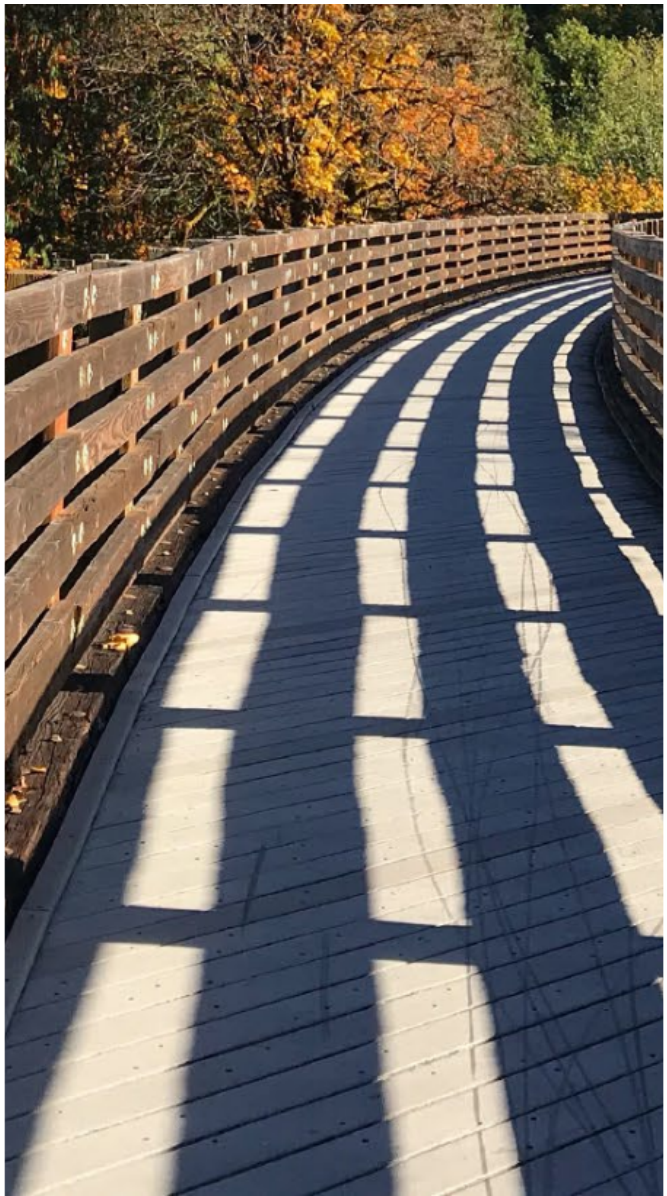
TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

2026

TrailLink Unlimited Guides



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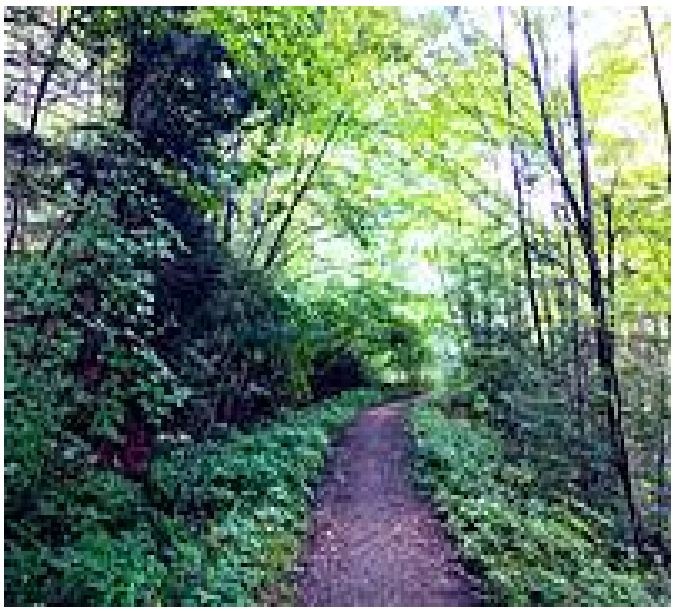

The Blackwater Canyon Trail follows one of the most challenging and picturesque segments of the former West Virginia Central & Pittsburgh Railway. On its 10.7-mile run deep through the Monongahela National Forest in eastern West Virginia, the rough dirt trail passes waterfalls and relics of the railroad and coal industries.

The trail has a steeper than normal grade; in the 1880s, the railroad builders who laid track across the route through the Allegheny Mountains couldn't avoid the forested canyon up the Blackwater River and its North Fork. The uphill grade between Hendricks and Thomas, which climbs 1,200 feet, required trains hauling coal to put on extra locomotives.

Today's visitors can arrange for a shuttle to Thomas to take a one-way downhill ride or choose to steadily climb from Hendricks and coast downhill on the return. The trail surface is rough, so hiking shoes are recommended for hikers, and wide tires are recommended for cyclists.

Located near the top of the grade in the north, Thomas was a bustling center for the coal mines that sprang up nearby and shipped their product via the railroad. Today, many brick buildings from that era house boutiques and antiques stores.

Technically, the trail begins in Thomas, 0.3 mile north of the dam on the North Fork of the Blackwater River, which is near the intersection of US 48 and US 219. Visitors can park in the lot at East Avenue/WV 32, located about 0.3 mile south, and take a short walkway to the trail, or they can use a small lot about a mile south on Douglas Road.

The trail is marred by potholes and ruts from the Douglas Road lot to Douglas Falls, about 1.2 miles downstream. Remains of beehive coke ovens that purified coal are visible along the trail just south of Thomas. More than 600 coke ovens operated in this area, known as Coketon. Interpretive signs posted by Friends of Blackwater mark the sites of old train depots, locomotive roundhouses, and machine shops along the route.

