

C&O CANAL

TRAIL TO HISTORY

HANCOCK • PAW PAW • OLDTOWN
CUMBERLAND



canaltrust.org

C&O CANAL

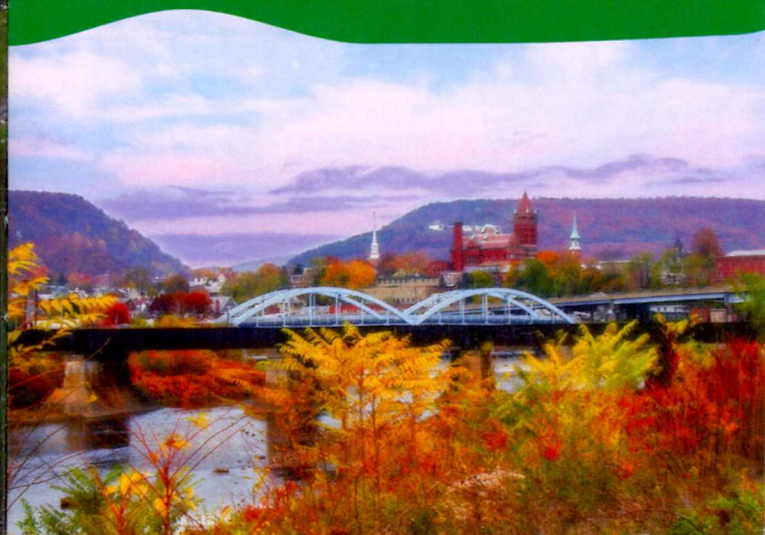
TRAIL TO HISTORY

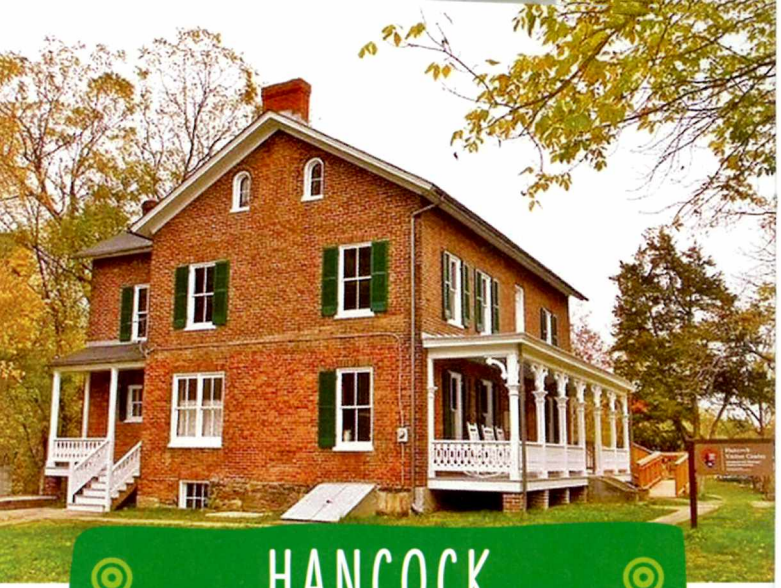
Take a journey into the rich history of our Canal Towns along the C&O Canal towpath. Explore our region in your car, ride a bike, raft the river, or take a leisurely stroll in our historic towns. Visit our historical parks and learn about our region's varied history. Pioneer settlement, transportation innovations, struggles for freedom—it all happened here.

Visit, explore, and enjoy!



It's 38 miles from **Hancock** to **Cumberland**, MD on interstate highways, but bends along the river when you are traveling the C&O Canal towpath stretch that mileage to 60. It's best not to rush anyway, as this wooded area is filled with natural beauty and wildlife. Travelers with an interest in heritage will also want to linger, as the towns of **Hancock**, **Paw Paw**, **Oldtown**, and **Cumberland** are rich in stories of frontier, mines, transportation, industry, and war. Opportunities for comfortable stays, good food and entertaining adventures round out the reasons to spend a few days exploring the C&O's Western region.





HANCOCK

Hancock's earliest settlers arrived in the 1730s, making it one of the oldest towns in Western Maryland. The town is named after Edward Joseph Hancock, Jr., who operated a ferry in the area and fought alongside George Washington in the American Revolutionary War. Hancock's unique location at a northern bend in the Potomac River made it a transportation hub, and it was connected by road to the National Road in 1818. The C&O Canal arrived in 1839, and by 1905 the Western Maryland Railroad formed a link to the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad.



