6

ESTABLISHING
INTERPRETIVE CONTENT:
HISTORIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Identifying Research Questions

The development of any historical site interpretation program must be grounded in rigorous research into the historiographic record. Having said this, however, the body of literature on any given historical subject, including Appalachian slavery, is often both deep and wide-ranging. For this reason, historiographic research must be focused and guided by specific research questions. The research questions formulated to guide the development of the Appalachian slavery interpretive complex emerged from the decisions discussed in previous chapters regarding the nature of the proposed interpretive complex itself. These decisions are:

- the educational goal of the interpretive complex (Chapter 1)
- the three interpretive program components (Chapter 2)
- the design approach (Chapter 4)
- the interpretive approach (Chapter 5)

Underlying these four decisions about the nature of the proposed interpretive complex was a set of attitudes about how visitors would interact with the site and the types of experiences the interpretive program would provide. These attitudes necessitated historiographic research focused not merely on the basic characteristics of Appalachian slavery and its manifestation in the landscape but also an understanding of the cultural, social, and environmental forces that shaped it.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the goal of the interpretive complex is to provide visitors with an opportunity to learn about the landscape of Appalachian slavery from the slave's perspective. This necessitated research into not only the behavior of slaves in the landscape but also their own internal understanding of their environment and their place in it. Given that the experiential nature of both the design and interpretive approaches adopted require visitors to engage in role-play, an emphasis was also placed on identifying specific events or circumstances common to Appalachian slavery that could be enacted by visitors and interpreters during both the self-guided daytime walks and the nighttime tour. The emphasis on the experiences of runaway slaves decided upon for both the daytime walks and nighttime tour meant, of course, that a great deal of this information was needed on the experiences of runaway slaves in particular.

The set of research questions developed to reflect these areas of emphasis are listed below. The goal of the historiographic research conducted in response to these questions was to provide a set of guiding design concepts as well as a palette of interpretive content elements from which to draw during the development of the physical site design and the interpretive programming. Which content elements would eventually appear in the final design and exactly how they would manifest themselves on the site would, to a great extent, depend on the opportunities and limitations of the site selected.

Distinguishing Features of Appalachian Slavery
- How did the mountain environment influence the character of slavery in the region?
- How was slavery in Appalachia different from that of the rest of the South?
- What were the effects of slavery on mountain slaves?

Adaptations of the Mountain Landscape
- How was social/economic power manifested in the landscape?
- How did slaves adapt the landscape to their advantage?
- How did members of the white power structure adapt the landscape to their advantage?

Experiences of Appalachian Slaves
- What were the settings of mountain slavery?
- What were the typical activities of mountain slaves?
- What were the typical experiences of mountain slaves?
- Who did mountain slaves interact with and how?

Experiences of Runaway Slaves
- What motivated slaves to run away?
- What methods of travel and navigation did they use? How did they move through the landscape? How did the landscape itself influence their movement?
- What were the typical experiences of runaways?
- What emotional, psychological, and physical reactions were typical of a runaway slave?

RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods were identified that offered the best potential to yield answers to the research questions. Although each research method was pursued independently, the results of each ultimately reinforced the conclusions of the other. The two research methods selected to best fulfill the research objectives were:

- a qualitative content analysis of narratives left by runaway slaves (Appendix B)
- a literature review of recent scholarship on Appalachian slavery (Appendix C)

Content Analysis

The primary goal of this qualitative content analysis was to address the research questions involving runaway slaves. The interpretive emphasis on the experiences of runaways from their own perspective for both the daytime walks and the nighttime tour led to the selection of the mostly first-person narratives of runaway slaves as a vital source of information regarding the runaway's experience. Although these narratives were sometimes exaggerated or distorted by the Northern abolitionists who often published the accounts to bolster their political cause, as a body, the narratives still represent the most reliable and richest accounts of the journey north from the runaway's perspective.

A qualitative approach was chosen for the narrative analysis because in addition to an inventory of the types of experi-

ences recounted by the runaways and the methods of landscape appropriation they employed, the larger goal of the analysis was to gain an understanding of the attitudes or world views that shaped the runaways' reaction to and behavior in the landscape. In other words, the intent of the content analysis was to focus not just on the words themselves but on the meanings behind them. Whereas quantitative content analyses typically focus on "the frequency and variety of messages" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160) found in the data (i.e., the number of times certain words or phrases occur in each narrative), the qualitative approach looks beyond the specific words used in the narratives to the "themes and recurring patterns of meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160) in the data. For example, runaways reported in their narratives acquiring food from a wide variety of sources, including other slaves, unattended barns, and remote fields. The importance of this information was not merely in the sources of food they named, but in the common strategies of occupying the landscape they indicated—namely, the appropriation of the unsurveilled margins of the white landscape (plantations, towns, and farmsteads) for survival.

