

Johnstown Flood

NATIONAL MEMORIAL

Allegheny Portage Railroad

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE PENNSYLVANIA



**National
Parks
Centennial 1872-1972**



An immense earthen dam, weakened by days of steady rain, gave way on the afternoon of May 31, 1889, and poured millions of tons of water down the narrow valley of the Little Conemaugh River in western Pennsylvania. The flood devastated the thriving steel center of Johnstown and its nearby communities and gave the Nation an enduring legend. Some 2,200 persons perished within a few hours, and other thousands lost everything but their lives.

To commemorate what until then was the Nation's worst natural disaster, Congress in 1964 authorized a 55-acre Johnstown Flood National Memorial to be established at the site of the old dam on the South Fork. The dam was originally constructed by the State from 1838 to 1853 to feed water during dry spells to the western division of the Pennsylvania Canal, a 395-mile waterway between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Only a short distance from the site of the dam are the remains of the Allegheny Portage Railroad, built between 1831 and 1834 to cross a forested mountain divide and link the eastern and western divisions of the canal. Congress has designated these structures as the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site "to illustrate the significant role of the...Portage Railroad and the Pennsylvania Canal in the Nation's history."

The memorial and the historic site will consist of five areas totaling more than 1,000 acres. Once sufficient land has been acquired, the National Park Service will begin developing both parks for the visiting public. One important mission is to safeguard surviving earthworks, structures, and buildings associated with the canal, railroad, and flood. Another will be to interpret through a variety of means the chapter of Pennsylvania's transportation and social history represented by these physical remains.

THIS BUILDING AT MAIN AND CLINTON STREET WITH THE CORNER MISSING WAS REPAIRED AND STANDS TODAY.

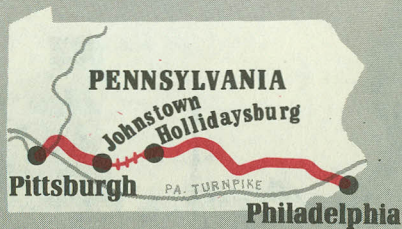


THE PENNSYLVANIA CANAL AND THE PORTAGE RAILROAD

One of the great public works of its day, the Pennsylvania Canal was constructed between 1826 and 1834 to connect the Ohio Valley and the State's eastern seaboard. For over two decades—until doomed by the rise of the railroad and its own obsolescence—the canal was the main line west. In 1857 the burgeoning Pennsylvania Railroad bought the canal, and 7 years later the western division was abandoned. The eastern division remained in operation until 1899. That year an observer, speaking of the engineering triumph that the Allegheny crossing represented, said: "The crossing of the Rocky Mountains decades afterwards was not so difficult an undertaking at that time as the crossing of the Alleghenies at the time the Old Portage road was built."

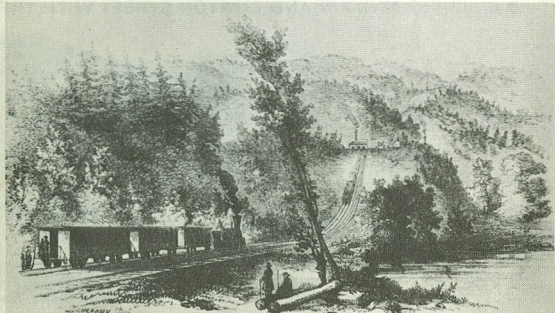
Ten inclined planes—five for the 1,400-foot ascent and five for the 1,200-foot descent—a 901-foot tunnel, and long level stretches carried the double-tracked railroad 36 miles across the

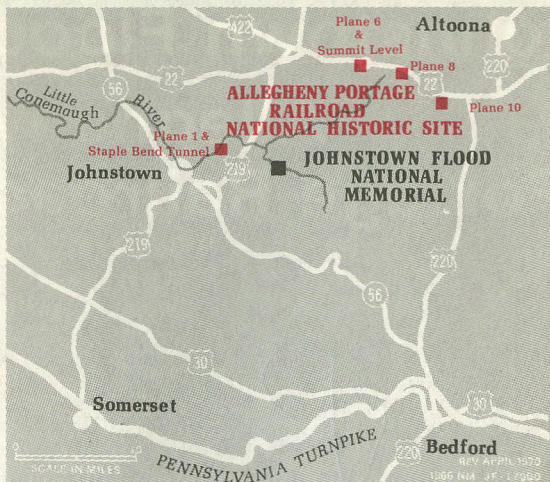
THE ROUTE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA CANAL.



Alleghenies from Hollidaysburg to Johnstown. At each town's canal basin, travelers and cargo transferred from barges to specially designed railroad cars, which were pulled up the inclined planes by "endless" ropes powered by steam engines at the top. Horses and, later, locomotives pulled the cars over the level stretches between the planes. In 1842 the English novelist Charles Dickens crossed the Alleghenies on the portage railroad and reported: "It was very pretty ... to look down into a valley full of light and softness; catching glimpses, through the treetops, of scattered cabins; children running to the doors; dogs bursting out to bark, whom we could see without hearing; terrified pigs scampering homewards; families sitting out in their rudegardens; cows gazing upwards with a stupid indifference; men in their shirtsleeves looking on at their unfinished houses, planning out tomorrow's work; and we rising onward, high above them, like a whirlwind."

AN 1853 ARTIST'S SKETCH OF AN INCLINED PLANE





ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Johnstown Flood National Memorial, at the intersection of U.S. 219 and Pa. 869, is 1½ miles south-east of the Borough of South Fork. Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site is in Blair and Cambria Counties, and U.S. 22 is the main route through the area. Plane 10 will be 1 mile west of Duncansville; Plane 8 will be 5 miles west of Duncansville; Plane 6 and the Summit Level will be 7½ miles west of Duncansville; and Plane 1 and Staple Bend Tunnel will be at Mineral Point about 7 miles northeast of Johnstown over Pa. 271. Visitors can get information about the Allegheny Portage Railroad at the historic Lemon House at Plane 6.



A SCENE POSED BY COUNTLESS FAMILIES AFTER THE FLOOD.

ADMINISTRATION

Both Johnstown Flood National Memorial and Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which these parks are units, is dedicated to conserving the great historical, natural, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.

A superintendent, whose address is Box 216, Johnstown, PA 15907, is in charge of both parks.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service