

Tour the Blackwater Rail Trail from Thomas to Douglas plus a side trip to the Davis Coal and Coke headquarters following the Francis Grade or Douglas Road

1 MINING UNDERGROUND IN THOMAS

The Thomas industrial complex drove employment, industry, & economic activity. Many coal mine entrances in and around the Town of Thomas led to miles of interconnected underground mine tunnels. On the surface the river front was covered with six rows of train tracks, a mine tippie and power plant.

2 MOVING COAL TO MARKET

After coming out of the mine and being cleaned, sorted, and graded, coal was ready to ship to market. Thomas mine works included "coke ovens," where impurities like sulfur were slowly burned out of the coal. The railroad carried the coal and coke all over the east coast.

3 RAILROAD STATION

The Thomas passenger and freight station was a point of arrival and departure for people, news, and goods. It sat at the junction where the Davis Branch split off from the main line between Elkins and Cumberland.

View coke ovens on the hill behind you.

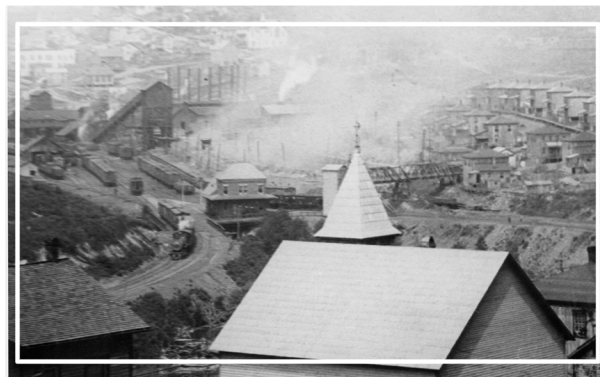
4 + **5** THE ENGINE HOUSE & COAL HAULING LOCOMOTIVES

The locomotive maintenance and turning facilities at this location facilitated local rail operations. The steepness of the Blackwater Canyon grade — the steepest passenger-haul line in the East — made moving coal difficult. The railroad constantly sought better ways to operate and maintain locomotives. A water tank foundation is across the track.

6 THE SNYDER RUN WYE

A "wye" is a place where three railroad tracks form a triangle, enabling trains to make a three-point turn. The main route followed the North Fork of the Blackwater, while a branch line followed Snyder Run upstream to the town of Benbush. There is a call box mounted on a pole just before the wye.

Continue down the trail to visit a section of preserved Coke Ovens and Douglas Falls, or head back up the trail and past the Francis Grade to reach downtown Thomas.



7 MINE PORTAL NO 29

This hillside was once the location of a coal mine entrance. This portal was located near Coketon, whose industrial complex and power plant was almost as large as those in Thomas. Underground mining ended here in the 1950s. Today, groundwater is exposed to and acidified by the coal deposits. Water flows out through this old mine entrance polluting the North Fork of the Blackwater River.

8 DOUGLAS WV

Henry Gassaway Davis's companies built mines in all directions around Thomas, and built branch lines to connect them. At each mine, company-owned mining towns sprang up. They included a railroad station, a company general store, a school, a post office, one or more churches, and single- and multi-family homes for the miners and their families. Douglas is one such community.

9 BLACK FORK GRADE

Just around the curve past the bridge is the crest of a steep grade on the former West Virginia Central and Pittsburg Railroad, later the Western Maryland Railway. Few rail routes required more machinery or personnel to keep coal moving up the Blackwater Canyon grade. To get a loaded, 90-car coal train up to Douglas and into Thomas, it took nine locomotives to pull the coal hopper cars up the 3% grade of the Blackwater Canyon.

10 B&L COMPANY STORE

The B&L Company Store provided the industrial community with the necessities of life — food, clothing, tools, etc. — but by paying in company scrip, Davis Coal and Coke Company ensured that an employee's earnings would be returned to the company. The company headquarters is across the street.