The content analysis was performed on seventeen runaway slave narratives that contained sufficient detail regarding the landscape. Although the narratives are sometimes vague about the route taken north, efforts were made to ensure that the landscapes described in the narratives selected exhibited characteristics common to the Appalachian region, such as mountainous terrain, forests, and streams. The narratives of slaves whose escapes took place primarily in coastal regions or by boat were eliminated because of the dissimilarity of these environments to that of Appalachia.

With the research questions as a guide, the narratives were analyzed one-by-one, using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Merriam, 1998) described in the Site Design Precedents section of Chapter 4. Information relevant to the research questions was sorted into descriptive groupings or categories that were continually modified as each new narrative was analyzed. As Altheide explains, this method is typical of content analyses: "Although categories and 'variables' initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160). Appendix B contains the results of the content analysis.

Literature Review of Secondary Sources

In recent years, professional historians' understanding of Appalachian slavery has evolved. Before this sea-change, slavery in the Mountain South was largely ignored or dismissed by scholars who believed the institution was insignificant in Appalachia, both in terms of the low numbers of enslaved and the absence of any distinguishing characteristics of slavery in the region worthy of study. Appalachian slavery was often dismissed with the evocation of the stereotyped image of the insular and staunchly independent mountain farmer whose egalitarian Scotch-Irish upbringing could not tolerate the concept of enslaving his fellow man.

This caricature, however, has given way under the weight of new scholarship to an understanding of the Mountain South as a socially, politically, and economically active region with strong economic and cultural ties to the rest of the South. Although some mountain residents did oppose slavery, as a whole, the region displayed a dependence on slaves as a source of economic profit and social status that was common throughout the South. Despite this shared world view, however, the

expression of slavery in the landscape was strongly influenced by the Appalachian environment. Recent scholarship has shown that the characteristics of the mountain landscape played a critical role in the evolution of a uniquely Appalachian approach to slavery.

In light of the evolution of historiographic research on slavery in the Mountain South, it was believed that the only way to gain an accurate understanding of Appalachian slavery in terms of the research questions identified was to review the existing research on Appalachian slavery. The result was not only a fuller understanding of the nature of Appalachian slavery but one grounded in an understanding of the biases inherent in some of the past research into the topic. See Appendix C for the results of the literature review.

RESEARCH SYNTHESIS:
GUIDING DESIGN CONCEPTS

The historiographic research yielded an almost overwhelming amount of material for possible inclusion in the interpretive complex. The question then arose, How could all of these content elements be organized into a coherent interpretive program and physical landscape for visitors? Clearly, a brief set of overall themes or concepts was needed to guide the process of selecting content elements and shaping the design of the physical landscape and interpretive program of the complex. This section presents the two guiding concepts that emerged from a synthesis of the historiographic research results. These guiding design concepts describe Appalachian slaves' overall

relationship to the physical landscape and, by extension, to the social, cultural, and economic landscape of the region. They represent the key understandings of Appalachian slaves' position in the landscape that the interpretive complex must convey to visitors, and as such, they play an important role in the design process of the complex.

Subversive Appropriation of the Landscape. Slaves were at once intimately connected with the landscape and estranged from it. With the strength of their hands and backs, they cleared the land, planted it, harvested it, built upon it, and mined it. Yet they had no legal claim to it. But slaves' daily experiences in the landscape defied the proclamations of civil law, as they "gradually identified . . . spaces as theirs through a routine of innumerable domestic acts" (Vlach, 1993, p. 235). Their daily interaction and familiarity with the land fostered a psychological attitude of ownership that was expressed in subtle, subversive ways. They used landscape elements not as they were intended by the Southern gentry that ultimately determined the appearance of the landscape but in ways that served their own needs. As Vlach (1993) says, "Slaves overturned the logic that their owners used to place themselves well up in the social landscape [and] privately remapped the domains designed by planters, reconceptualizing their various assigned landscapes in ways that they found more suitable" (p. 230). With no churches open to them, for example, slaves appropriated nearby forests or remote outbuildings for religious services. Unschooled in geography, many slaves who ran away used the same roads that once carried them into slavery as a guide to free territory. Hungry slaves denied adequate nutrition hunted for food in their master's chicken coups, fields, and milk houses after dark. While their masters visibly manipulated the environment to

demonstrate and propagate their own authority, slaves used their intimate knowledge of their immediate environment to temporarily appropriate it and subvert its intended uses to serve their own needs. As Vlach (1993) concludes, "Acts of territorial appropriation were exceedingly clever because they were carried out, in the main, simply by the slaves' occupying the spaces to which they were assigned" (p. 235).

