public about coal mining heritage. Several members of the community and Coal Mining Heritage Association have expressed an interest in a museum. The building of a mining museum at the park would provide an excellent center of activity for preserving an important part of the New River Valley’s heritage. We recommend that this be undertaken as a joint venture between the county and the mining heritage association. Other groups, including schools, universities, churches, and other regional history associations might also be drawn into a partnership to build and maintain activities at the museum. A museum would serve the county as a wonderful heritage preservation and heritage educational facility, as well as provide a focal point for the park in the form of a visitors center. The museum could house artifacts, photos, videos, tapes, and books. Museum activities could include exhibits, interpretive living history events, and educational outreach programs. Elementary and high school teachers could bring their classes, and visitors could learn about coal mining and its importance to this region of Virginia.

The community and students are interested in learning about coal mining. Several miners have visited local schools to share information on coal mining with students and received excellent feedback. Mrs. Wheeler who teaches a fourth grade class at Kipps Elementary says, “Our children live in the area and coal mining is an important part of their heritage. Standards of Learning (SOL) requires us to teach about products of southwest Virginia which includes coal mining. When the coal miners visit they tell delightful stories and give kids a chance to learn how to do things hands on with some of their tools. It would be wonderful to have a museum where things were permanently displayed. That would be a field trip for us.” Many other teachers have similar feelings about educating their students on coal mining and incorporating it into their curriculum.

The principal of Price's Fork Elementary, Dolly Cottrill, also comments that with a museum, "The children will learn to respect the past lifeways of their parents and great grandparents.” Currently the children at Price's Fork Elementary visit the Coal Mining Exhibition in Beckley, West Virginia. Beth McDonald, a teacher at Price's Fork Elementary School would like the field trip to hit closer to home. She says, "There isn't any reason why the children shouldn't visit a local coal mine. They learn about the local coal mining business yet they have to travel to West Virginia to experience it in real life." Many others feel that having a heritage coal mining museum in the area would be a wonderful resource.

Several members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association who worked or lived in the mines visit schools to teach children about coal mining. Fred Lawson who has presented at several schools says, “Kids are very curious about the process of mining and tools used. They ask a lot of inquisitive questions. Then, after we leave they usually send us thank you cards with their individual interests and sometimes drawings of the coal mines, the way they see them.” Dana Acres who has presented at the Roanoke Transportation Museum, Roanoke Art Museum, and Explore Park Symposiums has gotten similar responses from her audiences. Children and groups of all ages are interested in hearing her stories, which surround real events, adventures, and tragedies,
that occurred growing up, and living in the mines. She has been invited to appear before many groups and has gotten great support for her efforts. She believes, like others, that there should be a coal miner’s museum where information can be permanently displayed. After all, she says, "the oral tradition and legends on coal mining which have been passed down from one generation to the next will not last forever and they should be stored in a museum or place where they cannot be forgotten."

The best place to locate the museum is at the entrance to the park beside the parking lot. There are several reasons for this location. One is that people may be visiting the park only to see the museum, and in order to reduce traffic in other parts of the park it should be situated at the entrance. Secondly, several visitors may include small children or handicapped visitors who are not be able to travel far to get to the museum. For their convenience and safety this would be the best location. Last and most importantly, keeping the museum at the entrance, in a visible and public area, reduces the risk of vandalism. To further reduce the risk of vandalism a security system should be considered. A security system could cost up to $4,800 dollars, however the cost of rebuilding a museum and replacing all the information lost is far more expensive. Many people are only willing to donate items to the museum if they know the building will be secure.

Members of the community and Coal Mining Heritage Association are willing to help support a museum. Several miners have expressed an interest in staffing the museum themselves. What a wonderful resource it would be to have miners sharing their information and stories on coal mining with the public. Visitors would be able to learn about coal mining, first hand, from those who have experienced it.

As far as what to put inside the museum, many former coal miners and members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association have enough things to fill five museums or more. If such a museum were to be built by the county in association with the Coal Mining Heritage Association, they would willingly contribute pictures, maps, clothing, tools, household items, and much more. They would be proud to see items of their heritage displayed. We took an inventory of these items. Ideas for exhibits were generated from members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association, input from local teachers and schools, as well as observation of exhibits at the Exhibition Coal Mine in Beckley, West Virginia and exhibits at the Roanoke Museum of Transportation for its 1999 annual Coal Miner’s Day (set up in conjunction with the Coal Mining Heritage Association). Below, we have listed a number of potential exhibits for a museum at the Coal Mining Heritage Park.
Exhibits

Mining Tools

A miner worked with various tools inside the mine. Many of these tools should be displayed. Below is a list of many of these tools along with photographs.

**Mining pick** - a pointed metal tool used to loosen coal  
**Augurs** - a drill used to design holes for loading dynamite  
**Breastplate** - metal that attached to the augur and provided pressure while drilling into the mine seam  
**Tamping Bar** - long metal bar; one end was first used to clean debris from fuse and then the other notched end was used to load dynamite  
**Dynamite and exploders** - inserted into the mine wall to loosen coal  
**Powder Bag** - leather bag that carried dynamite and exploders

Figure 3.10  Tools in a case at Coal Mining Exhibition Mine in Beckley, West Virginia.

Figure 3.11 Powder bag with dynamite and exploders. Photo courtesy of Fred Lawson.
**Clothing**

A manikin could be displayed in miner's gear. In Figure 3.12, a manikin miner is wearing jean overalls, a jacket, high top shoes, a safety hat with a light, and a battery attached around a belt at the waist. He is holding a lunch pail and is standing in a pile of coal (field notes at Roanoke Museum of Transportation 11/6/99)

![Figure 3.12  Manikin wearing a miner’s clothing, Roanoke Museum of Transportation.](image)

**Lights In The Mines**

Other important tools that deserve their own display are lights. A miner used carbide and later electrical lights to light his workspace.

- Carbide lights- light produced from carbide gas that fit on a safety hat
- Carbide flask- metal canteen miner carried carbide in
- Carbide cans- commercial package carbide fluid was sold in
- Electrical lights-replaced carbide lights in early 1900’s, fit on the safety hat and charged from a battery.
- Belt- carried battery attached to electrical light
- Safety hat- hard hat that protected a miner from rock falls and held a carbide or electrical light
- Kerosene light- light created with a rag and kerosene in a bottle, only used in particular tunnel mines

![Figure 3.13  Safety lights. Photo courtesy of Fred Lawson.](image)
**Safety In The Mines**

The air within the mines was constantly checked for increasing levels of methane gas that could lead to a fire or explosion. A few important tools helped to maintain safety.

- **Air Gauge**: metal speedometer that fire boss used to measure air pressure and check air flow within mines.
- **Safety lamp**: gas fueled metal lamp used to detect methane in the mines, if the light flickered or went out methane was present.
- **Rescue Kit**: plastic face nozzle attached to an oxygen tank that a miner could use in the event that he was trapped in the mines. Could last him up to 30 minutes.

![Safety gear](image)

**Figure 3.14 Safety gear. Photo courtesy of Fred Lawson.**

**Other Items Used By Miners**

Several other items were used by a miner but were not directly related to the process of mining. However, these things were a necessity to miners.

- **Lunch Pail**: metal bucket with 3 components: first for a sandwich, second for a desert, and third held a quart of water to sustain a miner for several hours in the event that he was trapped in the mine.
- **Wash Tub**: metal bucket used to hold water and wash with in the washhouse following a day of work in the mine.
- **Scrip**: a form of currency at the mines that came in the form of paper or coins and could only be spent at the company store. Some script was equivalent to dollars and cents while others were more specific in value and could be exchanged for items such as dynamite, tools, or coal.
**Household Items**

Women and children who lived at the mines also participated in a number of activities. In order to understand their role and life at the coal mines many people have suggested featuring a display with a few of the household items:

- **Washboard**: wooden board used to scrub clothes
- **Sewing machine or treadle**: used to make clothing and bedding
- **Iron**: metal heated on a wood stove to straighten clothing
- **Curtains, table setting, sheets, and quilts**: colorful, sometimes made from empty cotton feed sacks
- **Dresses and bonnets**: also made from feed sacks
- **Strainer and crock**: fine screen and porcelain container that milk was strained and then stored in
- **Butter printer and paddle**: wooden implements used to make butter
- **Canning funnel and mason jars**: used to store vegetables and fruits from the garden
- **Potato masher and egg beater**: metal; old-fashioned kitchen tools

![Figure 3.15 Household items on a quilt. Photo courtesy of Esther Jones.](image1)

![Figure 3.16 Washboard, Roanoke Museum of Transportation](image2)
Photographs

There are also numerous photo collections in the possession of Fred Lawson, Kenneth McCoy, Jimmy Price and many other miners, as well as located in the Special Collections at the Virginia Tech Library. Photos display workers lined up to enter the mine, workers constructing the tipple, the mine supervisors, and miners and family members together. These photographs could all be displayed on the walls of the museum, providing an informative visual depiction of the mining way of life. After all, have you ever heard the saying “each picture speaks a thousand words?”

Videos

There are two great videos that illustrate mining life in the New River Valley. One is “Hard Times and Rich Memories,” a film produced by Robert Freis, Jimmy Price, and Shawna Scott. The film documents peoples’ memories of the mining life using numerous excerpts from videotaped oral history interviews. It covers the history, working conditions, family life, and some of the tragedies that occurred in the New River Valley mines. The second video was produced by Dudley Scott, a former fire boss for one of the New River Valley mines. This video also explores some of the hardships of life at the mines, with numerous interviews and photographs. Each video is an hour long. A room in the museum could be designated to showing videos, providing a dynamic look into mining life to complement the exhibits on display.

A Mining Heritage Archive for Books, Documentation, and Oral Histories

The Coal Mining Heritage Association is concerned that documentation about the region’s mines needs to be collected and preserved for heritage education. One room in the museum could function as an archive, housing books, historical documentation on the region’s mines and mining life, and oral history collections. Mining families have a wealth of photos and personal records which would be valuable for helping us document the region’s mining heritage, but the families want to be assured that their records will be housed in a safe location and be accessible for educational learning. The Coal Mining Heritage Association does not currently have a place to house such a collection. In addition to providing a central visitors center focus for the park, a museum at Montgomery County’s Coal Mining Heritage Park would be a logical place to establish a regional coal mining archive.

Children’s Corner

A number of people at our community meetings recommended having a small children's corner in the museum where workshops and games for kids could be set-up. Some of these games would help to teach the children in an exciting way. For example a train set and miniature mining structures could be displayed like they are below in Figure 3.17.
Stories about coal mining could be played by cassette. At several museums this method has worked with headphones or an intercom. Picture books should also be available. Children can then page through and see some of the scenes at the mines. Games played by children at the mines were simple games such as marbles and dominos. Members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association who have memories growing up in the mines suggest these games are set-up. All of these games and resources together will help children to learn about coal mining heritage at their own level.

The museum will be a central information and education source at the coal mining heritage park. It will educate people on the facets of a coal mining community. This includes information on the lifeways of men, women, and children. Information about the community and actual process of coal mining will be displayed. The visitors can rely on the museum to exhibit photographs, maps, and information that detail life in the New River Valley coal mines.

OTHER HERITAGE STRUCTURES

After the museum is built a few of the structures that were formerly at Merrimac should be reconstructed. Presently, there are no standing structures at Merrimac. There are the remains of a few foundations but buildings that once existed have now deteriorated. It is hard to imagine that an entire coal mining village once stood at Merrimac. In reconstructing a few of the structures visitors will be able to understand and see what a coal mining village might have appeared like. Members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association have made a number of recommendations on which buildings best represented the mining community.
Commissary

One central focus at the village was the commissary or company store. (See number 6 on the historic map of Merrimac, circa 1937, drawn by Scott Kennedy and Fred Lawson; see Figure 3.2.) A family went to the commissary on almost a daily basis to purchase food and other important items. The commissary could be reconstructed along with the post office and superintendents office as it once was. According to former Merrimac miner Fred Lawson, the building had the following appearance:

A long counter stretched along the front of the store. Behind the counter was where all items to be sold were kept. In the center of the room was a cage made out of chicken wire where suits were kept. Attached to the commissary were other important rooms. There was a flour room where bags of flour were stored. There was a feed room where 100-pound sacks of feed for hogs or cows were kept. In the back of the building were general offices where about 6 people worked in a room behind a desk doing engineer type work. In the back right corner of the building was a big room where the superintendent worked. Then back in the left corner was the post office. There were small boxes and a desk where the postmaster would sit. A porch wrapped around the outside of the building and the train line ran right beside it. All the mail, goods from the commissary, feed, and over all supplies would be dropped on the porch from the train (Lawson 10/12/99).

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Figure 3.18  Layout of the commissary, based on the description of Fred Lawson.

Combined Shops

Another important building was the combined shops. (See numbers 20 and 20A on the historic map of Merrimac, circa 1937, drawn by Scott Kennedy and Fred Lawson; see Figure 3.2.) This should not be confused with the company store. Things were not sold here instead, a number of people worked for the mines here. There was a blacksmith shop, a car shop, a sawmill, and a light house. These buildings were adjoined together.
The car shop is where they would bring the coal cars that had been damaged. They were also built there. The cars had to be built very sturdy. They were built with a metal frame, wooden side boards, and 4 wheels. They kept all sorts of machinery in the car shop. Then the blacksmith shop had a big table where tools would be laid out to be repaired. They used a forge and an anvil which were used sort of like a hammer to shape things. You sharpened picks and augurs and made parts to be used on the coal cars. The light house had racks for the electric lights to be plugged in. The miner would bring his light in and it would recharge over night. Lastly, the sawmill is where they dumped timber to be sawed. The saw mill was connected to the rest of the building with a roof but there were no walls, it was left open (Lawson 10/12/99).

Figure 3.19 Layout of the combined shops, based on the description of Fred Lawson.

Storage Buildings

There are a number of other small buildings that a miner visited on his daily routine. According to former Merrimac miner Fred Lawson at the start of the day a miner first went to the wash house to change his clothes (number 22 on the historic map of Merrimac, circa 1937, drawn by Scott Kennedy and Fred Lawson; see Figure 3.2), then to the lamp house to get his lamp (number 20A on the 1937 map), next to the powder room to get his dynamite and explosives (number 14 on the 1937 map), and last to the mule barn only if he was a mule driver (number 23 on the 1937 map). It would be interesting if we could re-create this process of events that went on by rebuilding the wash house, light house, powder house, and mule barn. These were not great big structures and certainly would not take as much effort or be as costly as reconstructing some of the other buildings.

The washhouse consisted of a cement floor with a drain. A pot-bellied stove sat in the center of the room and cabinets were on the side. A miner would come to the washhouse to get his clothes in the morning and then return to wash himself in a wash tub after a day of work in the mine. At the lamp house a miner would pick up his lamp that had been recharging in the room over night. It was basically a room with shelves where miners stored their lamps. Next is the powder and dynamite building where a miner went to buy his dynamite and explosives in the morning. Lastly was the mule barn. A mule driver would come here to
harness his mule up before proceeding to work. There were 15-20 stalls in the barn and bails of hay were stacked in the loft. Outside was a fenced area where the mules could roam (Lawson 10/12/99).

Tipple

The tipple and hoist house were paramount to running the mine (see number 15 on the historic map of Merrimac, circa 1937, drawn by Scott Kennedy and Fred Lawson; see Figure 3.2). Coal was processed and sorted at the tipple before it was loaded on to the train. In reconstructing these buildings people would be able to understand how the process of mining coal actually worked. It was an ingenious system that was all done by machine. Below is a description of the tipple and how it worked.

The tipple and hoist worked together to bring the cars of coal out of the mine. As the cars approached the tipple a signal was given and the hoist which pulled the cable was stopped. At the tipple the belts or scrapers would pull the coal out. Then it was washed. The coal was graded according to size and fell through different screens. Lastly, it was directed out the different shoots down to the appropriate bins where it could be loaded on to the train. (Lawson 10/12/99).

Figure 3.20  Tipple during mining operation.

Figure 3.21  Hoist presently at tipple area.
Rebuilding an Authentic New River Valley Miner’s House

After the park has been well established, one other possibility to be considered is moving an authentic New River Valley miner’s house to the Coal Mining Heritage Park. In contrast to the “reconstructed” houses discussed earlier in this chapter, we are speaking here about rebuilding an actual historic structure rather than a replica. The Coal Mining Heritage Association presently owns one of the last remaining miner’s houses, if not the last one, and it is interested in finding a new site for the house where it will be protected and appreciated for its historic value. This would truly be a valuable addition to the park, but one which we do not recommend undertaking until the park has become well established and has a good security infrastructure. Proper security is a “must” to protect such a building from vandalism. At a later stage in the park development, however, Montgomery County and the Coal Mining Heritage Association may wish to discuss possibilities for moving this authentic miner’s house to Merrimac as a joint county-community effort. The benefits would be to enhance the park’s role in preserving the region’s mining heritage, by placing an authentic structure on exhibit. The drawbacks are in providing a safe environment and acquiring adequate funding to ensure accurate reconstruction by a firm specializing in historic preservation. Explore Park and the Beckley Coal Mining Museum, institutions that have experience resituating and exhibiting authentic structures, should be consulted at that time as to the pros and cons involved in using authentic historic structures.

As mentioned, the Coal Mining Heritage Association is in possession of the last remaining miner’s house in the New River Valley. The Coal Mining Heritage Association contracted with an historic architect to disassemble and document the last standing miner’s house in Coal Bank Hollow in 1996. A photograph and description of this house by Hazel Hodge, who once resided in it, appears earlier in this chapter (see Figure 3.7). The house is presently dismantled and stored in a barn, awaiting a new home. Since the Coal Mining Heritage Park is focused on preserving the county’s mining history, it would be appropriate to “save” this last mining house by giving it a home on the park site. Documentation on the house, its condition, and documentation needed for accurate reconstruction, can be obtained through the Coal Mining Heritage Association. Many members of the Coal Mining Heritage Association who assisted in dismantling the house have indicated their willingness to help rebuild the house at a later time. A county-community joint effort to rebuild this historic building for the public might provide a wonderful opportunity for community involvement in the heritage park, which in turn would support and facilitate successive developments at the park.

