

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

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

Official Map and Guide



Darby Mill, Williamsport, Md., about 1895.

The C&O Canal began as a dream of passage to western wealth. It 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

The C&O Canal runs along the Potomac River from the mouth of Rock Creek in Georgetown to Cumberland, Maryland. Its 74 lift locks raise up from near sea level to an elevation of 605 feet at Cumberland. The towpath was originally built 12 feet wide as a path for mules that pulled canal boats. Today, the towpath 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 C&O 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.

National Park Service visitor centers at Georgetown, Great Falls Tavern, Williamsport, Hancock, and Cumberland provide information about ranger-led programs. For general information contact park headquarters: C&O Canal National Historical Park, Box 4, Sharpsburg, MD 21782-0004, 301-739-4200, or www.nps.gov/choh on the Internet. In emergencies, call 301-739-4206, or, from Georgetown to Seneca, call 202-619-7300; or call 911.

Maps, books, and other publications about the canal are sold at some information centers and by mail. For a free list write: Parks and History Association, 126 Raleigh St., SE, Washington, DC 20032, or call 202-472-3083.

Canal Recreation

Hiking and Bicycling Mile markers are posted. Bicyclists must observe these regulations: Do not exceed 15 mph. • Sound your bell or horn when approaching within 100 feet of other towpath users. • Ride single-file and stay to the right unless passing. • Yield to pedestrians and horses. • Wear a helmet as required by local law.

Camping *Drive-in camping* areas (primitive facilities only, no group camping) at McCoys Ferry, Fifteenmile Creek, and Spring Gap operate first-come, first-served, with 14-day limit May 1 to September 30 and a 30-day limit per year. Potable water is not available at McCoys Ferry and Spring Gap—or at any camping areas in winter. **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 Swains Lock and Evitts Creek. The Marsden Tract site requires a free permit obtained at Great Falls Tavern (see "Great Falls Information" below). Camping is permitted only in designated areas and at Antietam Creek, a tent camping area. **Camping supplies**, ice, food, and beverages can be bought at most stores along access roads.

Canoeing and Boating Canal canoeing and boating are popular in watered levels or sections from Georgetown to Violettes Lock. Canoeists must portage around each lock. Canoes can be rented at Swains Lock, Fletcher's Boathouse, and Thompson's Boat Center (see map below). Above Violettes 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; electric trolling motors are allowed at Big Pool, Little Pool, and Oldtown.

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 that is downstream from Harpers Ferry. Boating in these areas is extremely hazardous; it 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. Horses are prohibited in campgrounds, hiker/biker campsites, and the Paw Paw Tunnel. Horse riders should contact park headquarters at Sharpsburg for complete regulations on overnight camping. Keep horses at least 50 feet from picnic areas and campgrounds.

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 considered 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.

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Georgetown to Swains Lock

Georgetown Information The visitor center is at 1057 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW; phone 202-653-5844.

Great Falls Information The visitor center is in 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 can be made for organized groups only. For Georgetown tickets, go to the canal visitor center, or call 202-653-5190. For Great Falls, go to the tavern visitor center, or call 301-299-3613.

Rentals Canoes, boats, and bicycles may be rented at Thompson's Boat Center, 202-333-4861; Fletcher's Boathouse, 202-244-0461; or Swains Lock, 301-299-9006.

Georgetown An early, busy tidal port for trade along the East Coast and with Europe, Georgetown predates the Nation's Capital. The canal tidelock lies at the mouth of Rock Creek near the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Canal and towpath now thread a commercial and residential area featuring fine restaurants and shops. During 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 ancient river channel—upstream to Great Falls the canal adjoins an exciting river landscape. Mather Gorge below Great Falls was carved as the falls were eroded up stream. 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 a model of a lock and canal-era artifacts. A snackbar at Great Falls is open from April through October. No boat rentals—see Rentals, above.



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