

Blue Ridge Tunnel Rehabilitation Project

Nelson County Parks and Recreation

Jerry West

Director of Parks and Recreation



Have you been?

- September 23, 2020: Governor Ralph Northam visit to tour the tunnel and place the final brick of restoration.
- November 19, 2020: We opened the gates to the public.
- October 5, 2021: We welcomed the US Army for special night optics training and testing.
- October 28, 2021: First official field trip guided tour.
- October 25, 2021: 100,000 visitors!!!!
- Currently seeing an average of 5000-6000 visitors per month



Tunnel Facts

Tunnel Length: 4273ft (0.81miles)

700ft below Rockfish Gap at highest point

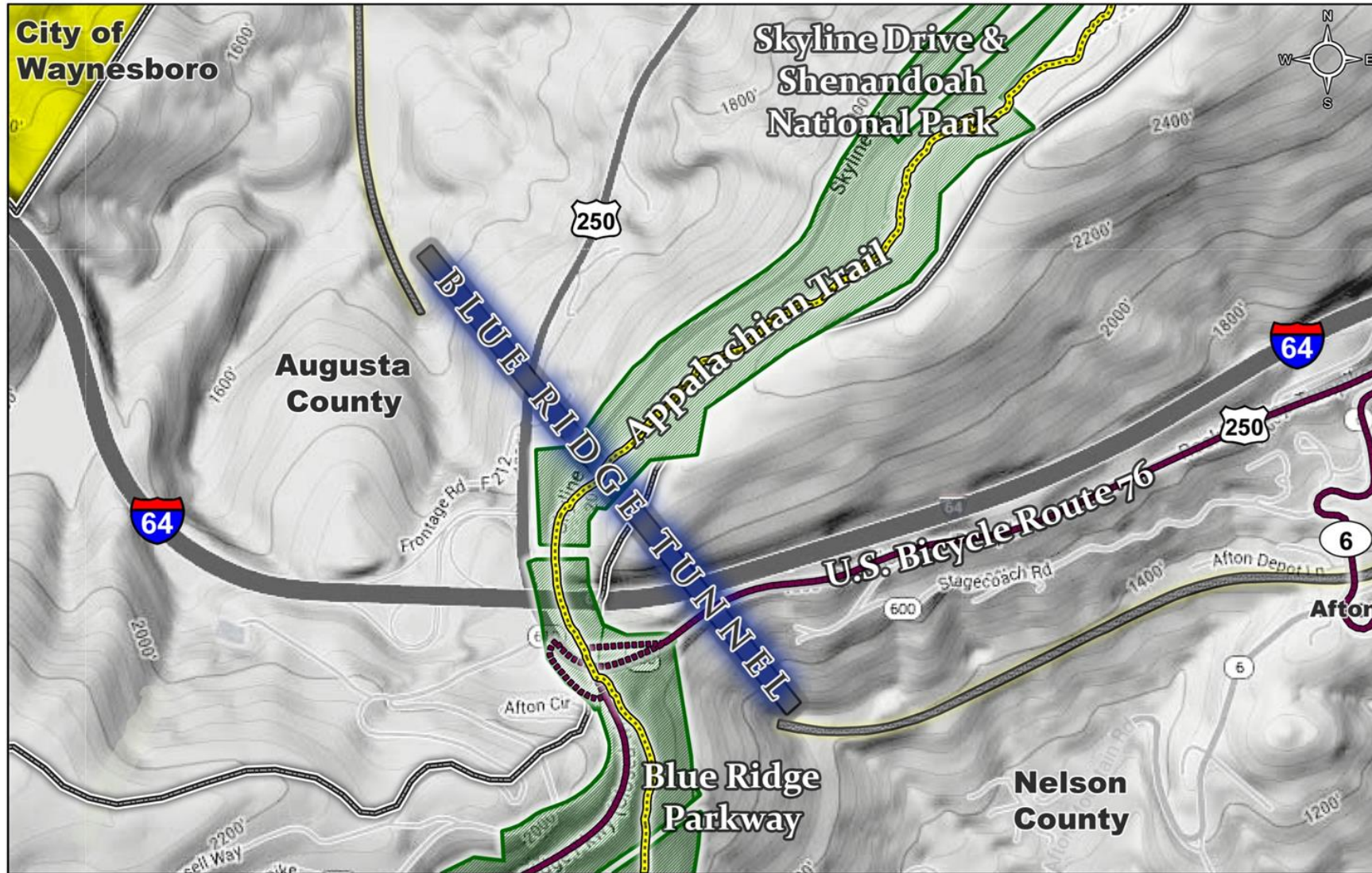
East Trailhead to West Trailhead: 2.25 miles