In conclusion, there are numerous possibilities for developing additional historical structures as part of the long-range heritage educational goal for Merrimac’s Coal Mining Heritage Park. Here we have described the commissary, combined shops, buildings that a miner visited on his daily routine, the tipple, and lastly, the rebuilding of an authentic miner’s house. We would not expect all of these options to be developed immediately, however, we have described the function and appearance of some of the more important buildings to be considered in the long-range goals of the park.
PHASING AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HERITAGE ASPECTS OF THE PARK

Decisions about the implementation of the park involve deciding which features should be constructed in what order. For the heritage aspects of the park, we recommend that several of the signs (discussed above) should be put in place at the very beginning of the park's development to give people a sense of progress and to bolster interest and enthusiasm. For Phase One in the park's development, we recommend construction and placement of the welcome signs at the three entrances. Also for Phase One, we recommend that attention be focused on developing the "Tipple Heritage Area" as the initial heritage focal point for the park. This involves establishing the larger signs at the "Tipple Heritage Area," which provide general information about coal mining in the New River Valley. It also involves setting up the outdoor exhibit of the hoist mechanism, coal cars and track, and the corresponding sign explaining this equipment. The "Heritage Bridge" should also be constructed over the tipple foundation at this time, if possible, to create a central exhibit feature that will serve as the park's initial information center and to provide an area for park dedications and other ceremonies.

Several other signs should be put up as soon as possible, preferably during Phase One, to identify other areas of heritage interest along the Huckleberry Trail. “The Miner’s Town” sign and “Bunker Hill” sign (described above) should be erected toward the eastern part of the Huckleberry Trail, and signs identifying the old hotel and commissary sites should be erected on the western side of the park. With heritage signs on the east and west, and the Tipple Heritage Area in the middle, visitors will be drawn along from one side of the park to the other.

The rest of the heritage signs should be put up as applicable to the other park developments. As the low-impact trails are constructed on the southern side of the Huckleberry, the heritage signs for those trails should also be put in place Trail (recommended for Phase Three, following the construction of the Community Recreation Area in Phase Two). The numbered post markers identifying the minor industrial buildings would be very inexpensive and easy to install. Similarly, heritage signs should be put in place when the trails are constructed on the north side of the Huckleberry Trail (recommended for Phase Four). Work on developing an archaeological exhibit at the ruins of the old supervisor's house, a destination along the Miner's House Trail, should be timed to take place when that trail is constructed (Phase Four). We have recommended that the first heritage structure, the replica of a miner's house, be constructed during Phase Five, and the Museum/Visitors Center be constructed during Phase Six.

There are several possibilities for other heritage reconstructions and interpretive exhibits at the park that could be added when the park has been well established. At that time (Phase Seven in our scheme), the possibilities/potentials for other reconstructed buildings should be evaluated and pursued if feasible. One of the most interesting possibilities is the reconstruction of an actual New River Valley miner's house, the mining house that the Coal Mining Heritage Association rescued, dismantled, and is storing until an appropriate site is found (as described above). The placement of an actual miner's house in the park, as a cooperative endeavor between the county and the CMHA, would lend authenticity and interest to the park. Other ideas for long-term possibilities include reconstructing the tipple, the hoist house, and many of the other
important buildings the pertained to mining life. These propositions have not been assessed by means other than expedient wishes and would need to be assessed individually at the appropriate time.

One concern that our research team has is that the entire historic Merrimac site be kept intact. At this time, some portions of historic Merrimac still lie outside the park boundaries. The site of the old hotel is currently outside the park. But, of even greater concern, is the fact that most of Bunker Hill, the residential area where mining families lived in company houses, is separated from the park. It appears that the county only owns the lower portion of Bunker Hill – containing the lower two house foundations. Bunker Hill is a necessary feature to include in the Coal Mining Heritage Park because of its historical significance. The majority of mining life happened in this area – the life of mining women and children, as well as the men. Historic interpretation in the industrial section of Merrimac, within the park, will focus much on what the men did throughout their days. But what about the women and children? Most of their activities centered around the homes. Without the activities in the residential area, none of the mining activities as we know them could have occurred. A portrayal of life at Merrimac would be incomplete without incorporating Bunker Hill in the park. This land needs to be added to the park to complete the heritage map of Merrimac. We urge the county to work with the park's neighbors to purchase of the remainder of Bunker Hill so that historic Merrimac remains intact, and can be preserved and interpreted to the public as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The Coal Mining Heritage Park presents us with a wonderful opportunity for heritage conservation and preservation that will provide the community with a story of its roots. In this chapter, we have detailed a set of recommendations for presenting the heritage of the region's coal mining in the park. From the initial signs erected, to placing the finishing touches on the miner’s house, all of these ideas contribute to saving a special piece of local history. We have designed the heritage aspects of the park to impart the rich history of coal mining, while at the same time integrating the heritage aspects with other recreational activities at the park (trails and other activities that will be discussed in the following chapters). We have designed many different facets for learning about the coal mining heritage and tried to portray a broad spectrum of the opportunities to learn what it was like in all of the aspects of mining life - from digging the coal, to getting food, to catching a ride into town for supplies, and many others aspects of life.

It is important to view the heritage plans for this park as a whole integrated unit, and not just as individual unrelated pieces. We have taken great care to unite all of the ideas into a complete vision for the park. As each part is phased in, it will build a more complete picture of mining life. The signs, exhibits, heritage trails, and reconstructed buildings will give park visitors opportunities to learn in multiple ways about the strong history of an all but forgotten era. We owe it to ourselves to create the Coal Mining Heritage Park, but even more we owe it to the miners and their families to give a little back of what they gave us all, for we would not be here had it not been for those who made this area what it is today.
The advent of the Coal Mining Heritage Park creates the need for several necessities to allow visitors to feel comfortable. The following discussion of facilities and family-oriented activities is based on feedback from surveys, community meetings, and informal interviews. People indicated that they desire conveniences such as restrooms, water fountains and picnic areas in the park. These amenities will allow the visitors to comfortably enjoy the natural environment and absorb the rich history of the area. The chapter's discussion of facilities and infrastructure is also based on a survey of park planning literature (Bartling 1983; Christiansen 1983; Espeseth 1982; Fogg 1975; Hultsman et al. 1997; Marcus et al. 1998; Molnar 1986; Sharpe 1983). This chapter contains ideas that will make the park a popular place for friends and family to gather in order to relax and learn.

In this chapter, we will discuss the details of the park’s infrastructure and the need for convenience facilities, including restrooms, drinking fountains, parking, benches, picnic areas, pavilion, and bicycle racks. We will also address security concerns and the need for regular park maintenance. These additions will help to create a complete heritage park and community resource. These facilities are necessary implements for the successful functioning of this park project. Figure 4.1 shows a map of the recommended park facilities.

AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

Before any specific facilities are addressed, it is important to define ADA (American Disabilities Act) in terms of the contents of this chapter. The ADA “…sets standards for facility accessibility by physically handicapped persons for Federal and federally-funded facilities. These standards are to be applied during the design, construction, and alterations of buildings and facilities…” (UFAS:5). This act was specifically designed for persons with disabilities to have access to parks like the Coal Mining Heritage Park. These standards should be integrated into the park not only because the law dictates them, but also because it would be a courtesy to the park visitors. The Coal Mining Heritage Park is meant for everyone and should be designed as such. Without these considerations, we would be excluding a large portion of our park patrons.
RESTROOMS
The community and users of the Huckleberry Trail have stated that restrooms are needed at the park. In the survey, restrooms were the most frequently asked-for facility (51 requests out of 64 respondents). Restroom facilities would serve the Huckleberry Trail users as well as the visitors of the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Currently, the trail is six miles long and without restrooms, so trail users would greatly appreciate this convenience.

There are a few considerations that need to be added to the design of the restrooms. First, it is necessary for the restrooms to be ADA accessible. This includes consideration for things such as the width of the door stalls, the width of the door entrances, sink heights and incorporating Braille into the signs. They need to be accessible to everyone. Another consideration would be to put diaper-changing stations in each male and female restroom. ADA Accessibility and family-oriented conveniences are needed immediately. At the moment, there are not only adults and children using the Huckleberry Trail, but also wheelchair users. The restrooms are needed for these patrons of the trail.

We have researched some possible additions that should be integrated into the design. The structure should be aesthetically pleasing and in balance with the natural surroundings. Incorporating skylights into the design would cut down on electricity costs, but needs to be inaccessible as a means of unwanted entry (Marcus and Francis 1999:110). It is best to use unbreakable or shatterproof materials such as stainless steel and polyvinyl for things such as mirrors, toilets, and sinks (Christiansen 1983:78-9). Water and sewage pipes should be hidden in an inner room so they will also be inaccessible to the public (Bartling 1983:36). There are ways to minimize maintenance work by using paints and tiles that are easy to clean (Bartling 1983:36).

While the Coal Mining Heritage Park is being developed, there will be families, school and other groups that would need and use these facilities. We suggest that the restrooms attached to the picnic shelters and be constructed during Phase Two. Later, another restroom can be built into the Museum/Visitors Center in Phase Six. By incorporating these needs and considerations into the design of the restrooms, all types of users will be accommodated and visiting the park will be a more enjoyable experience.

**DRINKING FOUNTAINS**

The community members and Huckleberry Trail users have made many requests for drinking fountains, both at the community meetings and in the survey. In the survey, nearly three-quarters of the respondents requested drinking fountains (46 out of 64 respondents). Those exercising on the trail will need a drink of water to quench their thirst and cool them off and will be especially appreciated on hot summer days.

The fountains need to be located on a pull-off area off of the Huckleberry Trail in order to avoid traffic congestion and safety problems. This could be a small area covered with wood chips, mulch or bricks leading away from the trail to the fountain. The fountains will need to be accessible to children, adults, and disabled persons. This can be accomplished by building two types of fountains. One can be wheelchair accessible and the other can be constructed to accommodate children and adults. Making the second fountain accessible on both sides can do this. On one side, there can be stairs that the children would use to climb up and the other side would be accessible to standing adults.
Like other features of the park, the fountains should blend in with the surroundings. These can be built in Phase Two. Additional fountains could be located near the picnic shelter and playground area (discussed in Chapter 5) and the Heritage Bridge in the center of the park. Later, when the Museum/Visitors Center is built (recommended for Phase Six), a drinking fountain would be located there also.

SECURITY

Security and vandalism are major concerns of the community. “It is unrealistic to expect ‘THE solution’ (singular) to such a collection of complex problems, but it is possible to eliminate some forms of vandalism, minimize others, as well as reduce the damage and cost of those forms which inevitably occur” (Christiansen 1983:2). Park vandalism control management should be cost effective. It is very important to have a security system, but it should be realistically designed for the Coal Mining Heritage Park. The security system should not cost more than the vandalism it is trying to prevent (Christensen 1983:6). Security concerns were brought up a number of times in our community meetings and surveys. Trail users and community members want the Coal Mining Heritage Park to be protected.

After talking with the Montgomery County Public Facilities Director and the Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Director, the most effective security system would consist of lights and motion sensor video cameras located along various points in the park (Phillips and Bain interview 10/13/1999). The area should be well lit, but not overbearing, thus not burdening the landscape with light pollution. These lights should blend with the landscape and the naturalistic style of the park. Security lights and cameras will deter vandalism and promote security within the park.

There are other ways, in addition to installing security systems, to make the park safer. The park entrance should be inviting, but should also clearly show the park boundaries. These boundaries define the park and make people more aware that they are entering a county-owned park and are more likely to acknowledge the park rules. Hidden spots in the park should be avoided when possible (Christiansen 1983:107). We suggest that the park hours be sunup to sundown. An emergency phone and an emergency access route will help to make park and trail users feel safer. We have heard from community members, especially women, that they feel uncertain about safety at that location and along the Huckleberry Trail in general. Integrating these security features will not only cut down on vandalism, but will also make the users feel more comfortable about using the park and the Huckleberry Trail.

PARKING

Parking for the Huckleberry Trail is located at the New River Valley Mall and in Blacksburg, too far away to serve the Coal Mining Heritage Park. The park will need its own parking lot. At the moment, parking at the proposed park site is limited. We will need more spaces than what is presently available if we wish to encourage people to visit the park, and especially if we wish to attract large groups to the park for school field trips and community events. The best primary parking area is where the current Consolidated Waste Site is located. This site is ideal for parking, and especially provides space to
accommodate handicapped parking and a school bus turnaround area. The county already owns the land that is adjacent to the current Consolidated Waste Site. A second tier can be built for additional parking on the hill above where the waste site is presently located (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). When the second tier is built, we feel it is important to leave several feet of land with trees to block the cars from the park view from below so that the parking area will not detract from the overall scenic view. Trail users and park visitors do not want to get distracted from the park by an obtrusive parking lot. These two levels would be united by one access road through the main entrance of the current consolidated waste site.

There are several ADA requirements to consider. First, if the waste site area is to be turned into a parking area, the designated spaces will need to be large enough to allow for handicapped accessible vans. This parking area should be paved to accommodate wheelchairs and make it an easier walk to the park. The lot will hook up to an ADA Trail (discussed in Chapter 5) and connect the parking area to the park. While the park is being developed, the primary parking area can be where the current consolidated waste site is located. This transition to a parking lot should be done in Phase One. We recommend that the upper tier of the parking lot be developed in Phase Six, when the
Museum/Visitors Center is constructed. Dirt removed from the hillside to construct the upper tier of the parking lot can provide some of the fill needed for the foundation of the Museum (see below).

BENCHES AND PICNIC TABLES

A few strategically placed benches and picnic tables will help to create a comfortable atmosphere for the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Individuals and groups, such as the Warm Hearth Retirement Community, will be able to sit, relax, and socialize. Visitors to the park will be able to rest while imagining what life was like in a New River Valley coal mining town. The picnic tables would be an ideal place to stop and eat and enjoy the view. In the survey responses, two-thirds of the respondents requested picnic tables (44 out of 64 responses) and over one-half requested trail benches (35 out of 64).

Picnic areas should be scattered throughout the park in arrangements that give a personalized feeling to family and social gatherings (Marcus and Francis 1999:92). We suggest that most of the picnic table arrangements be concentrated in the Community Recreation Area (discussed in the Chapter 5). Also, there should be a high concentration of picnic tables near the parking lot. These sites would be convenient for those using the playgrounds and for those who are just stopping to eat. Trail benches should be placed along the Huckleberry Trail and low-impact trails to provide visitors with places to rest. These should be placed near the signage for Bunker Hill, the Tipple, and the Commissary. There should also be sitting areas near the Reconstructed Miner’s House and the Nature Education Area (discussed in Chapter 6) to serve visitors who wish to sit and enjoy activities at the west end of the park.

There are a few established trees on the site that should be left for individuals or groups that want to relax or picnic. The environment surrounding the bench and table areas should be private, yet open. The tables and benches should fit in with the style of the park and take advantage of shade and sun use. The benches that are placed along the trails should also have a pull off area to not disrupt the trail traffic. It will be wise to have the benches and tables made of a material, like a polyvinyl chloride material, that would minimize carving (Sharpe 1983:206). The tables and benches should be secured to the ground.

Benches and picnic tables are an important convenience to place in the park. These facilities will get much use and their availability will be an attractive draw to the park for a wide range of users who wish to sit down to enjoy leisurely visits. These structures will establish a park presence and the community will feel positively involved in the park. They will feel invited to sit down, rest, and enjoy the scenery. We suggest that some benches be placed along the Huckleberry Trail right at the beginning, in Phase One, and that others be added during the development of the low impact trails so that visitors can stop and contemplate heritage and environmental sites. It would be wise to put a few picnic tables into the park during Phase One also, so that families and Huckleberry Trail users will begin to think of the park as a destination for outings and trail lunch breaks. When the Community Recreation Area is built (recommended during Phase Two), additional picnic tables should be placed in that area of the park.

PICNIC SHELTERS I AND II
A picnic shelter is a perfect location for family reunions and school gatherings. These shelters allow people to mingle, talk, and play. They will allow families and friends to spend quality time together. They will be used frequently and will be greatly appreciated by the community, the Huckleberry Trail users, and local school groups.

The picnic shelters can be simple structures like those at Bisset Park in Radford (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5). The ones shown here are larger than we envisioned for the Coal Mining Heritage Park, since the space at Merrimac is more limited. The picnic shelters should have picnic benches and trash facilities, and should provide a few barbeque areas for cookouts.

Figure 4.4 View of a picnic shelter at Bisset Park in Radford. The picnic benches, barbeques, and trash facilities are visible in this view.

Figure 4.5 View of a picnic shelter at Bisset Park in Radford. This view shows the restrooms, lighting, and trash facilities at the shelter.

Restrooms should be added to the picnic shelters for trail and park users. The examples from Bisset Park demonstrate how restrooms could be attached to the end of the picnic shelters (Figure 4.6). Since the shelters will be close together, it might be possible to have a single set of restrooms (one for males and one for females) on one of the shelters, however, if you consider that the two shelters might be in use by different groups, it might be courteous to provide a set of restrooms at each shelter. Also, during community events at the pavilion, heavier use of restrooms might justify providing a set
of restrooms on each of the two shelters. The restrooms should be placed onto the back of the structure so that users who go to use the facility do not disturb a family reunion or other gathering that would be going on in the picnic shelter.

![Image of a picnic shelter with restrooms attached](image)

Figure 4.6 Restrooms attached to the end of a picnic shelter at Bisset Park in Radford

The construction of the picnic shelters should fit in with the heritage theme of the park and be as unobtrusive as possible. We suggest that these facilities be built in the Community Recreation Area in Phase Two, so that they will be available for community use early in the project.

**BIKE RACKS**

Bike racks will be a useful addition, especially when picnic tables and shelters are brought into the park. Bikers will want to stop and learn about the heritage, rest, picnic, and see shows at the Front Porch Pavilion (discussed next). These could be conveniently placed in locations along the Huckleberry Trail: one at the southwest end of the park near the Reconstructed Miner's House, one near the Tipple Heritage Area, and another near the Community Recreation Area on the eastern side of the park. These can be integrated into the park in Phase Two.