Tension Between Center and Periphery. These spaces to which slaves were assigned in the landscape, and which they frequently appropriated, were typically at the periphery of their master's territories. Just as slaves held only marginal status legally, economically, and socially, they were also relegated to the physical margins of the landscape of Southern gentry—the edges of plantations, farmsteads, and towns. In the physical landscape as in all arenas of Southern life, a slave's position was defined relative (and subordinate) to that of his master. For example, he was typically housed in a cabin outside of his master's house and, like a moon caught in the gravitational field of a larger mass, sited in relationship to it. Slaves' presence on the periphery—both socially and physically—reinforced the authority of the center; without slaves there could be no masters. Thus, the Southern slave culture developed a paradoxical tension between master and slave—center and periphery. Each grew dependent on the presence of the other while also seeking to distance themselves and assert their autonomy.

This tension is perhaps displayed most dramatically in the strategies employed by runaway slaves. Rarely did runaways head out into the midst of the undifferentiated, unknown wilderness of the backcountry in an effort to maximize their distance from whites who may try to recapture them. Especially for the majority of slaves that had little knowledge of geography, this no-man's-land offered no assurances of finding food and shelter—not to mention the way north. Instead, most runaways hugged the margins of farmsteads, plantations, and towns in their journeys. Only in proximity to these centers of white authority could they hope to find fellow slaves that might help them, a remote and unattended cornfield or chicken coop that could provide the next meal, or roads that indicated the way to free territory. This created a strange tension: the success of a runaway's journey depended in large part on staying near the very places he was fleeing.

These peripheries often took the form of edges between spatial conditions—the hedgerow bordering a field, the thicketed edges of farmsteads, or a dense forest lining a road. Such spaces offered access to the advantages of the white landscape for runaways, such as food sources or use of the road as a navigational aid, while still providing cover and relative safety. Even those slaves who chose not to flee exploited these edges on a frequent basis, whether using forests between adjacent farmsteads as nightly meeting places for socializing or trading or simply to avoid harassment from the slave patrollers who watched the main roads. Slaves were adept at exploiting these spatial edges at the periphery of their masters' territories.

7

SELECTING THE SITE

Establishing Site Selection Criteria

Site selection began with the development of a set of site selection criteria. These criteria describe characteristics necessary for the successful development of the interpretive complex. The criteria are based on desirable site characteristics as determined by consideration of

- the Constructivist Design Approach (Chapter 4)
- the historiographic research (in terms of both the individual content elements and the guiding design concepts synthesized from them; Chapter 6)
- qualities of a successful tourist destination

The site selection criteria are summarized below in terms of these three considerations.

Constructivist Design Approach Criteria

The Constructivist Design Approach stresses making design decisions that ultimately facilitate a one-on-one connection between the visitor and the site. Although the Constructivist Design Approach is perhaps most prominent in the conceptual design phase (Chapter 9), considering the approach during the site selection phase can help facilitate later design choices.

Dislocation From the External World: A Land Buffer. Paramount to the Constructivist Design Approach is the ability of the site to encourage visitors to immerse themselves physically and psychologically in the experience of their immediate environment. One of the ways this immersion can be encouraged is by distancing the site from the everyday world. With no external distractions, visitors are encouraged to focus on their immediate environment and to immerse themselves more deeply in the interpretive experience.

In the site selection phase, this separation from the outside world can be interpreted in a literal sense—the physical distancing of the interpretive complex from the modern world around it with a buffer of undeveloped land. Such a land buffer would help assure that views off the site to modern structures as well as traffic noises from nearby roads could be minimized. In order to assure an adequate land buffer around the interpretive center grounds, a minimum site size was established at 100 acres. This size limit was based on the total acreage of Conner Prairie's Follow the North Star tour (the area actively used in the interpretive program plus the buffer zone around it).

Historical Connection to Slavery. The Constructivist Design Approach is based on the fundamental belief that meaningful experiences are generated through the collaboration of visitor and site (see Collaboration of Visitor and Site, Chapter 4), as the individual responds to elements of the site that resonate with his or her own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Given this basic process of meaning-making, the richer a designed site in terms of the material it draws from and the content it embodies, the greater the potential that some of this content will speak to or resonate with the visitor. In light of this, a constructivist designer must look for opportunities to engage in design that incorporates multiple layers or sources of content. In this way, a designed site depends on not a single thread of meaning but a collection of threads woven together to

create a rich tapestry that each visitor will see in a unique way. In the present design proposal, the selection of a site with a history of slave occupation was seen as an opportunity to potentially enrich both the physical design of the complex by incorporating historical structures and land uses and also its interpretive program by providing material for additional characters and scenarios.

