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RAHALL SEEKS NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM STATUS FOR MERCER COUNTY'S BRAMWELL

BRAMWELL, WV -- Southern West Virginia would be the home of a new unit of the National Park System under legislation that will be introduced next week by U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV). The bill would establish the Bramwell National Historical Park at the Mercer County community renown for its turn-of-the-century coal baron era mansions and coal camps.

"We have been fortunate to find in Bramwell some outstanding, and what I believe to be nationally significant, historical, cultural and architectural values relating to the coal mining heritage of southern West Virginia," Rahall said. "It is, without any doubt, in the national interest to preserve the unique character of Bramwell and its environs. It is also extremely important that we take those actions which will enhance the preservation, restoration and interpretation of the area. Bramwell not only reflects the 'Age of the Coal Baron,' but with the outlying coal camps such as at Coopers both sides of the story--management and labor--are represented."

The Rahall bill seeks "to gain the preservation, restoration and interpretation of the historical, cultural and architectural values of the Town of Bramwell for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations" providing Bramwell with a status similar to the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle.

Development of the historical park would be outlined in a management plan, which would be devised by the National Park Service with public input and through consultation with the Bramwell National Historical Park Advisory Committee established by the bill. However, the legislation does provide for the restoration of a brick surface to several streets in the town in order to enhance its the historical and architectural character; measures to mitigate the visual impact of public utility facilities such as phone and electrical lines on the historical and architectural character of the proposed historical park; the reconstruction of the Bramwell Railroad Depot; and, the restoration of an edifice or edifices suitable to provide for the interpretation and visitor appreciation of the area. The National Park Service would also be authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with the owners of properties of historical or cultural significance within the Park to mark, interpret, restore and provide technical assistance for the preservation and interpretation of the properties.

MORE

According to Rahall, the proposed Bramwell National Historical Park is envisioned as being a 'living' unit of the National Park System in a manner similar to Harpers Ferry. People would continue to make the area their homes. For this reason, the legislation makes a number of specific provisions to protect private property rights: acquisition of land could only take place with "willing sellers" and the National Park Service would not have access to private residential property within the Park without the advice and consent of the owner.

Rahall has stated that as part of his Southern West Virginia Coal Heritage Initiative it is his intention to seek the establishment through federal legislation of what he refers to as the 'Colonial Williamsburg' of coal towns. During an April 1989 meeting he asked Bramwell citizens whether they were interested in pursuing legislation to designate the area as a National Historical Park and received an extremely positive response. A draft of the bill Rahall fashioned was subsequently approved by the town council earlier this year.

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SIDEBAR

Aside from National Parks like Yellowstone and Great Smokey Mountains, there are many types of designations within the National Park System including National Monuments, National Rivers, National Seashores, National Battlefield Sites and Parks, National Recreation Areas, National Historic Sites and National Historical Parks.

The following units of the National Park System have been established in West Virginia: the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the New River Gorge National River, the Gauley River National Recreation Area and the Bluestone National Scenic River. All but Harpers Ferry were established under legislation sponsored by Rep. Rahall.

Many National Historic Sites encompass the home of a President, e.g. Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site at Hyde Park, New York, and the Lincoln Home National Historic Site at Springfield, Illinois, or other famous people, e.g. Longfellow National Historic Site at Cambridge, Massachusetts and the Edison National Historic Site at West Orange, New Jersey. In addition, there are numerous National Historic Sites for Revolutionary War and Civil War forts.

However, there are quite a few National Historic Sites and National Historical Parks which deal with cultural and historic values not unlike what exists at Bramwell.

For example, the Hampton National Historic Site located at Towson, Maryland, was established to ensure the preservation of Georgian mansions built during the latter part of the 18th century. The Lowell National Historical Park in Lowell, Massachusetts, involves America's first planned industrial city with exhibits and tours telling the story of the industrial revolution. The park includes mill complexes and worker housing among other items. Of the 136 acres involved, only 4 acres are federally owned with the remaining in private hands.

In all, there presently exists 63 National Historic Sites and 26 National Historical Parks nationwide. A National Historical Park generally is an area of greater physical extent and complexity than National Historic Sites.

U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall
Southern West Virginia Coal Heritage Initiative

"They felt, rather than knew, their history...Their lore was bloody: they had been crushed and killed on their jobs and fired from them when they tried to organize a union that could articulate their needs. They had been evicted from their company homes and machine gunned in their union tents. Periodically they had risen in fury." --Lon Savage, Thunder In The Mountains

Overview

The coal mining history of southern West Virginia is indeed a story of struggle, of human sacrifice and of occurrences which have left their mark on the history of the Nation as a whole. A central element in this history is, of course, the role of the men and woman who worked in the mines and their efforts toward unionization. In 1890, West Virginia's coal production was 6.3 million tons. Ten years later it rose to 21.5 million tons and the age of the coal barons such as James Otis Watson, Joseph Beury and Isaac T. Mann had begun. Company stores and housing and payment by script became a way of life for many. The native population became integrated with southern blacks and immigrants from Italy and other countries. Mary 'Mother' Jones became a frequent visitor to the State and many mines were unionized by 1902.

However, a great deal more history was to be made as represented by the subsequent labor disturbances on Paint Creek and Cabin Creek in 1912 and 1913, Matewan in 1920 and the battle at Blair Mountain the following year. These were the days of the West Virginia Mine Wars.