**FRONT PORCH PAVILION**

The Front Porch Pavilion will be a perfect place for families and friends to gather for special events. The events that can be held at the pavilion will be discussed in Chapter 5, but this chapter will discuss the actual structure of the pavilion (see Figure 4.7).
The Front Porch Pavilion can be constructed as an open timber frame structure. Its design will mimic a historic house with a covered porch. The roof of the pavilion will be covered with standing seam tin sheets. The “porch” floor wood can be made of tongue-and-groove planking. To create a structure that is most weather resistant, the flooring can be made of plastic composite decking that resembles wood. A stone foundation can be built to raise the floor off the ground, which will help to protect it further from outside elements. Lights appropriate to the period should be added to the main posts of the structure.

Community labor and private donations can be utilized in the construction of this pavilion. There are several timber frame companies in the surrounding area that can be approached for possible private donations of the crafted timbers. A workshop manned with community volunteers can assemble the building in a weekend. Traditional standing-seam roofers can teach volunteers the techniques of this trade in the same weekend. While building the pavilion, volunteers can learn traditional building techniques, turning construction activities themselves into a form of heritage education.

PARK MAINTENANCE

The Coal Mining Heritage Park will generate a need for certain maintenance tasks to be completed by Montgomery County. These maintenance tasks include, but are not limited to, trash pick-up services and lawn care. A maintenance shed can be built on or near the site of the old Mule Barn. It can be a timber-framed structure to fit in with the surrounding area. This area lies in a flood plain, so it needs to be elevated and constructed of composite plastic decking to prevent damage to the structure. Any materials that the County maintenance crew would need could be stored in this building.
Trash cans should be placed near picnic areas and anywhere trash is being generated. These should be animal-proof and non-moveable. The material should be strong but lightweight, due to the fact that they will become difficult to lift when filled. An entryway will be needed to pick up the trash at a central location, probably with a large truck.

It will be necessary to cut down much of the brush in the flood plain near Merrimac Road, but some of the natural vegetation should be left. Some areas can be planted with grass and certain areas can be covered with wood chips. This will cut down on the amount of mowing and maintenance needed for the grounds (discussed in Chapter 6). Another responsibility of the maintenance crew will be to maintain the trails. The maintenance crew will need be an established presence at the park to show that the County cares. Maintenance needs should be fixed promptly to continue a good relationship with the users (Marcus and Francis 1999:111).

**HERITAGE BRIDGE**

The former tipple location is the central heritage focus of the park and is an appropriate place for an initial Visitors Information Area (until the Museum/Visitors Center is built at a later date). This type of area is "often the initial contact point for people…whether it’s their first stop or not." This is how many “users often base much of their opinion” (Hultsman 1998:112).

Some exhibits in the Tipple Heritage Area can be outside exhibits, but we also recommend the construction of a covered Heritage Bridge. This structure is a recommended feature for safety reasons. Currently, the site of the old tipple could be unsafe for visitors since there is a large gap between the remaining concrete foundations that might provide a hazard to children. A covered bridge with railings could be built over the concrete foundations to connect the two sides (see Figure 4.8). A simple structure that reflects the time period is appropriate, such as a structure of wooden planks with a simple tin roof.

![Figure 4.8 Drawing of the Heritage Bridge. Drawn by Jeffrey Wallentiny.](image)

The Heritage Bridge structure would provide an excellent initial information center and exhibit area for the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Standing kiosk-style exhibit
panels can be placed inside the covered bridge structure. Photo exhibits of the mine and tipple could inform visitors of the area’s mining history. Other displays could explain how the Coal Mining Heritage Park will be developed, with information on the plans and phases of park development. Boxes could be placed on these panels to hold information pamphlets that park visitors could take with them to share among family and friends. The center walls of the bridge would be left open to allow for views of the creek. These panels would be protected from the weather by the nature of their design. They would be placed in a way that visitors could walk around them and see different exhibits on either side of the panel.

ADA accessibility will need to be provided in the area between the Huckleberry Trail and the Heritage Bridge, and for entering the Heritage Bridge exhibit area. In the early stage of it's development, the far side of the Heritage Bridge will be blocked off with a railing until the Mule Trail is developed. Later, the back railing will be taken down so that the structure will function as a bridge linking the Tipple Heritage Area with the Mule Trail. The Heritage Bridge will serve the need for an information area until the Museum/Visitors Center is built.

MUSEUM/VISITORS CENTER

The Museum has already been described (in Chapter 3) in terms of its potential as a focal point for visitor education, exhibits, and heritage-based preservation activities. In this chapter we will discuss the needs and considerations for the museum site. We recommend that the Museum/Visitors Center be sited as the eastern-most facility, located across the road from the park's parking lot. Currently, the land slopes down toward the flood plain, so it will require engineering to raise the site up to road level. We are aware that this is in a flood plain zone and can only be developed if it is feasible from an engineering standpoint. The site should be built up enough above the flood plain so that if a flood did occur, the retaining walls would not be undercut. (The parking lot possibly could be expanded at the same time, providing the fill dirt for the museum site.) We also need to ensure that there is no runoff/drainage from the museum site into the creek, so a drainage system will need to be included in the site construction plan. We think it should be feasible to raise the ground level with fill, raising it at least halfway to the road level, if not all the way to the road level. Building halfway might lessen the grade of the slope down to the creek bed but would still raise the building above the flood plain.

We have selected this particular site for the Museum/Visitors Center for a number of specific reasons. The number one reason is accessibility from the parking lot. The museum site is close to the parking lot and still allows legal turning room for school buses. During discussion at the community meetings, we were repeatedly asked that it be easy for the elders of the community to get to the museum site. Siting the Museum/Visitors Center close to the parking area makes it easily accessible to those who are not physically able to walk through the park. This will allow them to enjoy the heritage that is featured at the park, even if they don't go any further than the Museum. Secondly, a museum right next to the parking lot would concentrate a majority of the in-and-out visitors (visitors who are interested only in a quick view of the museum facilities and exhibits) in the front area of the park, close to Merrimac Road, leaving the rest of the park less developed/disturbed and more pristine for nature/trail/heritage users desiring to
see, hear, and feel the natural settings of the park. Third, the Museum fits well into this location. It would be nestled into the park, blending in well. There is a natural line of trees and bushes along the creek toward the Merrimac Road end of the park that would shelter the view of the museum from that end, where the Huckleberry Trail enters the park. Fourth, by putting the museum structure in that location, it will not be as intrusive an interference on peoples' sight lines from the Huckleberry Trail. One aspect that we have tried to carry out throughout the design of this park is to refrain from overburdening the landscape or disturbing the views that visitors can enjoy.

We recommend that the Museum be located near the parking lot for the reasons stated above, and strongly argue against placing it further down the flood plain in the area that we have designated for the Community Recreation Area. If we were to put the museum further down this flood plain, we would be essentially plopping a huge building into the largest open green space in the park. We feel it is more appropriate to keep the green space open and reserve it for the picnic, playground, and pavilion activities of the Community Recreation Area. We do not want to take up the open green space with a museum. We feel it best to separate the museum from the Community Recreation Area, and place it near to the parking lot where it will be easily accessible to visitors, as well as having road access for deliveries to the museum. If it should not be possible to build the museum at our preferred location, as an alternative, it could be situated at the back of the parking area (the current Consolidated Waste Site) if the parking area was enlarged.

The museum building should be constructed so that it fits in with the mining heritage theme of the park. It would be surrounded with benches, a few tables, green landscaping, and bike racks. In addition, it should have its own restroom and drinking fountain facilities. The Museum/Visitors Center will serve as a focal entry point into the park for some park visitors, and a destination in itself for other visitors.

MERRIMAC JUNCTION

As you enter the park from Merrimac Road, there is a concrete bridge where large metal drainpipes are visible. This primary entrance and view is disrupted by these drain pipes (see Figure 4.9).
Since we want visitors to have a positive initial impression of the park, we need to make the park entrance as welcoming as possible. This area is already a natural meeting place for the trail users, and the addition of a “Merrimac Junction” landscaping feature will enhance the location. A simple wooden deck with railings would be constructed over the pipes to hide them. Seats could be built around the edges of the deck, and a small roof overhead could protect the visitors from sun or rain (see Figure 4.10). A welcoming sign can be integrated into the Merrimac Junction area to briefly inform the visitors about future developments at the heritage park (see Chapter 3 for the suggested text of a welcoming sign to the park).

Figure 4.9 View of the metal drainage pipes at the entrance to the park

Figure 4.10 Drawing of Merrimac Junction. Drawn by Jeffrey Wallentiny.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The park is dependent on three basic needs: electric, water, and sewage lines. Electric lines already run through the park and will need to be brought to the South End Caboose, the south end Reconstructed Miner’s House, the Front Porch Pavilion, the Picnic Shelters I and II, the Heritage Bridge, the Mule Barn, and the Museum/Visitors
Center. It will also be needed to maintain the security lights and cameras that will cover 
the length of the park. Water lines are already located close to the Huckleberry Trail from 
the direction of the current consolidated waste site. These lines are needed for the water 
fountains, the restrooms at Picnic Shelters I and II, and the Museum/Visitor Center. 
Sewage lines will need to go to the restrooms at Picnic Shelters I and II, to the 
Museum/Visitor Center, and the Mule Barn. These lines should be tied into the main city 
lines. It may be more expensive initially, but it will pay off in the long run (Fogg 1975: 
49). In a meeting with Montgomery County Public Facilities Director, Steve Phillips, 
and Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Director, Tom Bain, it was suggested that 
the sewage lines be placed parallel to the Huckleberry Trail (Phillips and Bain 1999). We 
recommend that these lines be set up as part of the infrastructure development 
(recommended for Phase Two). The restrooms with Picnic Shelters I and II can be built 
at the same time to accommodate Huckleberry Trail users and visitors to the park's 
Community Recreation Area.

CONCLUSION

We have stated that there is a strong need for these conveniences for the users of 
the Huckleberry Trail and for the future Coal Mining Heritage Park visitors. The 
community has consistently shown interest for these facilities. The Huckleberry Trail 
will become more popular when these facilities are built. The Coal Mining Heritage Park 
will not be able to operate well without these facilities. There is no doubt that these 
facilities are needed at the site, especially when the park is fully developed. The park has 
become extremely important to many different groups in the community. It would be 
difficult for school group to take trips to learn about coal mining heritage without the 
availability of these facilities. Families will want to stay for extended periods of time and 
learn about the history and spend quality time together. If these facilities are not 
integrated into the park plans, groups will not have places to sit or have the basic 
conveniences that parks usually offer. The Coal Mining Heritage Park’s emphasis is on 
heritage, recreation, and education, but it would be incomplete without these facilities. 
They would benefit all types of users at the park and make it a more enjoyable and 
comfortable experience.

Chapter 5

SERVING A COMMUNITY: PARK RECREATION AND TRAILS

By Melissa E. Lamb, Jennifer K. Zelinski, and Daliah G. Macon

Radford University, in the fall of last year, scheduled two community meetings, 
which were highly attended by the residents of the surrounding former coal mining
communities. They came with suggestions for the future Coal Mining Heritage Park and clearly stated exactly what they wanted in the Montgomery County park placed on the Merrimac Mines property. In the meetings, some of the most requested facilities for community recreation in the park were: 1) picnic tables and picnic shelters; 2) a place where former miners could tell stories, give talks, and speak with local school children; and 3) a playground for area children of all ages. Based on the questionnaires that we mailed to the community, there was also interest in these community-based park facilities.

It is clear that the residents of Montgomery County have expressed a desire for these three types of recreation facilities. If Montgomery County had a voice, it too would demand these facilities for its community. Route 460 used to be filled with farmland and is now being filled with suburban development. We can recognize a definite shrinking of a view that, in the recent past, stretched across green open fields and up to the lip of forested Price’s Mountain. It was within this landscape that residents of the New River Valley defined themselves culturally (as seen through oral histories), and continue to think of themselves today. We lived in the country, in the great rolling expanse of the Appalachian Mountain chain. We were strong and independent – rugged survivors. We relied on ourselves, on our own will, and determination in time of need. If this wasn’t enough to help us through, we turned to our family, friends, and neighbors. We knew who these people were. We lived life at a pace where we could catch up with them every day after coming home from a day’s work, sitting on the family front porch, and sharing the stories of our lives. Living this way of life built a very definite wisdom – a knowing. We shared this wisdom with one another in the form of jokes, legends, personal stories, and songs.

We do not suggest an end to growth any more than we suggest an end to the livelihood of Montgomery County, but we do strongly state that it is in the best interest of the county to preserve the integrity of its cultural identity. What is Montgomery County? It would be difficult to describe all of the things in this one document, but one would be that it is a community nestled in and defined by the surrounding Appalachian Mountains. Price’s Mountain is an Appalachian Mountain, as is Brush Mountain, and others.

While this developing and growing county expands all around us, it only makes sense to match this growth with preservation and park development of open green spaces and sheltering ridges. We can have growth and preservation at the same time, especially if the community is to remain a desirable place to live. The creation of the Coal Mining Heritage Park on the Merrimac Mines property is a tangible, and not too difficult, step in this direction.

In the paragraphs that follow, we will look first at the need for and placement of a Community Recreation Area in the Coal Mining Heritage Park. The plans were developed to answer community input and response. In this section, there will be a general explanation of all facilities and features in the Community Recreation Area. The second half of the chapter addresses the need for trails within the park. A detailed description of recommended trails will be given, including an explanation of the need for and placement of each trail. The park overview map, Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2, provides a visual model of all the areas and trails described in this chapter.

COMMUNITY RECREATION AREA
What is a Community Recreation Area? Seven Components.

The Community Recreation Area at the Coal Mining Heritage Park will be a multi-use area designed to keep the majority of high-use traffic in the front central area of the park. It will be located on the East End Flood Plain, just below the parking lot area (see Figure 5.1).

There will be seven components and their associated facilities located in the Community Recreation Area:

1. **Merrimac Loop Trail**

   This is an ADA accessible loop trail descending from the parking area. The trail will descend into the flood plain and cross Lick Creek on an ADA accessible bridge before connecting with the existing Huckleberry Trail. In the process, it will connect with Picnic Shelters 1 and 2, the playground, the Environmental Education Station, and the Museum and Visitors Information Center. After crossing Lick Creek, the Merrimac Loop Trail joins with the Huckleberry Trail, continuing west to the end of the park. At the west end of the park, the Merrimac Loop Trail turns again and follows the present gravel road...
bed back east, continuing until meeting up again with the parking area. A more in-depth description of this trail appears later in this chapter.

2. Picnic Shelters 1 and 2

Two covered picnic shelters with tables, benches, and barbecue grills will be set near the north-facing slope below the Merrimac Loop Trail close to the parking area (the site of the present gravel road bed). For a more in-depth description of these structures, see Chapter 4.

3. The Front Porch Pavilion

The Pavilion will be set further (west) into the park but still near the picnic shelters and playground facilities. Community events, presentations, lectures, and festivals will take place here. For a more in-depth description of this structure of this facility, see Chapter 4.

4. Lick Creek Bridge and Playground

A playground will be placed between Picnic Shelters 1 and 2 towards Lick Creek. Just next to the playground, the Merrimac Loop Trail will cross Lick creek on a raised bridge. Surrounding this bridge will be an Environmental Station where an observation deck overlooking the creek will have signage that explains various aspects of the unique riparian habitat. A more detailed description of the playground will appear later in this chapter.

5. The Mule Barn

This facility will be located near the site of the historic Mule Barn (number 23 on the circa 1937 map by Kennedy and Lawson, Figure 3.2) and will be used to house the Montgomery County park maintenance equipment. For a more detailed description of the structure of the Mule Barn, see Chapter 4.

6. Interpretive Museum and Visitors Information Center

The eventual center of the Community Recreation Area, the Museum and Visitor Information Center, will be the eastern-most facility in the Community Recreation Area. Some engineering will be necessary to raise this site to the level of the current road bed and parking lot. The site will provide visitors with easy access from the parking lot to the museum facility. Accessibility is especially important for elderly or handicapped park visitors who wish to visit the museum without extensive walking. It is also important to have access to the road and parking lot so that deliveries (mail, supplies, etc.) can be made to the museum. The museum site is also in close proximity to activities taking place at picnic shelters and pavilion. Restrooms will be attached to serve users of the facility. Benches and area-appropriate landscaping will highlight the outside of the facility. Bike racks will be present for Huckleberry Trail users who wish to stop and explore the park. All Museum and Visitors Center facilities will be ADA accessible.
Greater discussion of the structure and activities of the Museum and Visitors Information Center is in Chapters 3 and 4.

7. Mule Trail
This low impact trail will leave the Community Recreation Area to the west, heading towards the boiler house and north-facing slope of the industrial mine complex area. A more detailed description of this trail appears in the trails section later in this chapter.

Why a Community Recreation Area?

In the community meetings and from mail-in surveys, community members expressed the desire to have a place where family and community group gatherings could take place. Specifically, picnic tables, a museum, a stage area, benches, and a playground were requested. The Community Recreation Area is an attempt to answer all of these requests while still keeping in mind the safety and access issues unique to the Merrimac Mines property (see the section "Where Should a Community Recreation Area be Located?" below).

The three things that will allow this park to succeed are:

1. Community Involvement.
A successful park is one that will be well used. When parks are used less, there is a greater potential for vandalism. The presence of regular visitors deters vandalism activity so that what is put into the park, in terms of time, money, and personal or county investment, is not lost. Community involvement will make the Coal Mining Heritage park a piece of public land that is used and not abused. So far, several community groups have offered to volunteer time and labor in the construction of various park facilities.

2. Timely Execution of Phases.
Community interest can wane over time if those who are investing time and energy do not see an equal return in the timely development of park facilities. It is important, when developing a proposed schedule of phasing, to post the proposed phases and stick with the schedule. This encourages community involvement and keeps the momentum going.

3. Support of the County Board of Supervisors, Planners, Facilities Management, and Parks and Recreation Departments.
The park must be a cooperative county-community undertaking. The park cannot be built without the support of the county Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission, and personnel from the county's Planning, Facilities Management, and Parks and Recreation offices. It is imperative that care and effort be taken at all turns to understand the needs of these bodies and work within their limitations. At the same time, these county representatives will be asked to consider the suggestions made by Radford University, based in large part on input from the people that the park is meant to serve.

Where Should a Community Recreation Area be Located?
In researching general park construction practices, cultural resource management regulations, and environmental resource regulations, we realized early on that there were many limitations placed on any development within the park. At every turn, flags of warning rose and halted the expansive ideas on park facilities development.