Although the incorporation of the site's history in the design was seen as critical to the successful implementation of the Constructivist Design Approach, this approach also stresses the importance of keeping the meanings embodied in the site by the designer flexible (see Structured But Flexible Meaning, Chapter 4). Thus, rather than limiting the meanings visitors could construct from the interpretive complex by presenting the complex as merely a reconstruction of the site's historical landscape, the Constructivist Design Approach seeks to broaden potential meanings through a less direct incorporation of the site's history.

Research and conversations with representatives of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources revealed several large sites with a historical connection to slavery:

• *Kentlands Plantation* – Kentlands Plantation is located in Montgomery County, just outside of Blacksburg. It is owned by Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University and currently serves as the school's horticultural research farm. Before the Civil War, it was one of the largest plantations in the region. The big house still stands (as student housing), but the slave quarters have been torn down.

• *Reynolds Homestead* – The Reynolds Homestead, formerly known as Rock Springs Plantation, is also owned by Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University. It is located near Martinsville (Henry County). Like Kentlands, this was a large plantation, with up to 88 slaves at one time. The grounds are currently open to visitors, and efforts are currently underway to expand interpretation at the site.

• *Buffalo Forge* – The Buffalo Forge area in Rockbridge County was also considered because of the Buffalo Forge iron plantation that once existed there. The iron furnaces of Appalachian Virginia figured prominently in the slave economy of the region. Buffalo Forge was one of the most successful iron forges in Southwestern Virginia, and a great deal of historical research has already been conducted from which to draw. The area would provide an important opportunity to educate visitors on the importance of slaves in the iron industry of the region.

• *Greenfield Plantation* – Greenfield Plantation, in southern Botetourt County, was the first mountain home of the Prestons, a family with a strong hand in the development of Southwest Virginia, both politically and economically. As the family prospered, their slave holdings grew and were often shifted between Greenfield and their other farmsteads in the Blacksburg area. The Greenfield site contained two farmsteads at one time. While both of the big houses have been destroyed, the slave quarters associated with each home still stand.

Historiographic Research Criteria

The historiographic research brought to light numerous landscape features and spatial conditions indicative of Appalachian slavery. As such, their presence on the site selected would

enhance interpretive opportunities. These landscape characteristics were derived from both the individual content elements established through the historiographic research and the synthesis of these research findings into guiding design concepts.

Karst Topography. This irregular patterning of hills and depressions is common in the valleys of Southwestern Virginia. Unlike the large expanses of flat bottom land in the Deep South that encouraged large crop fields and, in turn, large plantation complexes, the deeply karst valleys characteristic of much of Appalachia restricted the amount of land suitable for farming. Individual fields, restricted by topography, were smaller and much less efficient to farm. As a result, farmsteads of the region were relatively small, and families tended to consume the bulk of what they grew rather than sell it. Whereas the planters of the Deep South depended on large numbers of slaves to keep their plantations running and profitable, mountain farmers typically required few slaves. As a result, the Mountain South developed a unique slave economy—one based on the sale of slaves (or the renting of their labor), both locally and throughout the South, instead of one based on the agricultural production of slaves. Thus, the presence of karst topography on the site is essential to realistically portraying the cultural landscape of the antebellum Mountain South as a response to its environment. This terrain is also essential to the story of runaway slaves in the region, who often appropriated the dark hollows and remote hilltops of the region to conceal themselves.

Small Farmsteads Responding to the Terrain. The karst topography, rugged mountains, and narrow valley bottoms shaped a rural landscape dominated by small farmsteads whose buildings and fields displayed a less rigid spatial organization

than those to the east. Whereas the larger plantations found in the relatively flat Piedmont and Tidewater regions of the state could stretch out across the landscape unhindered by the terrain, mountain farms were forced to respond to the landscape to a much greater degree in terms of the siting of homes and outbuildings, as well as fields. Contrasted against the formal, geometric relationships between outbuildings and main house found to the east, mountain farms often appeared more haphazard in their arrangement. In reality, however, these farmsteads were responding to the logic of the land, attempting to turn the constraints of the terrain into assets by, for example, setting bank barns into the sides of slopes to minimize construction and maximize space. Crop fields and pastures were also smaller and irregularly shaped as they too responded to the terrain.

