

Coal

Coal production shaped the early economic and social history of West Virginia and the Kanawha Valley. Many primitive “punch” mines were located in areas where the erosive powers of rivers and streams (such as Davis Creek) exposed the coal beds. Remnants of these early mines are found in several locations throughout Kanawha State Forest in the form of mine voids & spoil piles.

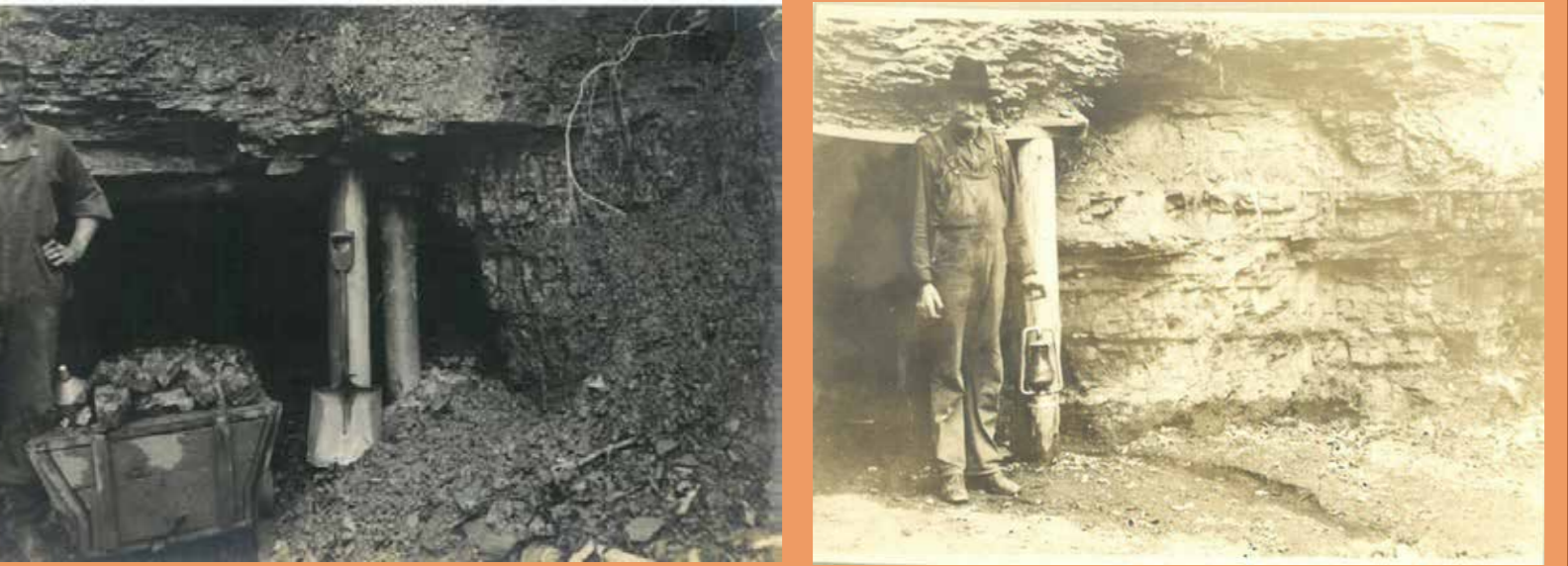
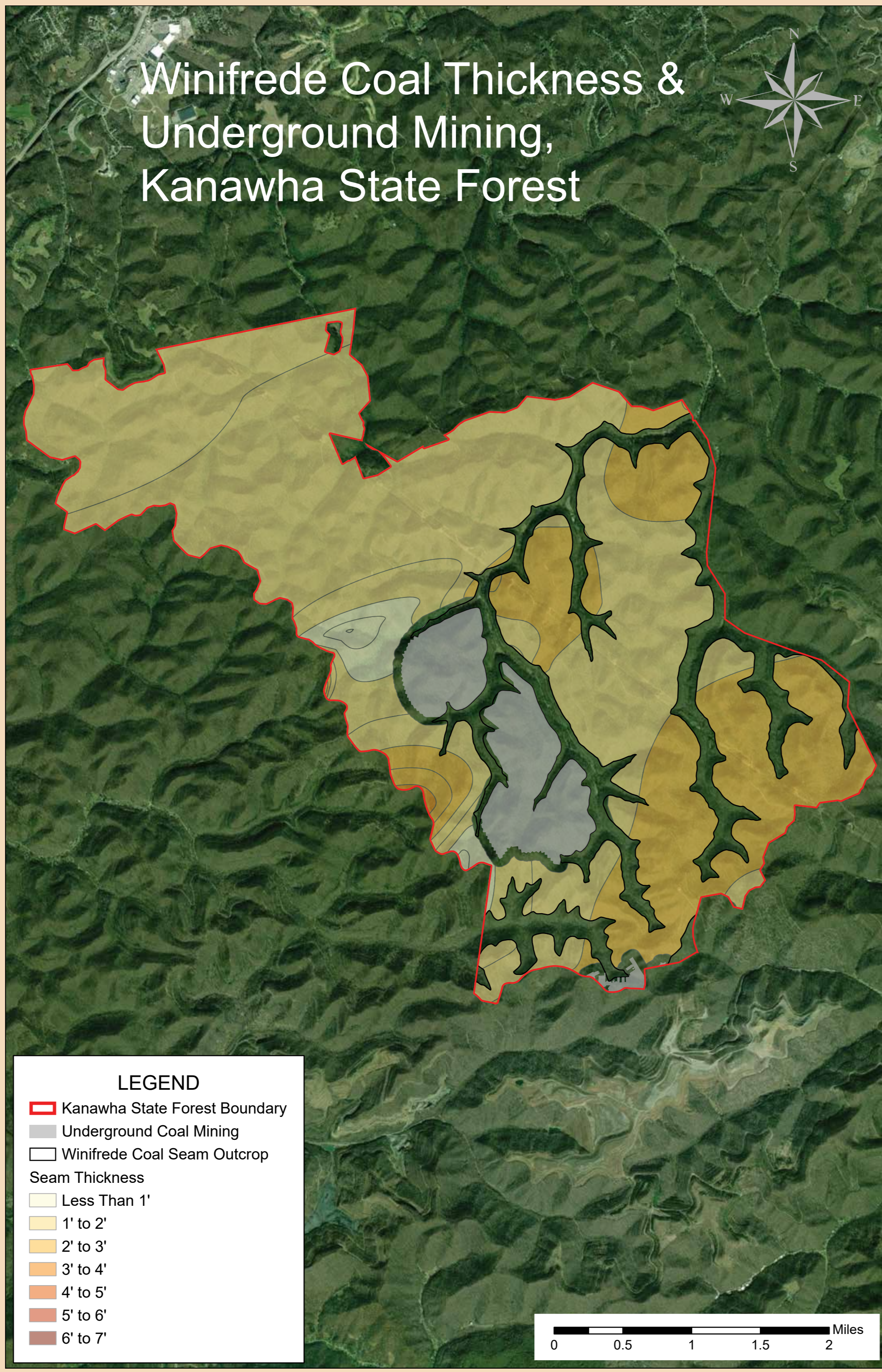
Mining in the Forest: Davis Creek & Black Band Mining Companies, 1908

