

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

Washington, D.C./Maryland/West Virginia
National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide

The C&O Canal started as a dream of passage to western wealth, operated as a conduit of eastern coal, suffered extensive and finally fatal flooding, and then resisted being paved as a highway. Today it endures as a national historical park—a pathway into history, nature, and recreation.

Information

Beside the Potomac River, the C&O Canal stretches from the mouth of Rock Creek in Georgetown to Cumberland, Maryland. Its 74 lift locks raise it from near sea level to an elevation of 605 feet at Cumberland. Its towpath today provides a nearly level byway for hikers and bicyclists. Its watered sections provide quiet waters for canoeists, boaters, and anglers.

The canal was proclaimed a national monument in 1961 and named a national historical park in 1971. Its 184.5-mile length preserves both history and nature. From tidewater at Georgetown in Washington, D.C., to Cumberland on the Allegheny Plateau, the canal winds through the Piedmont, past the dramatic Great Falls of the Potomac, and then through the ridge and valley section of the Appalachian Mountains. Its rich floodplain forests are gifts of the river's frequent floods.

The National Park Service operates information centers at Georgetown, Great Falls Tavern, Hancock, and Cumberland. For general information write: Superintendent, C&O Canal National Historical Park, Box 4, Sharpsburg, MD 21782, or phone (301) 739-4200. For information about the Georgetown to Seneca section, phone (301) 299-3613. For emergencies phone (301) 739-4206, or, from Georgetown to Seneca, (202) 619-7300.

Maps and books about the canal are sold at some information centers and by mail. For a free list write: Parks and History Association, P.O. Box 40060, Washington, DC 20016, or phone (202) 472-3083.

Canal Recreation

Ranger Programs and Museum Information about the walks and evening programs, conducted year-round, is available at information centers. A museum in the historic Great Falls Tavern includes an exhibit about the canal's operation.

Hiking and Bicycling The canal's towpath is an elevated trail 184.5 miles long. It was originally built 12 feet wide as a path for mules that pulled canal boats. Today it provides through-travel opportunities for hikers and bicyclists. Mile markers are posted.

Camping *Drive-in camping* areas (primitive facilities only, no group camping allowed) at McCoys Ferry, Fifteenmile Creek, and Spring Gap operate on a first-come, first-served basis. *Group campgrounds* are found at the Marsden Tract and adjacent to Fifteenmile Creek. *Hiker-Biker overnight* campsites for tent camping occur approximately every five miles between Horsepen Branch and Eviatts Creek. The Marsden Tract site requires a free permit obtained at Great Falls Tavern (see "Great Falls Information" phone number below). Camping is permitted only in the areas designated above and at Antietam Creek, a tent-camping area.

Supplies Camping supplies, ice, food, and beverages can be bought at most stores along access roads. Water-pump handles are removed in winter, so water must be carried then.

Canoeing and Boating Canal canoeing and boating are popular in watered levels, or sections, between Georgetown and Violette's Lock. You must portage around each lock. Canoes can be rented at Swains Lock and at Fletcher's Boathouse (see map below). Above Violette's Lock only short, isolated stretches can be canoed—Big Pool, Little Pool, and a 4.5-mile section from Town Creek to Oldtown. Motorized craft are generally prohibited, except electric trolling motors are allowed at Big Pool.

River Canoeing and Boating Only experienced canoeists should attempt to canoe on the Potomac River. Obtain canoeing information at Great Falls Tavern. For safety, canoeing is discouraged in these areas: Little Falls to Chain Bridge; Great Falls of the Potomac; and between Dam 3 and the U.S. 340 bridge downstream from Harpers Ferry. Boating in these areas is extremely hazardous and should not be attempted when water levels are high. All boating on the Potomac is subject to Maryland regulations; the river is not within the park. The National Park Service provides public access boat ramps—see maps.

Horse Use Horseback riding is permitted from Swains Lock to Cumberland. Horse parties are limited to five riders. No horses are permitted in the campgrounds or the hiker/biker campsites. Horse riders should contact park headquarters for complete regulations on overnight camping. Horses must be kept at least 50 feet from picnic areas and campgrounds. They are not permitted in the Paw Paw Tunnel.

Picnicking You may picnic anywhere along the canal, but fires are permitted only where fireplaces are provided.

Vehicles Prohibited All motor vehicles, including mopeds, motorcycles, snowmobiles, and animal-drawn vehicles, are prohibited on the towpath.

Safety and Management Swimming and wading are prohibited in the canal. River currents are strong, deceptive, and unpredictable. The Potomac River must be respected as extremely dangerous. Hunting and trapping are prohibited. Fishing is subject to Maryland or Washington, D.C., regulations. Possession of metal detectors and relic hunting are prohibited on park property.

Cover photo: Darby Mill, Williamsport, Md., about 1895.

Georgetown to Swains Lock

Georgetown Information The canal information center is located at 1057 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W., phone (202) 653-5844.