St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Hancock shortly after the Civil War



Towpath, canal, and town streets lie alongside each other in Hancock.

The Historic National Road, now a National Scenic Byway, was begun in 1811 and was one of the first federally funded transportation projects of the young nation. Its goal was both noble and simple: to connect the eastern cities with the western frontier via a road able to carry Conestoga wagons, as well as travelers on foot or horseback.

Hancock's main action during the Civil War took place in January 1862, when Confederate General Stonewall Jackson and his troops suffered one of their first defeats of the war. On January 5, Jackson's men occupied Orrick's Hill across the river from Hancock, firing on the town and demanding surrender. With the help of bad weather, Union Brigadier General F.W. Lander held the town and prevented an invasion by Jackson's men.

Today, Hancock continues its heritage as a transportation and trail hub with the Western Maryland Rail Trail (WMRT), the Tuscarora hiking trail, and the Historic National Road running alongside or intersecting the C&O Canal towpath here. The 28-mile WMRT's paved surface provides an alternative for wheelchair users, in-line skaters, and others



Bicyclists on the Western Maryland Rail Trail

unable to traverse the towpath. The 252-mile Tuscarora Trail is an official side-trail of the Appalachian Trail and provides a western alternative for long-distance or day hikers between central Virginia and Pennsylvania. Boaters are able to access the Potomac River on a ramp in Hancock.

Modern Hancock celebrates its history, but it also is home to small businesses drawn by the town's commercial incentives and transportation access. You can visit the Hancock Museum in Town Hall to learn about Hancock's Civil War history and the apple orchard industry that followed. Sideling Hill's well-known geology and wildlife exhibits are here as well. At Sideling Hill itself, you can see evidence of the unique geologic formations in the area.



Fort Frederick

Fort Frederick, located near Big Pool, Maryland, was built in 1756-57 at the time of the French and Indian War. The large stone fort was built primarily as a place of refuge for area settlers. During the American Revolutionary War, the fort was used as a prison camp to incarcerate German and British soldiers. Sold at auction in 1791, Fort Frederick lay abandoned until the Civil War, when it was garrisoned and served as a gun emplacement to protect the C&O Canal as well as the B&O Railroad.

Fort Frederick is located in the 585-acre Fort Frederick State Park. The C&O Canal National Historical Park runs through the park. Today, you can find ample opportunities for recreation in the area, including hiking, cycling, picnicking, camping, and fishing. Two reconstructed barracks with reproductions of period artifacts and a museum depicting area history are located on the grounds.

While you are in the area, at Mile 134.2 east of Hancock you can see the remnants of the old wooden structure on the Potomac River referred to as Dam #6. The Confederates attacked the dam and the nearby Lock 55 to sabotage Union supply routes along the canal.

BIKE ACCESS



Multiple roads and trails link the C&O Canal towpath with nearby and parallel Main Street, Canal Street, and the Western Maryland Rail Trail.

POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food, and other services, visit www.townofhancock.org

Bowles House, C&O Canal mile marker 123. Historic home whose original owners, the Yates, witnessed the construction of the C&O Canal out their front door.

Fort Frederick State Park, C&O Canal mile marker 112. The stone fort served as Maryland's frontier defense during the French and Indian War. https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/western/fortfrederick.aspx

Hancock Tollhouse, .5 miles west on MD Route 144. Built in 1820 for a toll keeper who collected a fee for the privately owned National Road. Not open to visitors.