The Davis Creek Mining Company, Mr. Frank H. Alcott, General Manager, has just recently opened up the Black Band coal at about eight miles above the mouth of Davis Creek and two miles below Chilton. Here the writer measured the following section:

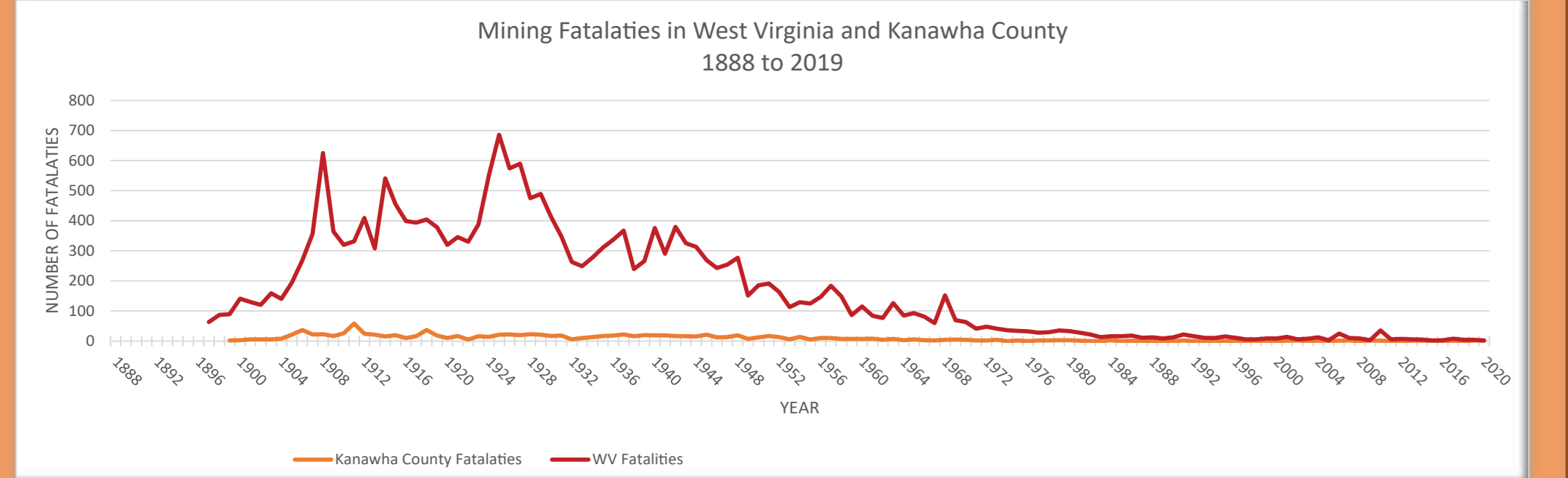
	Ft.	In.
Sandstone, very massive, pebbly.....	100	0
Concealed, bench at top.....	80	0
Kanawha Black Flint.....	5	0
Concealed and sandstone.....	140	0
Coal, Black Band (Winifrede).....	2	9
Fire clay, impure.....	2	2
Sandstone.....	2	6
Black slate.....	0	4
Coal.....	0	5
Shale, dark.....	0	3
Concealed.....	12	4
Coal ("Wild Cat") { coal and slate 2' 0" }	4	6
Concealed to Davis Creek.....	30	0

The bench for No. 5 Block coal comes just under the great pebbly sandstone at the top of the section. The Black Band coal at this locality varies in thickness from 27 to 35 inches, and frequently has a bony layer at top 2 to 3 inches thick. It is the same pure coal, coming out in great blocks as in the mines around Chilton, farther up Davis Creek. The Kanawha Black Flint crops here in its typical character at 140 feet above the Black Band coal, and thus leaves no doubt that this famous coal represents a part, at least, of the Winifrede seam.

