



C & O Canal Association

## ALONG THE TOWPATH

concerned with the conservation of the natural and historical environment of the C&O Canal and the Potomac River Basin

VOLUME XXX

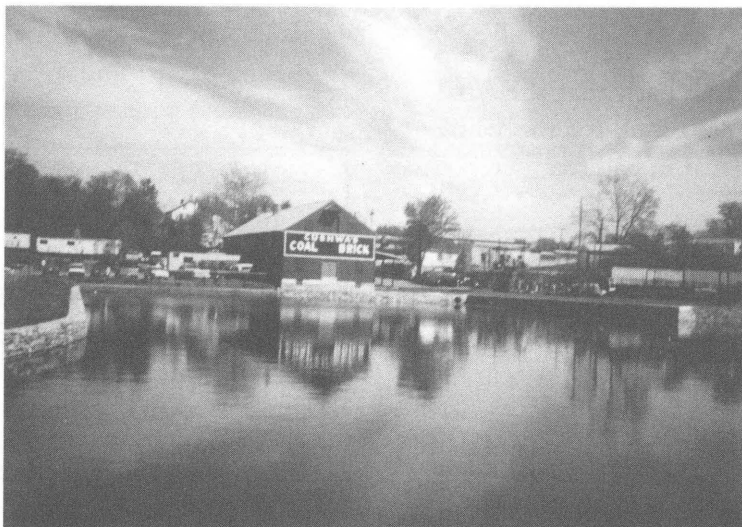
FALL ISSUE 1998

NUMBER 4

### COME TO THE HERITAGE HIKE OCTOBER 31!

After a long hot, dry summer, come on out and stretch your legs on a cool, haunting Halloween Heritage Hike on October 31, 1998.

No costumes are required – just your hiking “spirits”! You can enjoy the “haunts” of the Canal beginning at McCoy’s Ferry and ending at Williamsport, a total distance of 11 miles. A shorter hike of 7.5 miles will start at Dam 5 (johns available, but no water).



CUSHWA WAREHOUSE

Hikers will park at the Williamsport Volunteer Fire Department (directions follow “Heritage Hike Highlights”). Two buses will depart at 9:30 AM for McCoy’s Ferry. After a brief opening ceremony and ribbon cutting, one bus will take those taking the shorter hike to Dam 5 and the other to McCoy’s Ferry. A two-dollar fee will be collected for the bus. Bring lunch and water.

After the hike we will have a chance to relax, meet new members, and enjoy more “treats” at the happy hour and dinner which will

be held at the same place we left our cars, the Williamsport Volunteer Fire Department. Happy hour with an open bar will begin at 4:30 PM, and a buffet dinner will be served at 5:30 PM. After dinner, our guest speaker, Chief Ranger Martin Gallery, will talk about the canal restoration at Williamsport as well as future planning.

Advanced reservations for the dinner are required. Reservation forms must be received by 24 October 1998. You will not receive an acknowledgment of your reservation. Instead, a list of those who have paid will be checked at the door.

**Reservation form on page 19.**

*Photograph courtesy of Hal Larsen.*

## HERITAGE HIKE HIGHLIGHTS

This year's Heritage Hike goes through an area rich in both Canal and Civil War history, as well as, natural beauty. After a ride through picturesque, rolling countryside rich with fall colors, the bus travels along a newly reconstructed and repointed road culvert to McCoy's Ferry. Here, in 1862, General J. E. B. Stuart crossed the Potomac, and started a raid that ended when he crossed back into Virginia at White's Ford, just upstream from today's White's Ferry.

About a mile downstream, the Canal leaves the riverside and cuts across Prather's Neck. This shortcut avoided a 4-mile loop that the Potomac makes around the Neck, but it required the construction of "Four Locks" to accommodate a 32-foot change in elevation. Look for an interpretive display just before milepost 108 that marks the stone ruins of Charles Mill that predates the Canal.

Near Lock 50, the first of the "Four Locks" we come to, there is a restored mule barn that sheltered mules in the winter months. Also look for the white "watchshanty" the locktender used in bad weather.

At Lock 46 you can see the abutments of a mule crossover bridge. The towpath runs along the riverbank beside the slackwater. In this slackwater area there are great river and mountain views from the towpath as it rounds several cliffs.

Dam 5, 3.5 miles from the hike's starting point, has a large grassy area and broad vistas of the river, a good place for lunch. Stonewall Jackson's men shelled the dam in 1861, but did little damage.

Between milepost 102 and 103 is Pinesburg Quarry. It seems logical that Stone from this quarry was used in building the Canal. If you happen to be walking with Tom Perry, our president, he can point out the quarry.

Confederates crossed the Potomac River in this area after the Battle of Gettysburg. When you get to the Cushwa Basin, you have two choices after browsing through the Visitors Center. You can continue up the

hill to the Fire Department, or if you are running late or are too tired, Tom Perry has volunteered to shuttle hikers in his van. Be sure to visit Park Ranger Donna Swauger's bewitching haunted house in the Park Visitors Center.

The Heritage Hike planning committee includes Sonny DeForge (301)530-8830 and Tom Perry.

Historical facts are taken from the *C&O Canal Companion*.

### ***DIRECTIONS TO WILLIAMSPORT VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT***

Going south on I-81, take Williamsport exit, Exit 1, Route 68. This is Conococheague Street. The Fire Department is ½ mile on the right. Williamsport is about 1 hour 15 minutes from the Washington, DC area.



*Along the Towpath*

# MONOCACY AQUEDUCT RESTORATION ACTION PLAN NEARS COMPLETION

*Carl Linden*

The structural engineers of McMullan & Associates are close to completing their design for repair and restoration of the Monocacy Aqueduct. The engineers have developed a plan of action for the structure along with cost estimates. Structural engineer, Abba Lichtenstein, presented the findings, recommendations, and cost estimates for the project to Superintendent Doug Faris and the NPS A/E team at Canal Park headquarters in Sharpsburg September 3. The plan was thoroughly discussed and Doug Faris in his concluding remarks expressed his general approval of the plan and the work done to date. Bernie Dennis of the National Capital Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers and Carl Linden of the Monocacy Committee of the Canal Association also took part in the meeting.

The overall estimate for the restoration project (including direct construction, contingency, and overhead costs) is in the five million dollar range, a considerable improvement from previous estimates of twenty-eight to thirty-two million. Dennis McMullan, whose firm took on the project, and Abba Lichtenstein, a leading expert on historic bridges, are hands-on engineers with a wealth of experience and knowledge of stone and masonry bridges gathered over many years. The Canal's aqueducts, it might be noted, are masonry "water-bridges" designed to carry boats rather than land vehicles. Expertise on such structures is not easy to find these days when bridges are supported by steel rather than masonry.

