

Welcome to the AMD&ART Project in Vintondale, Pennsylvania

<http://www.amdandart.org/projectindex.html>

Southwestern Pennsylvania, indeed the entire Appalachian Region, is an area of remarkable beauty. Unfortunately, residents and visitors alike can often miss this natural beauty, blinded by the devastated environments, crippled economies and abandoned peoples that are the overshadowing regional legacy of pre-regulatory coal mining. Acid mine drainage (AMD) is the most widespread water quality problem, as well as a significant economic and social constraint. Seeping or surging from abandoned coal mines, AMD is the metals-laden water, often acidic, that coats stream beds with orange sediment, killing the bottom of the food chain. Often desolating entire watersheds, these rust colored streams are the consequence of a proud past filled with hard work and dedication in an era that paid little attention to environmental consequences. Today, AMD is a painful reminder of the poverty and economic abandonment that still exists in coal country, the emblematic orange silent signature of dying communities.



The AMD&ART Park in Vintondale, Pennsylvania

Photo credit: AMD&ART Photo Archive

AMD&ART is one effort to confront this legacy in a way that honors a past of hard work and significant accomplishment while opening windows to broader participation and deeper engagement. We worked with many disciplines to destabilize the typical negative expectations of this region with a large-scale, artful public place that directly addresses the problems of AMD and much more. Beginning our work in Vintondale, Pennsylvania, in 1994, we've established a model of holistic renewal that brings the perspective of history to mix with the discipline of science, the delight of innovative design, and the energy of community engagement. For me as Founding Director, each of these perspectives or disciplines is necessary — but none is sufficient. Our strength is in our interdisciplinary approach and in our determination to give art-full form to community aspirations.

— T. Allan Comp, Ph.D., Founder/Director

AMD&ART is the recipient of the following awards:

- 2005 EPA Phoenix Award (The first national EPA Brownfields award presented for community impact on mine-scarred lands)
- 2005 Western Pennsylvania Environmental Award for Green Design (Presented by Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) and Dominion, recognizing projects within the state of Pennsylvania.)
- 2002 Wetlands Award (Presented by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the Pennsylvania Partnership for Highway Quality)
- 2001 Five Star Restoration Site (Presented by the Wildlife Habitat Council and US Environmental Protection Agency)
- 2001 Governor's Award for Watershed Stewardship, Partnerships Category (Presented by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP))

[Vintondale & Coal Country >>](#)

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Treating Acid Mine Drainage in Vintondale

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2008

[ACID-MINE-DRAINAGE-IN.HTML](http://PRUNED.BLOGSPOT.COM/2008/02/TREATING-ACID-MINE-DRAINAGE-IN.HTML)

[HTTP://PRUNED.BLOGSPOT.COM/2008/02/TREATING-](http://PRUNED.BLOGSPOT.COM/2008/02/TREATING-ACID-MINE-DRAINAGE-IN.HTML)



(Technicolor poison. Image by Julie Bargmann.)

While writing the post on the [Silver Lake reservoir](#), we were reminded of [AMD&ART Park](#) in Vintondale, Pennsylvania.

The two share quite a few in common. For instance, both employ constructed wetlands to detoxify contaminated landscapes. In the case of Silver Lake, it is the Los Angeles River's heady stew of 14 EPA-listed chemical pollutants; AMD&ART, for its part, has targeted [acid mine drainage](#) (AMD), hence the name. Additionally, both were conceived as pedagogical landscapes, teaching visitors their respective historical context and technologies. As such, they are occupiable open spaces.

There is one major difference though: AMD&ART Park is actually built and has been in operation for almost 15 years.



(An AmeriCorps volunteer conducts system maintenance at AMD&ART Park. Photo by Cynthia Wigger.)

Beginning in 1994, a multi-disciplinary team — which consisted of T. Allan Comp, a historian and director of the non-profit AMD&ART; Robert Deason, a hydrogeologist; Stacy Levy, a sculptor; AmeriCorps interns; and landscape architect [Julie Bargmann](#), of [D.I.R.T. Studio](#) — were tasked to create “a large-scale, artful public space that directly addresses the problems of AMD and much more.”

AMD in the entire Appalachian Region, we read, is “the most widespread water quality problem, as well as a significant economic and social constraint.” Indeed, the EPA has designated it as the biggest environmental problem in the eastern mountains.

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entire watersheds, these rust colored streams are the consequence of a proud past filled with hard work and dedication in an era that paid little attention to environmental consequences. Today, AMD is a painful reminder of the poverty and economic abandonment that still exists in coal country, the emblematic orange silent signature of dying communities.

The result of the collaboration is, if not innovative, gloriously inspiring.



(Map of AMD&ART Park.)

Several discrete elements make up the park. Located in the eastern part is a passive water treatment system and the so-called Litmus Garden. On the other side is a wetland habitat zone and in between is a recreational area. Interspersed throughout are several art installations, hence the second part of the name, though one could call the whole site an art installation itself.

The treatment zone is easily distinguished by a series of 7 keystone-shaped treatment ponds. No cutting edge nanotechnology or the latest transgenic organism or even heavy machinery is used. Turning the highly toxic water into one that you can swim in is done with elementary physics, chemistry and biology. Regular limestone, for instance, is applied instead to lower the water's acidity. Plants simply dying off and decaying in the winter and then returning in the spring also helps to change its pH level. Even gravity is utilized to help suspended metals settle out of the ADM.



(An aerator on Pond 6. Photo courtesy of AMD&ART Photo Archive.)