First of all, there are safety concerns. Much of the parcel that makes up Merrimac park is underlaid with a complex of room and pillar mine shafts (Merrimac site visit 9/11/99). The landscape is literally riddled with depressions and holes created over time through processes of mine subsidence (Merrimac site visit 10/3/99 with Tom Klatka and Meghan Dorsett). Land-grading activities in such affected areas is highly dangerous, as shafts may open up, sliding down at a 22-degree angle for almost a mile, releasing pockets of methane gas. Even without initial disruptive grading, development of areas over the historic mineshaft complex may open over time as a result of regular subsidence activity. Either way, the areas over the mine complex are not safe for extended, high-use public facilities. This limitation is clearly recognized by the archaeologist and county personnel consulted in the research process (interviews with Tom Klatka 9/21/99, Steve Phillips and Tom Bain 10/13/99, Joe Powers and Meghan Dorsett 9/14/99 and 9/16/99). It is in the best interest of the park to focus development of community facilities and activity areas in the parts of the park that do not stand directly above the underground mining complex.

Second, there are regulations limiting what disruption can occur on existing archaeological sites. There is an associated need for survey in any areas of the park that might contain sites with “historic integrity” which require preservation techniques in the process of development. Federal and state cultural resource management laws require survey and preservation of cultural resources on any land developed with the help of federal or state monies. The cost of an archaeological survey and resultant cultural resource preservation is great and could become a significant financial stumbling block in the development of the park if facilities are placed on unsurveyed landscapes. Rather than building over these landscapes, it is best to avoid them. They will be preserved simply because they will be undisturbed and unused.

Lastly, there are environmental considerations. Although there are no outstanding limitations in specific regulation as to what we can and cannot do on this essentially “disturbed” once industrial landscape, the desire of all users to have an open green space within the park was noted early and consistently. Regardless of whether or not sensitive environmental areas within the park are protected by specific environmental regulations, they are presently existing as healthy, functioning systems; to alter them drastically may compromise the overall health of the desired green space (interview with Meghan Dorsett 11/1/99). Rather than struggling against these limitations, it would be in the best interest of the park to work with them, exploiting them as assets in the development of the park.

It has been expressed (by state archaeologist, Tom Klatka; Coal Mining Heritage Association members; Merrimac community members; Warm Hearth trail users; and Friends of the Huckleberry trail organizers), that the Merrimac park site is “not a blank slate” that can be swept clean and developed over. Rather, the landscape reflects the historic cultural and industrial use of the land. Any park facilities should reflect, not mitigate, this history. In planning for additions that require land grading, building of structures, and application of new, more user- and maintenance-friendly ground surface
material, a landscape that is free of safety, cultural, and environmental limitations should be the obvious first choice.

The East End Flood Plain (Located Near the Merrimac Road Entrance)

The East End Flood Plain is the only suitably large area of the park that is a blank landscape. (See the park conceptual map, Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2.) Past grading has affected the entire area. As a result, the concern for conservation of heritage or environmental resources, which must be taken into consideration in almost all other park planning, is not a limitation here (interviews with Meghan Dorsett 11/1/99, Tom Klatka 11/2/99). On the east end of the park, we can develop facilities and alter the landscape in ways not possible in other areas due to cultural resource management and environmental preservation limitations. Rather than fighting the existing laws governing historic and environmental resources, by attempting to build structures in other more sensitive areas of the park, it makes sense to concentrate development in this large, already disturbed area.

In addition to the reasons listed above, the East End Flood Plain is a good area for a concentration of community recreation facilities and activities because it is easily accessible from the proposed parking area. An ADA accessible trail (the Merrimac Loop) will bring handicapped, elderly, and young children to community recreation events and facilities. Adequate parking is less than ¼ mile from all facilities and activities within the east end Community Recreation Area. The only other piece of land in the park that is open and large enough to accommodate any picnic, playground, or pavilion activities is at the far west end of the park (and this area is considerably smaller). Inquiries into placing a parking lot at this end of the park were quickly halted by local property owners (Community Meeting 10/23/99). The land owners at the west end of the park strongly voiced that major community recreation activities (events drawing large numbers of people, a playground with associated loud noises) be directed to the east end of the park, near the entrance off of Merrimac Road. Additionally, the use of the west end for community events would require disabled and elderly visitors to park and walk much greater distances. Considering that the park is closely associated with the Coal Mining Heritage Association members and elderly community members, it would not be in the best interest of the park to distance community events from available parking. Again, what will make this park succeed as an asset, rather than a liability to Montgomery County, is its regular use. Alienating core user groups because of inadequate parking would hinder the regular use of the park.

Lastly, the land subsidence issues that limit grading and foundation digging in other areas of the park are not a consideration here. The mine shaft complex did not extend below the East End Flood Plain (Merrimac site visits 9/11/99 and 10/3/99, interview with Meghan Dorsett 11/1/99). Extensive regrading and general land disruption can occur here without concern for the danger of opening or collapsing an existing underground mine shaft.

Issues of Importance in the First Phases of the Park
The components of the Community Recreation Area will not be completed all at once. Rather, it will occur over two phases. We recommend these phases in order to build a community-friendly atmosphere:

**Phase One:**

1. *Relocate the Consolidated Waste Site to another location outside of the park.* The relocation of this facility is recommended to ensure the success of the park for five reasons:
   - A certain percentage of people will dump their trash anywhere possible when the Consolidated Waste Site is closed. Each time the research team visited the Coal Mining Heritage Park property this year, we observed recent instances of illegal dumping of household and industrial waste. In one instance, an illegal dumper drove onto the park property road, along the Huckleberry Trail, and dumped trash along the northwestern border of the park. A park that is used as a trash dump will not attract visitors.
   - It is expensive to continually remove trash. As mentioned above, the closeness of the Consolidated Waste Site to the park property encourages dumping after hours. The cleanup of this regular dumping and the enforcement of no-dumping regulations will cost Montgomery County unnecessary money to maintain the park.
   - The site and smell of the facility itself will, and currently does, inhibit visitors from coming to the property. At community meetings, the citizens and users of the current park property repeatedly and strongly recommended that the waste collection site be relocated. Visitors do not foresee a dumpsite to be desirable in a heritage/environmental education and recreation facility.
   - The site of the current Consolidated Waste Site is the only suitable place on which to put a parking lot. The reasons, including size and accessibility to the community recreation area, are detailed in Chapter 4. The site is already graded and the surface is prepared to accept this use, which also reduces the cost of developing parking at the park.

2. *Close the existing gravel access road on the southern border of park, converting it into a trail* (the upper portion of the Merrimac Loop Trail). The current roadbed poses a threat to the success of park development for three reasons:
   - Vehicle access to the borders of the park increases the chance of vandalism to park facilities under construction and/or those already completed. The chance of vandalism is much greater when vandals have quick vehicle access to otherwise secluded (not seen from the road) areas of the park.
   - The current road and waste collection facility encourages trash dumping throughout the park. The practice of driving past the current waste collection site after hours and dumping waste throughout the southern border of the park property is a recurring and common problem. To reduce the cost of cleanup of this waste, we recommend that access to this part of the park be restricted from regular vehicular access. This measure, in combination with the removal of the waste collection facility, will nearly eliminate the dumping problem.
Vehicular access to the interior and western borders of the park poses a safety threat to park visitors. Not only does four-wheel traffic pose a safety threat to visitors walking along the road but, in addition, any time a vehicle can access a public facility, the safety of visitors to that facility is reduced. For example, the Appalachian Trail Committee actively fights the placement of power lines near the Appalachian Trail specifically because the risk to trail users is made greater when power line access roads are built that bring vehicular traffic into recreational areas.

Closing down the existing roadbed to vehicular traffic and turning it into a trail, with ADA accessibility added in Phase Two, will create an asset in the Coal Mining Heritage Park for five reasons:

- The already graded roadbed stands directly above the historic mine entrance, allowing the only ADA acceptable access to this key park site. An alternate ADA accessible mine entrance from the hillside below is highly dangerous due to the many mineshafts that exist in this area. For a description of the heritage interpretation proposed at the mine entrance, see Chapter 3.
- The road is currently dangerous to visitors because of the speed and volume of vehicular traffic. The road itself is narrow with a tight right-hand turn, making foot travel very risky. As use of the park increases with the addition of facilities, so will foot travel on this road. Vehicular traffic is an unnecessary liability to the future of the park. If a park visitor were injured or killed on the road, the reputation and desirability of the park would suffer along with Montgomery County’s pocket book. Limiting vehicular access to state, county, railroad, and emergency vehicles will automatically, quickly, and cheaply create a new recreation area within the existing park property.

- The roadbed lies on the only north-facing slope available within the park. To enhance the desirability of the overall park as an environmental classroom, it is suggested that this one representative of a north-facing ecosystem be made safely available. As stated above, current traffic on the roadbed is a definite danger to any visiting school or community groups.
- The roadbed provides the only prolonged length of shade encircling the park property. The use of this stretch of shaded “canopied road” as an ADA accessible trail will increase usership overall of the park on sunny or hot summer days.
- Shutting down the road means stopping access to the property that borders the park to the southwest. Currently, recreational vehicles and hunters frequently visit this property, which poses a threat to the safety of park visitors. Closing down the road bed would create a quieter and safer atmosphere at the southwestern edge of the park, where visitors currently negotiate amongst three and four wheelers and the four wheel drive trucks that haul them. Closing the gravel road during Phase One of park development will reduce the possibility of vandalism aimed at park facilities in retaliation to the shutting down of the road to these types of visitors.

**Phase Two:**
1. **Grade and construct the Merrimac Loop Trail as an ADA accessible loop around the park.** For specifics on the Merrimac Loop Trail, see the trails section below in this chapter. It is recommended that this trail be completed early for two reasons:
   • To provide access to several important user groups:
     a. The individuals that this park is meant to remember and honor the aging New River Valley mining community.
     b. School groups with handicapped students.
     c. Handicapped users, currently enjoying access to the Huckleberry Trail.
   • To create an infrastructure that provides access to all key future facilities of the park.

2. **Construct the Community Recreation Area and its Facilities.** During Phase Two, we recommend that the East End Flood Plain, that holds the Community Recreation Area, be regraded to hold a mowable grass surface with the upcoming facilities: Picnic Shelters 1 and 2, Playground, and Front Porch Pavilion. These facilities will be built during Phase Two as well.

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**FACILITIES IN THE COMMUNITY RECREATION AREA**

Chapter 4, on infrastructure and facilities, provides a description of all facilities included in the Community Recreation Area. This chapter will highlight the two main facilities planned in the early phasing of the Community Recreation Area: the Front Porch Pavilion and the Playground by Lick Creek. Following each facility is a general description of the design, use, and need for that facility.

**Front Porch Pavilion: Bringing the Past into the Present, So That it May Serve Us in the Future.**

In the community meetings and in surveys from trail and potential park users, a large interest was expressed in having a place within the park where community events detailing and promoting local coal mining heritage could take place. The best venue for the suggested events is an open-air pavilion facing a large green space. A well-placed pavilion can be the center-stage for many different community events where an audience is present. All community and heritage events at the pavilion will draw visitors to park, and may bring in money that comes without the price tag of other industrial development endeavors that often involve resource extraction (whether they be environmental, mineral, or human labor resources). Several suggested uses of the Front Porch Pavilion are listed below.
**Heritage Interpretation**

The Education Committee of the Coal Mining Heritage Association holds events throughout the year aimed at educating local elementary, middle, and high school students on the history and heritage of the immediate region. Emphasis is placed on knowing the living local coal miners, their families, and their descendants. What is allowed to take place is the acceptance and growth of pride in one’s own heritage and family. Lori Shepard spoke of recent coal mining heritage presentations at Price’s Fork Elementary School: “You should have seen their faces light up when they found out about their history. They said, “This is me?”” (Class Meeting 9/2/99). When local residents are filled with the pride because of their region they will work to maintain the health of this region. Continuing and expanding the education efforts of the Coal Mining Heritage Association will specifically help the region to grow and develop in line with the needs of the citizens of Montgomery County.

**Lecture Series**

Education on heritage and history of the larger Appalachian region can expand beyond local school age groups and be presented in a format that welcomes the participation of community members and local colleges. Currently, Explore Park in Roanoke, Virginia holds an annual Blue Ridge Symposium directed towards the exploration of historic and heritage issues and lifeways. A similar event could be held annually at the Coal Mining Heritage Park and could be organized by Radford University and the Coal Mining Heritage Association.

**Music**

A significant part of the heritage of the region that draws communities together is Appalachian Bluegrass, Old Time, and Celtic music. Weekly music events similar to the Friday Night Jamboree at Cochram’s General Store in Floyd, Virginia could take place at the pavilion. Audience members could bring folding lawn chairs to these evening events, which would offer “something to do” other than less community enriching college and other parties. Alcohol would be prohibited and the events would be family oriented.

**Seasonal Festivals**

Seasonal festivals such as the Merle Watson Memorial Festival, the Ferrum Folk Life Festival, the Galax Fiddlers Convention, and the National Storytelling Convention, draw large crowds of generally family folk and are a boom to local economies where they take place. A pared down but equally effective version of such festivals could be held in Merrimac park, with focus areas being located at the Front Porch Pavilion, the Tipple Heritage Area, the Museum/Visitors Center, and the west end Caboose Environmental Education area. At Telluride in Colorado, weeklong workshops are held directed at teaching songwriting, banjo picking, dobro playing, guitar flatpicking, and other musical skills. Other possible workshops that could be offered are clogging, Irish dancing,
flatfooting, storytelling, basket making, log cabin building, quilt piecing, apple butter making, food preservation and canning, and traditional food cooking. The Appalachian Regional Studies Center and the Appalachian Events Committee at Radford University could be utilized in the planning and organizing of such events, as could the Coal Mining Heritage Association and Montgomery County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community members recommended that all buildings on the site not be visually modern intrusions, but rather be built to reflect the building styles of the past. The Front Porch Pavilion has been designed to meet this request. It will be constructed as an open timber frame structure. Its design will mimic an historic area house with a covered porch. The roof of the pavilion will be covered with standing seam tin sheets. The “porch” floor will be made of tongue-and-groove planking. To create a structure that is most weather resistant, this flooring could be made of the plastic composite decking that looks like wood. Community labor and private donations would be utilized in the construction. There are several timber frame companies in the surrounding area that could be approached for possible private donations of the crafted timbers. A workshop manned with community volunteers could assemble the building in a weekend. Traditional standing-seam roofers could teach volunteers the techniques of this trade in the same weekend. In the process of building the pavilion, traditional building techniques could be learned by all volunteers involved. The construction itself would offer heritage education in the community.

Playground: Fun For All Ages

In addition to other much needed and desired facilities, community members advocated for the addition of a playground for local children. The location of the playground is suggested for the east end of the park near the entrance. It should be placed on the south side of the trail between the trail and the creek, just past the road and bridge. This location is ideal because the land on that side of the trail is relatively open and level. This, as mentioned before, is an ideal location for picnic facilities, with restrooms and water fountains nearby. This location would place the playground within close proximity to the pavilion, so that children could play while their parents attended events at the pavilion. The east side of the park is also a prime location because of its proximity to the creek. Children who use the Huckleberry Trail currently engage in exploring the creek. A good suggestion is to clean up the creek, leaving a 15-foot buffer zone of vegetation for erosion control as suggested by Meghan Dorsett, County Planner. Constructing the playground further away from the road would draw children and families into the park. This is safer because children will be drawn further inside the park property and away from the road. This would also encourage children to play in an area away from the extreme west end of the park where they often wander onto neighboring property.

Community members, including parents of young children and local schoolteachers made several suggestions as to what specifically should be put at the playground. The first suggestion is that the playground be constructed out of a natural material, such as large wood planks, to enhance the rustic and natural appeal of the park. The playground should also be build with shock and moisture absorbent material such as wood/cedar chips. A local example of one such playground is the Hand-In-Hand playground in Blacksburg, which is across from Blacksburg High School (see Figure
5.2). This is a huge wooden structure with a vast array of different features that appeals to a wide range of ages. This is due to the larger passageways that enable older kids and even parents to play with their kids within the playground. The playground itself has unique features such as tire swings, a variety of bridges and towers, winding passageways, and various other obstacle-course type features. There is also a section of square tables and benches to allow families to be close by to watch their kids. This playground was built with money from local businesses. Additionally, ways can be developed so that patrons of the park can donate money to the maintenance and up-keep, and receive recognition for their support (e.g. have their names engraved in plaques or on part of the wooden structure).

![Image of the playground](image)

Figure 5.2 The Hand-in-Hand playground in Blacksburg.

**Lick Creek Bridge on the Merrimac Loop Trail**

An ADA accessible bridge will cross Lick Creek. It completes the Merrimac Loop Trail that encircles the park property. It also allows access to the playground, on the south side of the creek, for Huckleberry Trail users from the north side of the creek. In doing this, it directs play traffic away from the creek bed itself, preserving the protective fifteen-foot buffer zone of natural (unmowed) vegetation along the creek.

**TRAILS**

In creating an overall plan for trail locations in the park, it was necessary to bridge the gap between the circa 1937 historic map (see Figure 3.2, by Kennedy and Lawson) which details cultural resources, and the modern parcel and road map used by Montgomery County in planning. The struggle in merging these two separate maps mirrors an underlying struggle between two forces in the park and trail planning process: the heritage and integrity of the site and the modern use and development of the site as a
county park. Trails developed in any part of the park should provide ready access to undisturbed or slightly disturbed historic and environmental resources. To mitigate any damage that might be caused by overuse of one area or another, we propose a complex of five trails. Each trail has a different difficulty level and as a result, will draw different types of users. We hope that the trail complex will accomplish these three things:

First, the bulk of the park traffic will be directed to the disturbed areas of the park, where low difficulty and ADA accessible trails offer easy access to developed heritage and environmental interpretation facilities. The high impact and ADA accessible trails will offer access through the park for handicapped individuals, visiting school groups, families with children, and community elders.

Second, it is hoped that a more secluded, or wilderness type, experience be preserved in the park through the use of low impact trails wherever possible. Low impact trails have a higher difficulty level and, therefore, will limit the number of visitors into the more fragile and sensitive archaeological and environmental resource areas of the park.

