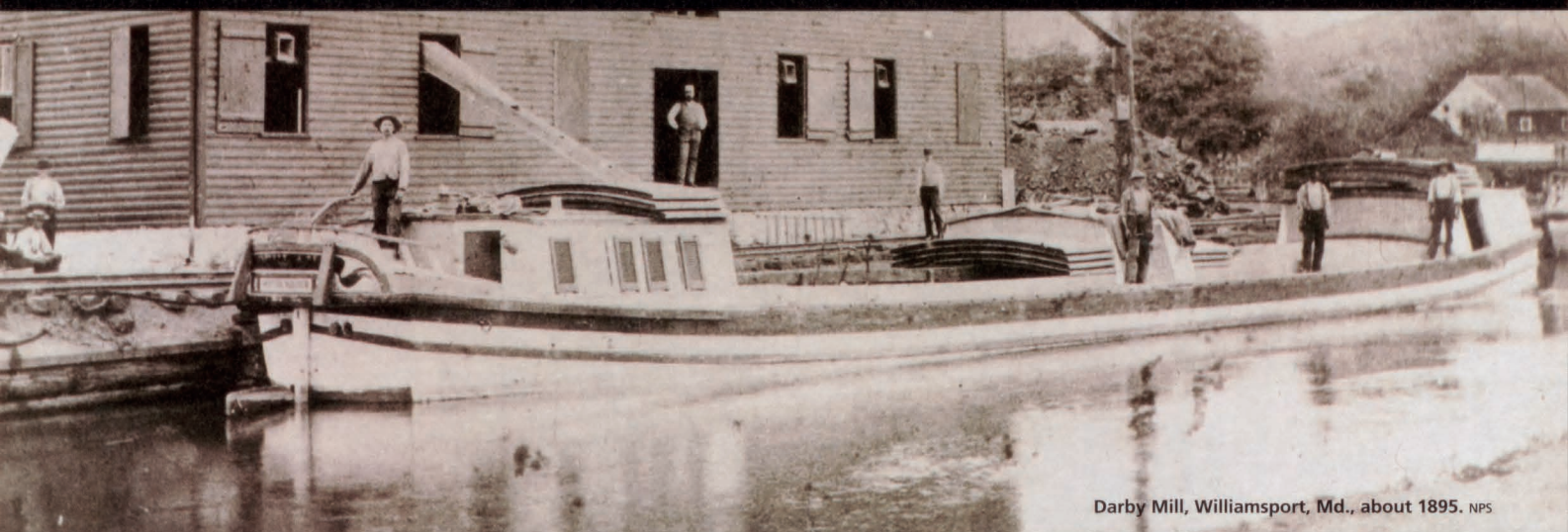


Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

National Historical Park
Maryland/Washington, D.C./
West Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Darby Mill, Williamsport, Md., about 1895. NPS

The Chesapeake and Ohio 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. It endures as a national historical park today—a pathway into history, nature, and recreation.

A Historic Waterway to the West

To cheers, toasts, and a blaring brass band, President John Quincy Adams broke ground for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal on Independence Day, 1828. The goal for the canal was ambitious: to improve on nature with a navigable waterway from tidewater at Georgetown to the Ohio River. The people had canal fever and dreamed of a united, wealthy nation trading with the world. A growing nation later saw the dream fulfilled but by other means of transportation.

By the time construction ended in 1850, progress had left the C&O Canal behind and canals were obsolete. Cost overruns, labor problems, and rocky terrain delayed building the canal, but new railroad technology had made great strides. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad completed the link to the West, while the canal stopped far short of reaching the Ohio River.

In a lifetime canals faded from beacons of a dawning age to quaint reminders of a bygone era. But from 1828 to 1850 thousands of immigrants found work—and hope of new life—building the canal. Until 1924, hundreds of working families would spend their lives along it. In the massive stonework of the locks and the aqueducts, their memories now linger like footprints of a restless nation's great migration westward.

After it closed in 1924 the C&O Canal sat nearly abandoned for 30 years. Flooding and financial ruin killed the C&O Canal Company but not the canal's physical remains. Now bypassed by freight and commerce, the canal was soon discovered by people with different goals. The canal's nearly level towpath ran 184.5 miles along the Potomac River. It had survived as a window on the past and a witness to the resilience of nature.

a long stretch of quiet and peace

—Justice William O. Douglas, 1954

One who rediscovered the C&O Canal was U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. Over time, Justice Douglas and other concerned citizens persuaded the federal government to protect the canal. In 1971 Congress established the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. Now you can enjoy what Douglas called, “a refuge, a place of retreat, a long stretch of quiet and peace.”