East Trailhead to East Tunnel Portal
0.63 miles
+37 feet net elevation change
1.5% average trail grade (Max: 5.3%)

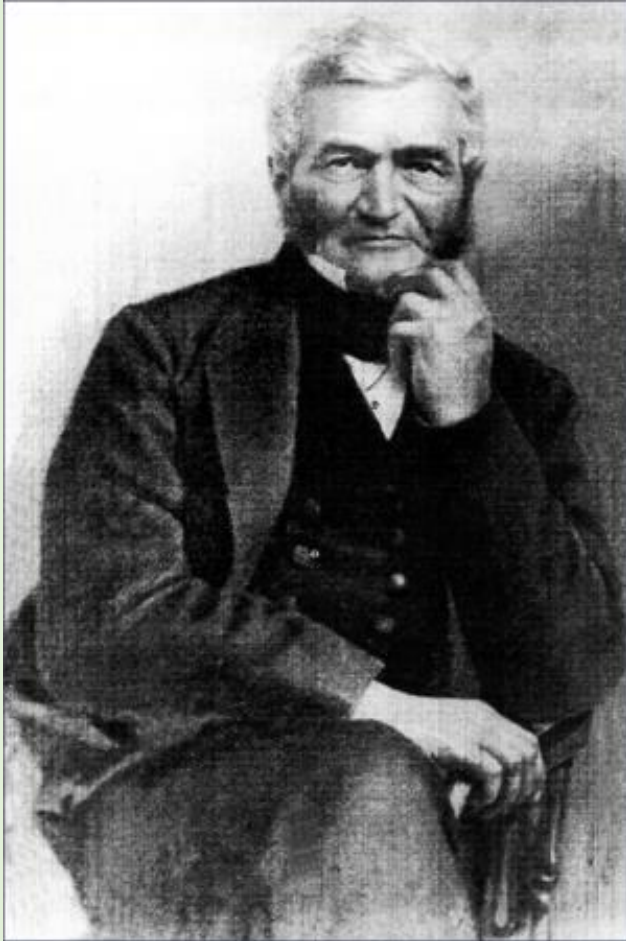
West Trailhead to Western Tunnel Portal
0.81 miles
+175 feet net elevation change
6% average trail grade (Max: 19%)



