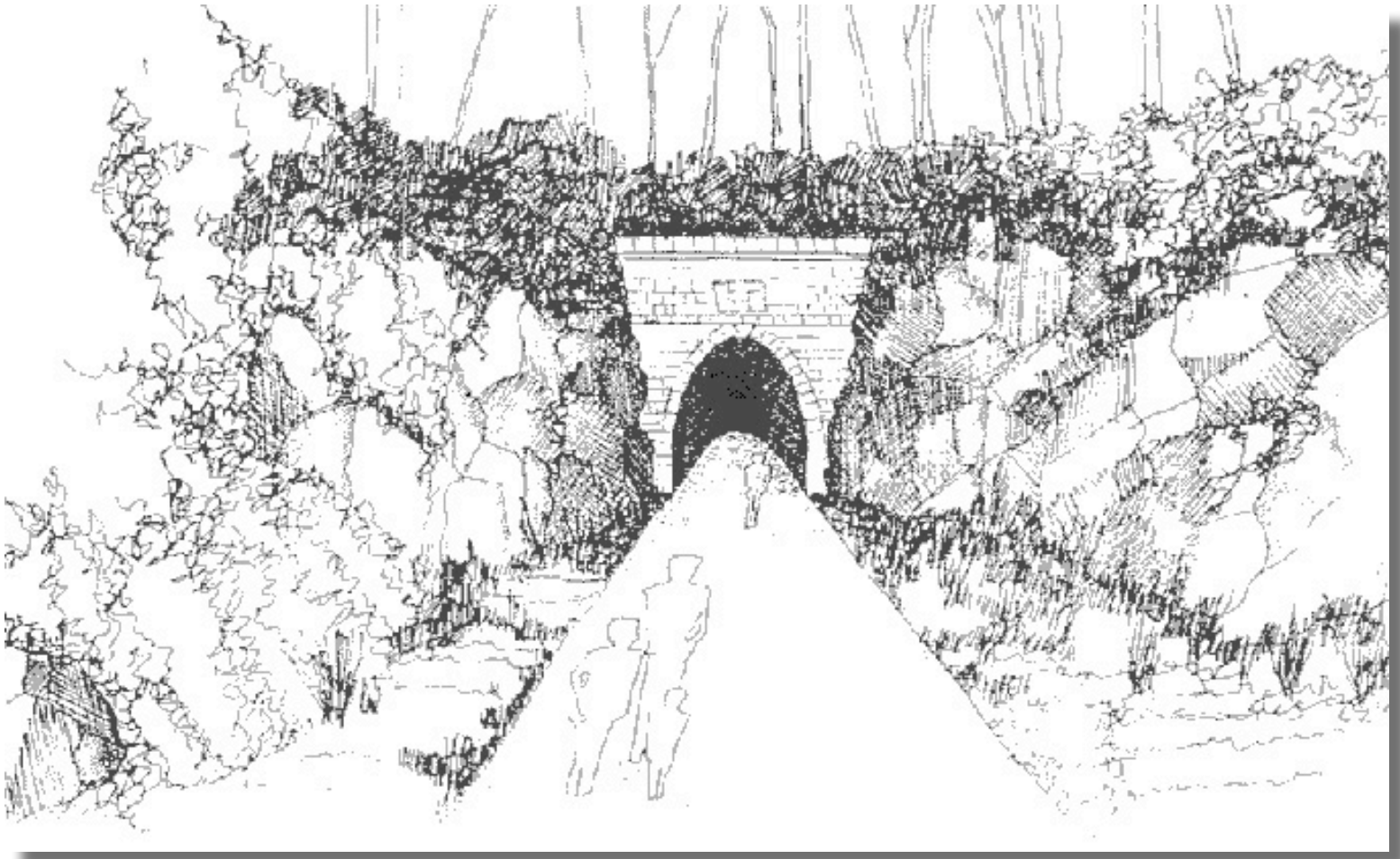


RESTORATION OF THE BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL

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PROPOSED REGIONAL GREENWAY:

Nelson, Albemarle, and Augusta Counties



Future Western Portal Entrance, Blue Ridge Tunnel, Afton, Virginia

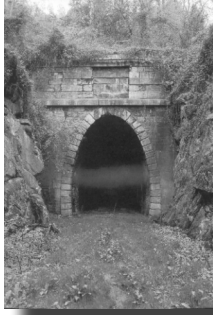
Presented by:

WHITESSELL GROUP LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS & LAND PLANNERS