At the heart of the repair and restoration plan is removal of the external "harness" now embracing the structure. It is to be replaced with an internal reinforced concrete slab incorporated into the structure. The slab will be inconspicuous and spans the aqueduct at the bottom of its canal prism. It will help seal the structure and provide a pavement for crossing of the aqueduct. The slab serves the same function of stabilizing and sustaining the structure's alignment as the harness but with the distinct advantage of not affecting the appearance or obscuring the shape of the aqueduct. The beauty of the aqueduct in its classic lines and

proportions will reemerge. The planned work will also include repairing pier foundations, filling cracks and voids, pointing mortar joints, reconstructing of damaged pier walls and abutments, anchoring parapets, sealing with waterproof membrane, and resetting missing coping stones. Gaps in the historic railing caused by the battering of debris coming down in floods will be filled either by replica or standard railings meeting contemporary requirements.

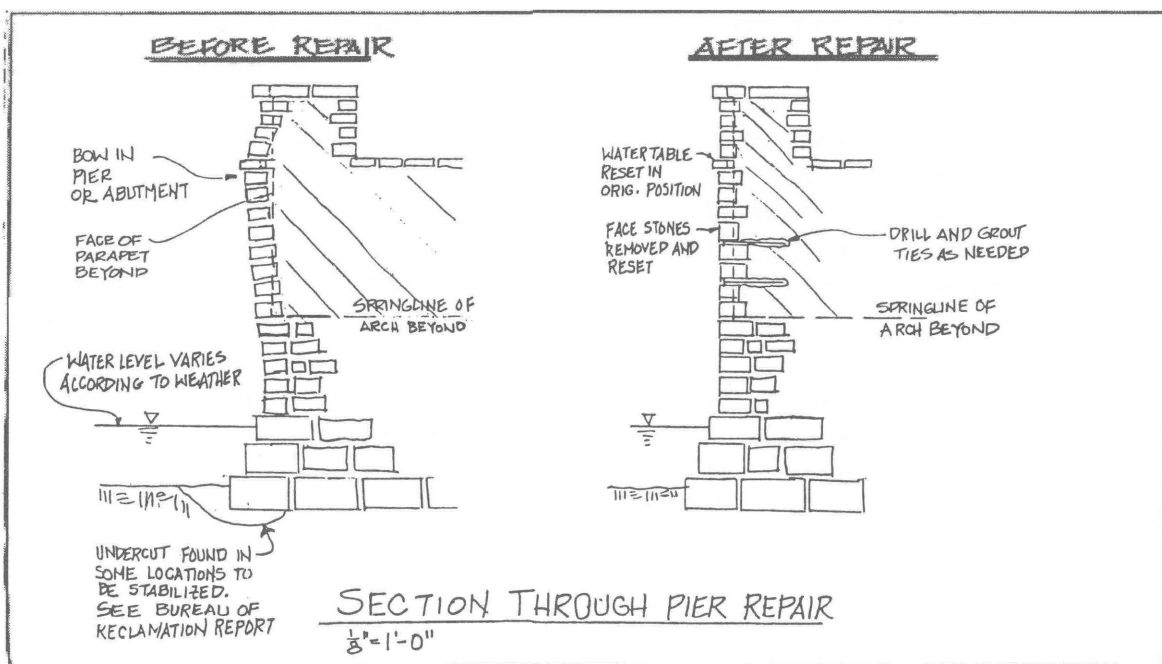
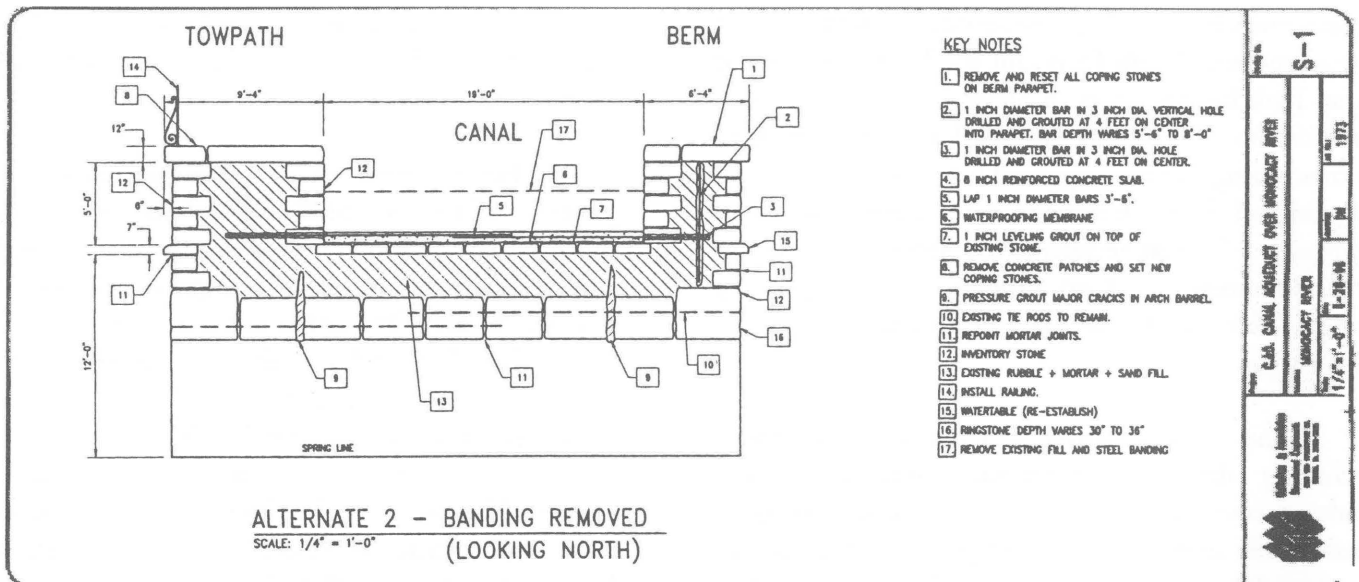
Bernie Dennis reported to the meeting on the progress of the National Capital Section's aqueduct monitoring project. A leading instrumentation company is ready to cover a large part of the cost of state-of-the-art instrumentation needed in this project. Bernie also said that the results of recent measurements of the "harness" revealed that the tension of the lateral rods register far below the 15,000 psi called for in specifications. However, this does not mean the "harness" has not served its purpose or has not helped stabilize the structure under flood conditions. Abba Lichtenstein believes that the "harness" over its time may well have prevented the collapse of the weakened upstream walls of the aqueduct over two arches in particular. He also added that some of the instrumentation the ASCE project includes can provide very valuable information to the restoration project.