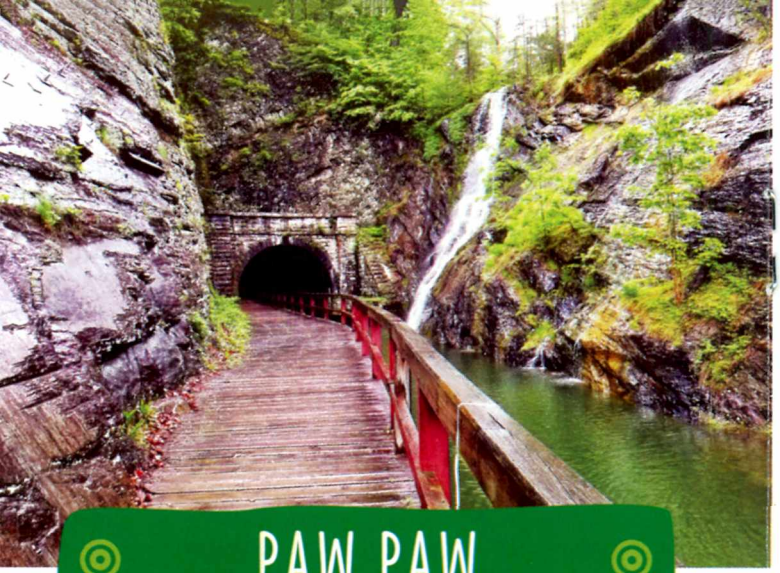
Hancock Museum at Town Hall, 126 W. High Street. Exhibits and archives of town history, Sideling Hill geological exhibits. 301-678-5622.

Outdoor recreation. Bike and surrey rentals, boat ramp, and camping. www.townofhancock.org/

Sideling Hill, six miles west of Hancock on I-68. 800-foot wide geological syncline exposed by highway cut in the mountain. Visitor Center includes a walkway and observation bridge. www.visitmaryland.org/listing/visitor-centers/sideling-hill-welcome-center

Western Maryland Rail Trail. Paved multi-use trail runs 28 miles through Hancock, much of it parallel and adjacent to the C&O Canal towpath. https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/pages/western/wmrt.aspx

Widmeyer Park and Veterans War Memorial, 220 Park Road. Monument etched with names of 900 Hancock veterans who served in the military from the Civil War through the Persian Gulf War.



PAW PAW

About 15 miles upstream from Hancock, the Potomac River snakes back and forth in what is known as the Paw Paw Bends. In one of these bends lies the town of Paw Paw, West Virginia, named after the native fruit tree common in the area.

The earliest Europeans in the area were fur traders and farmers. Colonial-era travelers, including George Washington, forded the river here. Later, a ferry operated until the present bridge was constructed in 1928. During the French and Indian War, British General Edward Braddock's army camped on the ridge above the settlement. In the 1860s, 16,000 Union troops would be stationed at the same location, then called Camp Chase, to defend the B&O Railroad from Confederate attack. Today, things are quieter, and you can visit Camp Hill Cemetery at the site.

Though the town of Paw Paw began to emerge around 1800, an industrial boom would come later. After 1868, the Paw Paw Tannery became the largest producer of industrial belt leather in the world. The Miller brothers planted orchards in the area in the early 20th century and established the Consolidated Orchard Company. In 1924 their "Mountaineer" variety of apples was patented and shipped around the world.

Transportation was also instrumental in Paw Paw's development. The C&O Canal Company and the B&O Railroad both arrived in the 1830s. The Canal Company's construction of the 3,118-foot Paw Paw Tunnel began in 1836 but was not completed until 1850. This tunnel through Sorrel Ridge avoided five miles of canal construction along the winding Potomac and created a nineteenth-century engineering wonder. Mules pulled barges through the Paw Paw Tunnel until the canal closed in 1924.

Today, hikers and bicyclists on the Canal towpath can walk through the tunnel; a flashlight will help. Canal travelers who cross the Potomac bridge will encounter a friendly town with food and overnight accommodations. Paw Paw is home to several buildings on the National Register of Historic Places and is a staging point for miles of gravel bike trails.



Old Mayor's Office and Jail

BIKE ACCESS

Downtown Paw Paw is one mile from C&O Canal mile marker 156.2, via a bike path and the Paw Paw Bridge. The ride is flat, and traffic on the bridge is moderately low.

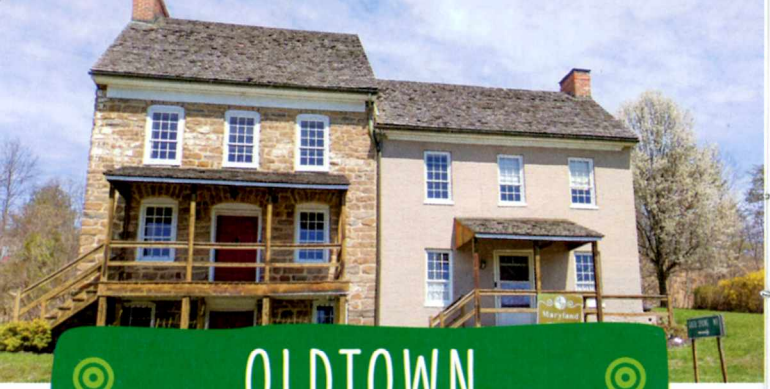
POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food and other services, visit www.visitpawpawwv.com

Camp Hill Cemetery, one mile south of town on WV 9. Beautifully situated cemetery served as encampment site in both the French and Indian and the Civil Wars.