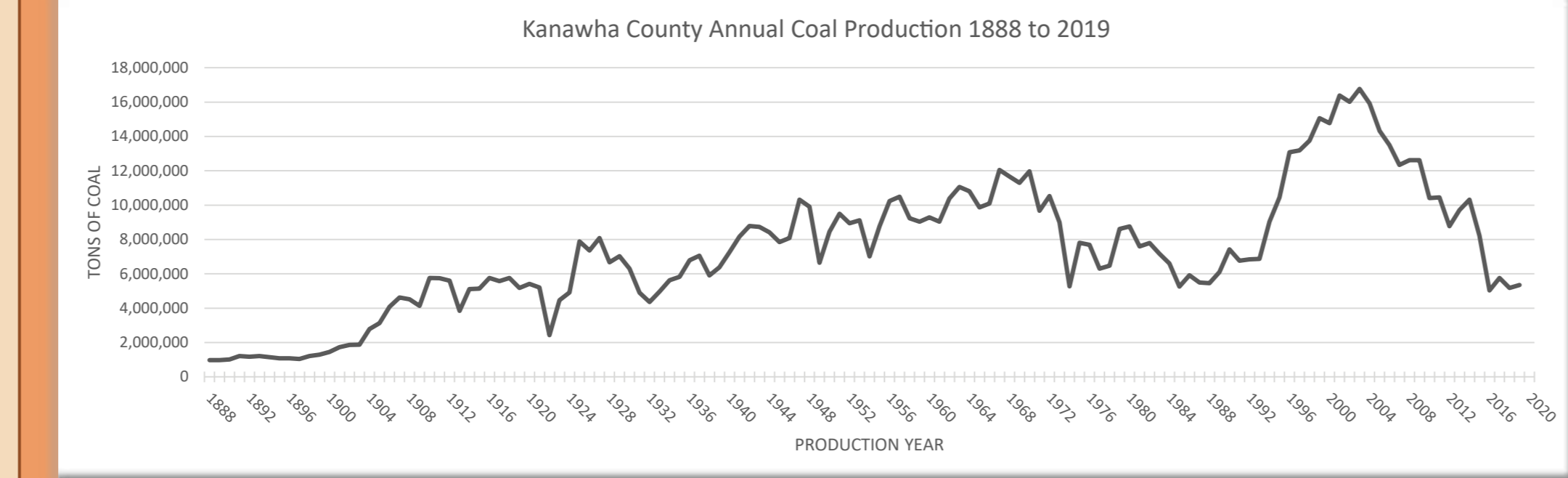
The "Wild Cat" coal seam below the Black Band bed is a local name given to the seam in question on account of its rapid variations in thickness and quality. This bed is apparently a lower division of the Winifrede seam. It has a curly fracture, and varies in thickness from 12 to 54 inches. Brier Creek heads up against Davis Creek south-west from Chilton, and, flowing westward, enters Big Coal River at Brounland, near the boundary between Boone and Kanawha Counties. The Black Band or Winifrede coal extends through from the headwaters of Davis Creek onto the several tributaries of Brier Creek, and has recently been opened and extensively mined for commercial shipments near the mouth of the Spruce Fork of the latter stream by the Olcott Coal and Iron Company of Olcott, Kanawha County, and the Reynolds Black Band Coal Company of Charleston.



The dangers of mining are numerous, even with modern technologies, but the early days of the industry were especially perilous. In the years from 1910-1920, when the photos above were taken, over 4,260 miners were killed in WV



Nearly 1 billion tons of coal (actual volume = 971,780,249 tons) has been produced from Kanawha County since record keeping began in 1888

