



Explore the Towpath

Hiking and Bicycling

Brown concrete mileposts are located every mile along the towpath.

Bicyclists must observe these regulations:

- Do not exceed 15 mph.
- Sound your bell or horn when approaching other towpath users.
- 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

- Drive-in camping areas (primitive facilities, no groups) operate first-come, first-served. Fees are charged. Length-of-stay limitations apply.
- Group campgrounds require a fee, and Marsden Tract requires a permit, obtainable at Great Falls Fee Station.
- Hiker-Biker Overnight campsites for tent camping occur approximately every five miles between Mileposts 16.6 and 180.1.

Camping is permitted only in designated areas. Camping supplies and food can be bought at stores near the park. Find restrooms and water pumps at all campsites. Potable water is not available in winter. Fires are allowed only in designated areas.

Bicyclists like the mostly level towpath.

Canoeing and Boating

Canoeing and non-motorized boating are possible in watered sections of the canal from Georgetown to Milepost 22, and for short stretches above that.

Important note: Canal users must portage (carry their boat) around each lock. Motorized craft are generally prohibited. Contact visitor center staff about boat rental possibilities.

For Safety's Sake

The Potomac River must be considered extremely dangerous at all times. The river's current is strong and deceptive and can be unpredictable.

- **Swimming and wading in the canal are prohibited.**
- **Hunting and trapping in the park are prohibited.**
- **Fishing is subject to Maryland or D.C. laws.**
- **Metal detectors and relic hunting are prohibited on park property.**
- **Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.**
- **Pets must be leashed at all times.**
- **The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park is a trash-free park. Please take your trash with you when you leave.**

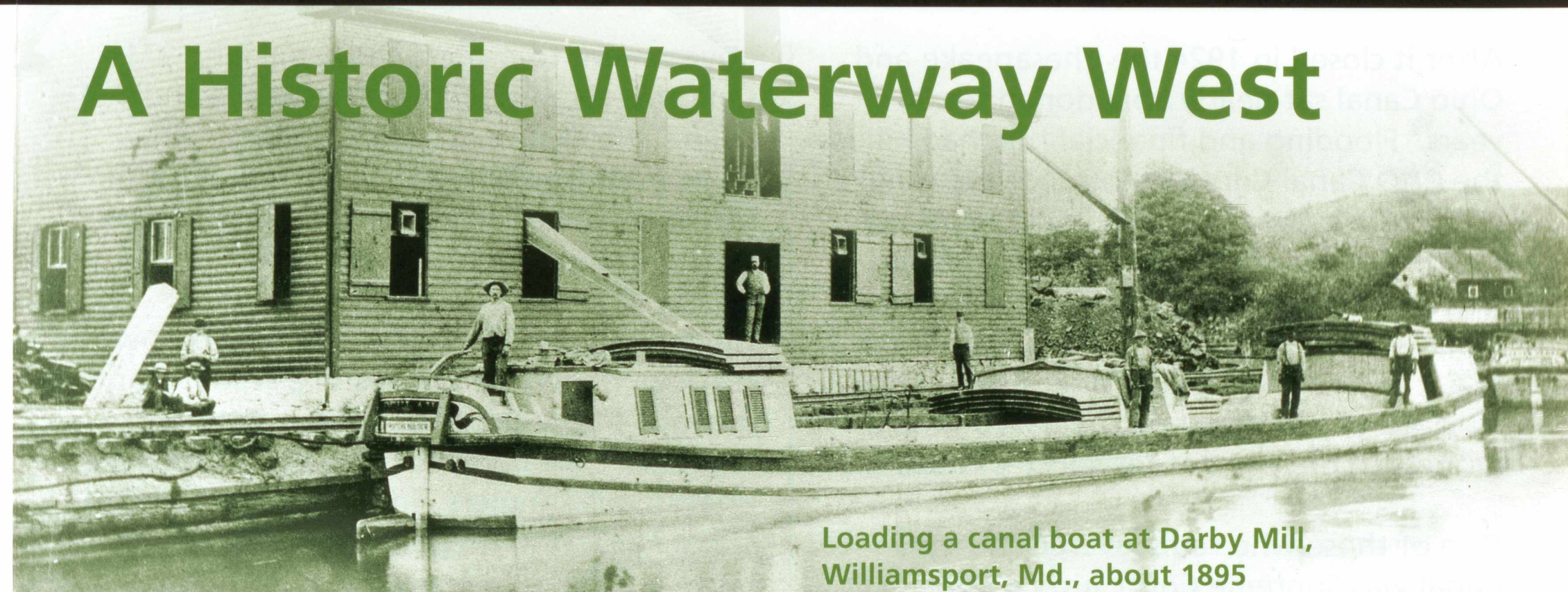
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park is one of over 380 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