The meeting also discussed the need for stabilization of the Monocacy's smaller sister aqueduct, the Conococheague, in Williamsport. Its vulnerable upstream side, in particular, needs attention to prevent further deterioration of the structure. Measures will be taken to determine the most effective stabilization method which, in turn, will be applied to the Conococheague as soon as possible. The experience gained in working with both aqueducts has been mutually beneficial to both and will prove invaluable in the care and repair of the other nine aqueducts on the Canal.

The repair and restoration plan for the Monocacy Aqueduct, if put into effect, should ensure the Monocacy Aqueduct's longevity in good form and

free of its post-Agnes "orthodontic braces." It could well go another 165 years without need for major repair. Now much depends on obtaining funds from Congress to do the job. A determined effort to achieve this goal is underway. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's featuring of the Aqueduct as the centerpiece in its annual announcement of the most endangered historic places this past June provides an obvious boost to this effort. However, this is not a time for complacency. Work remains to be done and success in this endeavor is not guaranteed.

In this connection, the Association's Monocacy Aqueduct and C & O Canal Funds continue to play an significant role in demonstrating the needed citizen support for the Aqueduct's preservation. We are not far from the \$100,000 mark of monies that can be applied to the Aqueduct. Send in your contribution now to help us reach this important milestone.



**McMullen & Associates, Inc.**  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS  
5901 Old Columbia Road, Suite 300  
Yemassee, Virginia 22512  
(703) 554-4011

PROJECT NAME: **Monocacy**  
SHEET NO.: **1773**  
DATE: **8-16-78**  
BY: **JB**  
CHECKED BY: **JB**  
SCALE: **1/8" = 1'-0"**

SELECTED DIAGRAMS OF PROPOSED AQUEDUCT REPAIRS.  
COURTESY OF McMULLEN & ASSOCIATES.



## BIG SLACKWATER TOWPATH OPTIONS CONSIDERED



As those who are familiar with the towpath know, the section along Big Slackwater between mileposts 85.5 and 88.2 upstream of Dam 4 in the Conococheague District is in a deteriorated condition. The towpath for some distance is squeezed narrowly between cliffs and rock formations close to the river's edge and the river. Since the Canal Park's establishment the NPS has deemed the section difficult. The way is made treacherous by damaged stone masonry retaining walls and lack of repair of the not easily accessible towpath between McMahon's Mill and Dam No. 4. NPS signs warn away travellers from the section and indicate a circuitous detour by road away from the canal. Visitors now must travel along a 4.6 mile detour along narrow Washington County roadways to rejoin the towpath. This is the only section on the 185.5 mile Canal Park which is not continuous. This section of the Park, located near midpoint, is heavily used with about 25,000 visitors a year. Over the past ten years, the NPS has looked into the feasibility of restoring the towpath's integrity by repairs of the stone masonry wall and stabilizing the towpath.

Under contract the engineering firm of Dewberry and Davis recently completed a report for the NPS outlining its recommendations and cost estimates for three alternatives the firm regards as feasible based on field study of the section. Alternative 1 is to repair the stone masonry retaining walls and towpath from McMahon's Mill to Dam No. 4. Alternative 2 is to develop a detour that is shorter in length and less dangerous than traveling the county roads. This detour would use the Allegany Power easement and a footpath through NPS property near the canal. Two detour options, A and B, under Alternative 2 are workable. "A" would create a small foot trail through NPS property to connecting the power line easement to the towpath--its final alignment would be field designed and coordinated with property owners along the route. "B" entails partial repair of the towpath and retaining walls downstream of McMahon's Mill and a continuation of the above detour.

Dewberry and Davis's estimates below do not include survey and engineering fees to support the design. These fees could be high. Alternative 2A is the least expensive and is recommended by the firm. The estimates are as follows:

Alternative 1	
(6 ft towpath)	\$10,600,000
(10 ft towpath)	\$12,800,000
Alternative 2A	
(Detour/Footpath)	\$ 302,500
Alternative 2B	
(Partial repair/Detour/Footpath)	\$ 3,500,000

The above discussion is based on Dewberry and Davis's summary of its findings. Obviously, 2A is the cheapest, within reach of the Canal Park's current and perennially slim budget. It would provide a continuity but not the continuity of the towpath. It would necessarily be a provisional solution since continuity of the towpath itself is also necessarily a fundamental aim in the maintenance of the Canal Park.

The Dewberry and Davis report was presented by a firm representative at the Citizens' Canal Advisory Commission meeting in Williamsport on September 12th. After the presentation the question of continuity was discussed in the Commission. Commissioner Ed Miller representing Washington County and a long-time Association member expressed concern over this long existing break in towpath continuity and that a detour may indefinitely defer addressing the problem. While Superintendent Doug Faris expressed doubt that the high cost of restoration of this section of the towpath could be avoided, Commissioner Miller believes a less costly repair of the towpath is possible than the above estimates indicate. Following the discussion Doug Faris said he would arrange a field trip for the Commission to look over the situation on site to help advance the discussion of the question in the Commission.

Carl Linden

## CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL TUNNEL OPENS

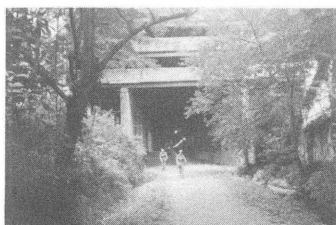
On August 15, the Wisconsin Avenue tunnel of the Capital Crescent Trail was opened for public use. This passage connects the trailhead at Bethesda and Woodmont avenues in Bethesda with the hiker-biker's continuance at 48th Street, obviating a winding, dangerous detour through heavy downtown traffic. The tunnel, which is open during daylight hours, was inaugurated by many bikers and hikers who came to check out this welcome improvement in the system. County Executive Douglas Duncan was on hand to greet the trail enthusiasts (as well as voters) who came for the occasion.



The well-lighted tunnel has a wide well-marked paved path that follows the former railroad's slightly curved progress under busy Wisconsin Avenue. The lighting is sufficiently bright to illuminate the entire cavernous interior in order to remove concerns about safety. Large gates are closed at both ends to prevent unwelcome users from entering at night.



The Capital Crescent is a **hiker-biker** trail, which means that it must be shared by cyclists and hikers. Indeed, the only prohibition is against motorized vehicles. In-line skaters, joggers, mothers with baby strollers, and slowly moving pedestrian groups out for Sunday strolls are welcome to use the trail. Bikers must bear this in mind, for the wide, nicely paved surface is tempting to those yearning to establish speed records. Cyclists are urged to use bells or their voices to warn non-bikers when they approach them.



The tunnel's opening enables bikers and hikers to go safely from Rock Creek Park to connections to the C&O Canal towpath, as well as to the Mount Vernon, or to Purcellville, Virginia, without leaving the path. The Capital Crescent Trail should be further improved with paving through to its end in Silver Spring. The surface to Rock Creek Park from the tunnel, while unpaved, has a good, fine-stone cover that makes for comfortable walking or cycling.