These mountain farmsteads are important interpretive elements for several reasons: they help point out the importance of the natural topography in shaping the landscape of Appalachian slavery, they offer opportunities through costumed interpreters to demonstrate aspects of mountain slaves' experiences on these farms, and they would help to illustrate the tension between center and periphery identified as a guiding design principle in terms of runaways who hover at the margins of such farmsteads, risking detection in order to find help.

Although it was unlikely that any site would contain extant antebellum farm buildings, an understanding of how structures were placed on the site and land uses were assigned would help ensure that newly constructed buildings and elements would respond to the terrain in a more historically appropriate manner.

Forest Patches. Forest interiors provided hiding places for both runaway slaves and absentee slaves. (Most slaves who ran away intended to stay out only temporarily and usually re-

turned on their own after a few days or weeks. These absentees, as they were called, usually hid at the fringes of their master's lands in order to take a break from their work, to socialize with other absentees, or in response to a whipping or other severe punishment.) These patches also became shortcuts for slaves hoping to avoid slave patrols on the main roads and secret meeting spots for outlawed church gatherings or social events.

Vegetative Corridors. Whereas the interiors of forest patches provided hiding places for slaves, linear corridors of vegetation provided visual screens as they made their way through the landscape. By keeping such corridors between themselves and a known observation point, such as a house or a road, slaves were able to increase their chances of traveling without being seen. Such corridors could be planted on a site, although the time required for them to mature to the point at which they could screen views was judged prohibitive. A more desirable scenario was to use existing vegetative corridors and enhance them with additional plantings as needed.

Edge Conditions. Edge conditions occur at the joints between landscape features or forms—a forest bordering a road or a hedgerow along a field. It was these edges—especially as they occurred at the periphery of farmsteads or towns—that runaway slaves often exploited in order to find food or shelter while remaining hidden. For the purposes of interpretation, edges with a vertical dimension were most desirable, as slaves would more often occupy edges with a strong vertical element in order to remain concealed.

Streams. These bodies of water figure prominently in many runaway slaves' accounts of their journeys to freedom. They ran through creeks to elude tracking dogs sent after them by slave catchers or their masters and followed stream courses through unknown territory as a navigational aid. But as often as streams were an asset to runaways, they could also prove to be imposing obstacles. Slaves were forced to find their own ways across large bodies of water instead of using bridges. Bridges were often manned by toll collectors that would, as a matter or course, stop any black man or woman traveling unaccompanied by their owner or overseer and demand to see their free papers or a pass from their master that detailed their travel route and the date of their trip. Given the prevalence of bridges in the modern American landscape, presenting visitors with the unfamiliar dilemma of finding their own way across a deep, fast-moving, or deeply incised stream was seen as an important interpretive opportunity.

Road Traces. Roads served as the main infrastructure of the mountain slave economy by facilitating the transport of slaves to the great markets of the Deep South as well as stimulating the buying and selling of slaves within the region. The itinerant slave trader with his coffle of slaves in tow was a common sight along the Great Valley Road and its byways in the Mountain South. For this reason, the presence of a road on the site offers an important interpretive opportunity. In addition, like streams, roads were often used by runaways as navigational aids—from the cover of adjoining forests. Wood-lined roads allowed slaves to stay near towns or farmsteads where they might find food or other assistance while still offering a measure of concealment. Although a new road could be constructed on the site selected, the use of an existing road trace would help ensure that road placement responded to the terrain in a manner more consistent with historical roads.

Tourist Destination Criteria

The development of site selection criteria also required considering the larger context of potential sites. The objective here was to establish criteria at the regional scale that would help position the interpretive complex as a viable tourist destination within the region—one that would facilitate the travel of not only local visitors but also those from other parts of the state and country. Underlying this set of criteria is the understanding that no matter how high the quality of design and interpretive programming at the complex, the selection of a site without an understanding of its regional context as a tourist destination could doom the complex to failure.

Highway Access. The site must be close to and have convenient access to a major highway. Convenient access from an interstate highway would encourage not only local visitors but those from outside the region. As Figure 7.1 shows, U.S. Interstate 81 provides the most thorough coverage of Southwestern Virginia and access from the rest of the state and the eastern portion of the country.

Proximity to Tourism Infrastructure. Although the need to buffer the interpretive complex from modern sights and sounds precludes its location in the heart of a city, any successful tourist destination must be reasonably close to a tourism infrastructure—hotels, restaurants, and tourist information centers—

Figure 7.1. U.S. Interstate 81 provides access to the greatest area of Southwestern Virginia.

that a city or large town can provide. Although, as Figure 7.1 shows, numerous towns are located along the Interstate 81 corridor, only a few (Abingdon, Wytheville, Christiansburg, Roanoke, and Lexington) are large enough to offer this infrastructure. As the largest city in Southwestern Virginia, however, Roanoke offers the largest selection of tourist amenities.