Third, it is hoped that the mix of high and low impact trails will be a small part of the overall cost of trail construction. It is inexpensive to construct a low impact trail, but it is very expensive to construct a high-impact or ADA accessible trail. By combining both in the overall trail system, we can provide the most available trail space for the available money, while satisfying both types of users. Both groups will have access to the key heritage and environmental components of the park. Listed below are the five trails that make up the trail complex. After each trail name is a description of the use, need, construction, and location of the trail.

**Merrimac Loop Trail**

The need for an ADA accessible trail, allowing access to key areas of the developing park, has been expressed by community members and future park users. In addition to this expressed need, if federal and state grant monies are to be used in the financial support of the park construction, measures must be taken to provide for disabled citizens to the main components of the park. The Merrimac Loop Trail seeks to meet this need while answering a few other obligations as well, which are explained below.

It is most desirable to only alter the geographic landscape where the historic (archeological, cultural) integrity of the landscape has already been compromised (interviews with Tom Klatka 11/2/99, Joe Powers and Meghan Dorsett 11/1/99, Steve Philips and Tom Bain 10/13/99). Building an ADA accessible trail requires geographic modification of the land. As a result, in designing the ADA accessible roadbed we must strive to do three things.

1. Make use of any existing ADA accessible trails already in the park.
2. Make use of any already established land features (road bed, past excavation, etc) that are within ADA rate of descent standards.
3. Avoid “dangerous” or sensitive areas of the park where past mining activity renders geographic land modification a risky endeavor.

Since the focus of the park is coal mining heritage, it is essential that the above logistical needs be met, while at the same time, the need for historic heritage
interpretation and preservation be met. The Merrimac Loop Trail meets these requirements. As demonstrated in the overview map, the Merrimac Loop Trail will encircle the periphery of the park. As it does this, it will cross through all major ecological zones of the park, accessible within ADA rate of descent limitations (see UFAS 1999). It will also access four major heritage interpretation areas and facilities: the Museum/Visitor Information Center, the Drift Mouth mine entrance, the Tipple Heritage Area, and the hotel/commissary site near the reconstructed miner’s house (for further description of these facilities and their heritage interpretation, see Chapter 3).

To best understand the areas visited by the ADA accessible Merrimac Loop Trail, we can take an imaginary tour of the trail and explain what we would be able to see and visit while on our walk. The trail is a loop, but we will begin our tour at the parking area off of Merrimac Road. Beginning at the parking lot (see the park overview map, Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2), the trail comes in from the west and enters the Museum/Visitors Information Center area. The Visitors Center will provide maps and information regarding the park that will orient visitors to the entire site. The Museum will run regular programs involving local coal miners and their families, and feature interpretations of heritage events and lifeways. Displays of mine artifacts will be housed here, as well as archived oral histories that can be listened to, read, or watched. A gift shop with a large variety of culturally related books and local food and craft items will also be present, as well as snack and drink machines. Handicapped accessible restrooms will be housed within the Visitors Center area, which will be accessible from the outside so that they may be used even when the Museum is closed.

From the Museum/Visitors Center, the Merrimac Loop Trail will descend into the flood plain gradually, traveling close against the bank of the parking lot above. There will be handrails on the outer edge of the trail bed. Once in the flood plain, the Merrimac Loop will pass the two picnic shelters, with paved access to each. Between the two picnic shelters, the trail will turn towards the creek to the west of the Playground. On the western edge of the Playground, a raised deck will begin that will take the trail over Lick Creek. The bridge itself will be fourteen feet wide with benches making guardrails on both sides. The decking that leads to the bridge will be arranged in a semicircle on each end, with benches surrounding the right and left sides.

The decking and bridge need to extend far enough out on either side of the creek to protect the existing margin of unmowed natural riparian plants. The various plants and animals of this unique habitat, as well as the possible threats to it, will be described in an environmental education station that holds a sign with photographs and explanation. It is important to maintain the existing flora of the immediate margins of Lick Creek in all parts of the park for two reasons. The first reason is user interest. Community members expressed, both through the survey responses and in both community meetings, that the plants of the park be preserved and explained wherever possible. School groups can incorporate environmental identification projects into lesson plans that bring students out of the classroom and into the field. Secondly, the existing plants of this creek margin area have adapted to and settled into this unique arrangement of soil type, sunlight availability, moisture level, and seasonal temperature fluctuation. To clear the existing plants would leave the slope open to degradation and, as a result, cause runoff problems. It is unlikely that any application of not already present ground cover material would be
as successful, in land reclamation and soil erosion control, as the plants currently on the site.

Once across Lick Creek, the Merrimac Loop Trail would join the existing Huckleberry Trail. A more intensive survey needs to be done on the section of the Huckleberry Trail, between the Merrimac Loop bridge (over Lick Creek) and the Tipple Heritage Area, to determine whether a parallel pedestrian trail needs to be constructed for park visitors to keep them from being run down by the faster bike traffic on the Huckleberry Trail.

The Merrimac Loop Trail will join up with the Tipple Heritage Area and Heritage Bridge, in which an ADA accessible ramp will ascend onto the Heritage Bridge. For a more detailed description of the structure of the Heritage Bridge at the Tipple Heritage Area, see Chapter 4. From the Tipple Heritage Area, the Merrimac Loop Trail continues west along the Huckleberry Trail. Again, further study needs to address the question of whether a parallel trail is needed to prevent park visitors from colliding with the faster bike traffic on the Huckleberry Trail. At the west end of the park, the Merrimac Loop Trail passes and provides access to the Caboose Nature Education Center and the reconstructed miner’s house near the historic hotel and commissary sites. (For a detailed description of the Caboose Nature Education Center, see Chapter 6. For a description of the reconstructed miner’s house, see Chapter 3.)

At the far west end of the park, the Merrimac Loop Trail turns south and travels along the existing gravel roadbed of the former access road. This area of the park (the southern border of the park) holds a unique environment: it is the only north-facing slope within the park. (For a description of the plants and conditions unique to this environment, see Chapter 6.) In addition to being ecologically unique, the trail bed along this southern border of the park contains an overarching tree canopy that provides shade and seclusion not offered in the otherwise mostly open and unshaded area of the park. Along this portion of the Merrimac Loop Trail, the drift mouth, or mine entrance, is passed. A Mine Overlook will allow visitors to view the mine entrance from the trail. This will be built as an ADA accessible deck with railings. Community dedication, celebration, and remembrance services may be held around this historic center. Interpretive signage will describe the mining activities and culture of the New River Valley. The Mine Overlook could have an audio station, where visitors could listen to interview excerpts of stories of life in the mines. After passing the Mine Overlook, the Merrimac Loop Trail continues east to reunite with the parking lot area where our tour began. For a description of the heritage signage and structures along the Merrimac Loop Trail, see Chapter 3.

We recommend that during Phase Two, this section of the Merrimac Loop Trail be regraded and paved for ADA accessibility. Pavement, in general, requires the least maintenance and lasts the longest. However, the color of asphalt detracts from the experience of the natural landscape of the park. At Explore Park in Roanoke, Virginia, where living history components have sought to bridge historic integrity with the modern needs of park maintenance, all of the paved trails in the park have been painted with light brown (soil colored paint). It is highly recommended that the surface of all paved ADA accessible trails sections added to the park be treated with a similar brown paint covering.

Federal and state grants will be used to create the Merrimac Loop Trail. Meghan Dorsett in the Montgomery County Planning Office, and researchers in Radford
University’s Spring 2000 “Practicum in Anthropology” class will be researching possible grants for the Coal Mining Heritage Park.

**Mule Trail**

The Mule Trail will be a low impact trail that connects the East End Flood Plain to the Drift Mouth Trail (which goes through the mine industrial area). This trail will offer a quieter and more “wild,” or natural, experience than the Merrimac Loop Trail, exposing to visitors the natural landscape that consists of the green space of Merrimac park. The Mule Trail links up with the Drift Mouth Trail and the Tipple Heritage Area, bringing visitors to these sites from a different route than the Merrimac Loop. As a result, the visitors to the park will be divided between both trails, distributing the total park visitors to separate sections of the park and preventing overcrowding.

As mentioned before, it was suggested at the October 1999 community meetings that any new park facilities or trails make an attempt to match or link to the historic building sites or trails. The Mule Trail will do just this. One would step out of the Front Porch Pavilion area, where a mowed lawn exists as ground cover. As the Mule Trail begins, from the mowed Front Porch Pavilion area, it moves into an unmowed natural field. It is recommended that mowing stop two-thirds of the way down the East End Flood Plain to preserve a section of this plant community and to lessen the burden of park maintenance of the site. The Mule Trail will follow the traditional path to the site of the old boiler house, where an interpretive sign will describe the boiler house. The Mule Trail will continue past the boiler house and head southeast, where it will end and connect with the Heritage Bridge in the Tipple Heritage Area. It will also connect to the Drift Mouth Trail. We recommend that the Mule Trail be constructed at the same time as the other trails on the south side of the Huckleberry Trail (suggested for Phase Three).

We recommend that all of the low impact trails in the park be constructed in a simple manner. Light clearing of obstructive brush and the laying down of a mulch ground covering is all that is required (this recommendation results from meetings with Steve Philips and Tom Bain 10/18/99 and Tom Klatka 11/2/99). Community volunteer groups could be used, for instance local Girl Scout or Boy Scout troops, along with general community members on a “trail clean up” day where the brush is cleared and mulch is laid.

**Bunker Hill Trail**

The Bunker Hill Trail will show a very important aspect of heritage at the site: the interpretation of the mining family's everyday life. We strongly recommend that Montgomery County acquire the land that holds the historic site of Bunker Hill itself, which is currently outside the park boundaries, so that it can become part of the park. In our current plans, the Bunker Hill Trail will ascend up the north slope from the Huckleberry Trail, leading to a Scenic Overlook, with interpretative signage about Bunker Hill, which can be viewed from the overlook. This will be a low impact trail leading up the slope along the bed of the old tramline. The use of the old tramline is...
strongly recommended in order to minimize destruction to the archaeological landscape on the north side of the park.

The Bunker Hill Trail will stop at a Scenic Overlook site where the entire Merrimac park can be seen. At this overlook, a transparent sign will be placed with a marked “viewing spot.” As a visitor stands on the “viewing spot,” they can look through the transparent sign at the landscape below, and see photographic images of the old mine industrial buildings that are superimposed on the landscape. This will allow the viewer to "see" the historic mine industrial complex pictured in its full glory, including the tipple, boiler house, combined shops, and other industrial buildings. (The photographic images will be compiled from historic pictures, as discussed in Chapter 3.)

As mentioned before, it was suggested at October 1999 community meetings that any new park facilities or trails make an attempt to match or link to the historic building sites or trails. The Bunker Hill Trail will branch off of the north side of the Huckleberry Trail at the Tipple Heritage Area, just below the hoist house and will turn uphill to the northeast to meet the historic tramline, where it will follow the path of the tramline until the park boundary is reached. The Scenic Overlook provides an interesting destination at the end of the trail. Later, if the area of Bunker Hill is incorporated within the park, the Bunker Hill Trail will be extended along the tramline through Bunker Hill itself.

Visitors walking the Bunker Hill Trail will be immersed in the disturbed forest regrowth area where multiflora roses and various other opportunistic plants have grown to overtake the once open mine area landscape. An interpretive sign will be placed here to orient the visitor to the three zones of plant communities that the trail will intersect as it ascends the hill slope: first, the open Huckleberry Trail landscape, followed by the disturbed historic and industrial landscape, and finally the early natural pin-oak and chestnut forest. (See Chapter 6 for a description of these zones.) Once at the top of the trail, the visitor will be able to stop and take a breather on the trail benches provided at the Scenic Overlook described above.

We recommend that the Bunker Hill Trail be constructed at the same time as the other trails on the north side of the Huckleberry Trail (we’ve suggested this during Phase Four of park development) along with the Miner’s House Trail. If the additional Bunker Hill property is acquired as part of early park development, then archaeological survey and investigation, conducted during a Radford University Summer Archaeological Field School (taught by Dr. Cliff Boyd) could take place during Phase Three and a more developed use of the entire Bunker Hill property can be enacted during Phase Four.

**Drift Mouth Trail**

The Drift Mouth Trail provides four essential and requested possibilities:

1. Access to the mine opening. Mine access will allow visitors to “see, hear, and feel” mining history (interest expressed during the community meetings 10/21/99 and 10/23/99). As part of the entire trail complex, the Drift Mouth Trail will distribute visitors to the mine opening along with the Merrimac Loop Trail above the Drift Mouth itself.

2. Access to the archaeological resources of the combined shops area. It is important that this trail be a low impact trail to limit access and traffic to these resources, as well as to maintain the safety of visitors in the park.
3. Access to the unique north-facing slope of this area, with its historic, native, and introduced plant species.
4. The archaeological resources in the form of evidence of past structures are significant. It is recommended that another audio-interpretive station be placed here at the site of the combination shops.

The area behind the tipple and before the mine entrance that the Drift Mouth Trail will explore, is ideal for a low impact spur from the ADA accessible Merrimac Loop Trail for these reasons:
1. The landscape is riddled with mine subsidence and underground mine shafts. The State Archaeologist, the Montgomery County Planning Department, and others do not recommend grading here.
2. The natural plant community is well established and offers a unique opportunity for the experience of solitude within the park.

The Drift Mouth Trail will split off from the Mule Trail and immediately ascend the north-facing slope that holds the combination shops site. Once on the level of the combined shops, concrete corner post markers and interpretive signs will describe the historic use of the landscape. (See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of these signs and marked foundations.) The trail will turn west and walk along the combined shops site until it reaches the mine opening. A handout available first at the Heritage Bridge information center, and later at the Museum/Visitors Information Center, will describe the mine.

We recommend that the Drift Mouth Trail be constructed at the same time, and in the same manner, as the other low impact trails on the south side of the Huckleberry Trail (during Phase Three of park development).

Miner’s House Trail

The Miner’s House Trail will start from the replicated Miner’s house (situated along the Huckleberry Trail) and up the hill to an actual archaeological site of a miner’s house. It will also provide entrée into the mature pin oak and hickory forest that holds the huckleberry plants after which the Huckleberry Railroad was named. The Miner’s House Trail will pass this archaeological site, and continue along the northern border of the park and meet up with the Bunker Hill Trail and Scenic Overlook.

As mentioned before, it was suggested at the October 1999 community meetings that any new park facilities or trails make an attempt to match or link with the historic building sites or trails. The Miner’s House Trail will ascend the south-facing slope near the replicated Miner’s House, following the original driveway bed that led to the archaeological miner’s house site in historic times. We strongly recommend that the Miner’s House Trail follow the path of the old driveway in order to minimize disturbance to the archaeological landscape on the north side of the Huckleberry Trail.

As the Miner’s House Trail leaves the Huckleberry Trail, the visitor is immediately surrounded by the shaded forest. Plants and trees typical to this disturbed landscape will be noted on the handout mentioned above (also see Chapter 6 for discussion of environmental education). The trail ascends along the existing driveway of
the former supervisor’s house. At the end of the driveway, the remains of the supervisor’s house will be seen. Signs asking visitors to not disturb the archaeological site will be present, along with a brush border placed during trail development that will discourage entrance onto the archaeological foundation itself. An additional means of discouraging excessive disturbance to the archaeological site is to leave existing briars in those areas. The use of brush barriers is a common technique used in many parks protecting Anasazi ruin sites in the western United States. A brush barrier is constructed of brush, twigs, branches, and briars intertwined and aligned in a circle around a site. It will discourage exploration, while at the same time establish the “legal” barrier to the site. Such a line is needed to reduce county liability concerns if a visitor is injured in the “out of bounds” area of the site.

We recommend that the Miner’s House Trail be constructed at the same time, and in the same manner, as the Bunker Hill Trail on the north side of the park (during Phase Four). It is possible that an archaeological excavation of the house site could be planned for Phase Three, directed by Radford University, and to include community members paying for the excavation training and experience through the Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Department. The Parks and Recreation Department offers classes in numerous other skill, adventure, and heritage related activities. In this particular class, Radford University staff would be utilized as paid archaeological instructors to direct the event.

Huckleberry Trail

As described above, the existing Huckleberry Trail will be incorporated into the park trail system as part of the Merrimac Loop Trail.

CONCLUSION

The Coal Mining Heritage Park embodies the identity of the region. The history of coal mining, and the way of life that was born from it, runs rich in the veins of the county’s landscape. The history carries with it the struggles and celebrations of the lives of past, present, and now future residents. It is a heritage to be proud of. It is an identity. In an era of rapid change, the Coal Mining Heritage Park will allow residents to reflect on their shared cultural identity: the “missing piece” in our ever-fragmented modern lives. This will not achieved only through heritage interpretation. What our research team has attempted to design into this park is this: a way that the community interaction of the past may be reestablished today, by creating the family and neighborly ties, for the future. As Montgomery County develops this park complex, its actions will be seen as progressive, insightful, and looking far ahead into the future. This park will create a meeting place, now, that will have a long-range effect on the development of the entire area. As mentioned before, development and preservation can go hand in hand. This park is an opportunity for Montgomery County to think ahead and begin to nurture this polished jewel of coal mining heritage and preserve it amidst the hard working engine of surrounding economic growth and development.

In this chapter, we have discussed structures, pathways, surfaces, and underground mine shafts. What is at the heart of all this park development, what led us as consulting anthropologists to come up with these recommendations, is people: past
ancestors, present residents, future descendants. *People.* This park has been designed from the start with people in mind. At the center of the greatest laid plans must be the people for, and with whom, it is being planned. Any successful park must meet the needs of the users who will spend time in it. In community meetings, park visits, and class meetings with local residents, it was suggested that any attempt to put up structures, signs, trails, or displays should answer one requirement: recreating the sights, sounds, realities, struggles, wisdom, and triumphs of mining history.