ALBEMARLE COUNTY

NELSON COUNTY

September 25, 2007



RESTORATION OF THE BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL

One of the most distinctive, compelling and exemplary projects under way in Virginia, incorporating crucial Virginia and U.S. History, with a uniquely educational adventure is the **RESTORATION OF THE BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL PROJECT**. The near mile-long (4,277 ft.), 150 year-old tunnel, 600 feet below Afton Mountain, and now owned by Nelson County, is one of the most profound memorials and examples of the toil and ingenuity that changed the world: rail transportation. Claudius Crozet, a leader at West Point, one of the Founders of Virginia Military Institute, an engineer, whom Thomas Jefferson proclaimed the Country's finest mathematician, was the man who was assigned, by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the task of a construction project that took 8 long years to complete. Crozet created *the world's longest rail tunnel*, and is revered throughout the nation as having performed one of the most remarkable engineering feats, even to this day.

LOCATION OF PROJECT

The Blue Ridge Tunnel, and the adjacent land needed to complete this project, is situated in the most advantageous position! Lying 600 feet below Afton Mountain, at the *convergence of five major routes*: I-64, Route 250, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive, and the Appalachian Trail, the Blue Ridge Tunnel commands a monumental place in historic recognition. The central location in the state offers tremendous opportunities for visitation. The interpretive signage along the trail will educate visitors of all ages in the most demonstrative method: *the unforgettable mystique of walking the length of the nation's oldest, naturally lit, near-mile-long rail tunnel, with the 19th Century toil and artifacts before their very eyes!*

BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL PROJECT DESCRIPTION

WHITESELL GROUP Landscape Architecture, the lead planner of this project, established a strong relationship with CSX Corporation, based on the possibility of conveyance of the Tunnel to Nelson County. The rail corporation was remarkably cooperative, and has maintained a positive working relationship throughout the \$1.00 purchase and 1.5 million dollar value, which the corporation will use for tax credit. WHITESELL GROUP structured the land and tunnel preservation project to create trails, which are ADA compliant, and have sensical and relevant applications.

This project will lead the visitor through historic and archeological sites, spectacular views of the Piedmont Plateau, and will link tourism from 5 major routes, into one of the most unique depictions of history this nation has to offer. A greenway trail from the Village of Afton to Route 250, through the Tunnel, will enhance the historic village that supported the Tunnel, and enable the public to access and experience the Tunnel completely. The viewshed of the Piedmont Plateau is an integral element of this experience, as is the archeological history and grand entrance of the Western Portal. Clean, succinct interpretive signage will lead a visitor of any age through the remarkable experience of the creation of the Blue Ridge Tunnel. The sensory experiences will delight students, as they experience for themselves the impact of geological blasting, and the characteristics of a mountain. All ages will be awestruck by the realization of hours, weeks, and years spent and conditions in such a vacuous, damp space, with a mere production of 3 feet a week as their most progress! Visitors will see for themselves the drill bit, broken flush with the rock—a mere 8 hours of work, just to set one bit. Historic photographs, remnants of life as an Irish immigrant worker, and the sacrifices that were made, that contributed to our life of prosperity as we enjoy it, the Blue Ridge Tunnel will capture the story. This highly unique adventure be the only one of its kind in Virginia; the Tunnel experience will seal the rich heritage of Afton Mountain, the immigration to the Shenandoah Valley, 19th century cultural history, and rail history, and have an impact for all who witness it.

A second project is being structured, that of connecting to existing and proposed trails from *Charlottesville to Staunton*. *Imagine walking or riding a bicycle through beautiful Albemarle County, through a mile-long tunnel, all the way to Staunton!* A REGIONAL GREENWAY, a green infrastructure, is being planned through a collaborative committee,

consisting of: Albemarle County, Augusta County, Nelson County, and the Department of Forestry.

The land to be acquired provides **the essential, connective links** that will make such a trail feasible. The land is privately owned beyond the immediate Tunnel. Though the rail bed (leading from the East Portal, into the Village of Afton) is conveyed, it is one plat short of a clean connection (.66 acres, described herein in this application). The impact for the region has significant potential, and the mystique, the history, and the adventure of the Blue Ridge Tunnel will be preserved and opened for an unforgettable experience to a fortunate public!

Nelson County, Virginia has received VDOT TEA-21 funding, which has awarded \$625,000 (thus far) of the projected 3.5 million dollar project. Being designated a “state” project by the State, after the second successful round of funding, allows the County to seek private funding sources, in addition to the TEA 21 funding. Funding has also been received: \$13,000, from the Department of Forestry, and in 2007, \$100,000 from DCR, for this project. Nelson County, Virginia purchased the Tunnel, which straddles the Augusta/Nelson County border, from CSX Corporation, along with its obsolete rail bed, which leads from the East Portal of the Tunnel into the Village of Afton.