Proximity to Other Historic Sites. The successful tourist destination will also be located within a convenient drive to other destinations offering related activities. Such a collection of tourist destinations provides the critical mass that helps draw tourists from greater distances and encourage them to not only travel to Southwestern Virginia but also to plan extended stays. Figure 7.2 indicates the location of tourist sites related to various aspects of African-American history throughout Southwestern Virginia and in areas immediately adjacent to the region. As the figure shows, the majority of such sites in the region are clustered around the Roanoke and Abingdon areas.
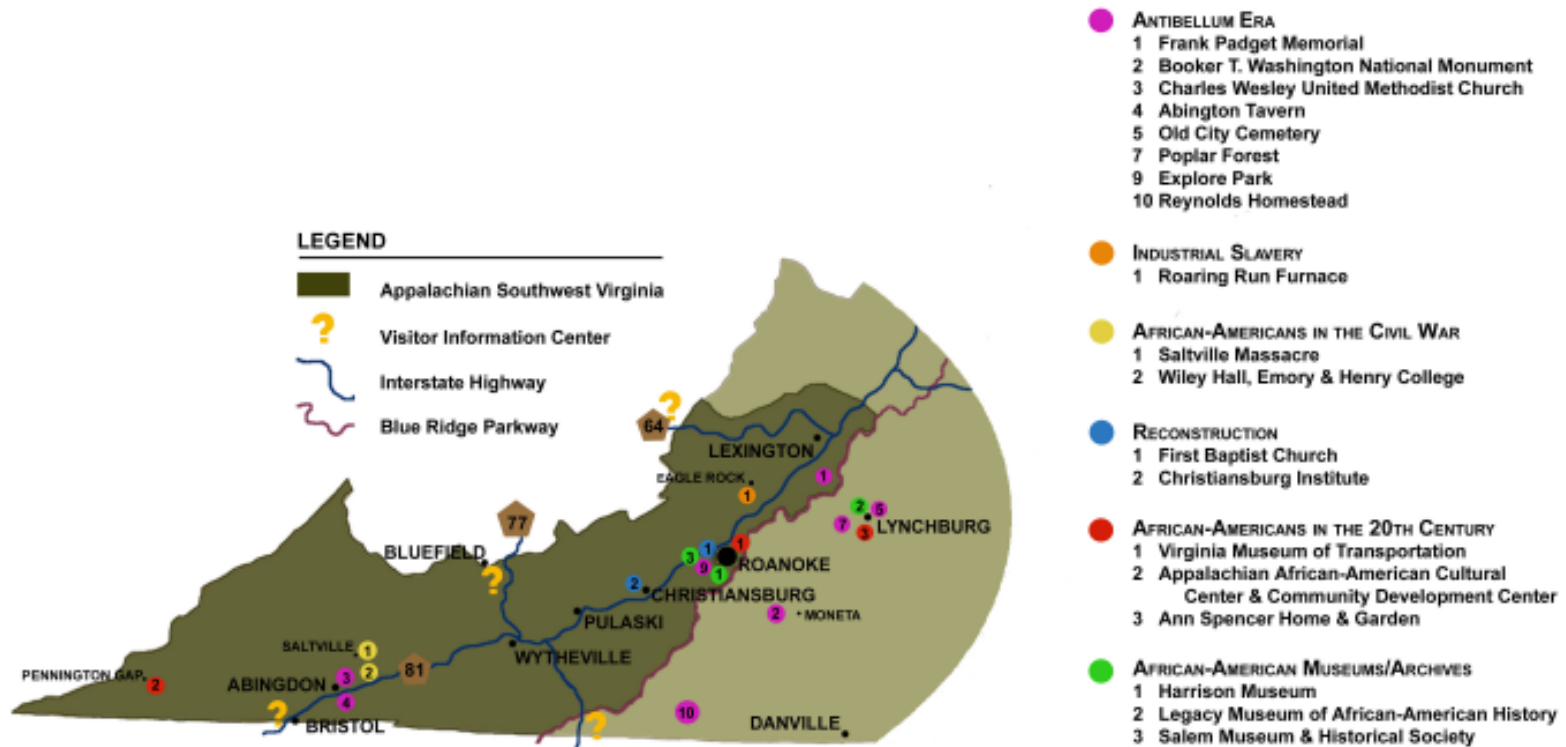