Paw Paw Tunnel, C&O Canal towpath, between mile markers 155 and 156. Nineteenth-century tunnel provided passage by canal through the mountain.

Visitor Center. A downtown visitor kiosk has general information on the town and area. A walking tour brochure is available there and online. The tour features several buildings on the National Register of Historic Sites, including the 1876 **St. Charles Catholic Mission Church**, the 1893 **Mayor's Office and Lockup**, the 1928 **Two-Room Black School**, and the 1909 residence of **Senator P.E. Nixon**, who secured funding for the bridge between Paw Paw and Maryland.



OLDTOWN

In 1741, a military officer named Thomas Cresap opened a trading post at the site of an abandoned Shawnee Indian Village called "Shawanese Old Town." While there, he helped Lord Baltimore establish Maryland jurisdiction over the area, worked with Delaware Chief Nemacolin to open a road to the Ohio frontier, and aided George Washington during several trips to the west. Thomas's son Michael fought in the Revolution alongside the future President.

In August 1864, Confederate raiders crossed the Potomac back into West Virginia here after returning from their destruction of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania during the Civil War. Union forces attempting to block the rebels' withdrawal at Oldtown were routed by Confederate Lt. John R. McNulty's close-range artillery fire.

Today, Oldtown is a quiet village right on the C&O Canal towpath. You can visit the Irvin Allen/Michael Cresap Museum in the old officer's home and cross over the 1937 low-water toll bridge to Green Spring, WV (free to pedestrians and bicyclists).

BIKE ACCESS

Oldtown is right off the C&O Canal towpath.

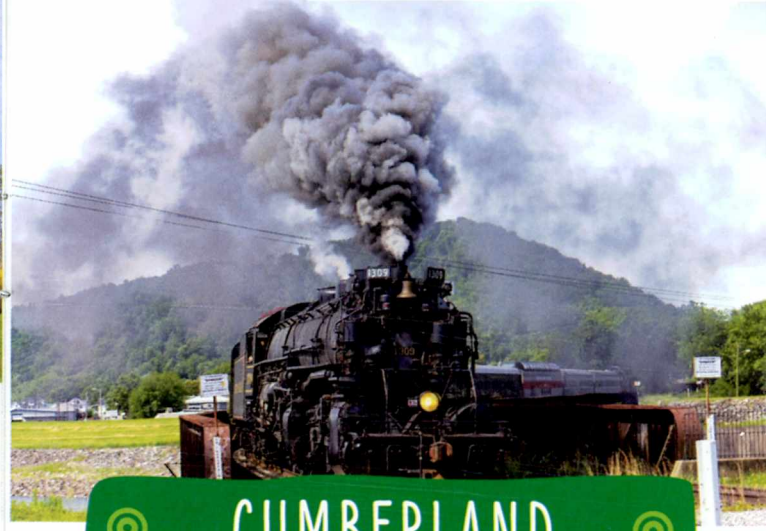
POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food and other services, visit www.mdmountainside.com

Irvin Allen/Michael Cresap Museum, 19015 Opessa St., SE. 1764 home of frontiersman and Revolutionary War hero.

Oldtown Historical Toll Bridge. 1937 bridge across the Potomac River, free to bicyclists and pedestrians.

Locks 69, 70 and 71. All on the C&O Canal towpath in or nearby Oldtown. Fishing in the canal is popular in this area; a Maryland license is required.