The Restoration of the Blue Ridge Tunnel project is an experiential, hands-on demonstration of the evolution of cultural, geological, and transportation history, to be experienced within a breathtaking viewshed and mystical trail. With trail plans to provide access to the Tunnel, access must extend from two points on Route 250 and from the Village of Afton. Acquisition of property will enable access from both portals of the Tunnel, and will extend access regionally.

SCOPE OF WORK TO BE COMPLETED IN TUNNEL RESTORATION

The Restoration of the Blue Ridge Tunnel project is planned for completion in 2008, after the stabilization of all areas of the Tunnel, the restoration of the vast brick lining at the entrance of the western portal, and the removal of two bulkheads, which were erected after the abandonment of the Tunnel in the 1940's, with the intent to store natural gas! Many springs in the humid Tunnel will be diverted, and “light” in the Tunnel will be captured naturally, so as to preserve the true experience of navigation almost one mile

in *mere natural light* from each end of the Tunnel. By using a series of reflectors to dimly illuminate the trail through the Tunnel, the visitor will experience the thrill of their navigation, as the trespassers have for decades!

Interest for a Visitors' Center, an Artisan museum, a Virginia Military Institute museum—complete with the artifacts and personal effects of Claudius Crozet, a Milepost 0 Blue Ridge Parkway museum, and other relevant centers are under consideration for the area: all tributes to Claudius Crozet, the beauty and power of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the continuing appeal of the area.

MAINTENANCE OF ACQUIRED PROPERTIES FOR MAXIMUM PUBLIC BENEFIT

Properties to be acquired will be maintained by Nelson County, and other affiliated service organizations. The properties, which are currently privately owned, present no public access to the Blue Ridge Tunnel, a historic landmark of supreme value. To own and maintain these properties for public access will preserve the heritage of this treasure, and place the Blue Ridge Tunnel in the hands of the deserving public.

The Blue Ridge Tunnel has been deemed structurally sound, and the Department of Historic Resources has approved relevant preservation elements of the Restoration of the Blue Ridge Tunnel project for the its two VDOT' TEA 21 awards.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT:

- Distinctive and Unique Project: designated “State Project” by VDOT TEA 21 Program
- Tunnel will be anchor for tremendous tourism-based Economic Development for Region
- Strong relationships and participation with contributing entities:
 - The Blue Ridge Parkway (project linkage to Parkway and Visitors Center)
 - Virginia Military Institute (potential source of private funding by alumni)
 - Skyline Drive
 - Adjacent Counties constituting the Region
- Historic Landmark (seeking designation)
- Key element in proposed Regional Greenway, “Green Infrastructure”
- Natural Heritage Resource, with conservation easements, preservation of wildlife
- Regional Trail Linkage
- Enhancement of Quality of Life

- Monumental Public support and momentum for the project
- Education

REGIONAL GREENWAY: A GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Plans for a Regional “Green Infrastructure” Greenway are under way, with a Planning Committee of three counties, and consultation by Department of Forestry, Department of Conservation and Resources, and Whitesell Group Landscape Architects. Albemarle, Nelson, and Augusta Counties make up the governmental core, but after the multi-county group sets a skeletal template, pertinent special interest groups and the general public will be invited for input.

The goals for the Regional Greenway are the enhancement of tourism, recreation, and transportation, through the vast points of interest of the three counties, with the restored Blue Ridge Tunnel becoming the central hub attraction. The Regional Greenway will encompass the stimulation of economic development, regional tourism, agritourism, and a large, regional attraction, from which significant benefits will be realized.

However, in order to move forward with the Regional Greenway, Green Infrastructure project, much coordination must be established, and support from the counties should be offered. For instance, two Planning District Commissions possess the materials required for successful mapping; comprehensive county plans; greenway plans, etc. Access to the plans, along with assistance with proposed project area will be valuable in the Regional Greenway project, which will:

- Increase Public access to designated areas of Green Infrastructure.
- Preserve areas of cultural and natural importance.
- Develop a green infrastructure program that will enhance economic development for the region.
- Preserve open space and waterways in areas experiencing a lot of development.
- Examine and utilize existing and planned linkage of trails.

Support is sought in bringing the Regional Greenway project to a structured template, so public input may be considered.