Hal Larsen

*Photographs courtesy of Hal Larsen*

# *CANOE TRIP FROM BRUNSWICK TO THE MONOCACY AQUEDUCT*

Fred and Judie Mopsik

We gathered together at Carl Linden's at 8:30 in the morning on July 25. It was a day that was as perfect as it can get and followed the hottest week of the year. Using our incomparable methods of organization, the canoes were strapped to the tops of our cars and the convoy left promptly one hour after the scheduled departure time. We parked several cars at the Aqueduct and continued on to Brunswick. The launching site in town was closed for a river festival, so we had to join the enemy and drive along the towpath to get to the alternate launch site at the Brunswick Town campgrounds. After railing all these years about the abuse of the towpath from improper uses, it was a new adventure.

We finally divided up two to a canoe and left Brunswick at 11:30 under a glorious blue sky and the trees lining the river bank forming a scene worthy of a French landscape. We then proceeded to try to get down river, remembering some basic canoe strokes so that we did not careen from bank to bank. It became more interesting as we progressed as the exposed rocks and the slightly exposed ones became more numerous and the navigation became more challenging. Fortunately, we only became trapped once, and after a vigorous debate as to who would step onto the rock and push off, Fred did the job and even managed to get back in the canoe before it finished departing for the rest of the trip. The vision of his standing on the rock and giving semaphore signals was not too far from our thoughts.

Two hours later, about halfway down the river, we stopped for lunch, and proceeded to engage in deep discussions on philosophic topics with Ed Miller that spanned Hegel to politics. Everybody around us partook in very deep and profound thoughts.

After a proper respite, we pushed off, well rested. We just marveled in the beauty of the river, and the glorious weather that we were fortunate to enjoy. Poetry was traded as we went along and with some practice in hand, we even managed to get through some spots that were more difficult than the ones earlier without any incident. Sonny DeForge expressed the opinion later that if the river were much lower, we would have been in for a treat in scraping bottom.

After that initial stretch after lunch, the river had much fewer projecting rocks, and we could just paddle down river and take in the sights of the river. Unfortunately, some practical joker seemed to move the Aqueduct several miles downstream just as we were getting there, so we arrived at the Aqueduct both happy and suitably tired.

It was an afternoon that was memorable and wonderfully satisfying. It provided both fun and contemplation and an appreciation for some of the impetus that led to the building of the Canal. It certainly led to yet another way to learn just how fortunate we all are to have such a resource in our own backyard



Photograph courtesy of Ed Miller

## *Calendar of Events*

**October 3.** NPS WORKDAY. Capitol Crescent Trail (K St. Georgetown). Trail maintenance. Call 301-767-3706 for details.

**October 3.** Continuing Hike Series. Edwards Ferry and Goose Creek River Locks. Meet at Edwards Ferry parking lot at 10:30 AM. Route 28 north from I270 (Rockville), left on 107 through Poolesville, left on Edwards Ferry Road and follow to parking lot and boat ramp at the Potomac River. Alternatively follow River Road from Potomac past Seneca, (name changes but don't turn) until left turn at T-intersection at Edwards Ferry Road. Call Pat White (301) 977-5628.

**October 3-4.** Brunswick Railroad Days, Brunswick, Maryland. Call Mary Lurch (301) 657-9542.

**October 3-8.** Fall Bike Trip. Cumberland to Georgetown. Call Tom Perry (301) 223-7010.

**October 10. 9:00 AM** Association work day at C&O Canal Visitors Centers. Call John Lindt (301-469-6381) for more details.

**October 24.** NPS WORKDAY. Lock House 6. Repair overflow bypass. Call 301-767-3706 to sign-up.

**October 31.** Fall Heritage Hike. McCoys Ferry to Williamsport, 11 miles. Optional 7.5 mile hike from Dam 5. Bus (\$2.00 fee) leaves Williamsport Fire Department parking lot at 10:30 AM. Happy hour at 4:30 PM, dinner (reservations required) at 5:30 PM at the fire department. Exit 1 from I81, turn toward Williamsport, the Fire Department is on the right. Call Sonny DeForge (301) 530-8830.

**November 7.** NPS WORKDAY. Great Falls. Painting and trail maintenance. Call 301-767-3706 to sign-up.

**November 8.** Continuing Hike Series. Meet at Snyders Landing at 10:30 AM. MD 34 to Sharpburg, turn North on N. Mechanic Street (stoplight in center of town), drive one block to left on Synders Landing Road. Follow road to canal and boat ramp. Call Pat White (301) 977-5628.

**November 14.** NPS WORKDAY. Carderock. Trail improvement. Call 301-767-3706 to sign-up.

**December 5.** Continuing Hike Series. Frostbite Hike 10:30 AM. Meet at the Dickerson Regional Park. From Rockville follow Route 28 north past Beallsville, make left turn at flashing yellow light (Route 28 makes a right turn) and follow signs to Dickerson Regional Park.

**December 13.** Holiday Sing-Along. Great Falls Tavern. Call Mary Lurch (301) 657-9542.

**December 31 – January 1.** New Year's Hikes. Williamsport, New Years Festivities and hikes in two years. Meet at Days Inn at 2:00 PM on the 31st, 10:30 AM on the 1st. Call Pat White (301) 977-5628.

**January 24, 1999.** Continuing Hike Series. Harpers Ferry south to Lock 31 (Keep Tryst). Meet at the foot bridge in Harpers Ferry at 10:30 AM.

**February 27, 1999.** Continuing Hike Series. 10:30 AM. Downstream from Sycamore Landing, follow River Road from Potomac past Seneca to a left on Sycamore Landing Road.

## Continuing hike activities for 1999.

These small circuit hikes (average 6 miles roundtrip) are designed to explore the canal. In conjunction with the Reunion and Heritage hikes we expect to complete the entire 184.5 miles of the canal over 3 to 5 years. Please join us.

For 1999 we are going to hike the last weekend of the month alternating Saturday and Sunday. All hikes will be at 10:30 AM unless otherwise noted.

**Thursday, December 31, 1998 and Friday, January 1, 1999** -- New Year's Hikes near Williamsport. 2:00 PM December 31 and 10:30 AM January 1. New Year's Eve Celebration in Williamsport. This was so much fun last year we are making it an annual event. Meet at Days Inn at 2:00 PM on the 31st, 10:30 AM on the 1st.

**January 24, 1999** -- Harpers Ferry to Lock 31 (Keep Tryst). Meet at the Foot Bridge in Harpers Ferry at 10:30 AM.

**February 27, 1999** -- Downstream from Sycamore Landing, follow River Road from Potomac past Seneca to a left on Sycamore Landing Road.

