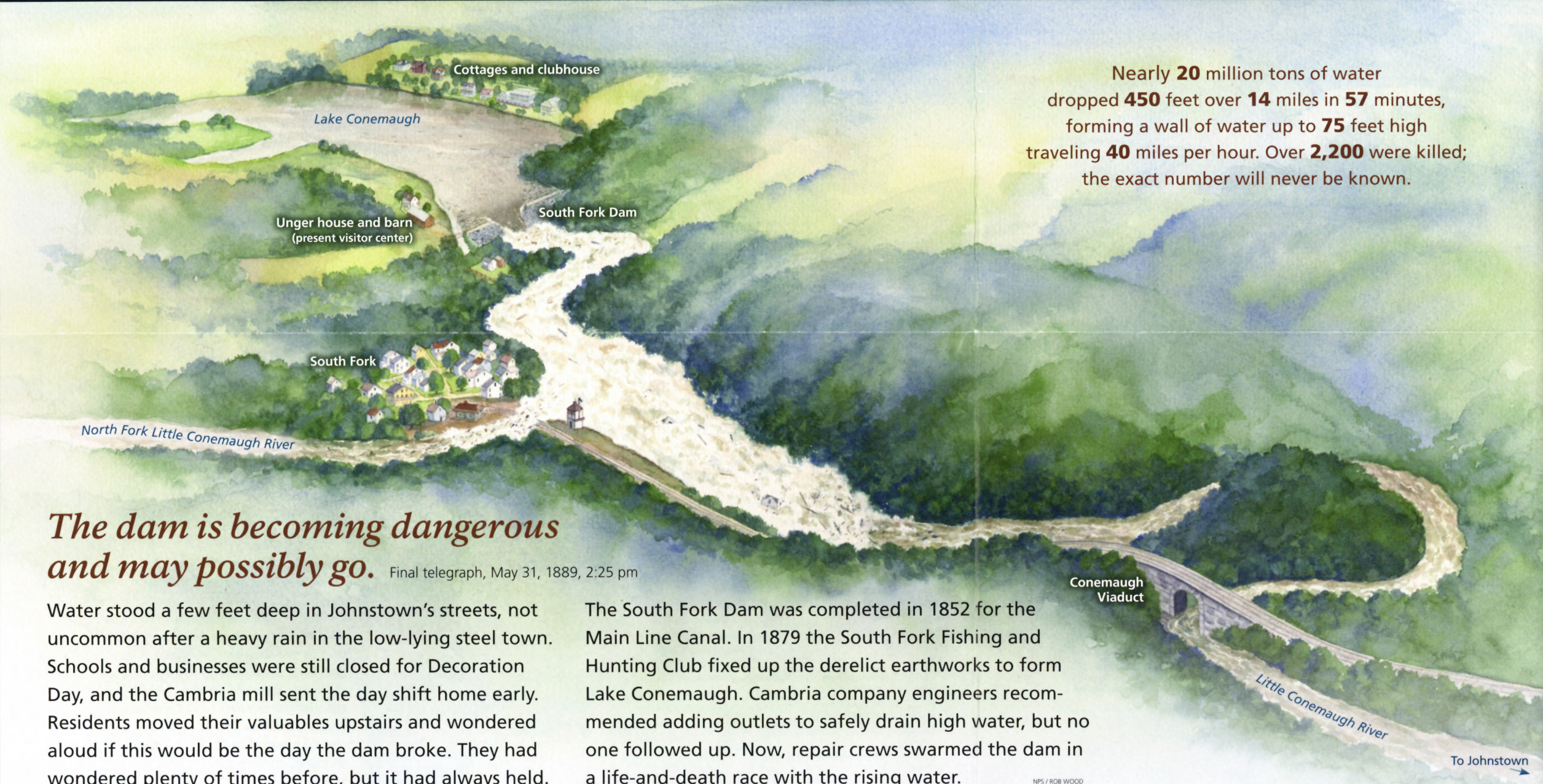




Nearly **20** million tons of water dropped **450** feet over **14** miles in **57** minutes, forming a wall of water up to **75** feet high traveling **40** miles per hour. Over **2,200** were killed; the exact number will never be known.

The dam is becoming dangerous and may possibly go.

Final telegraph, May 31, 1889, 2:25 pm

Water stood a few feet deep in Johnstown's streets, not uncommon after a heavy rain in the low-lying steel town. Schools and businesses were still closed for Decoration Day, and the Cambria mill sent the day shift home early. Residents moved their valuables upstairs and wondered aloud if this would be the day the dam broke. They had wondered plenty of times before, but it had always held.

