

A gold mine

CABIN BRANCH

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

Potomac News 4/4/78 A 1

VIRGINIANA FILE Ore is environmental

*Historic Sites
(Cabin Branch Mine)*

By JOAN GAUKER

There's a gold mine in Prince William Forest Park in the Dumfries Triangle area of Prince William County.

Of course, it hasn't been worked for the last 60 years, and only "fool's gold" (pyrite) was mined when it was worked.

But, in a sense, it's still a gold mine because of environmental and historic discoveries possible at that old site.

"It's a neat area" to visit and explore, according to Prince William Forest Park Naturalist Audrey Calhoun.

The site was recently designated a National Environmental Study Area by the National Park Service, which operates the park, along with two other sites in Prince William Forest Park—Davis Farm site and the Oak Ridge Beaver Dam site.

Ms. Calhoun said park officials are encouraging people to visit these sites. She said the sites, particularly the pyrite mine, could be a valuable learning experience for junior and senior high school biology students. Considerable research could be done on the condition of life found on the mineral-soaked land and in the water as a result of the mine being worked and abandoned without proper restoration.

It's about a mile and a quarter hike from the park's parking lot "D" to the quiet old mine site, according to Ms. Calhoun, but it's a pleasant hike.

Persons or groups interested in special information on the old mine site may call the park's nature center, 221-2420.

The mine was discovered in 1889 and producing pyrite ore by 1908.

After a hike to the old mine site, you may find yourself standing on a flat patch of yellowish land between the creek and a hill. If you look up the hill, you'll be looking at the remnants of the old mine's incline shaft. It has been filled in, now, for safety, but the timbers which still show may start your mind thinking about those days when that quiet spot was a bustling working early 1900s industry called Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine.

On that flat piece of barren land beside the creek, you'll find you are standing on soft, sparkling soil, which has pieces of fool's gold that still wash down the hillside with every rain.

From there, you can almost envision the mill that sat on top of the hill, and you can imagine the mining machinery and buildings that were needed there to

mine the mineral pyrite. Pyrite is made up of iron and sulphur and is used to make sulfuric acid.

Pyrite was found in the ground 1,000 feet long and between five and 13 feet wide. The mineral was found between rocks at a 25 to 60 degree angle to the earth's surface.

historic disco

(Weems-Botts Museum Collection)

As you look around and see a stand of pines across the creek, you'll note that is where workers' houses stood long before the pines took root. Also, over there was the mine company's store and that foundation still remains.

North of where the store stood, was a sawmill and several other buildings.



Cecil Garrison: We worked (the mine) 10 hours a day, from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., six days a week.

Potomac News photo by Kevin Manning



A class could develop its own hypothesis, and then research it to see if the hypothesis holds, Ms. Calhoun suggested.

However, she cautioned, nothing can be removed from the area.

overies

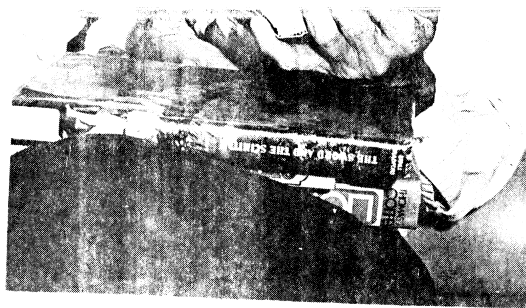
Distinct sounds of workers calling to each other, the clanking of tools and machinery, and the clacking and puffing of one of the three steam engines, which used to pull the ore out of the mine area, begin to drift in and out of your imagination.

The engines were affectionately named The Virginia Creeper, The Dewey and The Dinky.

Together, the three engines pulled over 200,000 long tons (2,240 pounds equals a long ton) of pyrite, worth over \$1 million, out of the mine in about 12 years of operation. The pyrite was pulled to the local Dumfries shipping port or the railroad station.

More exploration around the old site, will reward your imagination's wanderings with some real pieces of the old train tracks, as well as some building foundations and the old reservoir.

See MINI, page A-2



Info to go

A quiet corner is just the place for a good read at Potomac Library, and Ed Menninger has found his quiet corner. That's not all that goes on at the library. 'Info to go' is the theme for National Library Week this week. It happens in many shapes and forms, as evidenced on page B-2 of today's Potomac News. (Potomac News photo by Kevin Manning)

Repeated Vepeco rate increases take toll on the old, SCC told

RICHMOND (UPI) — A spokesman for Tidewater retirees says about 3,000 Virginians had their gas and electric service cut off recently after falling behind on utility bills — an action that sometimes had tragic consequences.

Donald Patten told the State Corporation Commission Monday that Brandon Fleming, 68, an ailing Newsport News man, was found dead in his house five days after Virginia Electric and Power Co. cut off his light and heat.

Comparing a 2.4 percent annual cost of living increase for Social Security recipients with Vepeco's proposed 20 rate increase, Patten said repeated rate hikes were taking their toll on pensioners with fixed income.