**March 28, 1999** -- Oldtown downstream toward PawPaw.

**For more information call Pat White at 301-977-5628.**

## ***VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS PROGRAM***

The Association and National Park Service (NPS) Volunteer Programs have been inactive since May due for the most part to the intensive work by commercial contractors on the towpath and the usual break for the hot weather months. The NPS WORKDAYS will be October 3 and 24, and November 7 and 14. A newsletter detailing dates, locations, and activities will be mailed by NPS to the general public and Association members whose names appear on the C&O Canal National Historical Park volunteer list. Those interested in participating may contact Ranger Nancy Brown on the VIP phone line (local metro area) 301-767-3706 or at Park Headquarters 301-714-2233.

The proposed Association CANAL DAYS on October 10 needs more help to select worthwhile activities and the assurance of greater numbers of enthusiastic participants. Additional information is available from John Lindt (301-469-6381).

**October 3. NPS WORKDAY.** Capitol Crescent Trail (K St. Georgetown). Trail maintenance.  
Call 301-767-3706 for details.

**October 10. 9:00 AM Canal Day** -- Association work day at C&O Canal Visitors Centers.  
Call John Lindt (301-469-6381) for more details.

**October 24. NPS WORKDAY.** Lock House 6. Repair overflow bypass.  
Call 301-767-3706 to sign-up.

**November 7. NPS WORKDAY.** Great Falls. Painting and trail maintenance.  
Call 301-767-3706 to sign-up.

**November 14. NPS WORKDAY.** Carderock. Trail improvement.  
Call 301-767-3706 to sign-up.



# *Alexandria Gazette, Tuesday, July 8, 1828 - FOURTH OF JULY, Breaking Ground Upon the Canal*

Friday last, the Fourth of July, the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Independence of the United States, was a proud date for the District of Columbia--for the states interested in an open navigation from the Chesapeake to the Lakes, and to the waters of the Mississippi...

On that day which, by concurrent votes of the President and Directors of The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, and the Corporations of Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria, had been fixed upon for breaking ground upon the line of the Canal...

At an early hour, the members of the several corporations, and those who were invited to accompany them and the President and Directors of the Canal Company...began to assemble at Tilley's Hotel, and cordial greetings were exchanged between them. At half past 7 o'clock the President of the United States arrived, escorted by Captain Turner's and Captain Tyler's troop of cavalry, under command of Major Stewart...

About eight o'clock, the procession was formed on Bridge Street and moved on, to the excellent music of the full band of the Marine Corps, to High Street Wharf, where they embarked in perfect order...and the boats immediately set forward, amidst the cheers of the crowds which lined the wharves.

The Steam Boat Surprise, followed by two other Steam Boats and a line of barges and other boats led the Procession up the Potomac... Along the road on the Maryland Shore, crowds of moving spectators attended the voyage of the boats and met the procession on landing.

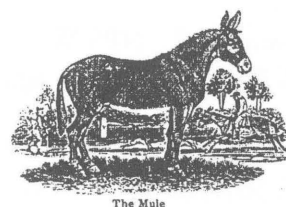
On landing...the procession moved...so as to leave a hollow space, in the midst of a mass of people, in the center of which was the spot marked by Judge Wright, the Engineer of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, for the commencement of the work. A moment's pause here occurred, while the spade destined to commence the work, was selected...and the spot for breaking ground was precisely denoted.

At that moment the sun shone out from behind a cloud, and amidst a silence so intense as to chasten the intimation of hope, and to hallow the enthusiasm of joy, the Mayor of Georgetown handed to Gen. Mercer, the President of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, the consecrated instrument, which having received, he stepped forward...and addressed the multitude.

As soon as he had ended, the President of the United States, to whom General Mercer had presented the spade, stepped forward, with animation of manner and countenance, which showed that his whole heart was in the thing, thus addressed the

assembly of his fellow citizens.

"Friends and Fellow laborers...we are informed by the Holy Oracles of Truth, that at the creation of man...the Lord of the Universe, their maker, blessed and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it. To subdue the earth was, therefore, one of the first duties assigned to man at his creation...To subdue the earth is preeminantly the purpose of the undertaking which the first stroke of the spade is now to be struck. That it is to be struck by this hand I invite you to witness"--here the stroke of the spade (the spade which the President held struck a root, which prevented its penetrating the earth...) Mr. Adams tried it again, with no better success. Thus foiled, he threw down the spade, hastily stripped off, and laid aside his coat, and went seriously to work. The multitude around...observing this action, raised a loud and unanimous cheering, which continued for some time after Mr. Adams had mastered the difficulty.



The Mule

## *Obscure no longer ...*

### *White's Ford is marked for posterity*

I have to confess a deep, abiding, and perhaps slightly obsessive interest in the seven miles of canal leading from White's Ferry to the Monocacy. (I trust that I can reveal this dark secret to my fellow travellers in the Canal Association.)

This is a charming stretch, with few physical landmarks other than the towering smokestacks of the Dickerson Power Plant. But if you consult the history books and look more closely at the terrain, a vivid story begins to emerge. Three times the Confederate armies crossed the river here, and each occasion was worthy of note, at least to those who recognize the names of Stonewall Jackson, J.E.B. Stuart, and Jubal Early.

I had read about the ford when I took my first overnight bike trip on the canal in 1989, from Great Falls to Antietam, and I looked for it up around Dickerson with no success. When I returned from that trip, exhilarated by the experience, I called the Park Headquarters for more information about the ford. The receptionist put me through to Gordon Gay, who no doubt already had considerable experience in dealing with the occasional historical enthusiasms of Park visitors.

I asked Gordon why there was no historical marker showing the location of the ford. Perhaps, I surmised, the ford lay behind the wire fence surrounding the Dickerson power plant's discharge channel. No, Gordon told me, it didn't have anything to do with that. There was a plan afoot to place over a dozen interpretative displays along the canal, but Park money was slow in coming.

This was less than reassuring to me—from the way that he described them, I was afraid that these would be one of the massive installations that I had seen in other parks. My enthusiasm somewhat dampened, I returned to my day job and put the ford, the canal, and Antietam to the back of my mind.

As I began to research *The C&O Companion*, White's Ford kept resurfacing in various accounts. This was no minor footnote—not only had Stonewall Jackson used the ford during Lee's Maryland Campaign, but Stuart made a daring escape across the ford a month later, after riding completely around the Union Army of the Potomac. Finally, Jubal Early's men used the ford as they retreated from their bold but inconclusive raid on Washington in the summer of 1864.

It soon became clear to me that the ford must have been considerably downstream from the Dickerson parking area. Jubal Early's account of the crossing during the Maryland campaign (September 5, 1862) described how his men had crossed the canal by going across a lock, after first trying a road culvert that proved too small. Given the position of the crossing, the lock must surely have been #26, known as Woods Lock.

