# Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historical Park
Maryland / Washington, DC /
West Virginia



**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.**

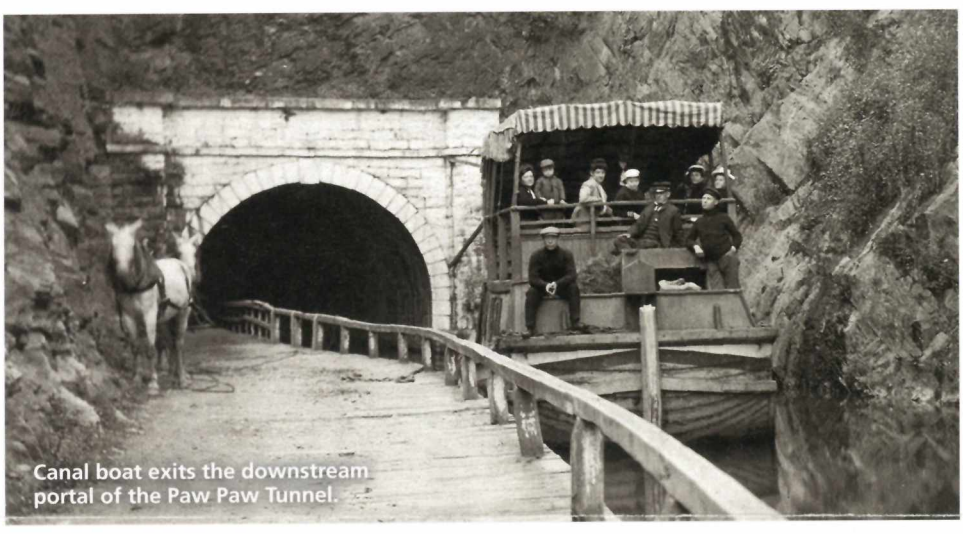
## Historic Waterway to the West

The goal was ambitious: to improve on nature with a navigable waterway from tidewater at Georgetown to the Ohio River. In 1828, amid Fourth of July fanfare and canal fever across the nation, ground was broken for the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. Before construction ended in 1850 the C&O was obsolete. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad completed the link to the West, while the canal stopped far short of the Ohio River.

In the span of a lifetime canals faded from beacons of a dawning age to quaint reminders of a bygone era. From 1828 to 1850 thousands of immigrants found work—and hope of new life—building the canal. Families worked and lived on the 12-foot-wide boats, and children often tended the mules.

After it closed in 1924, the C&O Canal sat nearly abandoned for 30 years. Flooding and financial ruin killed the business but not the canal's physical remains. Eventually the canal took on a new role as window on the past and witness to the resilience of nature.

Today, the nearly level towpath runs 184.5 miles along the Potomac River and serves as the spine of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. Hikers, campers, bicyclists, and others can experience the history, wildlife, and geology of the Potomac valley. The canal's watered sections accommodate canoeists, boaters, and anglers. In Great Falls and Williamsport, MD, rangers and volunteers in period clothing take you back to the canal's heyday.



Canal boat exits the downstream portal of the Paw Paw Tunnel.

## Enjoy the Towpath and Canal

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

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

**Camping** Camping is allowed in designated campsites only. Car-accessible and group campsites are reservation-only. Permits must be obtained at www.recreation.gov. Hiker-biker tent sites are located along the towpath every 5–7 miles and are free, non-reservation, and limited to one night. Potable water is not available in winter. Trash must be packed out from all park campgrounds.

For camping information visit www.nps.gov/choh/planyourvisit/camping. To stay overnight in a historic lockhouse visit www.canaltrust.org/quarters.

**On the Canal** Canoeing and non-motorized boating are possible in watered canal sections from Georgetown to Milepost 22 and for short stretches above that. **NOTE:** You must carry watercraft around each lock. Motorized craft are generally prohibited. Swimming and wading in the canal are prohibited. Maryland or Washington, DC, regulations govern fishing. Contact visitor centers about boat rentals.

Hunting, trapping, metal detectors, and relic hunting are prohibited in the park. Check the park website for firearms regulations.

**For Your Safety** The Potomac River must be considered *extremely dangerous at all times.* 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, DC, 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 where hikers and bicyclists can enjoy the canal's quiet beauty.

**Canal Boat Rides** Enjoy ranger-led programs aboard reproduction canal boats. Boat trips from Great Falls, MD, are mule-drawn. Williamsport trips are in electric launch boats. For hours and months of operation, ticket information, and group reservations call the visitor center at Great Falls Tavern or Williamsport, or visit the park website.

**Visitor Centers** Canal information and history are available at seven park visitor centers and seasonal contact stations (*see maps at right and on the reverse side*). Hours and days of operation vary by season, so please visit www.nps.gov/choh or call for schedules.

**Georgetown Visitor Center** 1057 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Washington, DC; 301-767-3714. Located in an urban canal setting. Exhibits on canal history.

**Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center** 11710 MacArthur Blvd., Potomac, MD; 301-767-3714. Originally a locktender's house and later expanded. Exhibits on canal and area history.

**Brunswick Visitor Center** 40 W. Potomac St., Brunswick, MD; 301-834-7100. Exhibits highlight the town's transportation history from early ferry service to the railroad.

**Ferry Hill Visitor Center** 16500 Shepherdstown Pike, Sharpsburg, MD; 301-582-0813. Former home of Confederate officer Henry Kyd Douglas. Exhibits on canal and Civil War.

**Williamsport Visitor Center** 205 W. Potomac St., Williamsport, MD; 301-582-0813. The Cushwa warehouse and basin are perfect places to delve into this canal town's history. Canal launch boat trip and program.

**Hancock Visitor Center** 439 E. Main St., just outside Hancock, MD; 301-582-0813. Displays on canal operations.

**Cumberland Visitor Center** Western Maryland Railway Station, 13 Canal St., Cumberland, MD; 301-722-8226. Extensive exhibits on the canal and its western terminus.

Park staff and partners open historic buildings to the public on occasion. Contact the park for a seasonal schedule.

**Accessibility** We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all.

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

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

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## Georgetown to Swains Lock




Canal and towpath trail
Other trail
Rapids and hazardous area
Parking
Restrooms
Snack bar
Picnic area
Wheelchair-accessible
Self-guiding trail
Canal Quarters site
Hiker-biker campsite

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