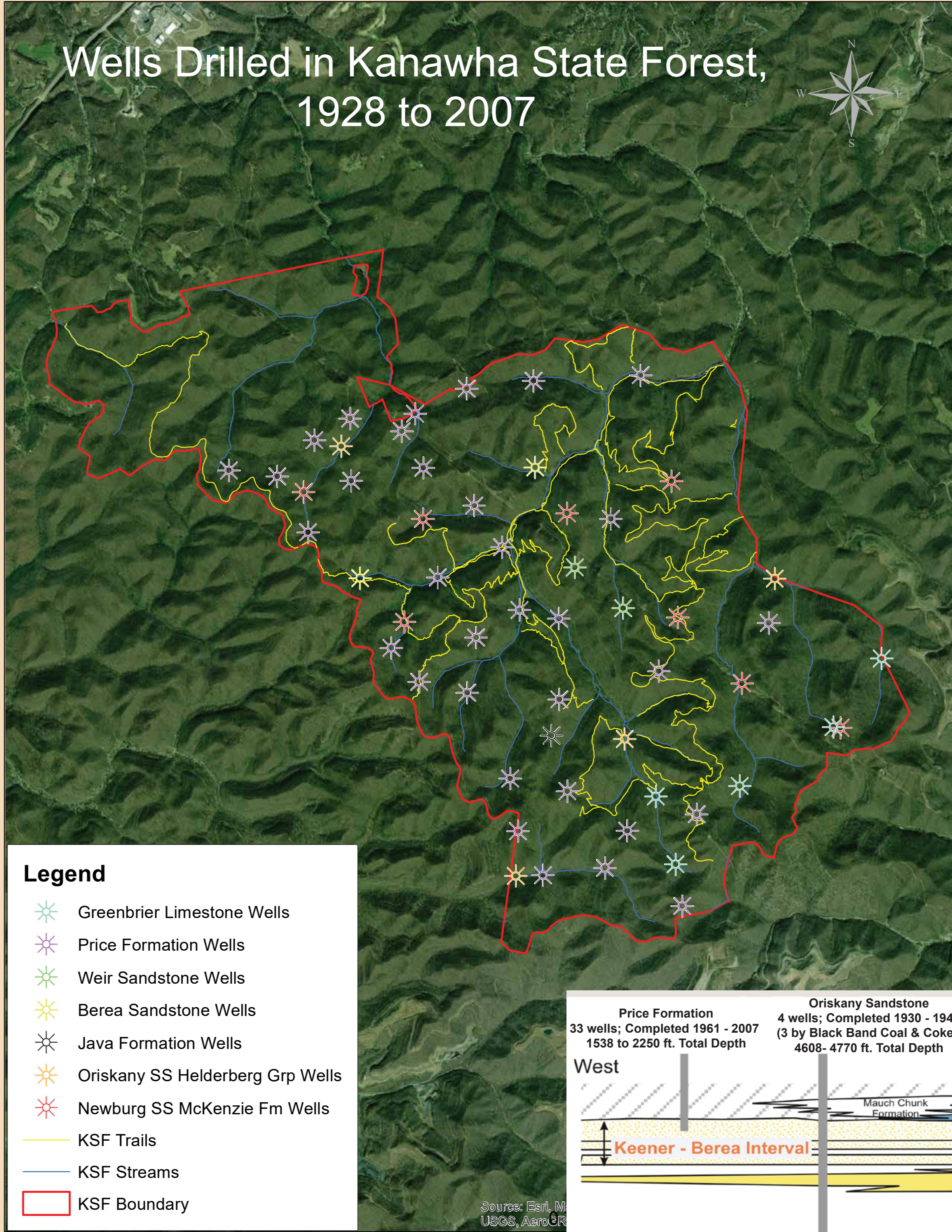