A further clue came from the memoirs of one of J.E.B. Stuart's officers, who described the approach to White's Ford as Stuart made his daring escape over the Potomac after his raid to Chambersburg a month after Antietam. The officer described how their escape route appeared to be blocked by Union infantry posted on a "precipitous quarry bluff ... separated from the ford only by the width of the canal." The only nearby place where you will find bluffs that close to the Potomac and the canal is below Woods Lock, these being the same bluffs where stone was once quarried for the mottled marble columns that still stand in the U.S. Capitol.

This narrowed down the location considerably, then—the ford must have been just above Oxley island. Shortly afterwards, while reviewing one of Eugene Scheel's maps of the Potomac, I saw his placement of the ford exactly at that location. When I called Mr. Scheel, an avid history buff who lives near Leesburg, he told me that his placement of the ford was based on the recollection of local residents.

Later, I had a most edifying conversation with Charles Jacobs, who had written a two-part biographical sketch of Elijah White for the Montgomery County Historical Society newsletter. We reviewed the anecdotal evidence and agreed the ford had to have been situated just above Oxley Island.

It wasn't until after my book was published that the most conclusive pieces of evidence turned up. First I stumbled across an evocative account of the Whites Ford crossing by Stonewall Jackson's legendary cartographer, Jedediah Hotchkiss:

*Friday, Sept. 5th.* We started about sunrise and went, by a private road, to White's Ford and there crossed the Potomac into Maryland, Gen. Jackson on a cream-colored, or "clayback" horse, and riding on the left of the front. The 10th Va. Regt. of infantry, preceded by a band and bearing a Virginia flag, was in the advance; as the band reached the Maryland shore it struck up the air, "Maryland, my Maryland," amid shouts of the soldiers. It was a noble spectacle, the broad river, fringed by the lofty trees in full foliage; the exuberant wealth of the autumnal wild flowers down to the very margin of the stream and a bright green island stretched away to the right.

The description of the "bright green island" could be none other than Oxley Island, placing the crossing at or near the upstream end of the island. Then, in the course of further correspondence, Mr. Jacobs sent me two remarkable maps showing the location of the ford. The first was drawn by Hotchkiss, and the second, even more precise rendering, was completed in 1865 by the Military Division of the U.S. Engineers.

To put the final stamp on my investigation, I decided to dip into the subject quite literally. A friend and I floated a canoe down to Oxley's Island, where I strapped on my sports sandals and waded back and forth between the Virginia and Maryland shores, the water rarely reaching above my knees. Granted this was the drought summer of 1997, but clearly the ford was shallow enough for use in anything but flood conditions.

On the Virginia side, one could see a path leading up out of the flood plain into what had once been Elijah White's farm. Jubal Early described this as "an obscure ford," and doubtless it would have remained obscure had Elijah White not been assigned to Stonewall Jackson's command at the outset of the Maryland campaign.

Last winter I was pedalling furiously along the towpath around Dickerson, when I came across a historical marker that had not been there when I last passed in September. I applied the brakes and came to a sudden stop. It was a marker for White's Ford, all right, placed along the towpath a few hundred feet below Lock 26, but still a bit upstream from the actual ford.

Once again, I excitedly called Gordon Gay at Park headquarters. He was in his last week of residence there, about to be relocated to Harpers Ferry. I reminded him of our long-ago conversation, eight years earlier, when he had told me about the plan to put up a Whites Ford marker. "So soon, then," he murmured wryly.

I mentioned to him that the marker was somewhat upstream of the true location of the ford. I wondered if this meant that the route up from the ford had followed the stream path up towards Woods Lock. Gordon assured me that the placement signified little beyond the fact that this seemed the best little clearing below Woods Lock.

The reason I was interested in the placement of the marker was that it may actually be quite fortuitous. Both the Union map and first person accounts of the ford crossing indicate that the Confederates followed a path upstream to a road culvert that was used by local farmers. While it was large enough for the farmers, it turned out to be too small for Early's heavier equipment.

The only problem with the description is that there is no culvert in the stretch between Oxley's Island and Woods Lock. Park surveys do indicate that Culvert #64 ran under the canal at the location of the present-day waste weir next to the historical marker (mile 39.2). But it seems odd that a stone structure large enough to be used as a road culvert could have vanished without a trace. (Though the wing wall jutting out from the waste weir might be the remnant of a culvert.)

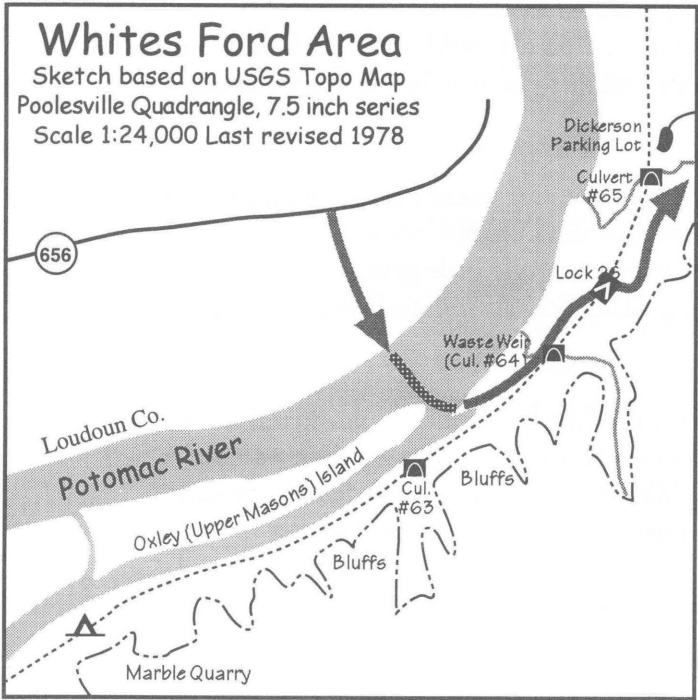
Canal company records are little help here—the company spent a great deal of time recording the details of locks, dams, and aqueducts, but apparently regarded the construction of the culverts to be beneath their attention. The 1831 report by Abert and Kearny (U.S. Topographical Engineers) does offer the tantalizing observation that three road culverts were under construction in the 7.5 miles between Broad Run and Woods Lock (labelled as Lock #27 in the report, but clearly described as present-day Lock #26). But the evidence peters out at that point.

Perhaps the answer lies in the musty tomes of the company records kept at the National Archives, or in an obscure soldier's diary describing the path to and from the ford in greater detail. Until something new turns up, though, my best guess is that Culvert #64 at mile 39.2 was the one used by farmers and soldiers crossing the ford during the Civil War. Which would make the placement of the historical marker for Whites Ford quite appropriate.

