

The Ridge Runner Train



Location:

The Ridgerunner Train is located in the Bluefield City Park (Bluefield WV/VA) * Lotito Park.

Other activities at the park include Yakkity Yak playground, streams, walking and bike trails, Tennis courts, Baseball / Basketball, Picnic tables, and Shelters, Horse ring, and more.

Hours of Operation:

Saturdays and Sundays from 12 pm to 6 pm *weather permitting, Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend.

Cost:

All rides are \$ 2.00 per person ... all ages.

Ridge Runner History:

BLUEFIELD, Va. — The fully restored Ridge Runner No. 36 locomotive was back on track as volunteers of the Save the Ridge Runner Committee took a major step in efforts to get the popular attraction back in service.

Thursday morning's re-railing of the Ridge Runner locomotive was an emotional experience. Lecia Smith, co-chair of the committee wore sunglasses, but they did not conceal the tears running down her face when the Cleco crane started lifting the locomotive off the RJ Mine Service utility trailer.

"I have been an emotional mess," Lori Mills said. "I have cried all morning long." In July 2009, Mills organized the initial grassroots effort to save the train after the city announced a plan to remove the tourist train from Lotito Park and place it downtown as a static display saluting the city's railroading history. Mills soon learned that she had hundreds of allies in her quest to save the Ridge Runner, and the city responded by appointing a committee to raise funds to restore the track, locomotive and cars of the train.

A private corporation, Skyland Corp., brought the Ridge Runner to the East River Mountain Overlook in 1964, as part of a larger plan to develop the mountain top into a major tourist attraction. The train attracted tourists to the world's smallest interstate railroad, but the completion of I-77 in 1976 with tunnels through East River and Big Walker Mountains, took traffic away from old U.S. Route 21-52. By the early 1980s, the railroad wasn't self-sustaining, and the city acquired the project with the idea of re-establishing it in Lotito Park.

The city re-launched the Ridge Runner in 1984, but time took a toll on the train and the track and with limited revenues as well as increasing maintenance costs, the city parked the train in its underground tunnel/garage complex where it remained until the a rail excursion to Bluefield from Roanoke, Va., prompted Andy Merriman, the city manager, to consider ways to promote the city's railroad theme.

The Save the Ridge Runner Committee exceeded all expectations with fundraising success, with in-kind and cash donations totaling \$194,357. RJ Mine Services put \$100,000 into the effort in in-kind contributions by restoring the locomotive to its 1964 glory.

Jamie Clark and Timmy Varney of RJ Mine Services carefully placed the locomotive back on the track as Gary Blankenship, a mobile crane operator with Cleco Corp., of Rosedale, Va., gently set the locomotive on the tracks. A small crowd that had gathered Thursday morning to witness the event broke out into a spontaneous round of applause. As the sun peaked through the clouds, the Ridge Runner was on track again for a new era of service to the region.

The task was not easy. Clark and the RJ Mine Service crew totally dismantled the locomotive and rebuilt everything from the ground up. The committee worked with Raymond Woody to replace the old cross ties with new ones and to erect a new depot for passengers to board the train

"What do you think of it?" Bea Paine, co-chair of the committee asked with pride as she, Mary Raub, Steve Coleman, Art Riley, Carl Snyder, Smith and Mills admired the restored train.

Paine coordinated the re-opening celebration that starts at 2 p.m., on Saturday, May 12. The Bluefield High School Band and the Bluefield State College Community Choir will perform and rides will be free throughout the day, according to Paine.

Clark and RJ Mine Service personnel hoped to place the cars on the track Thursday as well. Woody was on hand to assist with any necessary track-related projects as the Ridge Runner rolled again.

Address

Lotito Park
6PWX+M7 Bluefield, Eastern, VA
United States

[View in Google Maps](#)

37.251203368461, -81.249958424337