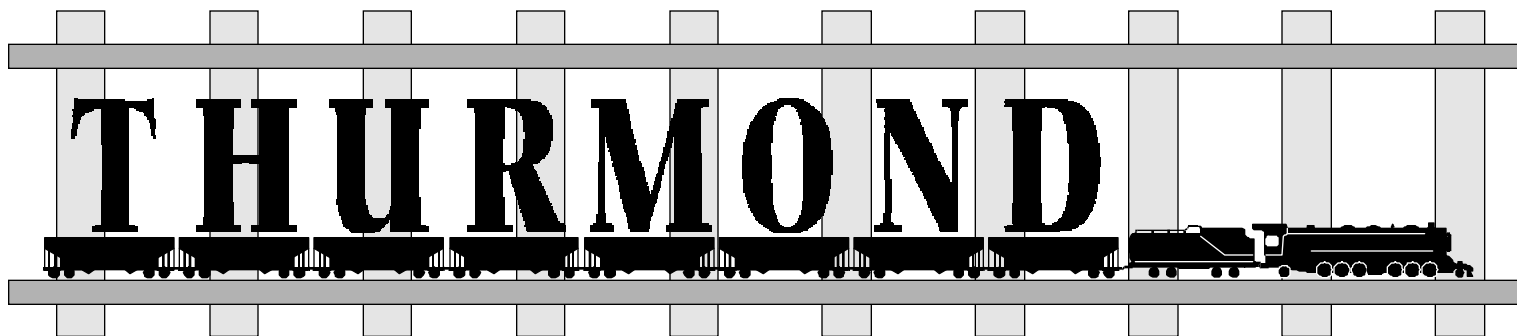


# New River Gorge

National River  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



In the mid-1800s, many changes were taking place throughout the United States due to the industrial revolution. The steam engine brought the boom of railroads, and the demand for iron created blast furnaces throughout the East. This rapid increase in industry created two needs—a way to transport goods and materials, and a reliable source of fuel. New River Gorge provided both of these—a path for the railroads, and a steady supply of coal.

Captain William D. Thurmond came to this area in 1873 to survey a parcel of land. As payment for his work, he was given seventy-three acres of land along the New River. With most of the land on the flanks of a steep hillside, it didn't appear to be a very promising piece of property. But another event that occurred in 1873 was destined to shape the future of Thurmond—the completion of the main line of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad through the New River Gorge.

Prosperity did not come immediately to Captain Thurmond's property. However, as more coal mines opened throughout the area, the town began to boom. A passenger depot, freight station, and engine house were constructed; along with water tanks, coal and sand towers. Houses sprung up and dotted the hillside. A hotel,



**The Town of Thurmond, early 1900s.** Photo by William O. Trevey. From the collection of Bill Hickman.

bank, meat-packing plant, department store, drug store, and several restaurants and boarding houses soon took their places in this busy little town. This unlikely bend in the New River became the center of one of the major rail lines in the East.

During its boom years in the first two decades of the 1900s, Thurmond handled twice as much freight as Richmond, Virginia and Cincinnati, Ohio combined. Travelers could catch one of the fourteen passenger trains that came through Thurmond each day. Over one hundred people in Thurmond worked directly for the railroad as laborers, machinists, brakemen, engineers, dispatchers,

and baggage handlers. Many others served the town as bankers, druggists, cobblers, clerks, and waitresses.

By the 1930s, however, business in Thurmond was slowing down. The depression had its grip on the entire country. Trains still rumbled through, but not nearly as often. Business picked up during World War II, but Thurmond's grand days were coming to an end—an end brought about by diesel locomotives. The Chesapeake & Ohio was one of the last railways to convert from coal-fired locomotives to diesels. But eventually diesel engines replaced steam locomotives, and the once bustling town of Thurmond was no longer an essential stop.



**Thurmond Depot and Freight Station.** Photographer unknown, about 1915. Courtesy C & O Historical Society.

## The Thurmond Depot

Originally constructed in 1904, the Thurmond Depot was restored to serve as a park visitor center. Exhibits and historic furnishings enable visitors to look back to the time when steel rails, steam, and coal were the major themes in our nation's history.

Trains still pass through Thurmond daily—providing a look at the railroad industry today. **Use caution when exploring the history of the area, and stay off all railroad tracks and railroad right-of-ways.**

## Thurmond Today

As less labor was required to dispatch and service the trains, and maintain the tracks, the town of Thurmond was steadily abandoned. Many of the buildings that filled the landscape are now gone—victims of fire, decay, and salvage. Without the crucial jobs offered by the railroad, most of the residents moved on. Isolated from highways and development, the town today appears captured in the past.

But Thurmond is far from dead, as its remaining residents and the many who have lived and visited here will gladly tell you. People still come to

Thurmond, but they no longer come looking for work in the mines, or jobs on the railroad. They come for the New River—to fish, hike, and begin their whitewater trips. They come to relive history—the railroad, the trains, the people, and Thurmond’s colorful past.