The reasons are simple: this was the closest culvert upstream of the ford, and the maps and accounts clearly describe the Confederate column turning in that direction after crossing the river. Once through the culvert, the army could have followed a relatively easy path along the berm of the canal away from the quarry bluffs and then away from the river valley. There are good reasons for excluding the two other candidates, Culvert #63 (too small and situated downstream of the ford) and Culvert #65 (too far from the ford, by map and contemporary accounts).

So, at least for the time being, I believe that the Park Service and the Pelham Society's intuition was uncanny. Before leaving the marker, though, I should point out one inaccuracy: the marker indicates that Cheeks Ford was another name for Haulings Ford at the mouth of the Monocacy. Cheeks Ford was a different ford, located about a mile and half above the Monocacy.

I'm not done with Whites Ford by any means. I've followed the stream through the woods, and trails along and over the bluffs. As summer approaches, the dog and I are looking forward to further exploration of Oxley Island and the river around it. The river runs shallow here, but the history runs deep.



Mike High

## *NATURE NOTES - Bird-Counting Along the Towpath*

A half-dozen sleepy people tumbled out of cars quietly parking at Great Falls Tavern. Only one vehicle preceded them in the early morning twilight of the last day of May. The van with two fishermen and their gear was unloading as the other cars arrived. The fishermen expressed surprise at the sudden arrival of additional cars and seemed even more surprised at their mission. Who would get out in the park before 5:30 a.m. just to count birds!

The Baltimore oriole that had been trying out a few notes in the trees near the Tavern was just starting his full song as Dick Tibbetts and his daughter, Andrea, located the first ribbon to mark the spot where everyone quietly waited while the official "observer" listened and looked for signs of birds. The chief sound breaking the early morning quiet was that of rushing water. Even the morning song of the Baltimore oriole was muffled by the sound of water, but Canada geese, crows, grackles and a mourning dove also made themselves heard.

At the next listening and watching point, a short distance away from the sound of water, Bob Caswell identified a red-bellied woodpecker, two tufted titmice, two red-eyed vireos, a cardinal and more grackles.

And so our walk continued, with frustration at the sightings of some less common birds, not at the official listening and watching posts, but in between. A great blue heron stalked the berm side of the canal but couldn't be counted because he wasn't in the right place. The prothonotary warbler displayed his brilliant yellow at another in-between point.

The gray overcast of a cloudy spring morning continued to the end of our assigned observation points, just below Swain's Lock. There Pat Schindler completed the morning's count at 7:25 a.m. after we had waited for a motorboat's din to disappear upriver.

Altogether the group's count for the morning yielded one Baltimore oriole heard at the beginning, 2 yellow-billed cuckoos, a downy and a pileated woodpecker, 5 red-bellied woodpeckers, 3 blue-gray gnatcatchers, 2 peewees, 4 Acadian flycatchers, 30 crows, 1 brown-headed cowbird, 31 grackles, 3 cardinals, 6 red-eyed vireos, 1 parula warbler, 4 Carolina wrens, 8 tufted titmice, 3 chickadees, and 2 barred owls. For a while a doe watched us from the berm side of the canal as we counted birds.

We compared the 1998 count with the count for the same area under similar circumstances in 1995. Observed in 1998 but not in 1995 were Carolina chickadees and barred owls. Observed in 1995 but not in 1998 were great blue herons, a single little green heron, a ruby-throated hummingbird, a blue jay, a house finch, goldfinches, an indigo bunting, a scarlet tanager and a prothonotary warbler.

Two members of our group were anxious to return home but five of us sauntered slowly back down the towpath, leaving it to take the path along the river. On the river we watched a loon dive and come up again some distance away. We also watched an adult bald eagle carry a fish downriver, returning shortly to deliver food to the two young eaglets occupying the nest on Conn Island. We continued to watch as the young birds moved from the nest to branches of their home sycamore and back again. Other birds observed on the river included a wood duck and a little green heron.



We barely missed stepping on a very small snapping turtle at the end of the path. Dick Tibbetts picked it up carefully and placed it in the brush at the side of the trail. We also watched as a box turtle paused at the river's edge before diving in. Several crayfish chimneys were found near the river's edge.

The Baltimore oriole was continuing to sing in the grey of early morning as sleepy bird-watchers got in their cars and drove away.

The recent bird censusing along the towpath is not the first. Beginning in the 1940s, the Audubon Naturalist Society conducted breeding bird and Christmas counts along the canal. When the breeding bird counts started, the location could be reached from the street car line at a stop identified by a beer joint, called at various times "Bill's Grill" and other names. The street car is long gone but the building is still there, now a dignified restaurant.

The path by which bird-watchers could scramble down the hill to Lock 7 was long ago demolished by the construction of the Clara Barton Parkway. The quiet lock-keeper's house where a Park Ranger lived with his family was disturbed at that time only on summer weekends when the "music" of the Glen Echo merry-go-round sometimes drowned out bird song.

A short walk upstream from Lock 7 in the 1940s led to a path along Cabin John Creek, leading in turn to a river path with intersecting paths criss-crossing a small island bounded by the canal and river, Cabin John Creek and a smaller creek at the lower end.

For 50 years bird-watchers haunted this area in mid-winter and spring. In the early days, we were often joined by Bona May McHenry, the wife of Park Ranger Donald E. McHenry, or by Keith, the younger of their two boys. One year we found a parula warbler's nest with strands of gunny-sacking woven into the nest. In several years, a pair of wood ducks nested in a hole in a tall tree near the river. On one occasion, an observer was lucky enough to see the ducklings tumble from the nest to the ground--one by one. In the early spring, loons were often seen as they dived and came up again downriver. Tables in the picnic area between the towpath and river just above Cabin John Creek were convenient for compiling data to be entered in Audubon Society records.

One record couldn't be entered since the nest was built in a tree in the McHenry's front yard. After the family of yellow-bellied sapsuckers left the nest, Bruce McHenry climbed the tree to check on nest contents. He hoped to find a snakeskin that was sometimes used by sapsuckers in place of wood chips. Instead, a crumpled bit of clear plastic, looking a little like an abandoned snake skin, came from the very bottom of the nesting hole.

Except for the lock-keeper's house and Cabin John Creek, little remains to mark the old census area. When I joined another ANS member on the Christmas count in 1997, nearly all of the census area was under water. We saw a few birds flying down the towpath or above the canal prism. On the census area itself we watched a beaver and a muskrat swimming upstream.