The South Fork Dam was completed in 1852 for the Main Line Canal. In 1879 the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club fixed up the derelict earthworks to form Lake Conemaugh. Cambria company engineers recommended adding outlets to safely drain high water, but no one followed up. Now, repair crews swarmed the dam in a life-and-death race with the rising water.

NPS / ROB WOOD

From left: Fundraising announcement; souvenir tag; recovering victims; Clara Barton, 1897; rescue worker's ID card.



Terrible Scenes Among the Ruins of Johnstown

The New York Times, June 3, 1889

As the water receded, devastation and misery were left in its wake. The official death toll was 2,209. Thousands were homeless, orphaned, widowed, injured, or sick from rampant disease. Help came immediately from all over the world—a new flood of food, clothes, medical supplies, and building materials that would continue for months. Clara Barton led the American Red Cross in its first major relief effort.

Only a few of the South Fork club members were present on the day of the flood. Many gave large donations, which did nothing to dispel the growing feeling that they were to blame. Meanwhile, club officers successfully fended off lawsuits and quietly shut down the clubhouse and cottages. By 1904 all property was sold.

In 1892 Grandview Cemetery was dedicated with a monument presiding over 777 unknown victims of the "Great Flood." Flood stories—true and apocryphal—captured the public imagination for decades.

What if the dam had been properly maintained, the towns built on higher ground, the warnings heeded? The "what-ifs" will linger for as long as the flood story is told.

Property damage (below) was estimated at \$17 million. The cleanup operation took years, with bodies still being found months later. The city eventually regained its population and rebuilt its mills.



May 31, 1889

8:30 am With the lake level rising, club president Col. Elias J. Unger and engineer John Parke order laborers to dig an emergency spillway on the dam's south edge while using the fill to build up the height at the center.

11:00 am The lake level reaches the top of the dam. Parke rushes to South Fork with news of possible dam failure. Telegraph operator Emma Ehrenfeld sends warnings to points downriver.

2:25 pm Ehrenfeld sends one last message, received at 2:45 by railroad agent Frank Deckert in Johnstown. He telephones Hettie Ogle at Western Union, who relays the warning, adding "This is my last message." Ogle dies in the flood.

2:50 pm Water breaches the dam, the fatal blow to the water-logged earthen structure.

The whole dam seemed to move out all at once. No not a break, just one big push.

U. Ed Schwartzentruber, eyewitness

3:10 pm The dam gives way. Twenty million tons of water shove a mountain of debris down the Little Conemaugh, taking out bridges, roads, train tracks, and entire towns along the way.

3:30 pm Debris lodges in the 78-foot Conemaugh Viaduct, temporarily blocking the floodwater. The viaduct collapses, unleashing a 75-foot wall of destruction.

3:41 pm The surge from the viaduct levels most of Mineral Point. Nearby, telegraph operator William Pickerill climbs to safety just as his tower collapses. He survives along with his family.

3:45 pm As the flood rolls into view, train engineer John Hess sounds his whistle continuously en route from Buttermilk Falls to East Conemaugh, where he jumps from the train and scrambles uphill just in time. Twenty-two passengers are killed along with 28 people in East Conemaugh and Franklin.

4:00 pm Woodvale is flattened, with 314 killed. The boilers explode at Gautier Wire Works, spewing miles of barbed wire into the roiling mountain of debris.

4:07 pm At Johnstown, the flood divides into three paths of devastation: northwest along the Little Conemaugh, southward up the Stonycreek River, and westward, where it hits Westmont Hill and rebounds back across town.



4:20 pm Northwest of downtown, the Stone Bridge's archways are clogged, trapping some 100,000 tons of trees, houses, freight cars, barbed wire, animals, and people as water continues to push from upstream.

6:00 pm Oil-soaked wreckage at the bridge catches fire, claiming up to 80 lives.

The seven-arch stone railroad bridge (left) held against the flood, trapping a 30-acre mass of debris that burned for three days. The bridge, refaced in concrete, is still used for traffic and trains.

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Explore the Stories of Johnstown Flood



Established in 1964, Johnstown Flood National Memorial commemorates the people, places, and events related to the 1889 disaster. As you visit this serene landscape, look for clues to the past: the remains of South Fork Dam, the

old reservoir bed, a farmhouse (*above*) that witnessed the dam break, and buildings from the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. Do you want to know more? Hike, bike, or drive along the path of the flood from the dam to Johnstown.

Visitor Center Information, exhibits, and a 35-minute film. Call or check the park website for hours, activities, and special programs. To reach the visitor center, take US 219 to the Saint Michael/Sidman exit, go east on PA 869 (Locust Street) for 1.5 miles, and turn left on Lake Road to parking.

Dam Site The north and south ends have viewing areas over the ruins of the dam. A trail on the south side leads into the old lake bed and through the breach.

