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Tennessee's Great Valley

# Dunlap Coke Ovens

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ca. 1899

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350 Mountain View Road, Dunlap, TN  
National Register of Historic Places

Situated along the remains of historic Hill Road and Coops Creek in Dunlap, Tennessee, the Dunlap Coke Ovens Park offers a glimpse into the mining industry that was once a thriving economic sector in the Sequatchie Valley.



## Dunlap Coke Ovens Park

**T**he Dunlap Coke Ovens Park is an 88-acre historical park in Dunlap, Tenn., that preserves the remains of 268 beehive coke ovens used from 1899 until 1927. The Dunlap coke facility converted coal mined on Fredonia Mountain into coke that was used in steel production at foundries in Chattanooga and Birmingham.

Prior to the opening of the coke facility, most residents in the Sequatchie Valley survived by subsistence farming. In the 1880s, the railroad arrived along with major coal mining operations.

Originally built in 1899 by the Douglas Coal and Coke Company, the operation was purchased in 1905 by the Chattanooga Iron and Coal Company.

When the ovens were in use, the area adjacent to the ovens contained a company town of approximately 200 wood-framed houses, two hotels and a Commissary. At its peak in 1920, the mining operation employed about 350 people. The museum (open seasonally) was built to look exactly like the company store that once stood in the exact site.

After a boiler explosion destroyed the coal washer in 1916, the operation was sold to Southern States Iron and Coal Company. The company operated until 1927, when falling coal prices and the onset of the Depression caused the company to shut down.

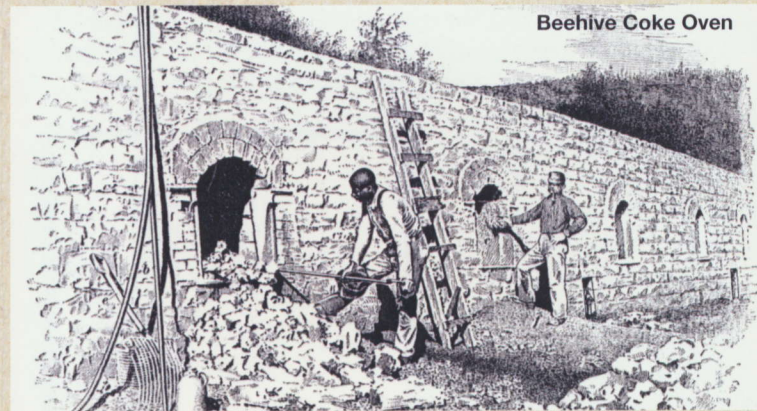
In 1985, the ovens were placed on the National Register of Historic Places and was opened as a park in 1987.

## Beehive Coke Ovens:

The Dunlap Coke Ovens Park features five batteries of 268 “beehive ovens,” so-called because of their shape. Each oven is 12 feet in diameter, with a sandstone exterior, firebrick interior and openings at the top and side.

In the early 1900s, railroad tracks ran across the top of each battery. An incline railway connected a coal mine further up the mountain to the coke ovens. Railroad cars would carry coal from the mine to the batteries.

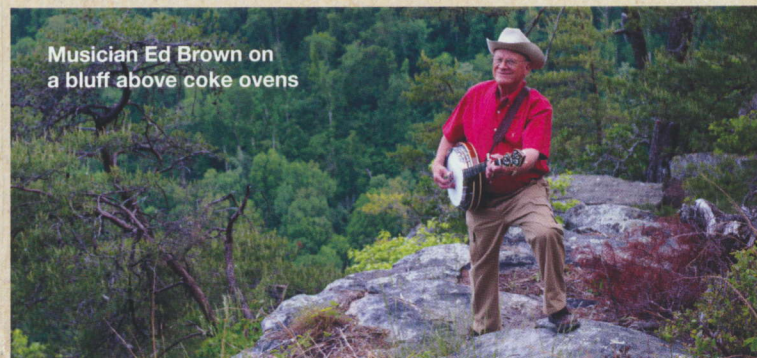
Unused since the 1920s, all of the ovens have undergone some deterioration, but still retain most of their historical and architectural integrity. The ovens are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Beehive Coke Oven

## Dunlap Coke Ovens Bluegrass Festival:

One of Dunlap’s longest-running events, the Coke Ovens Bluegrass Festival celebrates the traditional bluegrass music of the Sequatchie Valley. The event is held the first weekend of June at the outdoor amphitheater at Dunlap Coke Ovens Park.