The roaring river at the base of the canyon provides a steady soundtrack to the journey, as do the waterfalls that are occasionally visible along the way. One of the first is Albert Falls, about a mile past the coke ovens. In another half mile, after crossing a trestle over Long Run, you can hear Douglas Falls cascading 35 feet into a pool below. A path leads to an overlook. Plans are in the works to build a pedestrian suspension bridge across North Fork here to connect with a trail heading east to Blackwater Falls State Park near Davis.

The trail becomes narrower as you head south along the main stem of the Blackwater River, a destination for experienced kayakers. The junction with Limerock Trail appears about 5.6

Blackwater Canyon Trail

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States: West Virginia

Counties: Tucker

Length: 10.7miles

Trail end points: Main St/WV 72 at 3rd St (Hendricks) to US 48 & US 219/Seneca Trail (Thomas)

Trail surfaces: Dirt,Gravel

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Mountain Biking,Walking,Cross Country Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

In Thomas, head south on State Route 32 (Spruce Street). Turn right onto Douglas Road, which crosses the trail. Turn left off Douglas Road onto the trail (you can drive on this portion) to reach the trailhead, approximately 1 mile down the road. The trailhead, where there is space for parking, is marked by a Forest Service gate. Additional parking is at 172 East Ave/US 48/WV 32 between the north and south intersections of Spruce St/US 48/WV 32.

In Hendricks, take State Route 72 east through town and turn right on Second Street. The trailhead is on the right. Look for the gazebo and parking at the trailhead.

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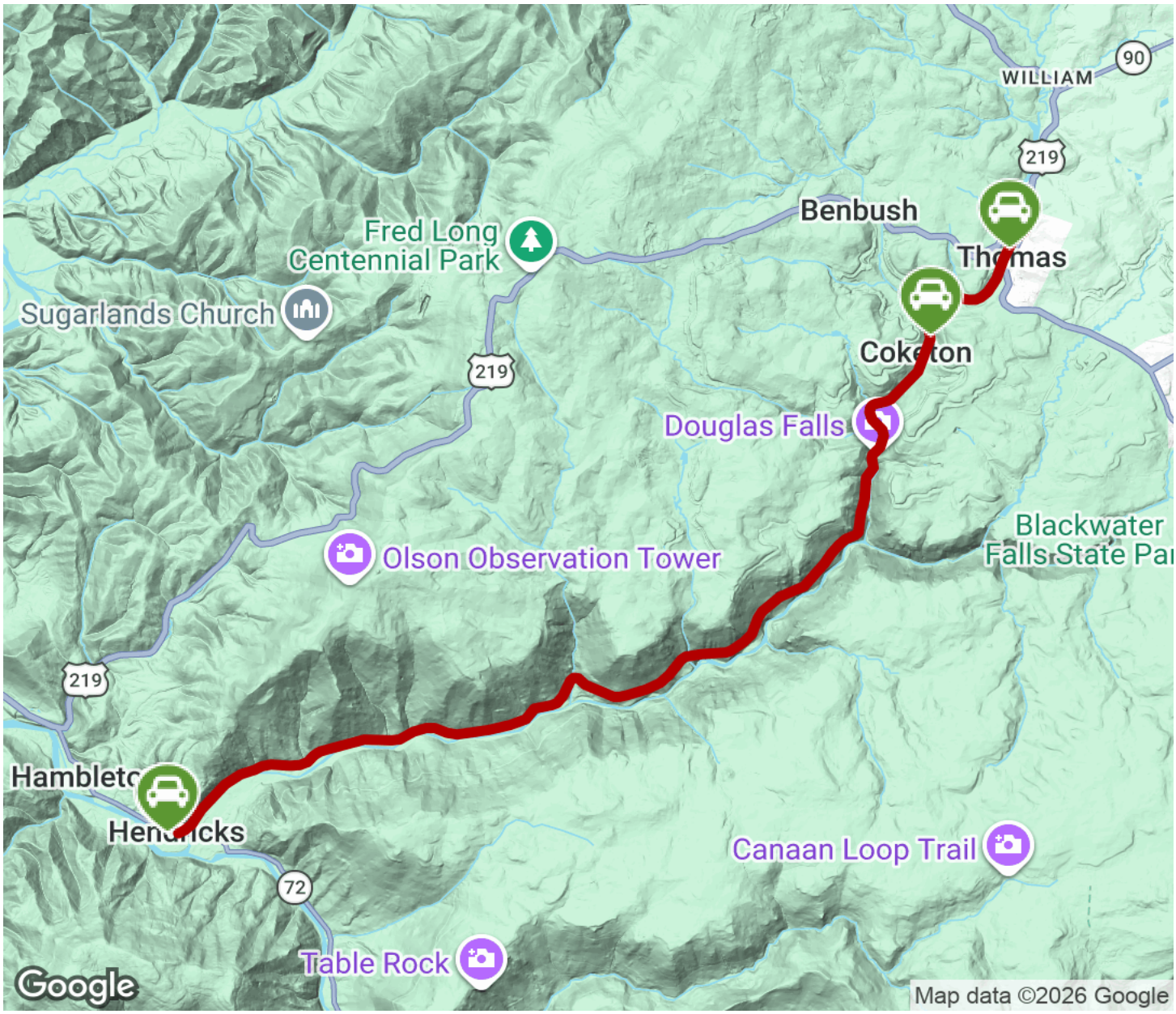

Trailhead Restroom Parking Water Fountain Tunnel

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