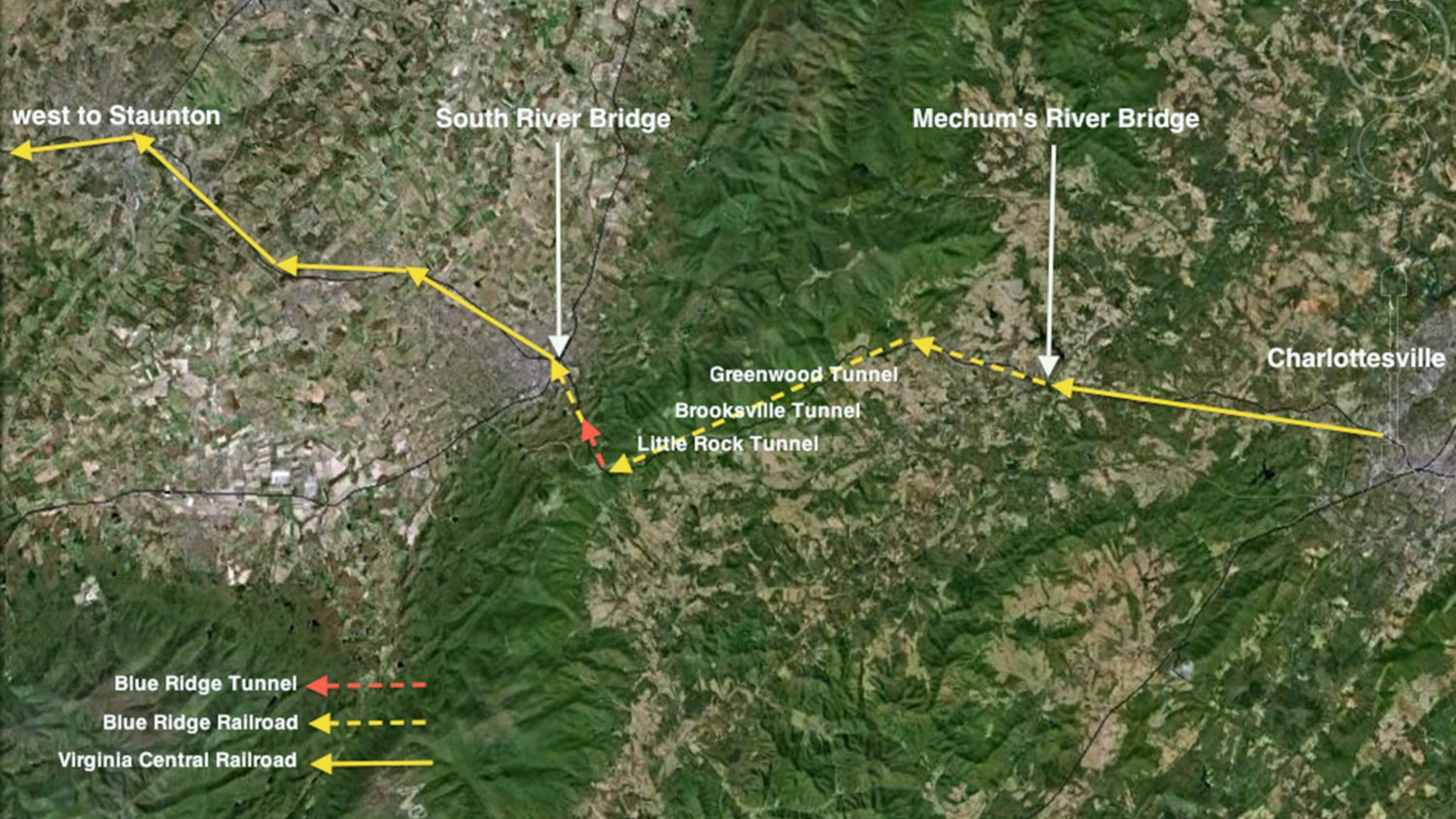
Path Through The Blue Ridge Mountains



Claudius Crozet



- An engineer and military officer in France prior to immigrating to the US.
- An advocate of railroads instead of new canals to take advantage of the newly improved steam engines in the 1840s.
- Was hired for a 3rd stint as Chief Engineer for the State of Virginia in 1849 to lead the design and project for the Blue Ridge Railroad.
- The Blue Ridge Railroad was a 17 mile section of the Virginia Central Railroad consisting of 4 tunnels.



west to Staunton

South River Bridge

Mechum's River Bridge

Charlottesville

Greenwood Tunnel

Brooksville Tunnel

Little Rock Tunnel

Blue Ridge Tunnel

Blue Ridge Railroad

Virginia Central Railroad

Construction Is Underway

- Claudius Crozet hired contractors John Kelly and John Larguet of Kelly and Company in February 1850. Their company consisted of mainly all Irish immigrants who had been working on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Maryland.¹
- March 1850, Construction is underway!
- Year One Progress:²
 - West- 72 feet
 - East- 19 feet

¹John Kelly to John B. Floyd, November 15, 1850, Blue Ridge Railroad Papers, Library of Virginia; Lyons, Thankless Business: Claudius Crozet and the Blue Ridge Railroad – Selected Letters, forthcoming 2017, 402.