Clubhouse and Cottages The original clubhouse and several private cottages are in Saint Michael. The buildings are open to the public only by NPS tour. Ask for schedules at the visitor center or check the park website.

Path of the Flood Tours From June through September, join park rangers on van tours and hikes from the South Fork Dam to Johnstown, with stops along the way.

Johnstown Flood Museum Operated by Heritage Johnstown, the museum is one of several sites in downtown Johnstown that tell the flood story. Visit www.jaha.org.

Stay Safe, Protect the Park Camping, hunting, and open fires are prohibited. • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. • Pets must be on a leash at all times. • GPS is unreliable; use maps (*right and below*) for navigation. • Using remotely piloted aircraft like drones is prohibited. • For a complete list of regulations, including firearms, check the park website.

Emergencies call 911

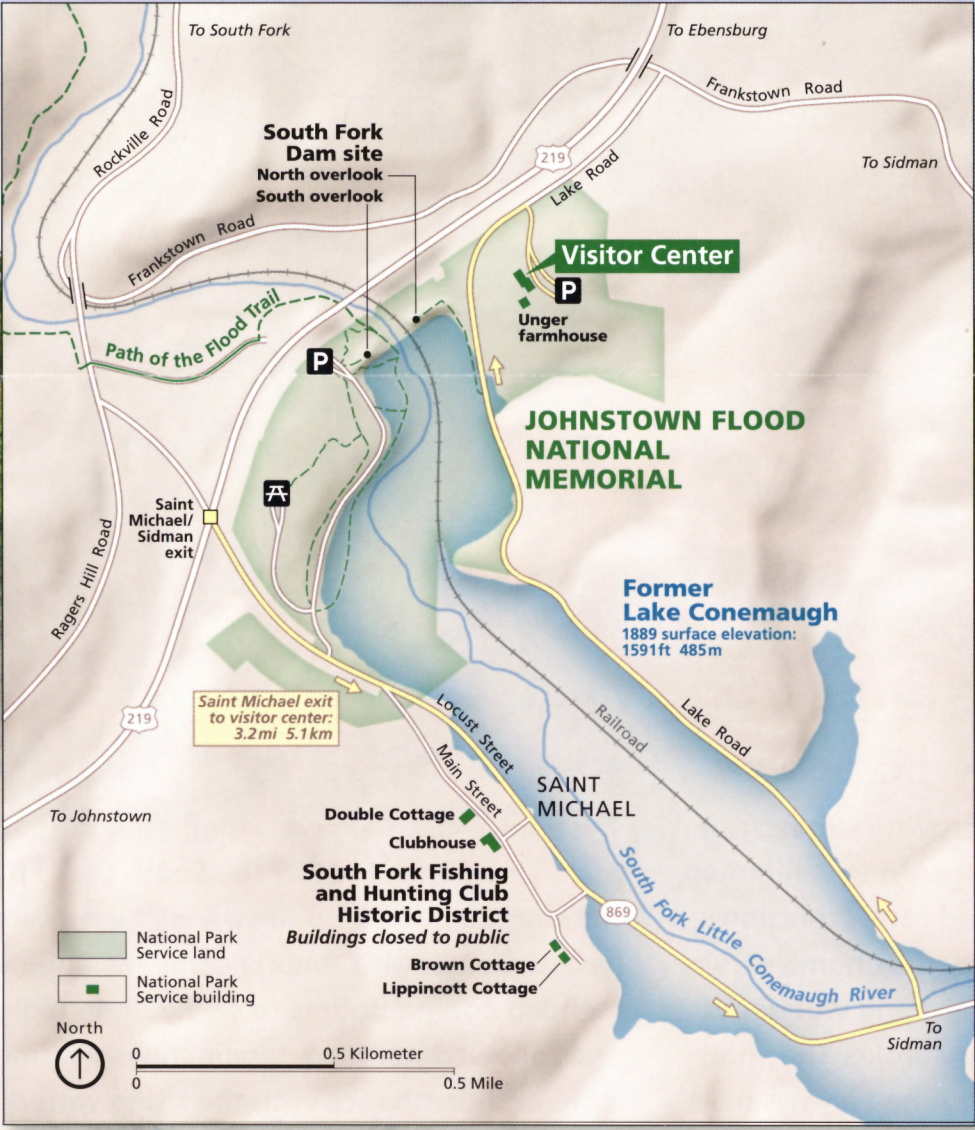
Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, call, ask a ranger, or check the park website.