New River Gorge National River invites visitors to experience the impact of the industrial revolution, the passage of time, and the National Park Service’s mission to preserve our history and heritage.

## Getting There

Thurmond is located in southern West Virginia, within New River Gorge National River. It is approximately 12 miles north of Beckley, and 68 miles east of Charleston.

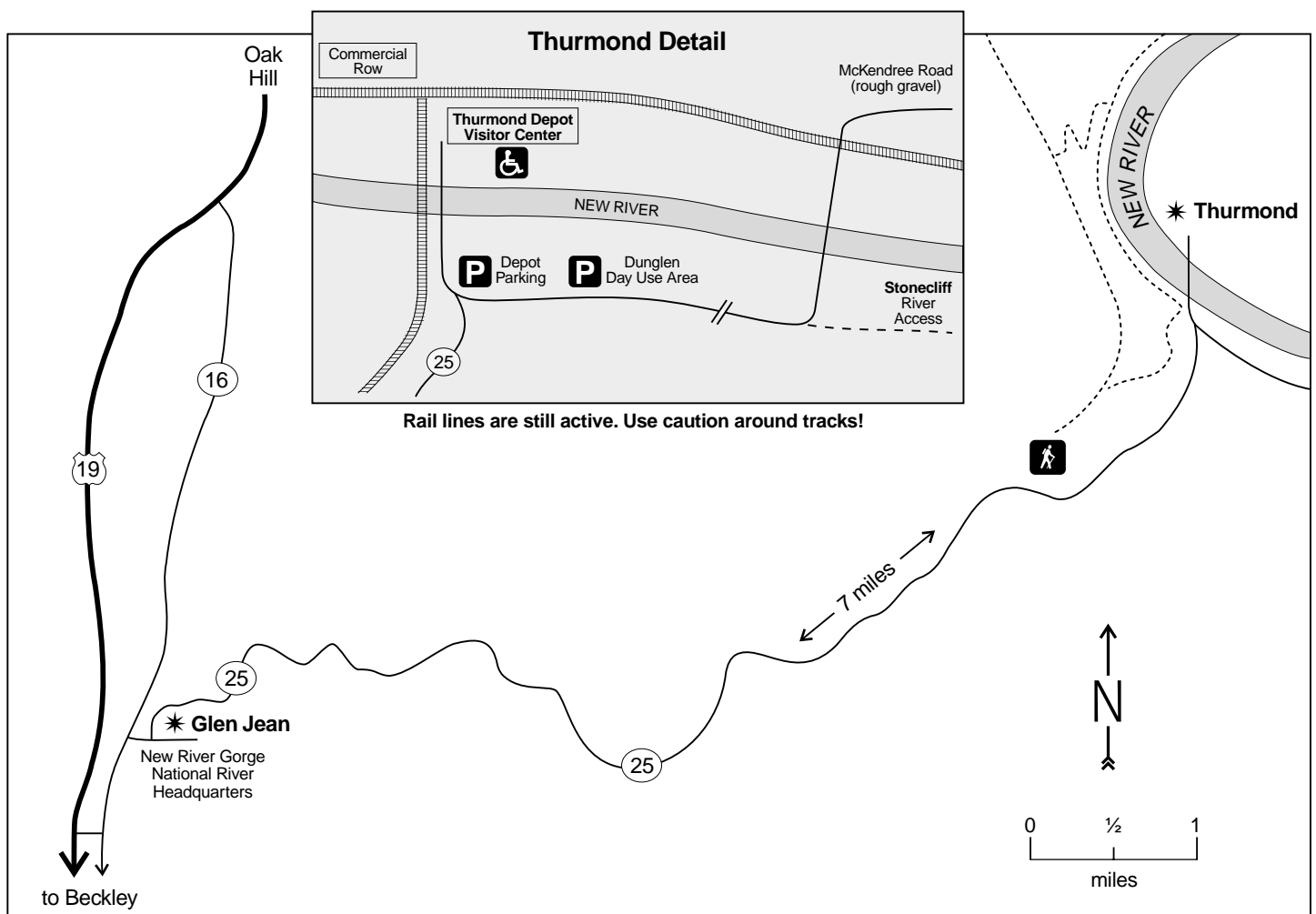
Take U.S. Route 19 (accessible from I-64, I-77, and I-79) to the Glen Jean exit, north of Beckley. Turn at the signs that indicate “Glen Jean” and “Thurmond”.

Take an immediate left, and go ½ mile to Glen Jean. Take a right on State Route 25, and follow the signs to Thurmond. It is seven miles from Glen Jean to Thurmond.

Thurmond is also accessible by train. AMTRAK comes through the New River Gorge three days a week. For information call: (800) USA-RAIL.

For information on area lodging and facilities call the WV Travel Bureau at: (800) CALLWVA, or the Fayette County Chamber of Commerce at: (800) 927-0263.

**Note: State Route 25 is a winding, narrow road. There are several one-lane bridges, active rail crossings, and very narrow sections of road. Please drive carefully!**



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER  
P.O. Box 246  
Glen Jean, WV 25846  
(304) 465-0508