²Claudius Crozet to the President and Directors of the Board of Public Works, January 15, 1851, Blue Ridge Railroad Papers, Library of Virginia; Lyons, The Virginia Blue Ridge Railroad, Charleston, S. C.: The History Press, 88-91, 145.

The Light at the Middle of the Tunnel

December 29, 1856

The West meets the East.

Only off by less than 6 inches from Crozet's original calculations.

THE BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL — On Monday morning last, at an early hour, the workmen in the western end of the Blue Ridge Tunnel perforated a hole about two inches in circumference, through the mountain, and in the language of General Gordon, "daylight now shines through the Blue Ridge." This event caused great joy on the part of the workmen, and every one of them immediately laid down their tools to spend the rest of the day in a frolic. The draft at the perforation is strong enough to extinguish a light on the eastern side. Colonel Crozet, Mr. Kelley, Mr. Alexander, of the Charlottesville Jeffersonian, and several other gentlemen were in the eastern tunnel soon after the hole had been cut through, when several toasts, pertinent to the occasion, were drunk. — *Richmond Dispatch.*

Perforation Announcement, Baltimore Sun, Jan 1857

Fast Forward 86 Years

1944: The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway opened a new tunnel parallel to the original Blue Ridge Tunnel.¹



East Portals – Old and New, circa 1950

¹Mary E. Lyons, *The Virginia Blue Ridge Railroad*, Charleston, S. C.: The History Press, 119-122.

1950s – 2000s

- 1950s – Dixie Bottled Gas Corporation installed massive 12ft thick concrete bulkheads to store propane. The venture was unsuccessful due to wet conditions inside the tunnel.
- The tunnel sat unpassable, unused and reclaimed by nature.



Vision for Restoration

- 2001: Nelson county undertook the project that is now the restoration of the historic tunnel to become a public outdoor trail.
- 2007: Nelson County acquired the tunnel through a generous donation from CSX Transportation.
- 2013: Nelson County purchased easements and land for the entire project from the eastern trail in Nelson County to the western trail in Augusta County.

3 Phases

- Phase 1: Eastern Trail and Parking Lot
 - Convert the original railway path to an easily accessible greenway.
 - Install parking next to the old Afton Depot
- Phase 2: Tunnel Restoration
 - Remove bulkheads
 - Repair and replace bricks on western end
 - Apply surface trail throughout the length of tunnel
- Phase 3: Western Trail and Parking Lot
 - Excavate path to designated parking lot
 - Apply surface crushed stone for walkable greenway path
 - Install parking in designed curved lot off of RT 250

Phase 1: Eastern Trail and Parking Lot



Phase 1: Eastern Trail and Parking Lot



Phase 1: Eastern Trail and Parking Lot



Phase 2: Tunnel Restoration



Phase 2: Tunnel Restoration



Phase 3: Western Trail and Parking Lot



Phase 3: Western Trail and Parking Lot



Assisting Partners

- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Commonwealth Transportation Board
- City of Waynesboro
- Woolpert Inc.
- Fielder's Choice Enterprises Inc.
- Whitesell Group
- Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Claudius Crozet Blue Ridge Tunnel Foundation

New Projects Since Opening Day

- Eastern parking lot has been expanded from 12 spaces to 56 spaces.
- Additional interpretative signs along trail.
- Routine trail repairs.
- Additional fencing along property.
- Additional picnic tables added to Eastern Trailhead picnic area as well as to an open grass area along the wester trail.