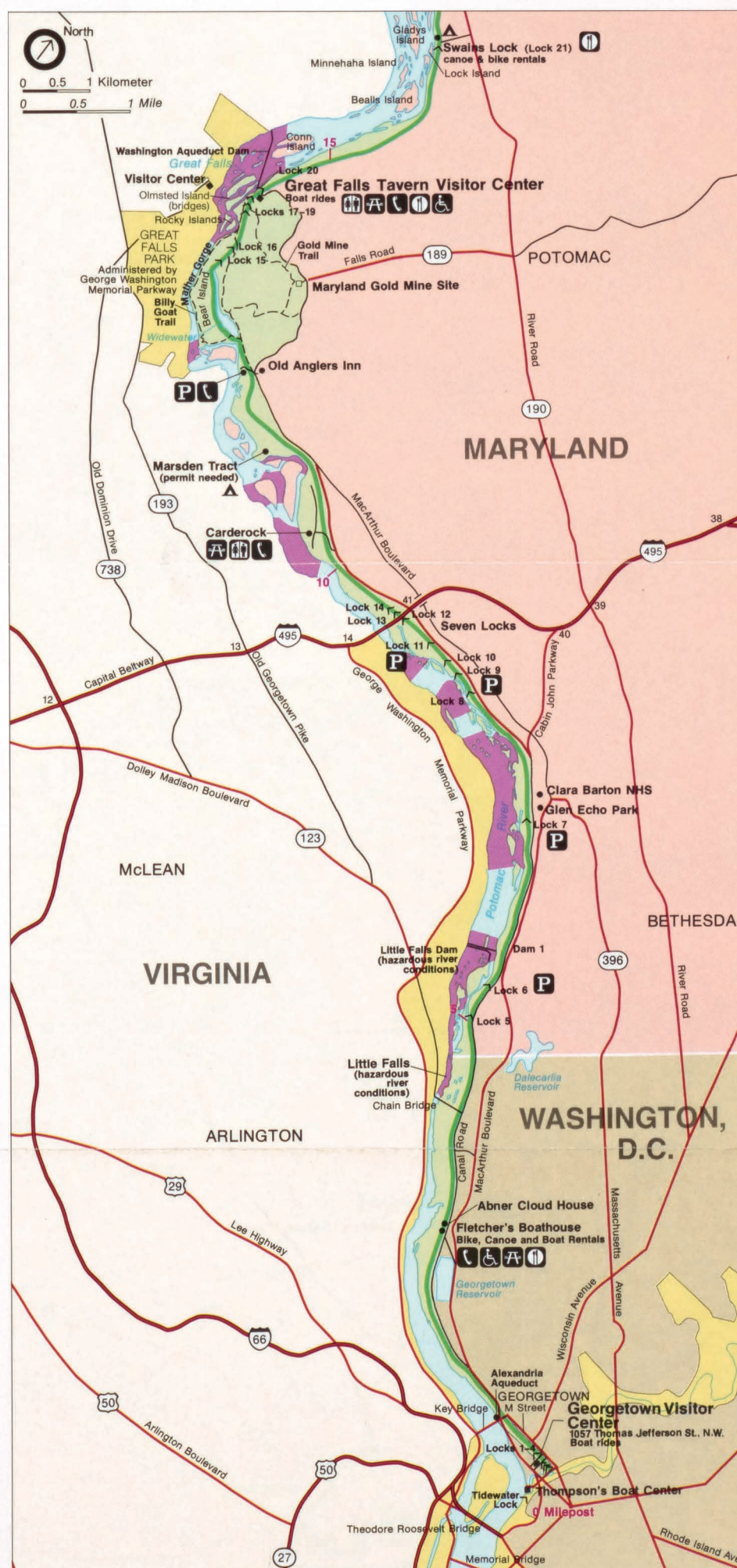
Great Falls Information The canal visitor center is in the Great Falls Tavern, 11710 MacArthur Blvd., Potomac, MD 20854; phone (301) 299-3613.

Boat Trips Relive the canal's heyday afloat under mulepower and lock through with a crew of interpreters in period clothing. Boats run at Georgetown and Great Falls from mid-April to mid-October. Tickets go on sale two hours before each trip. Reservations are taken for organized groups only. For Georgetown tickets, go to the canal information center (location above), or phone (202) 472-4376. For Great Falls, go to the tavern visitor center, or phone (301) 299-2026.

Rentals Rent canoes, boats, and bicycles at Thompson's Boat Center, (202) 333-4861; Fletcher's Boathouse, (202) 244-0461; or Swains Lock, (301) 299-9006.

Georgetown Georgetown predates creation of the Nation's Capital. It was an early, busy tidal port for the East Coast and Europe trades. The canal's tidelock lies at the mouth of Rock Creek, near the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Canal and towpath today thread a quaint commercial and residential area featuring fine restaurants and shops. In the canal's heyday Georgetown was a thriving industrial center.

Great Falls The Great Falls of the Potomac River attracted tourists from the canal's early days. The tavern, first built as a lockhouse, was expanded twice in its first four years. From Widewater—an earlier river channel—upstream to Great Falls the canal adjoins an exciting river landscape. Mather Gorge below Great Falls was carved by the falls. A trail system provides scenic but sometimes rugged hiking options. Ask at the tavern visitor center for directions to the Maryland Gold Mine. The visitor center exhibits show a lock model and canal era artifacts. A snack bar at Great Falls is open April through October. No rentals.



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