The Community Recreation Area described, in the first half of this chapter, seeks to do just this. Placing the Museum/Visitors Center above the flood plain on the northeastern edge of the parking area, allows visitors easy access from the parking lot to the museum’s interpretive displays, coal mining life history collections, video displays, and book collections that will detail the history and richness of coal mining life. Visitors who only seek to venture this far into the park will be able to easily access the Museum. Further into the park, down on the open green flood plain, picnic pavilions will allow a place for community and family events such as reunions, seasonal gatherings, and birthday celebrations. The open space will allow room for children to play, or for visitors to have frisbee tosses and football scrimmages. Further into the park, the Front Porch Pavilion will house any number of cultural and seasonal events and festivals: bluegrass jam sessions, coal mining storytelling, local guest lecturers on coal mining or environment education, clogging workshops, and Thanksgiving or Christmas celebrations to name only a few. The enclosed children’s playground is nearby, where kids of all ages can play during events at the Front Porch Pavilion or gatherings at the picnic pavilions. Everyone in the Community Recreation Area will be linked to the Tipple Heritage Area and Heritage Bridge with either the ADA accessible Merrimac Loop or the low impact Mule Trail.

The trail complex of high and low impact trails connects a wide variety of visitors to many sites within the park. It was designed with the needs of several different types of users in mind: Local residents, school groups, college students, and elderly visitors seeking heritage interpretation, a quiet walk in the park, a place to view nature, a place to picture the past, a rugged walk up the hillside of Price’s Mountain, or a long, but easy, stroll around the entire park. The planned trails use existing historic roadbeds and trails wherever possible. Interpretive signs and park facilities allow education on archaeological sites, historic events and life ways, geographic features, and environmental resources whenever possible.

The Merrimac Coal Mining Heritage Park Community Recreation Area and trail complex was designed using input from a wide range of people: from community members, former miners, Huckleberry Trail users, local secondary school teachers and administrators, Radford University students, Virginia Tech students, residents of Warm Hearth, a representative of Friends of the Huckleberry, an archaeologist from the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office, and parks and facilities management personnel from Montgomery County.
Chapter 6

GETTING BACK TO YOUR “ROOTS”: ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE EDUCATION

By Jacquelin T. Graham, Melissa E. Lamb, Jennifer K. Zelinski, and Rehana G. Durrani

On the site of the Coal Mining Heritage Park there lives not only a rich mining history, but also a very interesting and unique natural environment. This distinct environment can be used as an educational tool to enhance the park’s heritage focus. At the two community meetings held in October 1999, community members expressed a strong interest in building environmental opportunities into the park design. Therefore, we developed ideas on how to involve the park visitors in environment education at the park in a way that meets the needs of the community. The goal of this chapter is to address the need for this type of education and to identify the different groups who will benefit from environmental education. This chapter gives an overview of the different natural communities or environmental zones that make up this environment, and then makes suggestions on how to educate the public about the environment at the Coal Mining Heritage Park. As past coal miners and their families lived in, and made use of, the natural environment as it stood in the past, so must we understand and utilize this environment in present park planning and construction.

OVERVIEW OF PARK ENVIRONMENTAL ZONES

There are two general forces acting on the landscape at Merrimac. These are past and present cultural forces, and existing natural forces. Past historic uses of the land have had the first and most lasting impact on the park landscape. These land uses include coal mining activities, housing and domestic residence, and transportation (e.g., the Huckleberry Train). Since roughly the 1960’s, the landscape that supported these past uses has been largely left to its own. Decreased everyday use of the landscape followed the peak of mining activity. This lull in cultural activity on the landscape allowed the natural plant, animal, and insect communities time to recover from earlier usages. As a result, a distinctive plant community made up of both native and non-native plants evolved on the site. This live community demonstrates specifically what plants, animals, birds, insects, soil types, water quality, and levels of sunlight produce an active and recovering former mine site. The current condition of the environmental landscape is a direct result of both past land uses and present efforts toward conservation and restoration of the natural landscape. Plans for the development of the Merrimac park property are built on an understanding of the interaction of these two forces. As the park property becomes directed by a new force, the development of the park as a recreational facility, planning must reflect a desire to balance a concern for the natural recovery of the former mine, housing, and transportation site with the new cultural activities of this recreational site.

An environmental survey is in the process of being conducted as a required step in
Based on the Fall portion of this study, which looks into plant types, soil acidity and mineral content, elevation and associated soil drainage, and features of the physical landscape, the park can be divided into roughly six distinct environmental zones. The environmental zones are shown on the map in Figure 6.1 and are discussed below. Each zone is distinct due to its unique combination of the conditions as formed through past cultural and natural forces. These present environmental conditions will determine and guide the success of any future modification of the landscape. In the discussion below, specific plant names have been left out in anticipation of a complete listing of all plants within any given zone, available following the completion of the Spring portion of the plant survey.

**Zone One**

Zone One begins at Merrimac Road on the east end of the park. Stretching from Merrimac Road to the Tipple foundation along the northern bank of Lick Creek, this zone is marked by soil with a high coal content. As a result, only plants that can tolerate this high coal content will be found in this zone. There is a mixture of both native and non-native species here, as the zone is within a *recovering* natural landscape. As a result, the existing plant community reflects what plant species may help a landscape to reestablish itself after industrial mining activity. We recommend that the present plant community be preserved to allow the continuance of this recovery process. Leaving the land as it is means several things. First, it will cost less to develop and maintain the property. Money saved here may be directed to other projects within the park. Secondly, maintaining the natural plant community will draw in larger numbers of visitors interested in observing and studying it.

Even within Zone One, there are two general areas to be concerned with. There is an elevation change, which begins to the southwest of the Tipple. Here, the land drops in elevation as you continue past the Tipple. As a result, two distinct plant communities are observable, one adapted to well-drained soil and the other to wetter, boggier conditions. This area will need to be free from development and construction in order for local secondary schools and universities to utilize it as an “outdoor classroom” in educational programs within the Coal Mining Heritage Park.

To use the area as a heritage center for the park, we recommend that a Heritage Bridge be constructed over Lick Creek at the Tipple Heritage Area, utilizing the former Tipple foundation still present at the site. The Heritage Bridge will house a heritage interpretation center with signs, photographs, and information on mining life. The bridge will be the center of focus of early festivals and activities at the site. The structure itself will direct traffic out of the natural preserved areas and into the heritage interpretation center. (See Chapters 3 and 5 for greater discussion of the Heritage Bridge.)

Lick Creek runs through the Tipple complex area, as does the Huckleberry Trail.
Zone Two

Environmental Zone Two is located on the steep, forested slope of Price’s Mountain. The slope faces to the south, allowing for relatively high sun exposure. Two distinct areas exist on the Price’s Mountain slope within this zone. They are divided by
the historic tramline road bed. Below the road bed, where the land was cleared in the past for domestic use, we see a forest attempting to reestablish itself. Various opportunistic rapid colonizing plants have taken over the landscape. These are primarily spiny and thorny plants, making it difficult to get around in this stretch of woods. There were once several structures and houses within this lower slope of Zone Two. One of these structures, listed as the archaeological house site on the map, shows clearly the change over time from an occupied house site with a large grassy yard to an historic unoccupied site now underneath opportunistic briars. The briars surrounding sensitive archaeological sites such as this should be left on the site to keep people away from these sites until archaeological excavation and preservation is completed in later stages of park development.

Stepping above the tramline road bed we find in Zone Two a healthy and established pin oak and hickory forest. As one approaches the apex of the hillside, there is less degradation of the soil. The plants here are more typical of an undisturbed setting. A ground cover of creeping cedar indicates healthy soil, as do abundant understory trees of dogwood and redbud. Huckleberries can be found on this upper slope. The forest community found here is representative of the forest, which may have existed prior to and during the operation of the Merrimac Mine. As a result, it will be managed to allow as little impact on the existing natural landscape as possible. Low impact trails are planned within this zone to allow a solitary and natural experience to visitors of the park. We recommend constructing a low impact trail connecting the Miner’s House Trail to the Bunker Hill Trail showcasing Zone Two.

**Zone Three**

Moving to the south side of the park, Zone Four is made up of the north-facing slope above the Merrimac Loop trail. These woods on the north-facing slope have dense under story growth. This is the only such plant community visible in the park. There is scrub pine, pin oak, and rhododendrons. The rhododendrons grow in an area where there is less light. Although the land is not owned by Montgomery County, it borders the Merrimac Loop ADA accessible trail bed and the plants on this slope are visible from the trail. The north-facing slope creates a nice “canopied road” appearance, offering the only shaded walk in the ADA accessible trail complex of the park. We developed the plan for the Merrimac Loop Trail based on the unique plant community and the opportunity for shade offered in Zone Four.

**Zone Four**

Lick Creek runs through the entirety of the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Environmental Zone Four designates this riparian (riverbank) environment. The plants vary along the streambed. The existing margin along the streambed supports a unique plant and animal community within the park.

To control erosion along the creek, a 15-foot wide strip maintaining this existing community as a natural buffer should be left along the entire length of the creek. This will prevent erosion of the slopes and filter any applications of herbicides, fertilizers, and
pesticides used on the grass surfaces of the park. Bridges should be placed to keep traffic up off of the creek bed where through-paths cross the creek.

This zone also has two distinct areas of interest. The section along the creek between the Tipple and the west end of the park is lower in elevation and supports water plants and flowers. In one section, iron leakage from mine runoff into the creek has caused a possibly acidic environment. The plants along the creek in this portion of Zone Four are those that will survive in the mine runoff environment while assisting its recovery. Local secondary schools and universities can utilize this landscape in science education and environmental education. This is an environmental situation that will be closely monitored over time. The section of the creek between the Tipple and the east end of the park is higher in elevation with increased soil drainage. Plants adapted to a drier environment grow here. Of interest in this portion of the creek bed are wildflowers, medicinal plants and a thriving community made up of a symbiotic arrangement of native and non-native species.

Knapweed is one plant within this zone that will need to be monitored and possibly eliminated. Knapweed spreads by root and will quickly overtake an ecosystem, pushing out all other plants. As such, it is a threat to the plant community currently responsible for the recovery of the site.

**Zone Five**

Environmental Zone Five is the large, grassy open area below the consolidated collection site. During construction of the Huckleberry Trail, this entire area was cleared and the soil upturned and disturbed. As a result, all cultural and environmental integrity was lost. No native plants remain, as the area was planted in vetch to control erosion at the site. Zone Five represents the one area within the Merrimac park property that can sustain significant regrading and development. It is also the only open space large enough to support community events and gatherings. As a result, our park plan recommends the placement of picnic pavilions, a covered stage for community events (which we have named the “Front Porch Pavilion”), and a playground in Zone Five.

**Zone Six**

Environmental Zone Six is found along the combination shops area, between the Tipple and the mine opening. Development in this zone must answer to two significant concerns: mine subsidence and protection of archaeological resources. Active mine subsidence in this zone makes heavy digging or alteration of the physical landscape extremely dangerous. As a result, no structures or high impact (paved) trails are planned for this zone. The archaeological sites in this area are described as of “high integrity”, with much to tell about early mining life. As a result, efforts must be taken to protect and maintain the integrity of these sites while a plan for visitation of the sites is developed.

The plant community in this zone reflects a relatively high coal content. There are white pines, Douglas pines, and spruces present. The plant community creates a secluded, shaded area within this section of the park. Existing plants and plant communities will be left undisturbed in Zone Six to maintain the seclusion of this environment, to protect the existing archaeological resources, and to keep visitation low in this geologically active area.
In conclusion, the landscape held within the bounds of the Coal Mining Heritage Park is varied and unique. The existence of a riparian zone, of both south-facing and north-facing forested slopes, of various historically culturally affected landscapes, and of areas of differing elevation combine to create a landscape that holds several different and unique plant and animal communities. These communities offer a wide array of educational opportunities. As the plant survey continues and partnerships with area schools are established, we will continue to develop a clearer understanding of what types of plants and trees were in the park historically (when the mine was functioning). We will also gain an understanding of what types of plants have come into the environment throughout its attempt at recovery. It is interesting to speculate about which plants presently within the park may have been utilized by residents in the past. Of interest, 35 medicinal plants were identified within the Fall survey of the property.

Native and non-native plants exist within the park property generally in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Each plant present today has adapted to the soils existing on the property in which it has grown throughout the years. These individual plants, and more importantly, these communities of a combination of plants, play a vital role in helping to control soil erosion and to encourage recovery of the land within the park property.

In general, the plant communities of the Coal Mining Heritage Park demonstrate the ability of a landscape to recover after industrial and domestic degradation. The park itself and the plant communities it contains will serve as excellent educational vehicles for area schools and universities. In addition, the unique plant communities will draw recreational visitors interested in the natural beauty of the park.

NATURE EDUCATION

Today, the plant life is quite plentiful and is in the process of being surveyed and recorded. County planner Meghan Dorsett conducted an environmental survey on the plants and vegetation at the Merrimac Mine site in the fall of 1999, cataloging a number of plants growing at the site (Dorsett ms.). The following discussion of environmental education is based on the environmental survey to date. The study, however, is not yet complete since one cannot determine the entire plant community just by looking at the fall plants. It will be necessary to continue the study to determine what plants come up in the spring, what plants die at the end of spring, and what plants come up in the summer. Knowledge of the entire plant community, through all seasons, will provide a valuable basis for developing environmental education at the Coal Mining Heritage Park

Interest Groups

Many different groups are interested in the environment that makes up the park. Through interpretive signs and a nature education center, people will come to learn about the unique environment. Figure 6.2 below lists some of the potential users who will benefit from what the park has to offer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warm Hearth Walking Group</th>
<th>Boy Scouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scouts</td>
<td>Summer/Day Camps</td>
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</table>
During the two community meetings held in regards to the park, members of the community stressed that they would like to become educated, and have their children educated, on the different plants throughout the site. Which ones are edible? Which ones can be used for medicinal purposes? Are there any that are harmful or should not be touched? These are all questions that can easily be addressed through education at the park.

**Signage**

One way to teach people about the environment and the plant growth is through signage. For example, there are many noxious plants at the Merrimac site. These are ones that are non-native to the region, such as the common mullein (see Figure 6.3).

![Common Mullein](image)

**Figure 6.3 Common Mullein**

The common mullein grows in an area that is considered disturbed, which means that you get a proliferation of plants that are non-indigenous. In regards to this, there could be a sign next to the plant, explaining a bit about it:

“The Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) comes from the family *Scrophulariaceae*. It is native to central and southern Europe, as well as West Asia. The Common Mullein is the best species of Mullein to use for leaf production, as its’ leaves are large and droop like goat ears. Interestingly enough, the leaves can be used for medicinal purposes as tea or as tinctures for moistening mucous membranes. Therefore, the Common Mullein is a great soothing agent for the throat, bronchi, and lungs. Mullein leaves have also been used for curing dysentery, coughs, gout, and as a narcotic to induce sleep.”
This is the kind of information that members of the community want to learn about. By having signs throughout the park that convey the importance of plants such as the one described above, people will inevitably come to learn about the immense variety of plant life in the Merrimac community.

There is a very unusual combination of plants on degraded areas of the trailside of the creek (where the playground and bridge will be located). Some of these include the Joe Pye weed, irises, Russian olives, and the jewelweed (see Figure 6.4 for Jewelweed). So in this area, for example, there could be a sign about one of the particular plants.

We’ve provided a sample sign, using jewelweed as the example:

“The Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), also known as Touch-me-nots, is a medicinal plant that belongs to the family Balsaminaceae. The Jewelweed has soft semi-succulent stems and leaves that are shaped like spades, and it prefers shade rather than bright sunlight. Its’ flower color varies in shades of orange and it is spotted with a deeper red-orange. The flowers hang suspended from the tiny stems like earrings. For some reason, this plant’s leaves are waterproof. If you immerse a leaf in water, it will appear silver. Then when you remove the leaf, it will be perfectly dry. The Jewelweed also has some medicinal purposes. The juice from its stem can actually help reduce inflammation from both poison ivy and insect bites. Native Americans used it in treating stomach cramps; and by boiling the juice of the plant, they made a yellow-orange dye.”

Figure 6.4 Jewelweed

Some of the areas at Merrimac have been disturbed by bulldozers, and due to this type of disturbance, certain types of plants grow in those areas. At these areas in the park could be more signs telling about the specific plants found. Interestingly enough, two of the plants found near this type of disturbed area are edible. So there could be some signs talking about what these plants could be used for in a meal:
Another example of a sign in the same area would be about a plant called lambsquarter:

"Lambsquarter has an annual life span, and it is native to the area. Its’ leaves are trowel-shaped and can be used fresh in salads. This plant can also be used in quiche, omelets, and casseroles. It can be steamed and eaten, or you could add a few leaves into the juicer when making carrot or other vegetable juices. In addition, it can be sautéed with other vegetables, or used in place of spinach in most any recipe."

(Of the disturbed areas at Merrimac, one such area contains a heavy coal content in the soil. The viper’s bugloss is an example of one of the plant that grows in such an area. Therefore, at that specific area, there could be a sign next to a viper’s bugloss plant that could say this:

"The Viper’s Bugloss (Echium vulgare) is a noxious plant that belongs to the family Boraginaceae. As you can see, it is a gray plant with bright purple flowers. The leaves of this plant were used in Old English herbalism as a tea, which was used to strengthen the heart and give courage. The leaves were also used for treating the bites of poisonous snakes and for driving out poisons from the blood."

(Of Internet sources on plants, sources 5 and 6.)

Out of all of the plants found so far at the Merrimac site, there is one that has a variety of medicinal purposes that people could really benefit from. This particular plant is a kind of honeysuckle, and is called the bush honeysuckle (see Figure 6.5)."
The bush honeysuckle is a deciduous shrub that usually stands upright from six to sixteen feet high. These plants have egg-shaped leaves that range from one to two inches, and flowers that are tubular and fragrant. The flower’s colors range from white to pink and turn yellow with age. They also have berries that are usually red or orange in color. In regards to its medicinal purposes, there could be a sign next to a bush honeysuckle plant that reads:

“The flowers from the Bush Honeysuckle have been used for many medicinal purposes. They have been used in teas for fevers, flu, bacterial dysentery, and laryngitis. They have been used as a wash for sores, tumors, infected boils, swelling, and scabies. In experiments with the Bush Honeysuckle, flower extracts were also shown to lower cholesterol, and also proved to be antiviral and anti-bacterial.”

(Internet sources on plants, source 8.)