11 ENGINEERING BUILDING

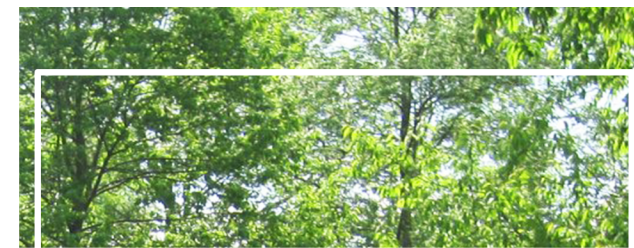
The Davis Coal and Coke headquarters was used for coal mine planning, payroll, and railroad operations management. The payroll staff operated from the first floor. Employees received their pay at a window inside. Railroad clerks tracked company store inventory, equipment, and other items arriving and departing by rail. As mining operations declined, rail operations became a primary use for this building.



For more information, visit: saveblackwater.org



571 DOUGLAS RD, THOMAS WV 26292
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A SELF-GUIDED TOUR TO THE BLACKWATER RAIL TRAIL



www.saveblackwater.org

*West Virginia
Humanities Council*

BLACKWATER RAIL TRAIL MAP

Use the map and guide to explore the structures and artifacts left behind by the coal, coke and railroad industries that built the towns of Thomas and Douglas. Additional information is available at each of the sites highlighted on the map.

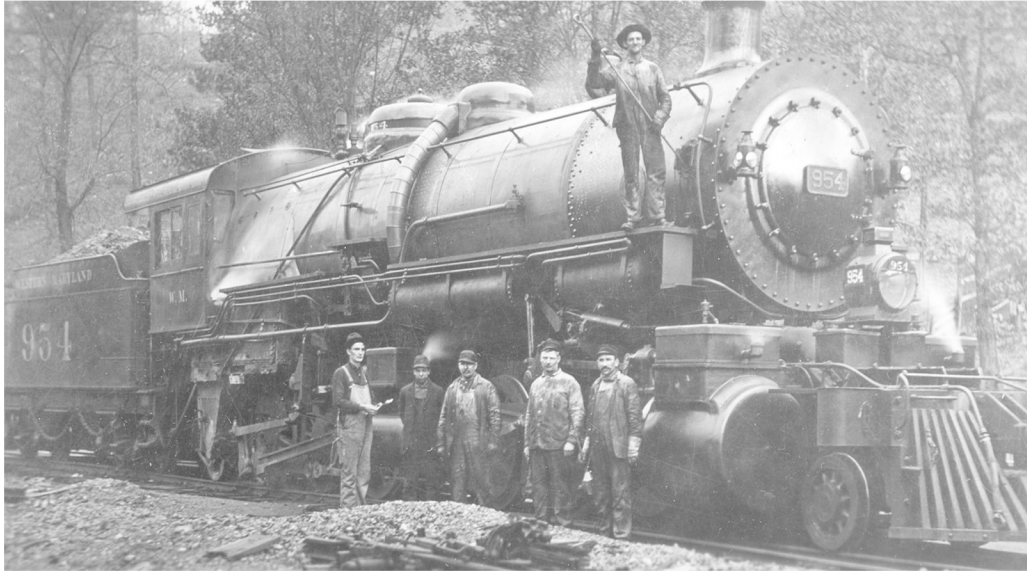


Photo: Western Maryland Railway Historical Society

LOCATIONS TO VISIT ON THE BLACKWATER RAIL TRAIL:

- 1 MINING UNDERGROUND IN THOMAS
- 2 MOVING COAL TO MARKET
- 3 RAILROAD STATION
- 4 + 5 THE ENGINE HOUSE & COAL HAULING LOCOMOTIVES
- 6 THE SNYDER RUN WYE
- 7 MINE PORTAL NO 29
- 8 DOUGLAS WVA
- 9 BLACK FORK GRADE
- 10 B&L COMPANY STORE
- 11 ENGINEERING BUILDING*] - DAVIS COAL & COKE BUILDINGS

*National Register of Historic Places

Approximate length: 2.5 miles

For more information on each location and the best route, please read the other side.