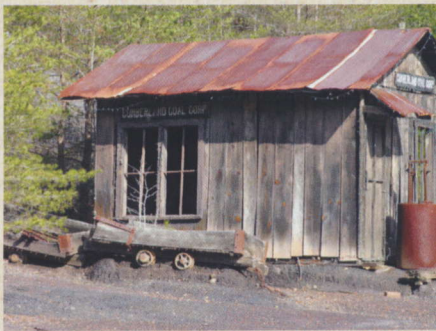


Musician Ed Brown on a bluff above coke ovens

## Dunlap Coke Ovens Museum

When the coke ovens were in use, the area adjacent to the ovens contained a company town of approximately 200 wood-framed houses, two hotels and a Commissary. At its peak in 1920, the mining operation employed about 350 people. The museum was built to look exactly like the company store that once stood in the exact site.

Today, the park's museum – a replica built at the original site of the company store - houses the largest collection of regional historic coal mining photographs in the state of Tennessee and features hundreds of mining artifacts, as well as historical objects common to the early settlers of Sequatchie County and Dunlap.



## Tennessee's Great Valley: The Sequatchie Valley Scenic Byway

The Sequatchie Valley is one of Tennessee's most dramatic landscapes. Bordered by Tennessee's South Cumberland Plateau and Walden's Ridge on each side, the valley offers a striking visual contrast of rocky bluffs and a rolling valley floor. The valley's history includes Native American settlements, as well as railroad and coal mining industrial booms.

Recently named Tennessee's Great Valley, The Sequatchie Valley National Scenic Byway is the perfect way to enjoy Tennessee's authentic landscape.

Learn more at  
[TNGreatValley.com](http://TNGreatValley.com)





## Historic Hill Road Trail of Tears Segment

**National Register of Historic Places  
Trail access at Dunlap Coke Ovens Museum,  
350 Mountain View Road, Dunlap, TN**

A section of original Trail of Tears route on Hill Road ascends the eastern face of the Cumberland Plateau from the Coke Ovens Park in Dunlap to the modern, paved Fredonia Road. The road, which was created during the 1820s, originally connected McMinnville with the Sequatchie Valley and the Tennessee River. Originally, the road connected with Poe Road in the Sequatchie Valley, crossed Walden's Ridge, and continued on to the Tennessee River.

By the 1830s, Hill Road was one of only a few roads passable by wagons over the Cumberland Plateau. To the northeast of Hill Road was the Higgenbotham Trace, a major wagon road across the plateau built by Aaron Higgenbotham in the early 1800s.

This section of Hill Road in Dunlap was utilized by an estimated 1,900 Cherokee people during the Trail of Tears in 1838 (two detachments led by Richard Taylor and James Brown). This roadbed has been accurately identified as one of the roadbeds used by the Cherokee people through historical research, early 19th century maps, and on-site field investigations.

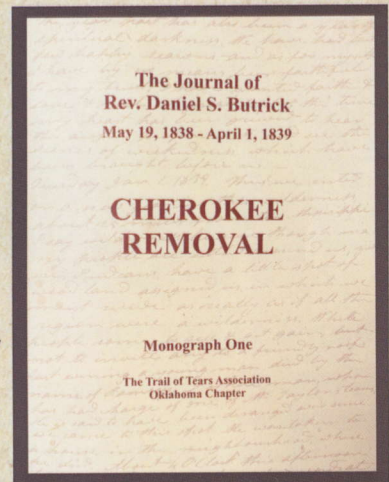
James Brown's detachment appears to have camped in the Sequatchie Valley and ascended the Cumberland Plateau in early November 1838. From Sequatchie Valley, they climbed the plateau on Hill Road and continued westward toward McMinnville. Richard Taylor's detachment followed five or six days later. Rev. Daniel S. Butrick, a Baptist Missionary, accompanied the Richard Taylor detachment and kept a journal of their journey.



In 1902, the Douglas Coal and Coke Company began construction of coke ovens on the south side of Hill Road. Later owned by the Chattanooga Iron and Coke Company, 268 coke ovens were built to extract coke from the nearby coal mines. Several maps of this coal mining operation show the continued usage of Hill Road well into the early 20th century.

With the increased use of the automobile and a statewide emphasis on highway construction, this original section of the Hill Road was bypassed when a new gravel road was built from Dunlap to Fredonia during the late 1920s. Known as Fredonia Road, this new roadbed incorporated some of the original Hill Road right-of-way as it neared the top of the South Cumberland Plateau. Fredonia Road became the primary road leading from Dunlap to the northwest and numerous sections of the Hill road were abandoned.

Hill Road retains much of its integrity from the 19th century and provides a physical link and sense of time and place for the actual Cherokee experience.



Rev. Daniel Butrick's journal.



[Sequatchie.com](http://Sequatchie.com)