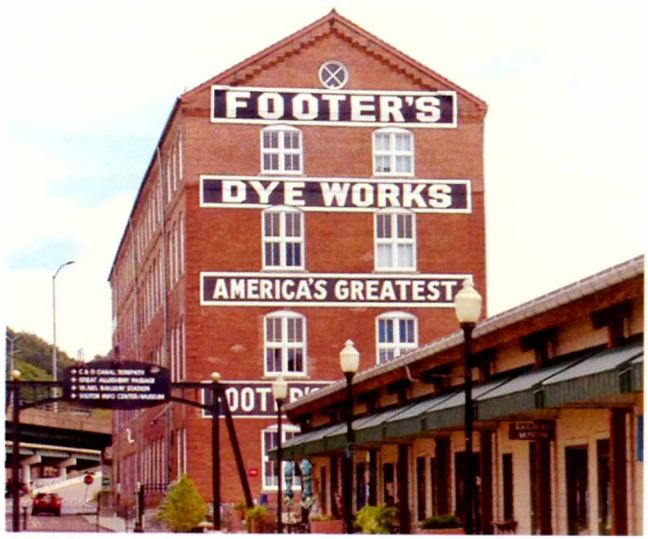
CUMBERLAND



Folck's Mill was a Civil War battle location.

In the mid-eighteenth century, an Indian village at the confluence of Wills Creek and the Potomac River gave way to a colonial settlement and a trading post. The British Fort Cumberland was established at this site during the French and Indian War, and both General Braddock and the 22-year-old Colonel George Washington used the fort to force French settlers out of the area.

The town of Cumberland became an important stop on the National Road in 1818, linking travelers from eastern cities



Canal Place



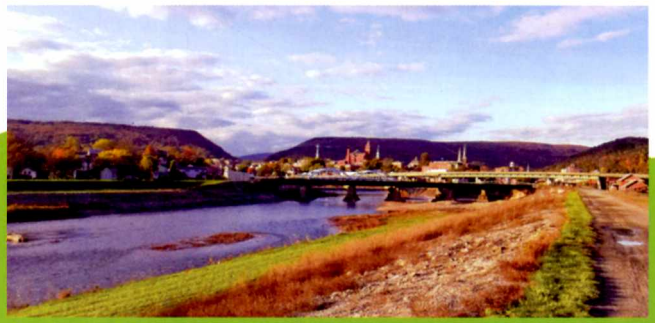
Baltimore Street



Gordon-Roberts House

with Wheeling, Virginia (now WV) and the Ohio River. The C&O Canal originally planned a similar route, but by the time the canal reached Cumberland in 1850, the B&O Railroad had raced ahead, making a canal over the Allegheny Mountains economically impractical. The city became the western terminus of the C&O Canal, and coal, flour, iron, and limestone all floated downstream from the area mines and mills.

During the Civil War, thousands of Union troops were stationed in Cumberland to protect this vital transportation, supply, and communication hub. Frequent Confederate raids were staged against the railroad in the area, the most spectacular being a pre-dawn raid on February 21, 1865, when Confederate Lt. Jesse McNeill and his raiders captured Union Generals George Crook and Benjamin Kelly. The raiders succeeded in entering Cumberland by overwhelming a Union picket post



Cumberland, "Queen City" along the Potomac



Washington's Headquarters

and gaining the secret countersign. The generals were unharmed and were soon exchanged for Confederates imprisoned in Cumberland.

Rich coal deposits and transportation resources transformed Cumberland into an industrial boomtown following the Civil War, and it became an important producer of beer, glass, tires, and textiles. Today, many factories have ceased operation, and tourism rivals industry as an area employer and economic force.

At the end (or the beginning!) of your C&O Canal towpath tour is Canal Place, where you can learn about C&O Canal history, take a ride on the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, and learn about tourist sites in the area. Cumberland's vibrant downtown has shops, cafes, and museums, and historic neighborhoods lie nearby. In Riverside Park, you'll find Washington's Headquarters, the only remaining structure from old Fort Cumberland.



Near Cumberland, the Great Allegheny Passage trail runs alongside the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad.

BIKE ACCESS

The C&O Canal towpath ends at the edge of downtown Cumberland at Canal Place, where the Great Allegheny Passage begins.

POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food and other services, visit www.rediscovercumberland.com

Allegany Museum, 3 Pershing Street. History and natural history of Cumberland and its region. www.alleganymuseum.org/

Canal Place, 13 Canal Street. C&O Canal National Historical Park Museum and Visitor Center for the C&O Canal and Cumberland; canal boat replica, "The Cumberland." www.passagesofthepotomac.org/

Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 16 Washington Street. Built on remains of British colonial fort, with Tiffany windows.

