

Brant Mine at Deep Creek Lake State Park



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Hidden away in Maryland's most western region is Garrett County's Deep Creek Lake — the largest manmade lake in the state. It is unique because of its mountain setting and it attracts many visitors and vacationers throughout the year. If we stop and peer through "that window to the past," before the creation of Deep Creek Lake, there is another story to tell.

East of Deep Creek Lake, on the northwest slope of Meadow Mountain, lies a mining site that probably started as a dream of two local pioneers: Delphia Brant and George Beckman. The time was in the early 1920's when Deep Creek Lake was still in its planning stages. Delphia Brant purchased 40 acres on Meadow Mountain where he speculated there was coal. According to his son John he could look at the ground and tell if there was coal to be dug. Delphia and George, being great friends, put their skills, determination and instincts together to turn a profit at coal mining.

By 1923, Delphia built a six room homestead below the mine. His son recalls growing sweet potatoes and buckwheat as a youngster. He also remembered the sweet smell of roses, fragrant mock orange bushes and the scent of apple blossoms from trees grown with the seeds of an eaten apple.

George Beckman was a farmer and blacksmith who, at the time, was considered to be one of the best "smiths" in the state. With his skills in smithing, George would be a much needed partner in this joint venture. Tools were an essential ingredient to the miner and their upkeep would be in his capable hands.

Together, Delphia and George began working the mine. The mine held a two foot vein of bituminous coal, the majority of which remains within the mountain today. The coal was considered to be the quality used to heat homes. During this period, good house coal sold for about two dollars a ton. Both men worked a twelve hour day year 'round, but this hard pace, primitive conditions and the lack of any type of ventilation system, proved to be a deadly combination. By 1926, both had fallen victim to silicosis, a chronic lung disease caused by inhalation of silica dust. After three years working their mine, George died at the age of 52 in 1926 and Delphia followed him the next year at the age of 49.

During the years Delphia and George worked the mine, the landscape around them began to change dramatically. Thousands of trees were being cut down in the valley of Deep Creek Lake and its tributaries. Great bonfires of brush were burned, and the logs were hauled to one of the many sawmills which suddenly appeared. Over a thousand men were employed on this vast project.

March of 1925 began what many welcomed and others considered frivolous as the dam was plugged and Deep Creek Lake began. Delphia and George probably lamented the loss of their beloved fishing spots, and the 20-22 inch native brookies they caught regularly. Quickly the water accumulated, due to a snow laden winter and a wet spring. By May of the same year,



*Top: Entrance to Brant Mine after being restored by Andy Felsecker, Nature Tourism field associate (above center).
Right: an old mining cart and rails remain to be seen.*

the level was high enough to generate the power but would in fact, take the balance of the year to fill completely. Delphia and George were probably still working the mine, and were witness to this unique creation of man and nature. I'm sure that summer was long remembered by all who had the opportunity and the time to watch.

Today you can hike or bike back in time to visit the "Old Brant Mine," which has been recently refurbished by Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Nature Tourism Program, coordinated by Patricia Manown Mash and staff at Deep Creek Lake State Park are on hand to further explain details of the mine to hikers, history lovers and all who take time to explore this unique heritage destination. One can truly feel appreciation for Delphia, George and other men who left their mark on this Meadow Mountain vista.

Mary Jo Hunter, because of her appreciation for Heritage Tourism has been embracing this "Old Brant Mine" project and also serves as a member of the Garrett County Heritage Committee and Literacy Council.

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