Know Before You Go

EAST TRAIL INFO

RULES

- Flashlights or headlamps required-tunnel is unlit.
- Trail open sunrise to sunset.
- No motorized vehicles.
- No alcoholic beverages.
- No littering.
If you carry it in, carry it out.
- Dogs must be on leash at all times.
Please clean up after pets.
- Bikes must yield to pedestrians.
- Stay on trail at all times.
- No trespassing on private property (land on either side of the trail.
Active railroad is off limits).
- Respect wildlife. Keep your distance.
Never feed wild animals.
- Follow "Leave No Trace" principles.

SAFETY

- Flashlights or headlamps required!
- Do not leave valuables in your car.
- Do not climb rocks.
- Do not drink unpurified water from inside or outside the tunnel.
- The tunnel stays around 55-65 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Dress appropriately.
The tunnel is damp and water flows and drips constantly in many spots.
- Beware of uneven ground.
Please use caution.



DISTANCES & ELEVATION

Distance from East Trailhead to East Tunnel Portal (entrance)
3,346 ft. (0.63 miles); net change in elevation +37 feet, max. grade 5.3% for 150 feet, most of the rest of the trail is < 1.6%; avg. 1.5%

Length of Tunnel
4,273 feet; change in elevation +55 feet; average grade 1.3%

Trail width is 10 ft. Cross Slope 1-2% for the entire trail. Surface material: crushed stone

West Portal (entrance) to West Trailhead
Length 4,279 feet (0.81 miles); net change in elevation +175 feet; grades range from -17% to +19% for lengths of 150+feet with grades over 5% for a majority of the trail; average grade is 6.5% max grade 19%. One section includes a concrete mat stream crossing that may have water flowing over it during or shortly after rainstorms.

East Trailhead to West Trailhead: 2.25 miles

? Trail or tunnel issues, or concerns, please call: (434) 263-7130



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Bring a flashlight!

East Trail is more easily accessible.

Dress Appropriately:
Constant water flow
Average temperate 60°

Beware of uneven ground.

ENJOY!!!!

WEST TRAIL INFO

RULES

- Flashlights or headlamps required-tunnel is unlit.
- Trail open sunrise to sunset.
- No motorized vehicles.
- No alcoholic beverages.
- No littering.
If you carry it in, carry it out.
- Dogs must be on leash at all times.
Please clean up after pets.
- Bikes must yield to pedestrians.
- Stay on trail at all times.
- No trespassing on private property (land on either side of the trail.
Active railroad is off limits).
- Respect wildlife. Keep your distance.
Never feed wild animals.
- Follow "Leave No Trace" principles.



THE WESTERN TRAIL HAS A MUCH STEEPER INCLINE.
The western trail has very little elevation gain and might be better for individuals seeking a less strenuous experience. Parking at the east side is limited, but includes accessible parking.
No buses may park at the East Trailhead parking lot. Vehicles only. Eastern trailhead parking lot address: 215 Afton Depot Lane, Afton VA 22920

SAFETY

- Flashlights or headlamps required!
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- Do not climb rocks.
- Do not drink unpurified water from inside or outside the tunnel.
- The tunnel stays around 55-65 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Dress appropriately.
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DISTANCES & ELEVATION

Distance from West Trailhead to West Tunnel Portal (entrance)
Length 4,279 feet (0.81 miles); net change in elevation -175 feet; grades range from +17% to -19% for lengths of 150+feet with grades over 5% for a majority of the trail; average grade is 6.5% max grade 19%. One section includes a concrete mat stream crossing that may have water flowing over it during or shortly after rainstorms.