LEGEND

◼ Appalachian Southwest Virginia
❓ Visitor Information Center
〰 Interstate Highway
〰 Blue Ridge Parkway

ANTIBELLUM ERA
1 Frank Padget Memorial
2 Booker T. Washington National Monument
3 Charles Wesley United Methodist Church
4 Abington Tavern
5 Old City Cemetery
7 Poplar Forest
9 Explore Park
10 Reynolds Homestead

INDUSTRIAL SLAVERY
1 Roaring Run Furnace

AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR
1 Saltville Massacre
2 Wiley Hall, Emory & Henry College

RECONSTRUCTION
1 First Baptist Church
2 Christiansburg Institute

AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN THE 20TH CENTURY
1 Virginia Museum of Transportation
2 Appalachian African-American Cultural Center & Community Development Center
3 Ann Spencer Home & Garden

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSEUMS/ARCHIVES
1 Harrison Museum
2 Legacy Museum of African-American History
3 Salem Museum & Historical Society

Figure 7.2. Tourist destinations interpreting African-American history within and adjacent to Appalachian Southwestern Virginia.

In addition, the proximity of Roanoke to the Booker T. Washington National Monument near Moneta, which is interpreted as a Piedmont rather than a mountain plantation, and the clustering of sites in Lynchburg, which is also in the Piedmont region, holds the potential advantage of enhancing tourists' understanding of the conditions of mountain slavery through comparison with these nearby sites.

Although not all of the tourist sites listed in Figure 7.2 currently offer interpretation focused on African-American history, the presence of a regional slavery interpretive complex could serve as incentive for the development of more focused programs at these sites. This would not only increase tourist revenues for surrounding sites but also provide a richer understanding of African-American history in the region for visitors.
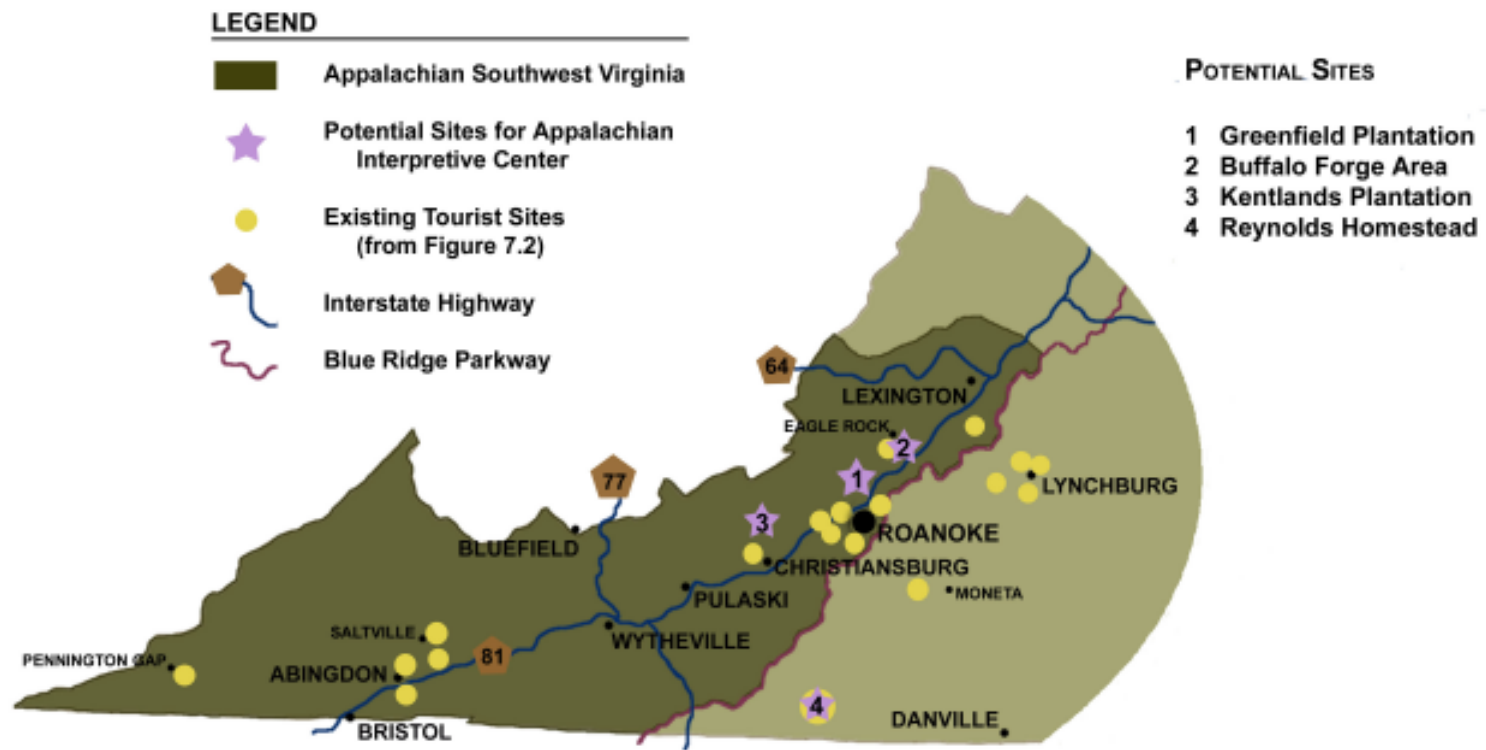

