

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**historic Phillips-Sprague Mineand or common Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine**2. Location**street & number New River Park☒ not for publicationcity, town Beckley \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_state WV code 54 county Raleigh code 081**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**name City of Beckleystreet & number P.O. Drawer ADcity, town Beckley \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state WV 25801**5. Location of Legal Description**courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Raleigh County Courthouse

street &amp; number \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Beckley \_\_\_\_\_ state WV 25801**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**title Raleigh County Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate September, 1985 \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state ☒ county \_\_\_\_\_ localdepository for survey records Raleigh County Historic Landmark Commissioncity, town Beckley \_\_\_\_\_ state WV 25801

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine is located off Ewart Avenue in the City of Beckley's New River Park. The tract within which the mine is located is bounded by the city's Oakland addition to the east, Combs Addition to the south, and Ewart Heights to the West. A secondary entrance to the park is off Valley Drive (State Route 3).

The Exhibition Mine consists of 1500 feet of restored passageways and entries with 3000 feet of vintage track. Visitors are transported into the mine through the original entry, now enlarged, and into the mine on authentic battery-operated mine cars. Stops are made at a number of exhibits displaying mining equipment and tools dating from the late 19th Century hand-mining era and the machine era of the 1950's-1960's. Certified retired miners serve as guides and mine inspectors who explain equipment, techniques and their own experiences in mines. The coal seam, old entries and even a slate fall can be seen as the mine car moves through the mine. The forty-five minute tour in the dampness, darkness, and 50-degree temperature offers a real experience of a mine environment.

The Phillip's mine is a "drift" mine which was discovered on the Phillips farm when the coal seam was exposed on the side of a hill. Using pick and shovel, the family mined the coal for their own use. During the early commercial years miners used black powder to blast the coal, drilling the powder hole with hand auger, inserting the powder, and lighting the fuse. The miner provided timber roof supports, loaded the coal in a 2,240 pound car which was pulled from the mine by mules. The height of the coal ranged from two to three-and-a-half-feet in thickness, as measured from the bottom of the coal seam, which meant the miner often worked on his knees. The mine was a dangerous working environment because of the presence of water which made the fire clay floor slippery, and the miner wet and cold. The rock above, or within, the coal was heavy draw slate which could and did fall unexpectedly on the miner, injuring or killing him.

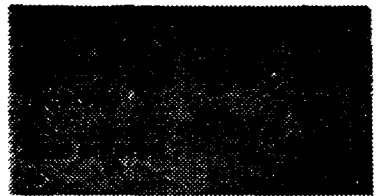
The fabric, working conditions, and equipment of the Phillips-Sprague Mine, whose numerous passageways are often little more than four feet high and seven feet wide, provide the observer with the sense of the evolution of a small West Virginia family-owned drift mine into an important commercial operation. Exhibits within the mine show machinery which gradually replaced hand-loading era tools. Air and electric drills replaced hand augers and powder; roof bolting machines replaced the timber posts, and cutting machines and conveyor belts replaced miners, laborers, and mules. Carbide and later battery-operated lamps replaced kerosene with the miner's hat evolving from canvas to today's modern hard hat. "Mantrip" cars replaced the miner's scooter. Today's tourists are taken into the mine on metal, upholstered cars drawn by battery-operated engines.

In the early 1970's, additional passageways were restored. This expanded the ride from 900' to 1500'.

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Alterations in the mine are confined to the portal, which was enlarged to permit safe access, and to shoring systems which evolved through the industrial era of the mine to provide maximum security to miners. These changes witnessed the appearance of roof bolting machines that replaced timber posts. Both roofing techniques are presently in evidence.

The resources of the nominated property are essentially subterranean. They consist of passageways, fixtures associated with the structural stability of the mine, period tracks, and the mine portal. Above-ground facilities and buildings such as the museum, concession area, restrooms, and sheds are not historic structures and do not contribute to the significance of the nominated resource. Adjoining the mine area is the newly constructed Youth Museum of Southern West Virginia, Inc. whose programs include exhibits and classes depicting southern West Virginia's cultural and industrial traditions. This building also is a noncontributing element.

Contributing Resources - 1 structure (mine)

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** c.1889-1962 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Meets National Register Criteria A and C

The Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine is an authentic historic industrial site, the only preserved example of small coal mines which once dotted the state's mining districts. The mine is also significant because it provides evidence of the evolution of a small West Virginia family-owned drift mine into an important commercial operation. Another area of the resource's significance relates to the interpretation, conservation and preservation of the subterranean structure as a place providing educational opportunities to citizens of the state and traveling public.

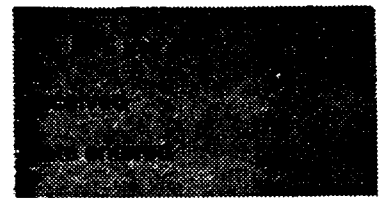
On a farm purchased by the Phillips family in 1850, family members discovered a coal seam exposed on the side of a hill. The extraction of coal from such a deposit is called a "drift" mine operation. Using pick and shovel, the Phillips mined the coal for their private use. By 1905, the Cranberry Coal Company had developed the mine for commercial use. During the early commercial years miners used black powder to blast the coal, drilling the powder hole with hand auger, inserting the powder, and lighting the fuse. The miner provided timber roof supports, leading the coal in a 2,240 pound car which was pulled from the mine by mules. The height of the coal ranged from the bottom of the coal seam, which meant the miner often worked on his knees. The mine was a dangerous working environment because of the presence of water which made the fire clay floor slippery, and the miner wet and cold. The rock above, or within, the coal was heavy draw slate which could and did fall unexpectedly on the miner, injuring or killing him. Such a fatal accident occurred in 1908.