Length of Tunnel
4,273 feet (.081 miles); change in elevation -55 feet; average grade -1.3%

East Portal (entrance) to East Trailhead
3,346 ft. (0.63 miles); net change in elevation -37 feet, max. grade 5.3% for 150 feet, most of the rest of the trail is < 1.6%; avg. 1.5%

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Special Events

Tunnel After Dark

Friday before Halloween



Special Events

Blue Ridge Tunnel Accessibility Day



New Programs

Blue Ridge Packs and Tracks

<https://www.blueridgepacksandtracks.org/>



Accessible Chair Tours

BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL

FREE!
Donations Made To
Blue Ridge
Packs & Tracks

Action Trackchair

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Sundays 1:00pm | Tuesdays 10:00am

How To Register:

Nelson County Parks and Recreation

(434)263-7130

www.nelsoncountyrecreation.com

Scan For
More Info



WOW Moments

Pictures worth a 1000 words



Photo Credit: Jack Looney Photography



Photo Credit: Virginia Tourism Corporation

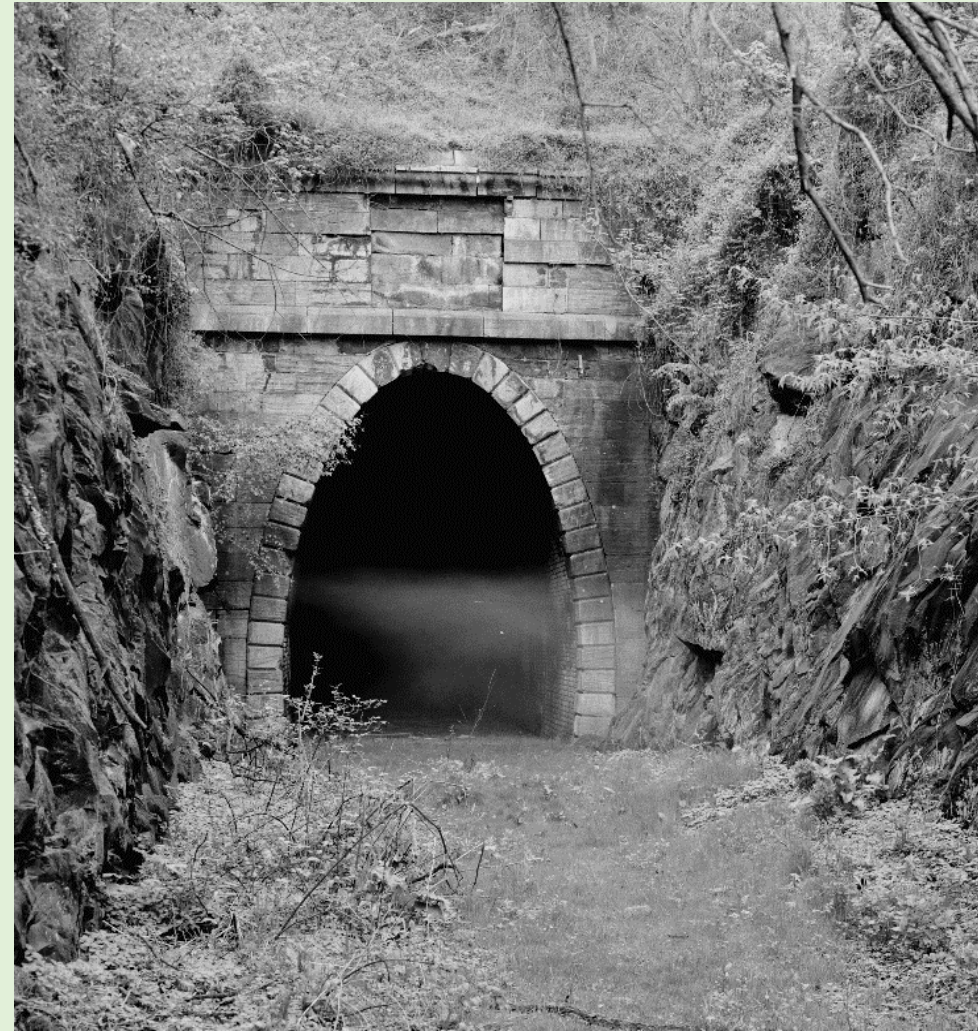


Photo Credit: Unknown



BLUE RIDGE TUNNEL

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