Figure 7.3. The four sites identified under the histoical connection to slavery criterion are shown in relationship to the sites idenified in the proximity to related historic sites criterion.

Given the characteristics necessary for a strong tourist destination, the greater Roanoke area was identified as the most desirable location in terms of its proximity to a primary transportation corridor and its potential to draw tourists to other area attractions while providing them with an ample selection of hotel, entertainment, and dining choices. A site in the greater Roanoke area would draw visitors into the region and serve as a convenient base for travel to other local destinations.

SITE SELECTION

With the site selection criteria established and four potential sites identified, as well as a preferred location for a tourist destination, a process of elimination ensued. Given the strength of the greater Roanoke area in meeting the criteria for a successful tourist destination, this general area was favored as the location of the Appalachian slavery interpretive complex. The four sites with a historic connection to slavery were examined in light of their regional location in order to eliminate those outside of the greater Roanoke area. As Figure 7.3 indicates, the Reynolds Homestead is not only remote from the Roanoke area, but it is also located outside of Appalachian Southwestern Virginia.

With the three remaining sites all relatively close to the greater Roanoke area, field visits were conducted to determine the suitability of each site. The Buffalo Forge area was eliminated because the property on which the iron plantation was located is now in the hands of various private owners. Kentlands was also removed from the list of potential sites
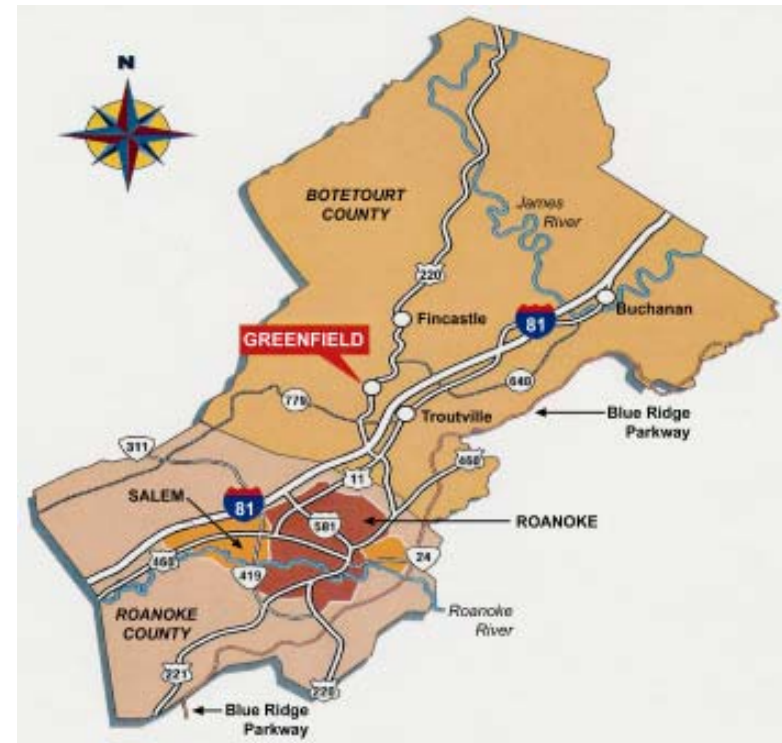

Figure 7.4. Greenfield's proximity to Roanoke and convenient highway access indicate the site could make a viable tourist destination. Greenfield is 3.5 miles from Interstate 81 and 15 miles from Roanoke. (Map courtesy of the Botetourt County Office of the County Administrator)

because it lacked convenient access from Interstate 81. Conversely, site visits to Greenfield Plantation confirmed its suitability as a site for the interpretive center. Not only did the site have easy access to Interstate 81 (Figure 7.4) but it also met all of the other site selection requirements discussed in this chapter (see Chapter 8 for the complete site analysis).