All of the plant descriptions above cover only a small sample of the most commonly found fall plants at the park. Therefore, it is not all-inclusive. After the entire plant community has been surveyed, there will be hundreds of plants to note and study. But from what you have just read, you can see that there is a multitude array of flora and vegetation throughout the Merrimac community. Wouldn’t it be great if the citizens in the area could learn about what Merrimac has to offer in its environment? After the different trails have been small signs along the paths will inform hikers and other users about the plants surrounding them. It is also suggested that a sign is placed at the entrance to the park requesting that visitor’s not pick the flowers and plants they see so as to let them remain for other’s to enjoy as well.

WETLAND CONSERVATION AREA

Wetland and Accompanying Nature Trail

The west end of the park, in addition to its unique plant communities contains a substantial wetland area that should be preserved and protected. The area, in environmental Zone Five, is the only place within the park that is at the lowest elevation
combined with inefficient drainage that makes the vegetation in this area differ than any other location in the park. The west end of the park is similar to the east side in that it has a significant amount of water running through it. In contrast however, it has less efficient drainage and is also at the lowest elevation in the park. This is a principal location for the establishment of a wetland conservation area as well as the Nature Education Center and accompanying Nature Trail.

The area is ideal for the establishment of this section of the park as the Wetland Conservation Area. It would be aimed at informing visitors about the local vegetation in greater number and frequency than the other nature signs placed throughout the park. In addition, this section of the park will be maintained as an actual wetland conservation.

A specific hiking trail designed for a secluded natural and educational hike along the creek would be a minimal and enjoyable addition to the other trails at the park. This trail itself would begin at the creek behind the Heritage Bridge and run alongside the creek and continue until the end of the park. The trail should be placed to the north side of the trail leaving a 15-foot buffer zone of vegetation between the creek and the trail. This trail would traverse through environmental Zone Five, a prime wetland area and lead to the Nature Education Center. This end of the park has ideal vegetation and environment for this low-impact trail. Along the trail would be signs like the ones mentioned earlier in this chapter. This also reinforces the establishment of this section of the park as a nature conservation and education area.

**Location for the Nature Education Center**

A prime location for the Nature Education Center is the west end of the park at the end of the Drift Mouth Trail. This area of the park has a unique plant community comprised of non-native plants. This plant community represents opportunistic plants that are highly adaptive to changes in soil. Due to their adaptability, they were essential in the recovery of the land in that area. They also aid in erosion control along Lick Creek. A more detailed description of this area is outlined in Zone Five at the beginning of this chapter.

The Nature Education Center should be housed in a building that complements the Historic focuses of the park as well as be something that will attract visitors to the park. Because of the vital role the railroad played in the transportation of coal and the development of Coal mining communities in the New River Valley, a restored railroad car previously operating in the local area would be an excellent addition to the park. More specifically, a caboose from the Merrimac Coal and Anthracite Railroad, a subsidiary of Norfolk and Western, would be a perfect acquisition to be used as the Nature Education Center.

A caboose of this nature is commonly used in parks throughout Appalachia, and several have been restored and are currently established as nature centers, railroad museums, and youth centers (see Figure 6.6). These can be found in downtown Roanoke, Salem, and Damascus in Virginia, and Beckley, West Virginia. Roanoke Railcar is one such group who is dedicated to historic preservation and restoration of railroad equipment throughout the New River Valley. Members of this group are currently working to acquire a wooden caboose used in this area on a coal transport line. A private owner in
Merrimac currently owns it. The group hopes to have the caboose donated to them, and would handle its movement and placement in the Coal Mining Heritage Park.

![Image of a restored railroad caboose such as the one proposed to house the park's nature center](image)

Figure 6.6 Example of a restored railroad caboose such as the one proposed to house the park's nature center

After the caboose is moved to the site, it will need restoration. The current extent of this restoration is not known at this time. At the very least, the caboose will need to be cleaned and painted, and the inside stripped and prepared to house exhibits. Since Roanoke Railcar is a non-profit organization, a grant proposal to Norfolk Southern would enable this group or others to restore the caboose. Once the caboose has been fully restored, it will be the responsibility of Montgomery County to maintain the caboose. They can contract out to Roanoke Railcar or Norfolk Southern for this task. The next step will be to establish the inside of the caboose for nature displays and exhibits.

The nature education center is a place that will attract visitors of all ages, and offer educational opportunities for people to learn about the environment and different plant communities that make up the park. When students come to the park for field trips, the center will be set up as a nature classroom. It will educate students, teachers, and others about the environmental aspects of the park. It will also provide students with the opportunity to look at different types of soil and learn about the conditions that determine the plants that grow in each kind. The center will also be the central location for the complete compilation of all the plants surveyed at the park. Displays will be set up to teach people about water, rocks and minerals, weather, seasons, and the life stages of animals. School projects and science experiments could include things such as raising plants and insects (such as butterflies) to reintroduce into the park.
Information in this exhibit will be formatted in pamphlet versions for visitors to take with them as they walk along the trails. For example, local plants, leaves, trees, and animals will each be in a separate pamphlet for people to use as resources. Nature enthusiasts will be able to learn what types of plants and animals thrive in the park and the pamphlets will enable the users to identify each one as they walk through the park. Samples of pamphlets from other parks are shown in Figures 6.7 and 6.8.
Figure 6.7 Educational pamphlet showing leaves of the Green Ridge State Forest Arboretum
OTHER SUGGESTIONS

There are other various environmental improvements that will enhance the visual enjoyment of the park. For example, Warm Hearth currently has a walking group who frequently use the trail. They enjoy the scenery and identify plants along the trail. They would like to see the mowed area along the Huckleberry Trail be narrower to encourage the plants to thrive and be closer to the trail and add to the greenery. This recommendation will need to be weighted and balanced with the need to provide adequate space for park visitors to step off the Huckleberry Trail to get themselves out of the path of high-speed bikers and skaters. Hopefully, the addition of the park's low impact trails and nature areas will provide Warm Hearth users with numerous new environmental locations to view in addition to the area along the Huckleberry Trail itself.

Another suggestion would be to clean up Lick Creek. Children who use the park now play in the water near the entrance by Merrimac and Hightop Roads. This area should be cleaned of trash and perhaps the stream itself could be irrigated slightly so as to aid in the flow of water to prevent stagnant pools. A sandy area by the water near the playground would encourage children to play there instead of near the road. The stream is a valuable outdoor classroom location as well. Science classes in primary and
secondary schools can do water tests and take soil samples. Minerals in the soil and water serve as geological and ecological laboratories. It is also suggested that a 15-foot plant buffer be left on either side of the creek for erosion control. Cleaning up the entire stretch of the stream would increase the enjoyment for all visitors and add to the visual appeal of the park.

**CONCLUSION**

The environment and plant communities at the site of the future Coal Mining Heritage Park, along the Huckleberry Trail, are interesting and complex. They reflect the past industrial and domestic use of the landscape. Community members have stressed a want and desire to learn more about the complex system of plant communities that they will soon be hiking through. Children with local secondary schools and university classes will soon have the opportunity to visit the site and learn from the educational resources provided by this environment. There will be a complete record of the plant communities at Merrimac by the end of the summer in 2000. Meghan Dorsett, of the Montgomery County Planning Department, is completing this environmental assessment. At this time there will be a more comprehensive understanding of the environment at the Coal Mining Heritage Park.
Chapter 7

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARK DEVELOPMENT

By Mary B. La Lone

Recommendations for park development appear throughout this report, however, in this concluding chapter we would like to emphasize some of our stronger recommendations for the development of the Coal Mining Heritage Park at Merrimac. All of these recommendations are important; the numeric listing does not reflect priorities.

1. The heritage focus is a unique, exciting, and important theme for the park at Merrimac. Montgomery County is demonstrating that it cares about the county's past, and that it views heritage preservation and education as one of its roles. Protecting the heritage so that it can be passed on to the next generation is extremely important right now, at a time in which the county landscape is undergoing such rapid change. Cultural stewardship of the land is a concern throughout the Appalachian region, as demonstrated through the theme of the March 2000 Appalachian Studies Association conference ("Regional Stewardship for the Millennium"), and Montgomery County is taking a leading role through its development of the Coal Mining Heritage Park.

The Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County has a special interest in working cooperatively with the county in developing the park at Merrimac. The county and the CMHA have a common goal: to honor and preserve the county's mining heritage. Many of the recommendations in this report point to ways in which the county and CMHA can join efforts to develop heritage-based education at different phases in the park development.

2. Plan park development to take place in those areas of the Merrimac property that have previously been disturbed – try not to disturb undisturbed land. The reasons for this recommendation are:
   • In order to preserve the archaeological integrity of the site.
   • To protect and enhance the recovery of the natural landscape.
   • To minimize the potential for mine subsidence.

This recommendation is applied in our park planning in a number of ways:
   • We recommend the development of the Community Recreation Area, parking lot, and Museum/Visitor's Center take place on the east end of the Merrimac property, in areas where the land has been disturbed previously.
   • We strongly recommend that the trails within the park, wherever possible, be constructed on top of previous roads, driveways, and tramlines since these routes have already undergone disturbance and compaction. Placing
the trails on previously compacted vehicular and industrial foot routes will protect the rest of the historic site. The low-impact trails recommended in this report have been specifically routed to follow prior road beds and industrial paths, to the best of our knowledge (with the exception of the Nature Trail along Lick Creek). Archaeological survey and historic knowledge should be combined to identify and mark the exact locations of these previously-existing road beds before constructing the trails.

3. Extend the park boundaries to incorporate all of the historic districts associated with the Merrimac Mine. Currently, the park encompasses the industrial mining section of Merrimac, the commissary, and some of the houses occupied by mine supervisors. However, two major areas of historic Merrimac fall outside the park boundaries:
   • Bunker Hill, where mining families lived in company houses built by the Merrimac Mine
   • The site of the Merrimac hotel.

   The concern is that historic Merrimac be preserved, treated appropriately, and interpreted to the public as a whole. The concern is also that the additional pieces of Merrimac currently lying outside the park boundaries need protection so that the heritage they represent, and the archaeological remains at those sites, not be bulldozed over or developed. Montgomery County should play an important role in historic preservation by ensuring that the whole historic site of Merrimac is kept intact and protected as the county's Coal Mining Heritage Park.

4. Create a buffer zone, for sight and noise, between the park and its neighbors.
   • One recommendation is to extend the park boundaries outward enough to create a buffer zone between park users viewing the historic features of the park and current/future houses outside the park. On the northern side of the park, especially, the park boundaries appear to lie right across some of the historic house sites. As park visitors hike the Miner's House Trail and visit the archaeological ruins of a supervisor's house, they may find themselves staring directly at a park boundary fence, or into the backyards of future housing developments. This is not a conducive atmosphere to provide visitors the feeling that they are stepping back in time to become immersed in the heritage experience. Additionally, future house owners that have backyards butting right against the park boundaries will not be pleased to have trail hikers staring into their yards. The potential for these tensions can be eliminated by extending the park boundaries outward enough to put a buffer zone between the historic sites and trails, and the houses (or future houses) outside the park.

   • A second recommendation is that where houses now lie close to the park boundaries, such as at the west end of the park, efforts be made to create "green screens" that will muffle the noise from the park, prevent trail hikers from staring into the neighbors' yards, and prevent park and trail users from straying into the neighboring properties. These living screens
could be hedges or dense plantings of trees and shrubs, and would be best if they consist of low maintenance plant materials that fit with the surrounding environment.

5. Move the current Consolidated Waste Site and use this graded lot, located next to the park, to provide a needed parking lot for visitors to the Coal Mining Heritage Park and the Huckleberry Trail. This report (Chapters 4 and 5) discusses the need to provide suitable parking for automobiles and school buses, and the reasons why the current Consolidated Waste Site provides the only suitable site for parking. Among those reasons are its proximity to the Merrimac Road entrance and the Community Recreation Area of the park, the fact that it is already graded and large enough for the needed parking, and its location above the sight lines of Huckleberry Trail hikers.

6. Keep development at the park, especially along the Huckleberry Trail, in keeping with the heritage, community, and environmental themes of the park. All structures should be built in ways that fit and are in character with the mining heritage theme. Larger scale construction, such as the parking lot and the museum, should be placed so as to be minimally intrusive to walkers and hikers who wish to enjoy the natural beauty of the Huckleberry Trail. Since environmental education is a theme of the park, the natural environment should be left undisturbed in areas away from the trails and Community Recreation Area wherever possible. This will also serve to keep park users from disturbing the areas of the park that are best protected for archaeological reasons.

7. Security for the Coal Mining Heritage Park is a concern that needs to be addressed early in the planning process. We have made a number of recommendations in this regard:
   - Close the access road beside the park to vehicular traffic to discourage vandalism, trash dumping, and injury to park visitors. We recommend that this measure be taken immediately so that disgruntled four-wheelers will cool off before substantial development occurs at the park.
   - Work out a systematic plan with the Sheriff's Office for patrolling the park on a regular basis.
   - Provide emergency call boxes at one or more locations along the Huckleberry Trail (this may be one area in which the county's park plans may dovetail with the Amenities Plan for the Huckleberry Trail).
   - Develop a strong security system as part of the park infrastructure to protect park buildings (especially those of heritage value), outdoor exhibits, and signs against vandalism, and similarly, to protect people and discourage after-hours activities in the park. These measures will go a long way in winning the community and protecting park property.

8. Make community input and involvement prominent in all aspects and stages of the park planning process. The importance of community involvement has been
stressed in this report, and it was central to the research methodology. If the community is to have a stake in developing and maintaining the park, it must be a park that meets its needs and furthers its goals.

- Many of the recommendations in this report were generated by people from the community, elicited through community meetings, targeted interviews, and small-group brainstorming sessions. From this we learned what facilities the community would like to have at the park, and what their interests and concerns are in park development. We recommend that the county continue to find ways to generate citizen input in all phases of the park development. The community, as it becomes familiar and comfortable with the park's goals, may also prove to be a substantial resource base for development if community involvement is fostered. In the report, we recommend a number of ways in which community events can be staged to heighten public awareness of the park and to foster people's sense of ownership and responsibility to the park.

- During the research process, we discovered that the park sparked great interest with a number of segments of the community. New River Valley school teachers were very excited about the possibilities the park presents for heritage-based and environment-based education. Residents of Warm Hearth use the park and are interested enhancing its environment. Roanoke Railcar, a group involved in restoration of historic railroad equipment, is interested in the possibility of locating a Huckleberry caboose at the park. The Merrimac church youth group, hiking and biking clubs, and nature groups are among other potential park users and supporters. We recommend that the county seek out and involve these, and other potential user groups in the park planning.

- We recommend that Montgomery County establish a Citizens Advisory Board to guide developments at the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Members of this board should include key people who worked in partnership with the county on this planning report (Robert Freis, Fred Lawson, Tom Klatka, Mary La Lone), as well as representatives from the local communities and the potential user groups identified in this report (for example, Stacie Haynes from Merrimac community, Lori Shepherd from Price's Fork community, Bill Ellenbogen from Friends of the Huckleberry, Dolly Cottrill from Price's Fork Elementary School, John Robinson from Warm Hearth). Also, so that the wider community audience has venues for input and participation, we recommend that the county hold community meetings early in each phase of the park's development. The purpose of the meetings should not be just to inform the public but, instead, to seek people's active participation in meaningful ways that give them a real stake in the park's development.
9. Similarly, we recommend that the county continue its partnership with Dr. La Lone, involving her and her anthropology students at Radford University in future planning for the park. Dr. La Lone has established a scholarly reputation and a basis of rapport with the Coal Mining Heritage Association, and her students have developed extensive knowledge of the New River Valley mining history and archaeology through this research project. The groundwork laid here – knowledge of the heritage/archaeology considerations that are the foundations for this plan and the community relations developed – need to be infused in the successive stages of park planning. Many aspects of park development will provide excellent educational opportunities for students in applied anthropology and archaeology (from planning, to environmental work, to museum studies), and their work, in turn, will contribute to the county's efforts.

10. We recommend that Montgomery County also work with the Friends of the Huckleberry Trail in park planning efforts. The county may find that its plans for the park and the Amenities Plan for the Huckleberry Trail dovetail, making joint efforts at fund-raising a fruitful venture.

11. Maintaining the archaeological and historic integrity of the site should be a high priority. Archaeological survey on the south side of the Huckleberry Trail was done by state archaeologist, Tom Klatka, providing valuable information for park planning. We recommend that an archaeological survey of the north side be conducted soon, before trail development occurs on that side of the park. This will help to determine the locations of archaeological features, and enable planning designed to protect archaeological sites and to make use of them in heritage education. We recommend that Tom Klatka continue to be involved in the park planning. Similarly, this report recommends ways that Dr. Cliff Boyd and his archaeology students at Radford University could work in partnership with the county to further archaeological study at Merrimac.

12. The county is to be commended in its vision to create a park along the Huckleberry Trail greenway – the Merrimac park and the Huckleberry Trail will complement each other. Ways need to be explored to enable the park visitors and Huckleberry Trail users to coexist happily. While there is much overlap, there are also differences between the users of these two entities. The Coal Mining Heritage Park audience will include people wishing to stop and view the heritage and environmental signage and exhibits along the Huckleberry Trail, parents with small children, families coming for reunions and to hear music at the pavilion, and a fair number of elderly and handicapped visitors. We expect that these park visitors may encounter some accidental run-ins with high-speed bikers and skaters on the Huckleberry Trail, and we recommend that the county work with Friends of the Huckleberry to establish some rules for the Huckleberry Trail within the park boundaries. At the minimum, we recommend posting signs at each entrance to the park advising Huckleberry Trail users that they have entered a park and asking them to extend courtesy to slower pedestrians. We are hesitant to recommend that a separate path for park users be cut to parallel the Huckleberry
Trail for its full distance within the park boundaries, largely because of the desire expressed by so many people to retain the natural landscape along the Huckleberry Trail as much as possible. We do, however, recommend that signs, exhibits and other activities be placed in a manner that will encourage park visitors to step off the Huckleberry Trail to view them. With precautions such as these built into the park planning, we expect that park visitors and Huckleberry Trail users alike will appreciate and make extensive use of the Coal Mining Heritage Park at Merrimac.

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Parker, Bobby, Joe Powers, and Meghan Dorsett
10/14/1999  Class visit by Bobby Parker, Joe Powers, and Meghan Dorsett, at Radford University. Concerning organization, publicity, and planning for the Merrimac community meetings.