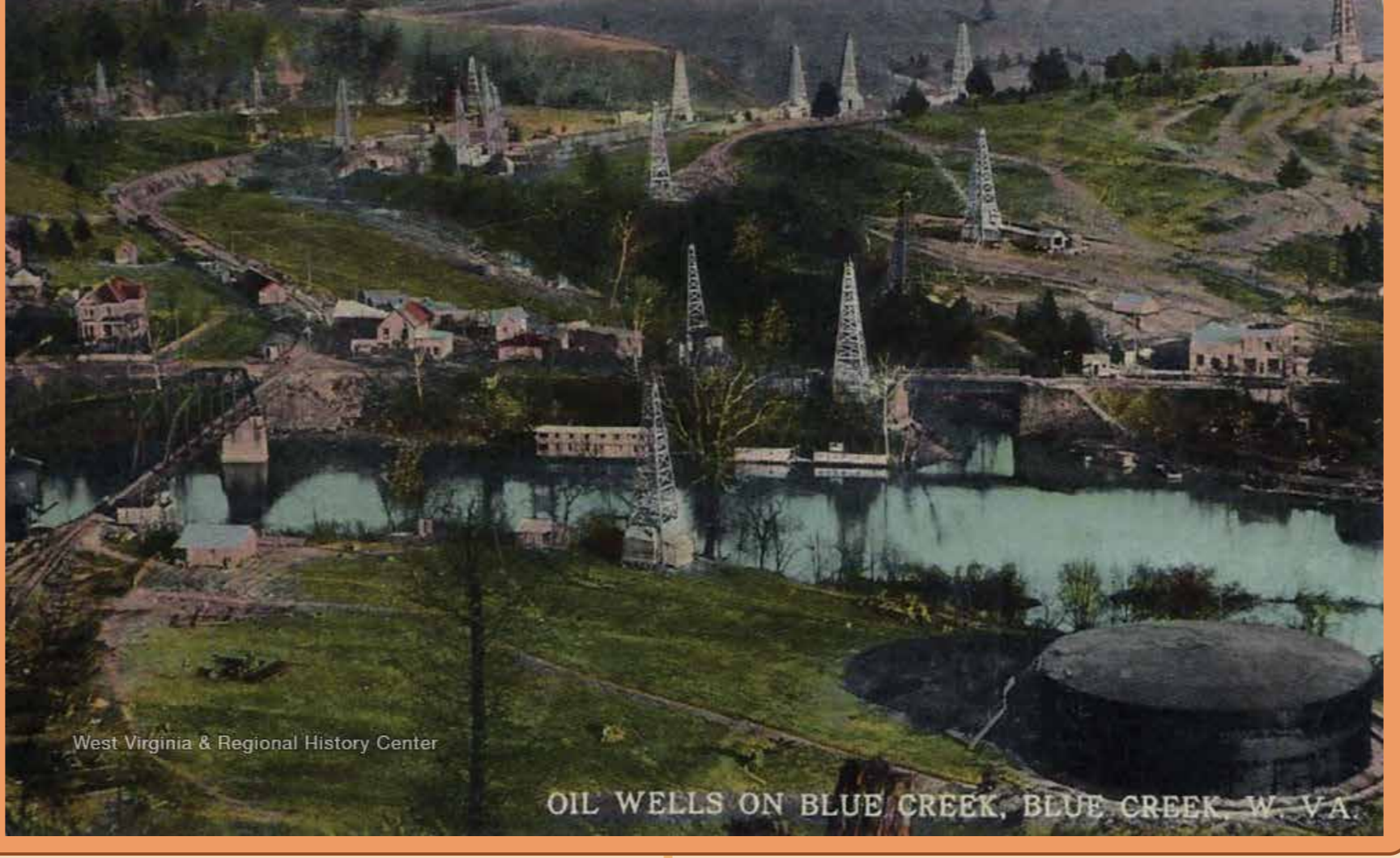