For More Information

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100
Hagerstown, MD 21740
301-739-4200, V/TTY
www.nps.gov/choh

Report crimes in National Capital Region parks toll-free 866-677-6677.

A Historic Waterway West



Loading a canal boat at Darby Mill, Williamsport, Md., about 1895

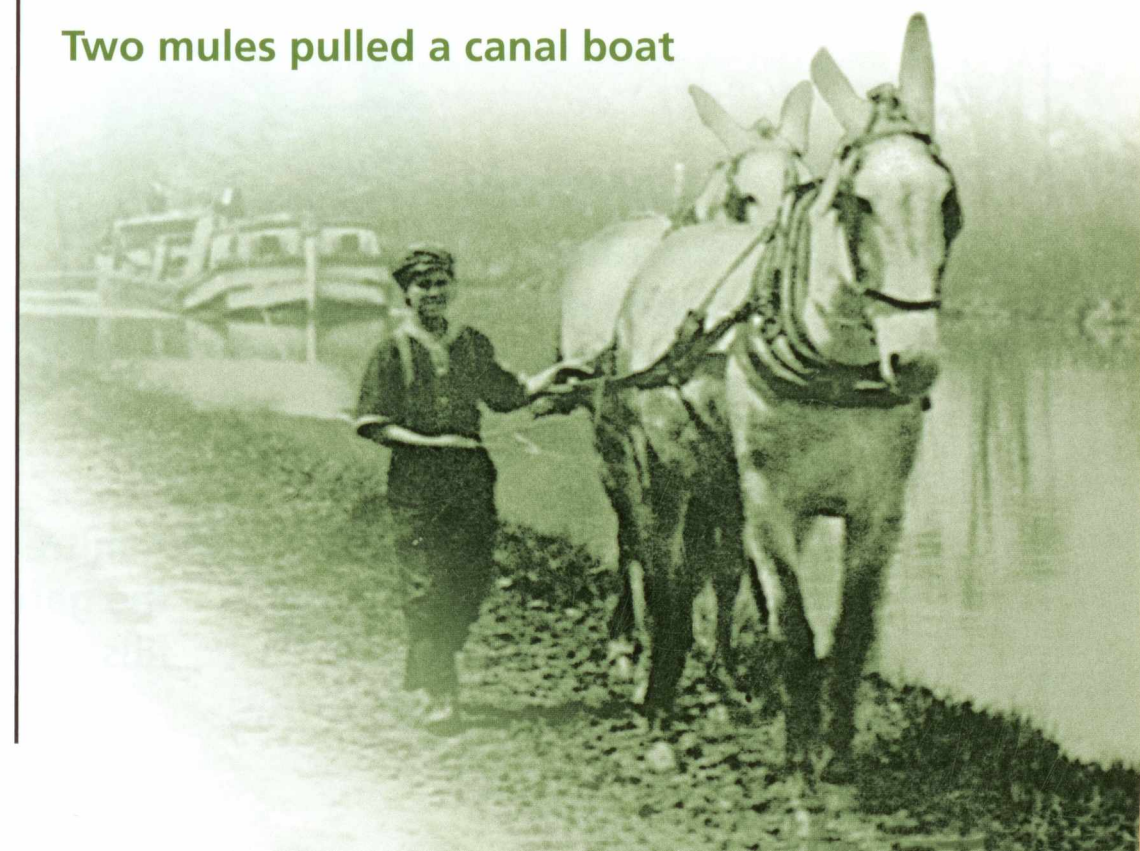
Amidst cheers, toasts, and a blaring brass band, President John Quincy Adams broke ground for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal on Independence Day, 1828. The goal for the canal was ambitious. It was to improve upon nature with a navigable waterway from tidewater at Georgetown to the Ohio River. The nation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

By the time its construction ended in 1850, progress had left the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal behind. Canals were already obsolete. Cost overruns, labor problems, and a 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 short of reaching the Ohio River.