The testimony came at the start of SCC hearings on Vepeco's interim request for an \$82 million surcharge to pay startup costs for its first North Anna nuclear reactor. The startup costs are to cover accumulated insurance, depreciation, taxes and costs of capital borrowing which fall due on the day the reactor starts producing commercial power.

Where's Henry?

While the SCC holds public hearings on Virginia Electric and Power Co.'s request for a rate increase, there's somebody missing. For the first time in more than a decade, Henry Howell is not fighting a Vepeco increase. For details, see page A-3.

Vepeco has announced plans to seek overall rate increases of about 25 percent or \$236 million, before the year's end. If so, however, that the overall increase would amount to just 20 percent because of an estimated \$50 million fuel saving through greater reliance on cheaper nuclear power.

Attorney General J. Marshall Coleman urged the commission to consider the surcharge request together with all Vepeco's proposed rate increases at formal hearings later this year.

"In this case the company has not alleged the existence of an emergen-

cy," said Coleman. "It now offers the claim of urgency as justification for its request."

"It's our belief that the SCC will have established a dangerous precedent if it allows the company to file for relief at the 11th hour."

Several consumer representatives, including Fran Francis of the Apartment and Office Building Association and a Fairfax County lawyer, endorsed Coleman's proposal for a single, formal rate hearing on all Vepeco's requests.

State Sen. Clive L. DuVal, D-Fairfax, representing his constituents, called Vepeco's surcharge request "a clear violation of the intent of the General Assembly" because it was not billed as an emergency, yet it allowed no time for thorough consideration by the commission.

John Schell of the Consumer Congress of the Commonwealth said the utility was attempting to stampee the orderly ratemaking process by creating an artificial emergency at the last possible moment.

"This emergency is selfimposed."

See VEPECO, page A-3

Executive c

By FRANK GREEN

Amid the turmoil and controversy surrounding Clinton B. Mullen's pay raises and resignation, the Prince William Board of Supervisors has tentatively approved a 4.1 percent budget increase for the county executive's office next year.

The current budget for the office, \$6,345, is expected to have \$3,000 left over at the end of this fiscal year. The remaining of approximately \$3,000 is

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MINE

Park officials have an old site plan of the mine, dated 1916, revised 1919, which shows an impressive number of buildings and mining operations spread across about 10 acres. The park officials are interested in about half of the

area, Ms. Calhoun said.

The mine was owned by the American Agriculture Chemical Company, which paid miners \$3.50 a day and timber crews \$2.75 a day.

"We worked 10 hours a day, from 7

-Continued from page A-1

a.m. to 5 p.m., six days a week," Cecil Garrison of Dumfries recalled from his days of working on the timber gang in 1916 and 1917.

Garrison, born in 1895 and still a figure about Dumfries, said the mine was worked around the clock.

As a timber gang worker, he said, he helped cut wood on mine-owned land in what is now called Possum Point. Then it was called Barrow Siding. The timber was taken along a narrow gauge R. F. & P. (Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac) railroad to the mine. There it was cut up at the head of the mine shaft for use inside, he said.

There were three mine shafts, according to Garrison and the park officials, two vertical shafts and the incline shaft.

The vertical shafts had elevators to carry the workers up and down, Garrison said.

Garrison's father, James H. Garrison, ran the company store when Garrison was a youngster.

"He sold everything from knitting needles to two-horse wagons," Garrison reminisced. Also, Garrison remembered, a company official would make daily trips from the store to the main office to check the wages owed each man. This was to make certain workers didn't buy more at the company store than they could pay for, he said.

Garrison said the mine, worked during the first world war, produced copper and iron, in addition to pyrite.

Park officials say gold, silver and lead were present at Cabin Branch Mine, but none was recovered since each was in such low concentrations.

The 2,350-foot vertical main shaft was the last one worked before the mine closed in 1920. A strike closed the mine when the miners demanded an increase in wages to \$4 a day.

The mine owners found they could get pyrite cheaper somewhere else, and never reopened the mine. Garrison said the somewhere else was Spain, and park officials say it was in the Gulf states.

Garrison said he left the company two years before the strike to take a job in the post office.

After it closed, the mine fell to ruin, and wood from the mine's numerous buildings was used for other buildings in the Dumfries area.

Garrison said he believes a Baptist Church in the area was formerly one of the miners' houses. It was moved from the mine by horse and wagon, he said.

All the happenings at the mine had an environmental affect on the land, as well as an historic affect, Ms. Calhoun points out.

Because of this, she said, park officials are particularly eager for high school biology classes to undertake research projects at the old mine site.

The students' efforts would help the park officials with documentation, she said, and at the same time, provide a valuable learning experience for the class.

Research on soil and mineral content could be done by students, according to Ms. Calhoun. Also, tests on the water quantity of the stream and how it affects the wildlife.

A class could develop its own hypothesis, and then research it to see if the hypothesis holds. Ms. Calhoun



Potomac News photo by Joan Gauker

Pyrite mine has been made a National Environmental Study Area.