More Information Johnstown Flood National Memorial 733 Lake Rd. South Fork, PA 15956 814-886-6171 www.nps.gov/jofl

Johnstown Flood National Memorial is one of over 430 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org
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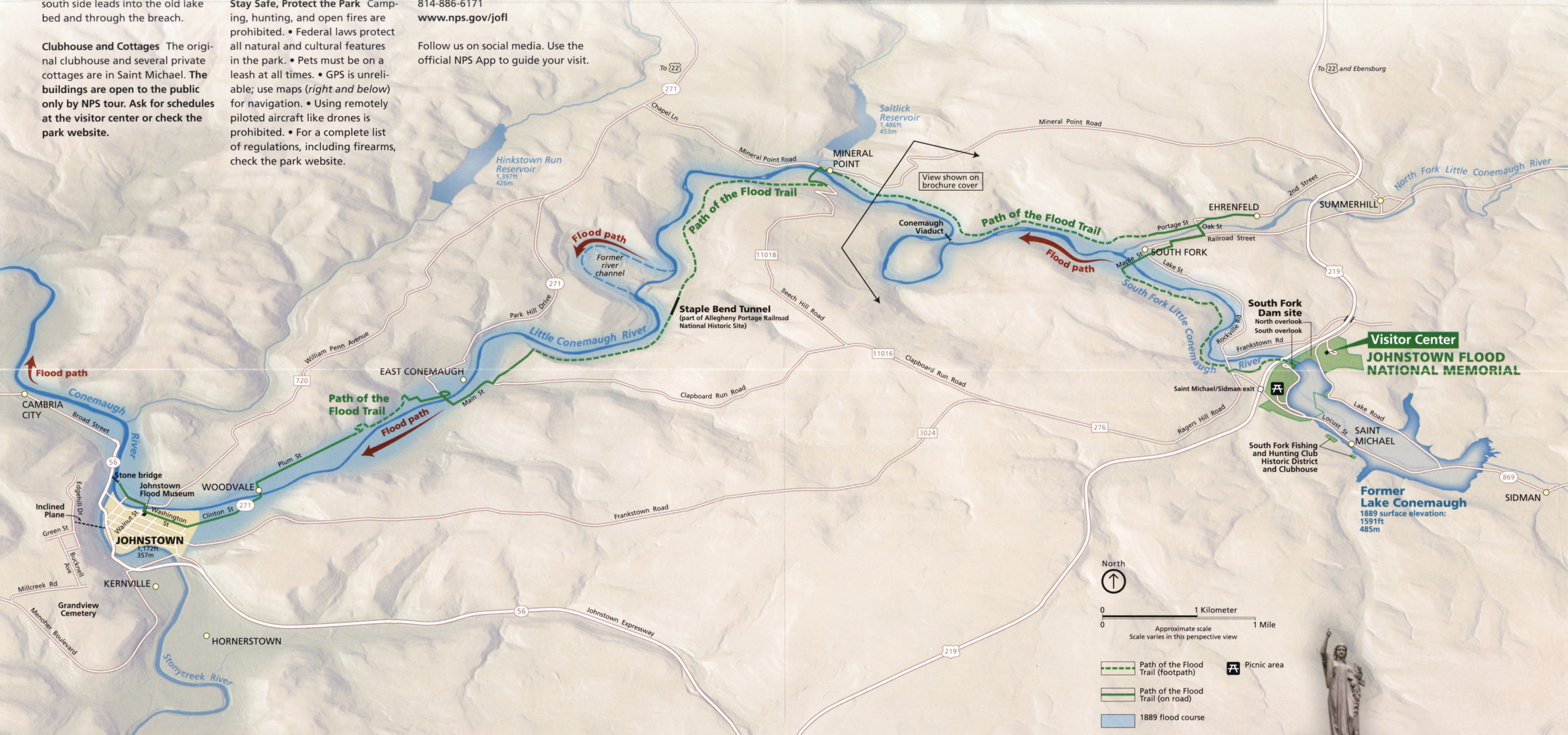
Follow us on social media. Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.



Of the 16 cottages built for the club, nine remain. Six are privately owned, and three are owned by the park. You can view them from the outside and can see the inside of the clubhouse on a ranger-led tour.



South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Formed in 1879, the club took over the defunct reservoir built years earlier for the Main Line Canal. The club's founders sought out prominent Pittsburgh industrialists like Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick. Soon, several cottages and a clubhouse (*above*) had been built along the shore of the new Lake Conemaugh. Wealthy families arrived by train and spent summer days fishing, sailing, shooting, and socializing.



Grandview Cemetery Hundreds of victims of the "Great Flood" are buried here. The monument at far right, dedicated in 1892, stands over the graves of 777 unidentified

adults and children. Founded in 1885, the cemetery spans most of Johnstown's history, including world wars and the floods of 1936 and 1977.