This is, in part, our coal mining heritage. A part of America's heritage. A heritage that played not only an essential role in the formation of our culture and values, but to the industrialization of the United States. Today, there are few physical vestiges of this era remaining. I believe it is incumbent upon this generation to ensure that what does remain is not lost to further decay. For these old mining camps, company stores, tipples and related structures are an integral and important part of our heritage and the lessons learned from them should not be forgotten or lost to future generations.

The Southern West Virginia Coal Heritage Initiative is aimed at salvaging remnants of these coal sites and as such, preserving our unique heritage. This must be done not only for educational purposes, but for the potential regional economic benefits this type of historic preservation may hold.

The Initiative

"The Southern West Virginia Coal Heritage Initiative seeks the coordinated development and promotion of southern West Virginia's unique cultural and historical resources associated with our coal mining heritage to compliment the existing network of State and National park units, State forests and Army Corps recreational lakes."

Coal Heritage Studies

A. Coalways, Inc., non-profit organization study funded through EDA grant obtained with assistance from Rep. Rahall provides a road map plotting the course of private sector coal heritage developments. *Status: Completed.*

B. National Park Service study authorized by legislation sponsored by Rep. Rahall will identify sites of cultural and historical significance involving southern West Virginia's coal heritage, evaluate the sites using National Park Service standards and identify a "Coal Heritage Trail" linking these sites together with existing federal and state park units, state forests and Army Corps recreational lakes. Study to be transmitted to Congress. *Status: \$100,000 appropriated by Congress, study being conducted by National Park Service in conjunction with West Virginia Division of Culture and History and Coalways, Inc..*

Coal Heritage Developments

A. Development of a Matewan Revitalization Strategy to implement a conservation, revitalization and tourism strategy for the Matewan area. *Status: Action Plan signed by National Park Service, Matewan Development Center, Inc., Army Corps of Engineers, State of West Virginia and Rep. Rahall.*

B. Designation of Bramwell historic district as a National Historical Park. *Status: Legislation to be introduced by Rep. Rahall in early June 1990.*

C. Other designations subject to result of National Park Service study.

Heritage Commission

The establishment of a Southern West Virginia Heritage Commission to make loans and grants to preserve buildings, structures and facilities associated with southern West Virginia's coal heritage; to coordinate governmental and private sector activities relating to historic preservation and economic revitalization; to provide assistance in preparation of loan and grant applications to federal agencies; and to develop historic preservation guidelines for coal heritage sites. *Status: Legislation introduced by Rep. Rahall late February 1990.*

Scenic Roadways and Designated Heritage Trail

Further scenic roadways may be established as well as the placement along existing routes of "Coal Heritage Trail" highway markers linking both coal heritage and scenic/recreational sites. *Status: Shawnee Parkway legislation introduced by Rep. Rahall in May 1990. Other developments subject to results of National Park Service study and federal highway legislation.*

BRAMWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK ACT OF 1990
U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Aside from National Parks like Yellowstone and Great Smokey Mountains, there are many types of designations within the National Park System including National Monuments, National Rivers, National Seashores, National Battlefield Sites and Parks, National Recreation Areas, National Historic Sites and National Historical Parks.

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BRAMWELL BACKGROUND

The purpose of the bill is to gain the preservation, restoration and interpretation of the historical, cultural and architectural values of the Town of Bramwell for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations.

A portion of the Town of Bramwell, where the historic 'coal baron' homes are located, is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a 'historic district'. The Bramwell Historic Landmarks Commission is in the process of working to expand the existing historic district to include the outlying Coopers, a coal camp. A National Register of Historic Places listing simply denotes that the area is of local, regional or national historical significance.

It is intended for the expanded historic district, once completed, to serve as the boundary of the proposed Bramwell National Historical Park. This is why the specific area to be included is purposely left blank in the bill. It will be added later.

The proposed Bramwell National Historical Park is envisioned as being a 'living' unit of the National Park System in a manner similar to Harpers Ferry. People would continue to make the area their homes. For this reason, the legislation makes a number of specific provisions to protect private property rights: acquisition of land could only take place with "willing sellers" and the National Park Service would not have access to private residential property within the Park without the advice and consent of the owner. In addition, the National Park Service would be authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with the owners of properties of historical or cultural significance within the Park to mark, interpret, restore and provide technical assistance for the preservation and interpretation of the properties.

Development of the Park would be outlined in a management plan, which would be devised by the National Park Service with public input and through consultation with the Bramwell National Historical Park Advisory Committee established by the bill. However, the legislation does provide for the restoration of a brick surface to North River Street, Main Street, Rose Street, South River Street and Bloch Street to restore the historical and architectural character of the Park; measures to mitigate the visual impact of public utility facilities such as phone and electrical lines on the historical and architectural character of the Park; the reconstruction of the Bramwell Railroad Depot; and, the restoration of an edifice or edifices suitable to provide for the interpretation and visitor appreciation of the historical, cultural and architectural features of the Park.

The 13 member Advisory Committee would consist of the Governor of the State of West Virginia or his delegate; one member to represent the West Virginia Division of Culture and History; the Mayor of the Town of Bramwell; one member to represent the Mercer County Commission; one member to represent the Mercer County Historical Society; two members to represent the Bramwell Historic Landmark Commission; two members to represent the Bramwell Millionaire Garden Club; one member to represent the West Virginia Preservation Alliance, Inc.; one member to represent Coalways, Inc.; one member to represent the West Virginia Association of Museums; and one member to represent the Pinnacle Rock State Park Foundation, Inc.