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

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal began as a dream of a waterway to the West. It carried Appalachian coal, suffered repeated ruinous flooding, and then resisted being paved as a highway. Today the canal endures as a national historical park—a pathway into history, nature, and recreation.

Two mules pulled a canal boat



...a long stretch of quiet and peace...

Justice William O. Douglas, March 1954

After it closed in 1924 the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal sat nearly abandoned for 30 years. Flooding and financial ruin had killed the C&O Canal Company but not the canal's physical remains. Although 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 as a witness to the present resilience of nature.

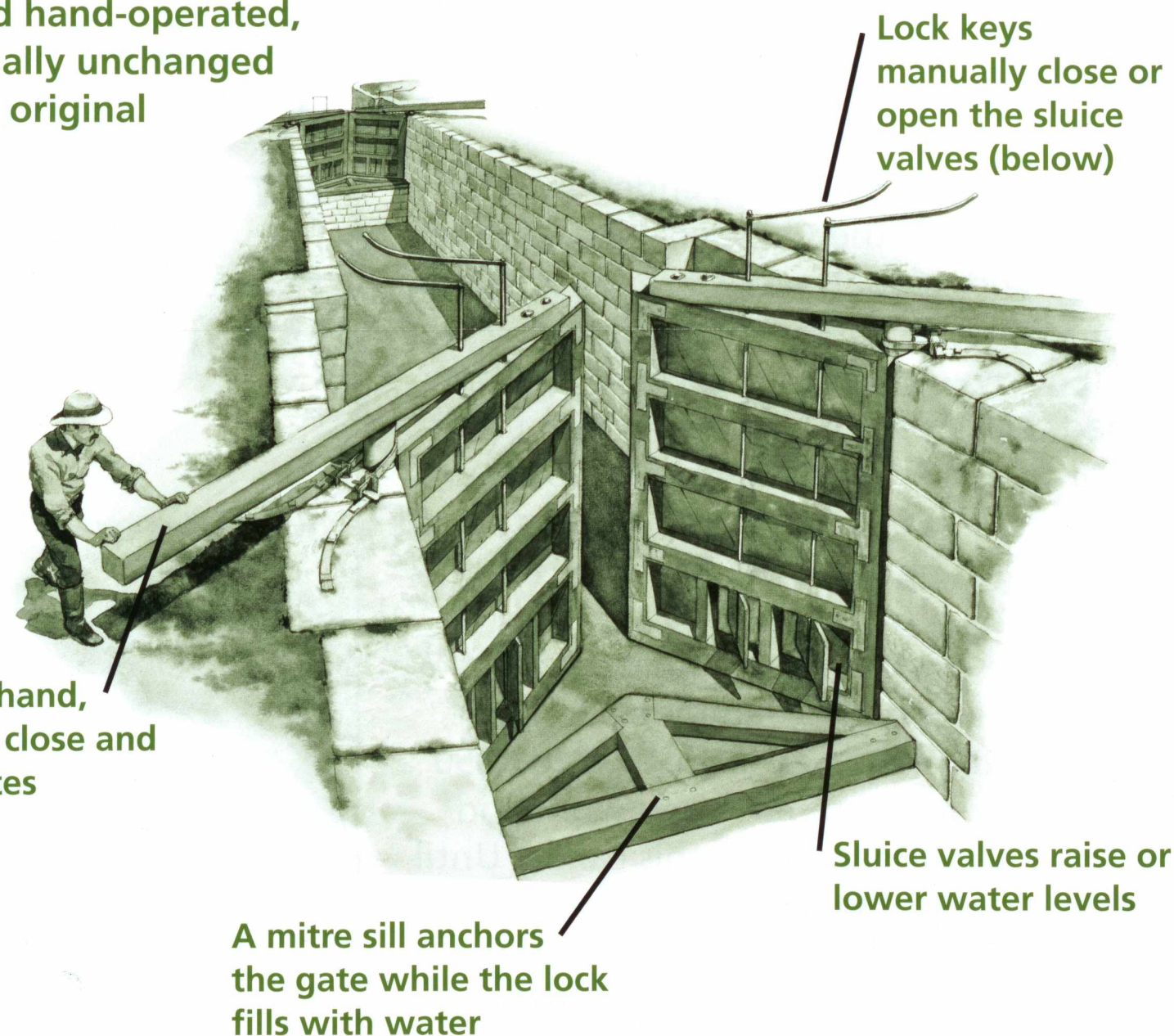
One of those who rediscovered the C&O Canal was Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. Over time, Justice Douglas and other concerned citizens convinced the