Powers, Joe and Meghan Dorsett
9/14/1999  Class visits by Joe Powers and Meghan Dorsett (Montgomery County Planning Office), at Radford University. Concerning general considerations in all park planning.
9/16/99  County Planning Office, at Radford University. Concerning general considerations in all park planning.

Roanoke Museum of Transportation, Coal Miners Day
11/16/1999  Field notes and photographs taken by team member Elaine G. Staab at the Coal Miners Day activities at the Roanoke Museum of Transportation.

Robinson, John

Phillips, Steve and Tom Bain
10/13/1999  Meeting with Tom Bain and Steve Phillips, Montgomery County Offices, Christiansburg, Va., by Daliah G. Macon,
Matthew D. Schrag, Melissa E. Lamb, Elaine G. Staab, Jennifer K. Zelinski, and Mary B. La Lone.
Discussing the role of Facilities Management and Parks and Recreation in park construction and maintenance.

Scott, Dudley
10/23/1999 Interview with Dudley Scott at the community meeting, Merrimac Pentecostal Holiness Church in Merrimac, Va., by Matthew D. Schrag.

Steiger, Janet.
10/13/1999 Interview with Janet Steiger by telephone, by Jennifer K. Zelinski.

APPENDIX A:

THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

AND SURVEY RESULTS
### SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES ABOUT TYPES OF PARK FACILITIES DESIRED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF PARK FACILITY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONSES (n=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restrooms</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic shelters</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic tables</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical signs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining museum</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water fountains</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information center</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail benches</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped accessible trails</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking trails</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature trails</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassy areas</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WRITTEN RESPONSES FROM THE SURVEY

What would you like to see at this park?

...about local mining history

*Visuals*
- signs and information of the coal mining heritage days
- historic markers
- story of mining in area
- memorial plaque with names of miners killed in Merrimac mine
- interpretive signs
- informative signs about our ancestors who worked there
- pictures showing mining process
- pictures of how it used to be
- pictures and literature
- monuments and information about mining and “mining” culture
- coal map of mines
- see and hear oral histories
- replica of tools
- pictures of mine operations
- movies of their days mining for families to see
- a plaque with the workers names and the position they held
- a plaque with the names of men who lost their lives there
Structures and Artifacts

- a museum of mining equipment and tools
- exhibits of things what miners worked with and the history of the mines
- relics from that time period
- something from each coal mining community included in the museum
- phases to see and articles that were used—things that can be on hand so children can enjoy touching
- replica of company store could double as a museum of mining artifacts
- museum
- full blown living history educational site
- mining buildings and equipment; period style reconstructed residences, stores, hotel, offices, common areas, etc.
- “mine entrances”—tunnels? shafts?
- replica of the actual mining operation, such as the anthracite mines in Pottsville, PA
- company house
- coal cars
- boiler house
- visitor’s center
- statue of a coal miner

Information

- [information] about local mining history should be main impetus since it is to be the Coal Miners Heritage Park. This shouldn’t be taken over by other interests or overpowered by children’s desires, etc. This should be unique!
- how related to local and regional needs (coal there supplied the Merrimac in the Civil War, I understand)
- would like to see information about local mining history
- information to educate others—let them know about the past
- Appalachian history, lifestyle, crafts and culture
- emphasize the family strengths of the time and community impacts
- how the mines began and how they were worked
- how the mines were worked, the safety features, how the workers liked it
- emphasize the mining family and the role of women
- how we lived in the coal camps and went to work in the coal mines
- how [coal] was mined and brought to the top of the ground
- anything that will let people know how life was “in hard times”
- emphasize all that is possible to do
- family life and support
- the economic impact from 1900 to 1940
- the attraction of mining to men who moved to the mines (e.g. from distant areas)
- coal miners work-a-day life
- history of all area mines (large and small)
- historical impact of mining on development of area
- details of coal mining in the early times (1920-1945)
- the home life of our forefather who went into the coal mines everyday—it was so different than today
• emphasize on the miners
• from the beginning, a true history of how it was—both the good and bad—people have no idea of how things really were from past to present—it’s our heritage up here
• how people took it on themselves to have small mines of their own, not owned by Big Companies.

**What would you like to see at this park?**

...for recreation

**Nature**
• native wildflowers, shrubs and trees
• no mowing along the trail—it destroys wildflowers
• the scenery is beautiful—don’t put too many things in that will distract from the natural environment!
• a place to be able to walk around and identify wildflowers and other flora
• wildflower garden, bird and wildlife habitats
• please change as little as possible (mow less) while sharing history

**Trails**
• trails for walking, study
• a place for group nature walks
• side trails
• picnicking
• biking trails
• secluded trails
• undeveloped/rustic hiking and nature trails
• hiking
• hiking trails with historical markers

**Events**
• social events
• a place to see music
• country music
• gospel singing

**Activities for Children**
• a small ride for children or an underground area to simulate the mines and kids could go into it with lamps or lighted hats
• small recreation ground for children
• areas for children to play
• a place for kids to play at so they will be interested in the park
• old time tire swings
• things for kids (swings, see saws, etc.)
• mining equipment to play on—old fashioned play area and things along these lines
• a place for children, ages Kindergarten ages through middle school to play ball and a special time to see a movie of coal mining and the Christian way of life.
• science education site
• information and murals for children
• this should be more of an educational park rather than a play park
• some hands on or interesting things for children because they have no memories of it
• playground

Activities for Families and Groups

• shady areas for picnicking
• a place to have fun, relax and learn
• a place for gatherings and picnics
• a place for the community to enjoy
• grassy areas
• ball games
• a place where everyone could meet and socialize and be together for different occasions and relax
• a ball field
• picnicking for family and group picnics
• light games grounds
• horseshoes, volleyball, softball
• passive recreation areas

What would you like to see at this park?

...facilities

• there would be better parking at 4.5 mile [marker]
• parking
• picnic tables
• barbecue pit
• benches
• picnic shelters
• water fountains
• bike racks
• none [no facilities]
• trail benches
• restrooms

...security
• good security
The Coal Mining Heritage Association sent the questionnaire to its membership. It contained the questions listed and, in addition, the CMHA version included three more questions. Responses to those questions follow:

**Who should pay for building and maintaining the park?**

- local and state funds—also check and see if it is possible to secure a grant to help in securing money to carry out the work and expenses that will occur in undertaking this project
- Virginia grant funding
- private donations
- donations
- fund raisers: bake sale, softball tournament, car wash during the summer with students going to the river (we could set up by monument), chili dinner
- [help from] members and donations from other sources
- Montgomery County
- county taxpayers
- government grants
- memorial gifts
- members of the Coal Miners Association
- Coal Miners Union
- we should pay all that we can and take any help that we can and take any help we can
- family participation
- keep it simple and low in cost by an emphasis on natural features and “collected” items
- institutional funds
- contributions
- counties where mining occurred (Montgomery, Pulaski, etc.)
- everyone
- for those who give, make plaques with their names for doing so
- donations given in memory of loved ones who have died from mining
- small donations to visit park
- Montgomery County Recreation Department
- young Merrimac people
- donations from book sales
- flea market setups at the community buildings
- auctions of donated items conducted by Coal Miners Association members

**Is this new park as important to you as the Coal Miners Memorial Monument at McCoy?**

- Yes. I am one of the youngest people to have scant memories of the mines—and I’m 35—I want my children to understand their heritage and the hardships their ancestors survived and the strength that came from it.
• Although I am not familiar with the area, a coal miner's heritage park for the future generation would be informative as well as educational. I am for it.
• It could be made to be very important. They are both very important in their own way.
• Yes this would further keep memory of coal mining alive in Montgomery County.
• I think both of them are equally important but I also believe more people might visit the park.
• Yes because my father and brother—also quite a few relatives—worked at the Merrimac mines. I was born on the hill opposite the Merrimac mines coal tipple (11-6-1922).
• Yes—if not for the park to show how it was in the coal camps and mines we would need no coal mines memorial. It was a hard life with mine accident [typed as written in survey].
• Unfortunately, I have not had the chance to visit the site. My father ______ born and work in Wake Forest. I hope to see names of uncles, cousins, and family friends. It would be a great comfort to the family members.
• Yes it’s closer and would be enjoyed by more citizens.
• Yes. Even more important. The historical significance should be preserved. Also, its closeness to Blacksburg would assure high attendance.
• Yes because it connects to my family’s history for many generations.
• This will be in an area which will gain much more public attention and should further the cause of the mining association.
• Yes. The Coal Miners Memorial Monument at McCoy is fantastic but it relates more to relatives or acquaintances of the ones who are honored on it.
• Yes. The monument honors the men who sacrificed their lives for their family. The park will represent the aspects of the way our forefathers worked and lived.
• I think the new park would help to keep our loved ones alive forever in our Hearts and minds.
• Yes it would be nice in memorial of each miner.
• Yes this will include everyone. Represent all miners in the county.
• Yes.
• Yes—again as this both the heritage of miners, it is also a heritage of out whole community and we are losing out on so much of our heritage. Yes—we need all we can for future generations to see and know.
• One is as important as the other.
• Yes because there is lots of history of mining.
• Yes.
• Yes because my husband ______ and his dad and granddad and uncles worked here. He took me down the trail and showed me the site of the mine area where he lived and played as a boy. He always sat and rested on the big machine that’s parked there when we walked the trail.
• No, the monument shows appreciation for the work done by the miners.
• No, we appreciate the progress and effort. Everyone is looking forward to having a park, but the miners' memorial monument represents the miners who lost their life [word unclear] in the Merrimac mines.
• Probably not—because I feel more closely connected to the McCoy area by family ties and familiarity with the McCoy and Parott mines.
• The monument is the centerpiece of this movement. The park cannot be as important. Move the monument to the park!
• No, I have roots in the coal mining community in McCoy.
• No, because I grew up in McCoy and my father was a coal miner in McCoy.

**History**

• coal mines owned by the state furnished coal for the VPI Power House. Also coal mines in Poverty [a coal mining community]. Individuals rented and mined the coal until the vein of coal was completely exhausted.
• It was the leading way families made a living up until the 1930’s.
• This area was important to me many years ago—late 1920’s. I have many memories.
• But I don’t think there is enough attention put on the small mines. It was a way of life for small business miners, whose living depended on it. But it seems all the attention is somewhat put on the Big Company mines.
APPENDIX B:

COMMUNITY INPUT

FROM THE COMMUNITY MEETINGS HELD IN MERRIMAC,

OCTOBER 21 AND 23, 1999
Community Input from the Community Meetings
October 21 and 23, 1999

During the community meetings, the audience broke into three different "interest groups" to generate ideas for the park: a interest group focusing on heritage interpretation; an interest group focusing on developing educational activities for the park; and an interest group focusing on recreation and facilities desired at the park. The ideas generated by each interest group were written down, and are listed here. In some cases, the discussion in the groups overlapped.

Heritage Interest Group:

Building restoration and reconstruction
- rebuild and furnish miner’s house with appropriate furnishings from period
- construct small buildings to represent mine buildings
- open driftmouth (put in timbers)
- reconstructed church
- recreate top of tipple to actually be top of pavilion
- have a working mine or an opening at the driftmouth
- reconstructed house set up like a miner’s house

Signage/ Displays
- signs to indicate driftmouth (dates)
- show map of houses (1937 map)
- signs everywhere (explanations of different coal and buildings)
- community could buy signs and have “In Memory of…”
- overlays with image against landscape to show how it used to look
- scale model of the mining community
- scale model of mine and houses
- clear areas around house sites and identify previous owners (contact families)
- be able to relate how mines operated
- mention Merrimac school
- importance of railroad (how it connected county)
- importance of coal in the community and development of county
- mention all mines (find way to connect all of them)
- people (who ran what)
- mention of Ruby Smith and Greyton Smith in McCoy
- Civil War information
- how the coal industry built up the county
- railroad history
-connection to Merrimac battleship
-monument for miners killed
-work and risk involved in mining coal
-Bunker Hill
-name the side trails after different communities

**Museum**
- main exhibit should be Merrimac, but additional exhibits to demonstrate life at different mines
- museum with artifacts (pictures, equipment)
- display relics (miner’s tools, attire)
- volunteers for museum
- plexiglass or glass for display cases, used to protect artifacts
- be able to relate how mines operated
- show the importance of coal mining and relate the similarities between different coal companies
- have a timeline of events
- stories of cadets riding
- remember small mines that didn’t have corporate backing represent railroad and farming

*(Note: Many of the ideas for signage and the museum overlap).*

**Facilities/ Amphitheater**
- bathrooms and water
- picnic tables
- community could buy benches
- clear up spring houses and use as drinking water
- have storytelling relate specific events at mine (at amphitheater)
- entertainment; events on site
- music

**Security**
- people will be willing to donate artifacts if they will be in a secure environment
- for museum security, put a chain link fence and alarm system
- security was a concern
- close park at dusk

**Other Ideas**
- use public access channels to storytell and announce events at the park
- research bookkeeping records for facts
- importance of faith, kids
- gardens
- a balance of physical, emotional, and biological aspects
Education Interest Group

Location of park
- mouth of Merrimac mines (above water level to avoid flooding)
- Tipple location

Building restoration/reconstruction/new buildings
- tipple
- the wash houses near the tipple, shower buildings
- coal miner’s house
- museum
- amphitheater
- pavilions, picnic tables, benches, and other facilities

Signage
- name buildings and former locations
- maps on the signs
- details of religion; the importance of church and religion in the mining heritage
- closeness of the community
- ways of life of men, women, and children
- environmental aspects along the trails
- mark the entrance and boundaries of the park
- place signs on back of benches along with photos covered with Plexiglas
- details of explosions and disasters at the mines
- trees, flora, and fauna labeled
- walking trail identifying vegetation
- soil and water types labeled

Museum
- several suggestions to put this at old tipple location
- make museum look like the tipple on outside (small scale)
- photos or copies of photos of different aspects of mining life
- a scale model of the coal mine with buttons to push that activate audiotapes that tell stories or give factual information; these will be in the voices of actual coal miners or family members
- maps of the region
- maps of the insides of the mines
- history of The Huckleberry and the importance of the trains to the coal mines
- a storyteller to tell oral histories
- stories about the explosions and disasters at the area mines
- memorial or plaque to remember who died in the coal mines
- differences between the various New River Valley mines
- mining was an honored profession; miners were respected; miners enjoyed their work
-company store script
- African-American history: no discrimination in mines; whites and blacks worked side by side; example of blacks owning their own mines

Amphitheater
- surround sound with Imax Theater
- make the visitor see, smell, taste, feel, and hear the mines
- available to use for scheduled field trips
- festivals to celebrate coal mining heritage
- storytelling
- music

Community Aspects
- a proud close knit community
- the Depression did not affect their way of life
- they cared about each other
- religious people
- bring out the “good” aspects of the community and not just the fact that they were poor
- self sufficiency of the households

Women’s way of life
- child rearing
- housekeeping
- cooking
- other life ways
- an interpreter present to act out the daily activities (like Explore Park)

Children’s way of life
- games children played (marbles, dominoes)
- chores done by the children
- what were school days like for children
- an interpreter present to act out daily activities

Working in the mines
- the sounds, sights, and smells of a mine
- how did it feel when an accident occurred
- interpreter to act out the daily activities
- attitude of the miners

Other Ideas
- hands on activities: example, make homemade ice cream like they used to do (activities children can do on field trips)
- community wants an alternate route from the mountaintop to the trail
- the traffic is too fast in the area, put up 25 mph sign
- need to make cliff side on Hightop Rd. less steep
Facilities and Recreation Interest Group

History
- a place to see history
- ethnic history; blacks and whites
- make a link with history
- continue history
- historical ways to teach kids about coal

Signage/ Displays
- plaques, pictures
- reconstruct buildings pictorially (names of people, how things were laid out, mine openings, maps
- for the commissary, show what you could buy in it and the prices
- the different types of mines and how these different types effected the people who lived around and worked in them
- audio signs that provide interview clips
- show park boundaries (maybe by using grass hedges)
- signs for No Guns
- signs indicating plant life and what plants are safe to touch, which are edible, which are harmful
- interpretive signs
- tracks and train car for display
- benches with Plexiglas covering pictures of tools and buildings
- what were the resources at the time in the community
- what characteristics were developed, used, endured, etc.
- show current and past lines of the railroad on maps

Amphitheater/ Picnic Pavilion
- a concern: Is there room?
- good for education and outdoor classrooms
- definitely want an amphitheater
- Sunday school picnics
- reenactment’s done here; show sights, sounds, and smells
- have local people who mined speak

Reconstructed buildings/ Museum
- reconstructed store
- reconstructed mining house
- show living history inside the buildings
- visualizing is the key
- community involved with maintenance
- interpreters inside buildings
- curators inside buildings
- natural architecture
- have old artifacts and things to buy (souvenirs) in the museum
-place to watch a movie (“Hard Times, Rich Memories”), possibly in museum

**Trails**
- hiking trails with stopping points and different signs throughout with explanations of the area in which one is at (in relation to the mines)
- youth groups could help with maintaining these trails to earn merits (example, Royal Rangers, Christian Boy Scouts)
- side trails
- ADA accessible trails
- hiking trail that ends in the park near where it started with campsite in middle of trail
- lights along trails (lamppost lights)

**Playground/ Recreational Activities**
- hunting and fishing
- monkey bars
- camping area for tents
- bike racks
- swings for children
- involve community and churches in construction (Royal Rangers could help in building swing sets, and in maintaining trails
- Youth Girls Christian group would also help
- show what recreation was like during the coal mining period
- dump sand and make a beach area near creek for kids to play in
- benches provided for sitting

**Security**
- if something is low maintained, vandalism more likely
- people involved in whole process should decrease vandalism
- low lighting for security
- one resident concerned with the distance between park and her home
- patrolled park all the time
- bicycle police

**Other Ideas/ Facilities**
- circulating waterfall along the creek
- snack stand
- first aid station
- huckleberry gardens
- recycling
- pamphlets with maps of trails, campsites, etc.
- emergency phones
- concern for parking

- preserve the land and keep it from going to other development
- continue to collect stories from people
-must be a place for older and younger people