



Coke Ovens

This long, low, masonry structure is a bank of coke ovens. It is the only structure that survives from Nuttallburg's earliest days. Workers used these ovens to convert coal into a hot-burning fuel called coke.

One of the first things John Nuttall did when he opened the Nuttallburg Mine in 1873 was build 80 coke ovens. Workers produced coke here for nearly 50 years, but changing markets and new technology made coke ovens obsolete. Historians believe Nuttallburg's ovens have been idle since about 1920.

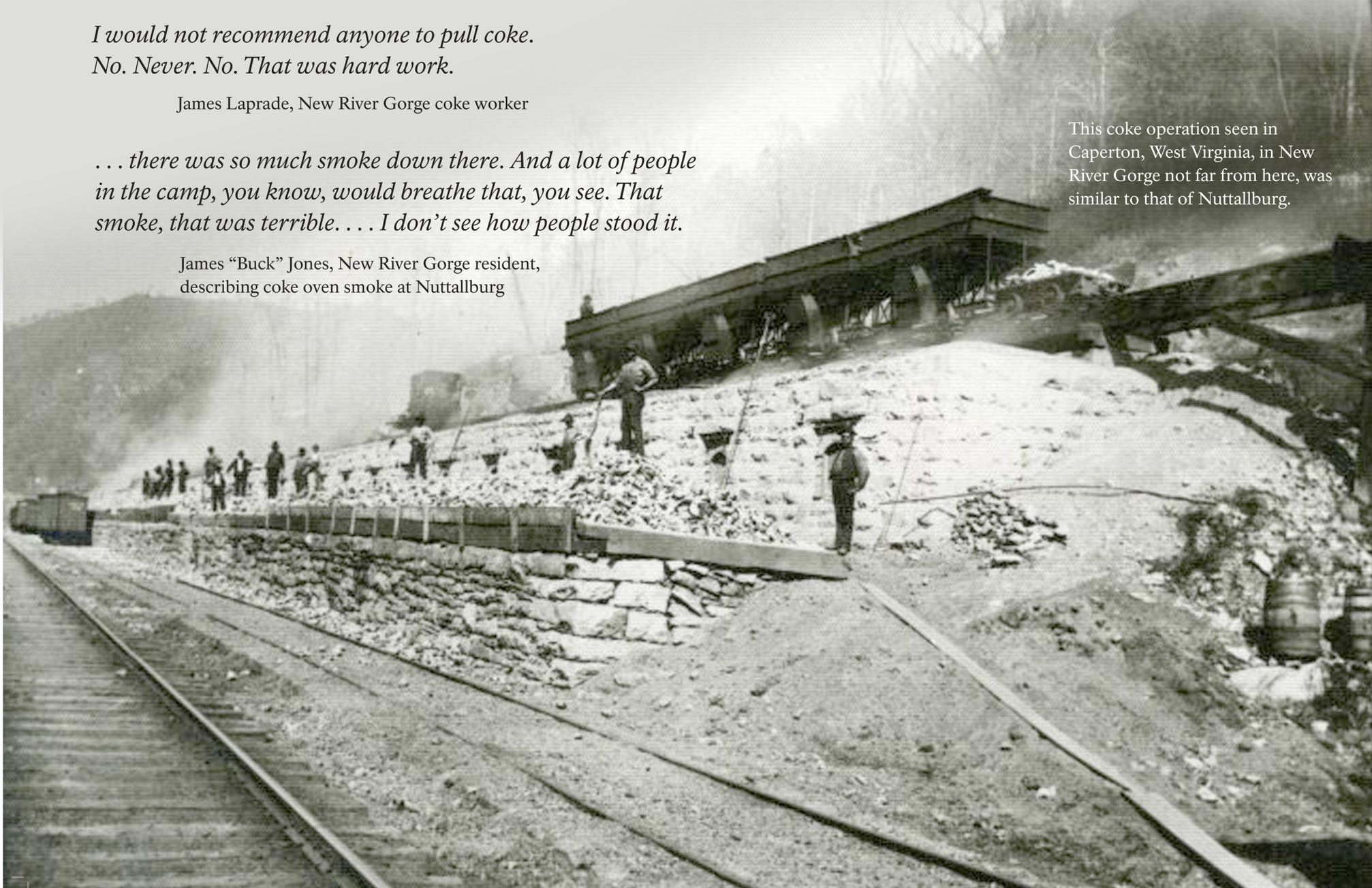
I would not recommend anyone to pull coke. No. Never. No. That was hard work.

James Laprade, New River Gorge coke worker

. . . there was so much smoke down there. And a lot of people in the camp, you know, would breathe that, you see. That smoke, that was terrible. . . . I don't see how people stood it.

James "Buck" Jones, New River Gorge resident, describing coke oven smoke at Nuttallburg

This coke operation seen in Caperton, West Virginia, in New River Gorge not far from here, was similar to that of Nuttallburg.



Other Coke Ovens in New River Gorge



Sewell



Quinnimont



Kaymoor

Making Coke

Used extensively by iron furnaces, coke was highly marketable, and added value to the coal mining operation. Coke is made by baking coal under a regulated flow of air. Raw coal is loaded through the top of the oven, the oven is sealed and allowed to burn for several days, then the coke is pulled from the bottom. Impurities (volatiles) have burned away, leaving only high-carbon coke, which burns hotter than coal.



Coke



Coal