Hikers, campers, bicyclists, and others can experience the rich history, wildlife, and geology of the Potomac River valley. Watered sections of the canal accommodate canoeists, boaters, and anglers. In Georgetown and Great Falls, Maryland, rangers and volunteers in period clothing take you back to the canal's heyday in the mid-1800s.

Enjoy the Towpath and Canal

More Information
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Hagerstown, MD 21740
301-739-4200, www.nps.gov/choh

Hiking and Bicycling Brown concrete mileposts occur every mile along the towpath. Bicyclists must observe these regulations: • Do not exceed 15 mph. • Sound your bell or horn as you approach other towpath users. • Ride single-file, staying to the right. • Yield to pedestrians, horses, and mules. • Wear a helmet, as required by law. • Walk bikes across aqueducts.

Camping Camping is permitted only in designated areas. Restrooms and water pumps are at all campgrounds. Potable water is not available in winter. Fires are allowed only in designated areas. • Drive-in camping areas (primitive facilities, no groups) are first-come, first-served. Fees charged. Length-of-stay limits apply. • Group campgrounds require a fee, and Marsden Tract requires a permit you can get at the Great Falls Fee Station. • Hiker-Biker Overnight campsites for tent camping are placed at about five-mile intervals between Mileposts 16.6 and 180.1.

Canoeing and Boating Canoeing and non-motorized boating are possible in the watered canal sections from Georgetown to Milepost 22, and for short stretches above that. **NOTE:** Canal users must portage (carry their boat or canoe) around each lock. Motorized craft are generally prohibited. Swimming and wading in the canal are prohibited. Fishing is subject to Maryland or Washington, D.C., regulations. Contact visitor center staff about boat rental possibilities.

Hunting, trapping, possessing metal detectors, and relic hunting are prohibited in the park.

For Safety's Sake *The Potomac River must be considered extremely dangerous at all times. The river's currents are very strong, deceptive, and unpredictable. Do not swim in the river.*

Boat Rides and Visitor Centers

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal runs along the Potomac River from the mouth of Rock Creek at Georgetown in Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Md. Its 74 lift locks raised canal boats from near sea level to 605 feet of elevation at Cumberland. The towpath, built 12 feet wide as a path for mules, is now a nearly level byway for hikers and bicyclists to enjoy the canal's quiet beauty. The watered sections afford canoeists, boaters, and anglers quiet waters, while park rangers in period clothing take you back to a time when the canal was alive and well.

Canal Boat Rides Relive life on the canal aboard the park's reproduction canal boats. Enjoy ranger-led programs as you glide along the canal under mulepower. Boat rides depart from Georgetown and Great Falls from April through October. For group reservations, ticket information, and hours of operation, call the Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center (see below).

Visitor Centers

Canal information and history are available at six park visitor centers and at seasonal contact stations. See maps at right and on the reverse for locations. Hours vary by season, so please visit www.nps.gov/choh or call for schedules.

Georgetown Visitor Center 1057 Thomas Jefferson Street NW, Washington, D.C. 202-653-5190. Exhibits on the history of the canal and an urban canal setting.

Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center 11710 MacArthur Blvd., Potomac, Md. 301-767-3714. Originally a locktender's house, the building was later expanded. Exhibits present the history of the canal and the area.

Brunswick Visitor Center 40 West Potomac Street, Brunswick, Md. 301-739-4200. Exhibits highlight the town's transportation history from early ferry service to the predominance of the railroad.

Williamsport Visitor Center 205 West Potomac Street, Williamsport, Md. 301-582-0813. The Cushwa warehouse and basin on the canal are perfect places to delve into this canal town's fascinating history.

Hancock Visitor Center 326 East Main Street, just outside Hancock, Md. 301-678-5463. Displays tell the story of the canal and explain its operations.

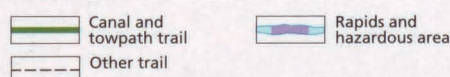
Cumberland Visitor Center Western Maryland Railway Station, 13 Canal Street, Cumberland, Md. 301-722-8226. Extensive exhibits tell about the canal and its western terminus.

Park rangers and partners open seasonal contact stations at the River Center at Lock 8, Lockhouse 29, Ferry Hill, and Lockhouse 75—maps at right and on the back show locations.

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. For information about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities please visit www.nps.gov.

Note: This is a trash-free park. Please take your trash with you when you leave.

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Detail Map of Georgetown to Swains Lock



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