Natural Gas

Production of natural gas & oil has occurred in the Kanawha Valley for more than 150 years; many drilling technologies were invented and developed in the area for early salt brine wells. Sixty-four gas wells are identified within Kanawha State Forest, the earliest of which were drilled before permitting was established in 1929. The most recent was drilled in 2007. Thirty-seven wells still produced gas in 2020.



Black Band coal tippie and tracks in what is now Kanawha State Forest. The company also drilled wells in the area, likely hoping to replicate the success of nearby Blue Creek and Cabin Creek oil fields. But the rocks of the forest only produce gas.

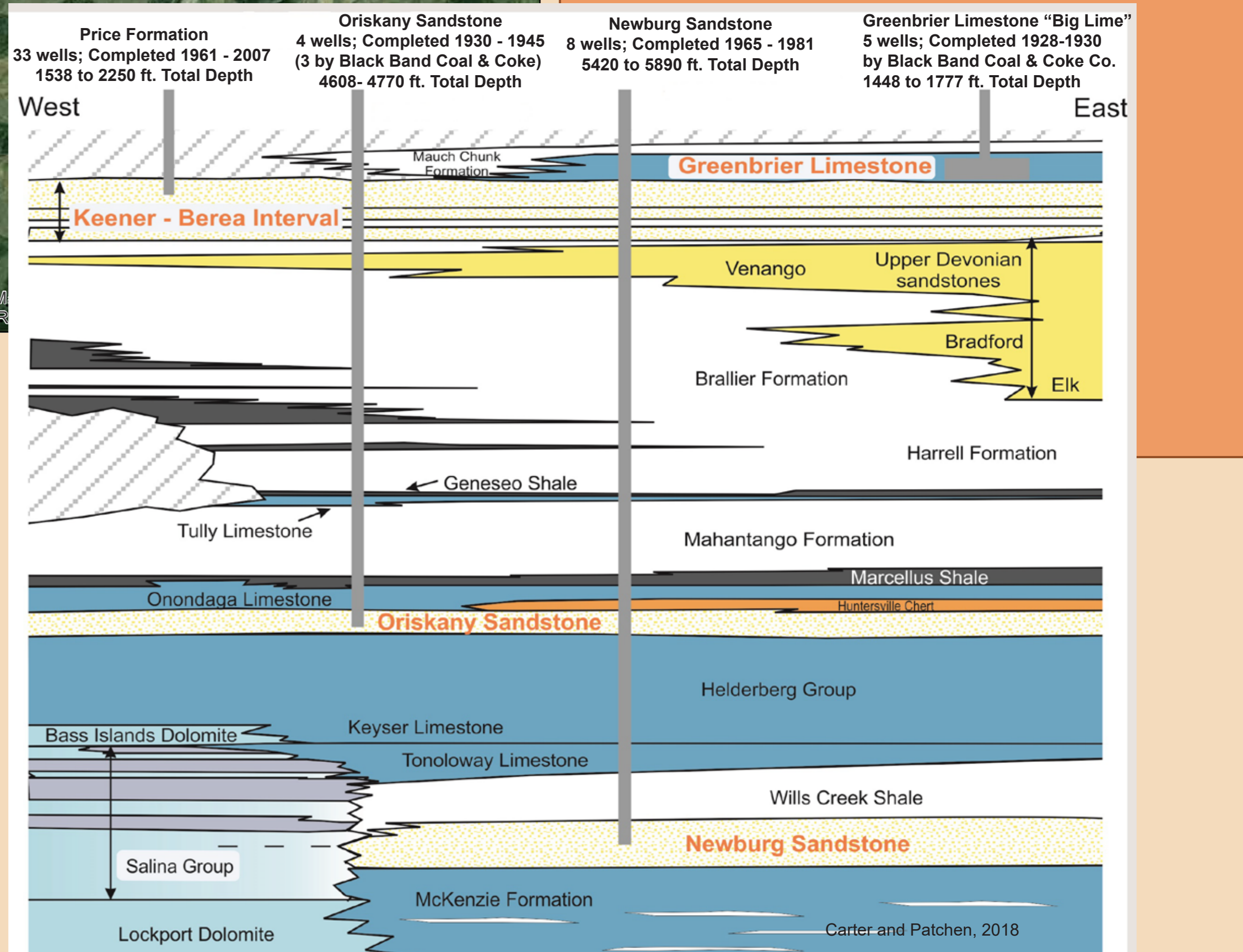


Drilling Through Time: Early drilling rigs, such as this one from 1897, had simple construction and were heavily dependent on manual labor. Many thousands of these wells were drilled before permitting was established and their exact locations are often unknown.



By the 1960s, drilling technology had greatly improved. Pumps, hydraulics and automation aided exploration efforts and drilling depths increased.

Today, the combination of hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling enables precision targeting of reservoirs



Gas well production has been reported since 1979; earlier production volumes are largely unknown. Modern production volumes of the 30-40 vertical wells are low; a single modern horizontal shale well produces more gas in ~6 months