The profits from coal mining were attractive enough, however, to override dangers, setbacks, and expenses. Coal from the Phillips-Sprague mine was shipped over the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad to Hampton, Virginia, where it was sold to New England utilities and to the U.S. Navy for fueling its ships.

The mine was opened c.1889 by descendants of John A. Phillips who purchased 50 acres of land from Alfred F. Beckley in 1850. In 1903, the descendants leased and later sold the land to the Cranberry Fuel Company. The Company began commercial development of the drift mine in 1905 and the first coal was shipped on January 4, 1906. The coal was mined from the Beckley seam with an irregular thickness measuring from two to four feet (low coal). Height and width of the haulageways depended on the thickness of the seam. The mine used the double entry system. A ten foot disc fan ventilated the mine and two pumps drained it. The mine was considered very dangerous because of water, the fire-clay bottom and heavy draw slate mixed with the coal. A Polish miner was killed in the mine by a

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slate fall in 1908. By that time, the mine was about 4000 feet with three entries and employed fifty men and fifteen mules. In 1906, the Cranberry Company became a part of the New River Company. When mine operations ceased in 1953, the New River Company sold 27.45 acres to the City of Beckley for \$10,000., including the old mine buried under the slag pile. The old mine entry was discovered in the late 1950's when the land was being developed as a park. Under the direction of D. Elmer Warden, Beckley Street Commissioner, the mine was drained and cleared. The entry and passageways were opened and restored. Local coal and mining equipment companies provided machines and tools while area residents donated photographs, artifacts and memorabilia. After an inspection by the state mine inspector, the exhibition mine was opened July 23, 1962 and has been in use ever since.

The Beckley Exhibition Coal mine has achieved significance within the last fifty years as the result of pioneering efforts in West Virginia to preserve and interpret an important site associated with the state's coal history. When the exhibition mine opened in 1962, it became the first historic site wholly dedicated to educating the public in West Virginia about coal mining. Coal production has been a basic industry in West Virginia for generations, and West Virginia has long been a leader in the nation's production of bituminous coal. Certified veteran miners provide an authentic view of low seam coal mining from its earliest manual stages to the era of later mechanized operation. The mine thus represents during its period of significance, c.1889-1962, a resource of exceptional importance to community and state by providing a sense of past and place.

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The surface area of the nominated property consists of the mine opening (portal) and adjacent open ground measuring approximately 1/4 acre, at and about the opening. There are no above-ground buildings contributing to the significance of the mine structure. Beginning 25 feet north of the entrance at the ground level center of the entrance, the boundary of the nominated resource extends 25 feet east and 25 feet west; thence 50 feet in a straight line south, 50 feet in a straight line east, and 50 feet in a straight line north, to form a square.

Sub-surface resources include the mine passageways-haulageways marked in red on the sketch map attached.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

West Virginia Department of Mines Annual Reports, 1905-1911.

Beckley Newspaper Industries' files and photographs.

Interviews: Earl Warden, Beckley, WV., retired engineer and surveyor with New River Co. who surveyed and mapped mine in 1950's.

Mine guides: James Dillard, Howard and Thurman Southern.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1/4 acre

Quadrangle name Beckley, WV

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	7
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4	8	2	7	1	0
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4	1	8	1	6	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lois C. McLean, Chairman; Rodney S. Collins, WV Dept. of Culture & History

organization Raleigh County Historic Landmark Commission date February 3, 1988

street & number 217 Granville Avenue telephone 304/348-0240

city or town Beckley state WV 25801

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☒ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 2/17/88

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

PHILLIPS - SPRAGUE MINE, BECKLEY, RALEIGH CO., W.VA.  
SKE H MAP

THE NEW RIVER CO  
TO

CITY OF BECKLEY

PARCEL No 1

27.45 ACRES SURFACE

PORTAL

PORTIONS OF

THE NEW RIVER COS

JOHN PHILLIPS

31.32 ACRE SUR TR

C32°

M.C. BIBB, ET. ALS.

115 ACRES OF 87 POLES TR

PARCEL No 1

27.38 AC. (PHILLIPS) & 207 AC. (BIBB)

PARCEL No 2

0.54 AC. (PHILLIPS)

PARCEL No 3

0.12 AC. (PHILLIPS)

PARCEL No 4

0.30 AC. (PHILLIPS)

OUTCROP

SEAM

GEWELL

BAIR

OAKLAND ADDITION  
CITY OF BECKLEY

— mine passageways

August 18, 1953  
Earl Wadon, Surveyor  
New River Co

(MINE map  
added later - 4' ceiling  
6-7' wide passageways

COMBS

ADDITION

HEIGHTS  
CITY OF BECKLEY  
PARCEL No 4  
0.30 ACRE SURFACE







JEFFREY 61-AM  
CONVEYOR

COURTESY OF - LONG AIRBORNE