government to protect the canal. In 1971 Congress established the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. Now all year long visitors can still enjoy what Douglas called, "a refuge, a place of retreat, a long stretch of quiet and peace."

Hikers, campers, bicyclists, and others now can experience the rich history, wildlife, and geology of the Potomac Valley. Watered sections of the canal accommodate canoeists, boaters, and anglers. In Georgetown and at Great Falls park, rangers and volunteers in period clothing take you back to the canal's mid-19th-century heyday.

Lock Gates

The 74 lift locks built on the canal enabled boats to overcome the 605-foot change in elevation between Cumberland and Georgetown. Simple and hand-operated, the lock gates were virtually unchanged from Leonardo da Vinci's original design in 1485.



Visiting the Canal Today

Information about the canal, ranger-led activities, and points of interest is available at visitor centers along the canal. (See the insert map for locations.) Visitor center hours vary seasonally, so phone ahead or check the website for hours, schedules, and current towpath conditions.

Georgetown Visitor Center

1057 Thomas Jefferson Street NW,
Washington, DC 20007
Phone 202-653-5190

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 April through October. For group reservations, ticket information, and hours of operation, call the Georgetown Visitor Center.

Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center

11710 MacArthur Boulevard
Potomac, MD 20854
Phone 301-767-3714

Great Falls Tavern was first built as a house for the lock tender but later became a hotel. It is a good example of how the canal provided business opportunities.

At the **Olmsted Island overlook**, you can view the spectacular Great Falls of the Potomac, geologically unique. The area between the towpath and the overlook is home to many rare plants.

To the west, at Milepost 42.2, stands the **Monocacy Aqueduct**. It is the best example of the engineering that was required to carry the canal over smaller rivers.

Brunswick Visitor Center

40 West Potomac Street
Brunswick, MD 21716
Phone 301-739-4200

Exhibits highlight the history of the canal and railroad in the town of Brunswick.

Williamsport Visitor Center

205 West Potomac Street
Williamsport, MD 21795
Phone 301-582-0813

Williamsport is an excellent example of a canal town. A short walk around the Visitor Center at the Cushwa warehouse and basin reveals a wide variety of support structures important to the canal's operation.

West of Williamsport, at Milepost 109, is **Four Locks**. This is a well-preserved example of the many smaller communities that once thrived alongside the canal.

Hancock Visitor Center

326 East Main Street
Hancock, MD 21750
Phone 301-678-5463

Between Hancock and Cumberland, at Milepost 156.1, intrepid visitors can explore the last, most challenging canal segment to be completed—the 3,118-foot **Paw Paw Tunnel**. With a flashlight and sturdy shoes, you can walk through the tunnel.

Cumberland Visitor Center

13 Canal Street
Cumberland, MD 21502
Phone 301-722-8226

The visitor center is in the Western Maryland Railroad Station, next to the rewatered canal basin. Together they tell of Cumberland's busy transportation history from colonial times to the present. Cumberland is called the "Queen City of the Alleghenies."