F. Brooke Whiting House
218 Washington Street. 1911 bungalow with the art collection of a famed connoisseur.
Tours by appointment; call 301-777-7782.
www.thewhitinghouse.org/



F. Brooke Whiting House

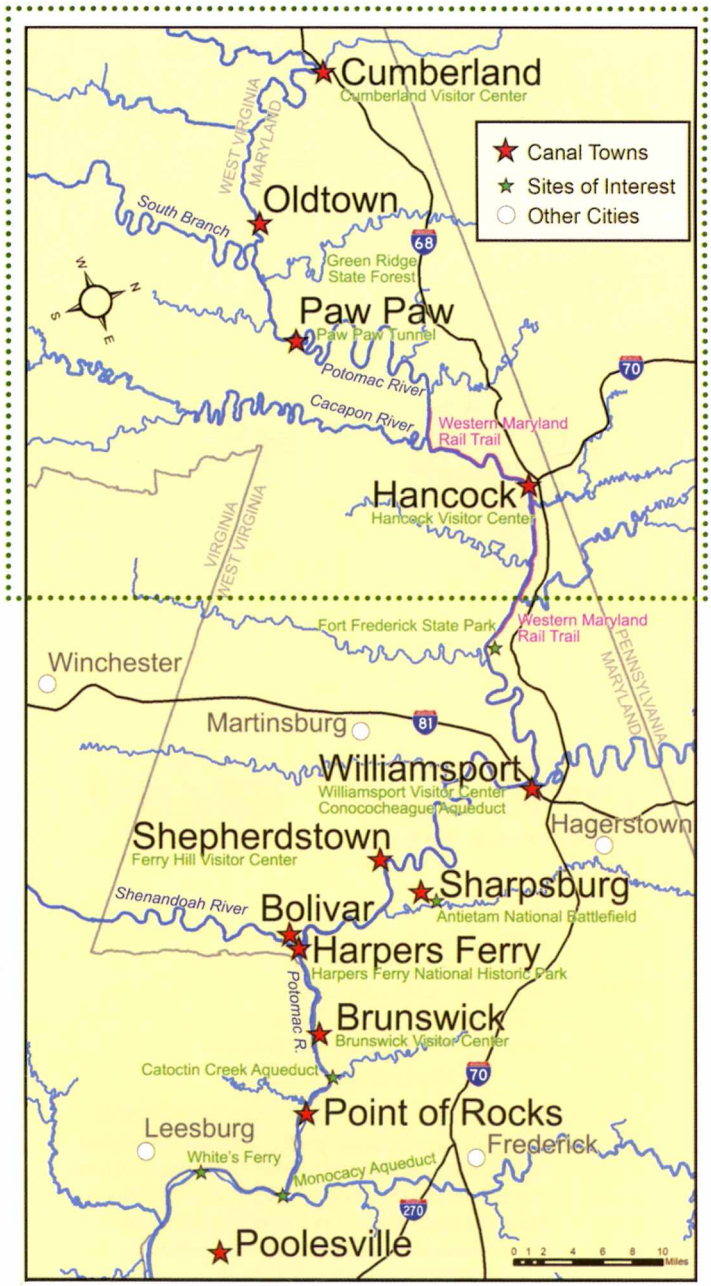
George Washington Headquarters and National Road Monument, Riverside Park at Greene Street. One-room cabin used by Washington during the French and Indian War.

The Gordon-Roberts House, 218 Washington Street. 1867 furnished Second-Empire-style mansion. Tours available. www.gordon-robertshouse.com

Great Allegheny Passage. Bike trail along old railroad lines from Cumberland to Pittsburgh, PA. www.gaptrail.org

Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, 13 Canal Street. Scenic and historical train ride through the Allegheny Mountains. www.wmsr.com

MAP



The C&O Canal Explorer app has over 600 points of interest mapped for you in a searchable format, allowing you to find hiking trails, campgrounds, history, trailheads, parking, and more at a glance.

The app also calculates the distance from your location to nearby amenities, and points of interest. The C&O Canal Explorer app will encourage you to tread new paths and journey to new parts of the Park!
www.canaltrust.org/app

www.canaltowns.org

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The C&O Canal National Historical Park is a recognized site on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.