Helen L. Johnston

*Along the Towpath* is published in March, June, September, and December by the :

C & O Canal Association

P.O. Box 366

Glen Echo, MD 20812-0366

Articles for publication should be received by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Please mail articles to:

Delilah Hawa

Editor, *Along the Towpath*

18508 Locust Point Court,

Montgomery Village, MD 20886

email: Deli500@aol.com

Membership in the C & O Canal Association is open to all persons with an interest in the C & O Canal, the C & O Canal National Historic Park, and the Potomac River Basin. Annual membership dues are \$15 individual, \$20 family, and \$25 patron, and are assessed on a calendar-year basis. Dues should be mailed to the C & O Canal Association at the above address. A newsletter subscription is included with membership. The Association is a non-profit organization as defined by section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and all contributions are tax deductible.

The C&O Canal Association maintains a home page on the WWW or  
<http://www.cyberrealm.net/canal>. The COCA Webmaster is Olivia Casasnovas. COCA also maintains a telephone for information and inquiries.

Please direct calls to (301) 983-0825.

#### C & O CANAL ASSOCIATION

1998-1999 Association Officers

**President:** perry@aol.com

Thomas L. Perry

116 S. Conocoheaque St. Williamsport, MD  
21795

301 223 7010

**First Vice President:**

William J. Evans

3813 Juniper Rd., Baltimore, MD 21218-  
1828

410 243 6315

**Second VP & Level Waker Chairperson:**

Kela@bellatlantic.net

Keith Kridenoff

1725 Red Oak Road, Baltimore, MD 21234  
410 661 6130

**Secretary:**

Rachel L. Stewart

5914 Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA 22205  
703 237 4727

**Treasurer:**

David M. Johnson

9211 Wadsworth Dr., Bethesda, MD 20817  
301 530 7473

**Information Officer:**

Mary A. Lurch

4701 Bradly Blvd., #104 Chevy Chase, MD  
20815  
301657 9542

**Board of Directors:**

(Terms expire in 2000)

Christine Cerniglia, Carl Linden,

Mary Ann Moen, James Preston, Ken Rollins  
(terms expire in 1999) Charles Ayres,

Harold Larsen, Nancy Long, Robert Perry,  
Patricia White (terms expire in 2001) Karen

M.Gray/KMGrayPhD@compuserve.com,  
Fred Mopsik/mopsik/mopsikj@pop.erols.com,

Helen L. Shaw, Michael Schuchat &

John G. Viner.

Committees (contact at the COCA telephone number or write to COCA)

Archives: Hal Larsen

**Canal Restoration/Monocacy Aqueduct:**

Carl Linden

**Environmental:** Ralph Donnelly/Fred Mopsik

**Level Walkers:** Keith Kridenoff

**Membership:** Rita Bauman

**Programs:** Sonny DeForge/Ken Rollins

**VIPs:** John Lindt

**Membership Coordinator:** William Bauman.

**Editorial Staff:**

Editor: Delilah Dane Hawa

301 963 1133/Deli500@aol.com

**Associate Editors:**

Carl A. Linden

Jane D. Perry

Ken Rollins

Nancy Long

Ellen Holway

Hal Larsen

**Directory**

C&O Canal NHP Telephone Numbers and I

**C&O Canal NHP HQTRS:**

Box 4, Sharpsburg, MD 21782 301 739 4200

Superintendent: Douglas Faris

Assistant Superintendent: Kevin Brandt

Chief Ranger: Keith Whisenant

Admin. Officer: Ken Brodie

Asst. Ch. Ranger & Chief Visitor Protection

Branch: Kevin Fitzgerald

Chief Natural Resource Mgmt Branch:

Patrick Toops

Chief, Cultural Resource Mgmt Branch:

Doug Stover

Chief of Maintenance: Bob Hartman

Volunteer Coordinator: Nancy Brown

Flood Recovery Team: Bob Conway

**Palisades District:**

11710 MacArthur Blvd, Potomac, MD 20854

301 413 0024

District Ranger: Tom Nash

Supv Ranger- Fee Collection: Terry Barbot

**Georgetown Visitors Center:**

1055 Thomas Jefferson Street, Washington,

DC 20007 202 653 5190

Park Ranger: Kathy Kupper

Great Falls Tavern Visitors Center

Great Falls Tavern Information

301 229 3613

Park Ranger: Faye Walmsley

The Palisades District begins at Milepost 0

(Tidelock) and continues to Milpost 42.19

(Monocacy River)

**Western Maryland District:**

301 739 4200 x 237

District Ranger: Mark Spier

Western Subdistrict:

Rick Erisman, Matt Stoffolano

Central Subdistrict: John Bailey,

George DeLancey

Eastern Subdistrict: Luis Krug, Bill Orlando

District Interpreter: Martin Gallery

**Williamsport Visitors Center:**

205 West Potomac Street, Williamsport, MD

21795 301 582 0813

Park Ranger: Donna Swauger

**Hancock Visitors Center:**

326 West Potomac Street Hancock,

Maryland 21795 301 722 8226

Park Ranger: Paul Apple

**Cumberland Visitors Center:**

Western Maryland Station, Cumberland,

Maryland 21502 301 722 8226

Park Ranger: Rita Knox

The Western Maryland District begins at

Milepost 42.19 (Monocacy River) and ends at

the Canal Terminus, Cumberland, Milepost

184.5

**Other Useful Telephone Numbers:**

Georgetown Boat Operation

202 653 5190

Abner Cloud House 202 472 2679

Fletcher's Boat House (Concessionaire) 202

244 0461

Canal Clipper, Great Falls Tavern

301 299 2026

Swains Lock (Concessionaire)

301 299 9006

# ACROSS THE BERM

*John Seabury Thomson, 1919-1998*

*John Thomson died doing what he liked best, canoeing. After gliding along the Potomac River with a friend, John collapsed in the parking lot when they were stowing the canoes after their trip. He succumbed soon after to a heart attack. One may argue that this is the way to go, quickly and doing what you love. But for those who survive him, family, friends and colleagues, there is a void in their lives.*

*We knew John as an Association member who served briefly on the Board of Directors and as the information officer in 1989-90. Obviously other achievements eclipsed his role with the association: he is remembered as the commuter who licked the rush-hour problem by paddling across the river each day to his work at the CIA. Many canoeists will revere him as their mentor; he liked to teach neophytes how to maneuver a canoe without capsizing the boat. Beyond that he was an old China hand, one who spoke the language fluently and who served his country well during turbulent Chinese-American relations after World War II.*

*But given all his contributions, he left his mark with us in the Association as well. We remember him for his energy, his good cheer, and his interest in anything pertaining to the canal and the Potomac (but especially canoeing). No more shall we hear that lusty laughter, the storytelling, and the rich baritone at caroling time at the old tavern. No more shall we enjoy his warm, genuine friendship. He took the lead, he listened to others, he spoke eloquently when he felt strongly about an issue that he took an interest in, and he invariably had a cheery greeting for everyone. We'll remember him that way.*

*Hal Larsen*

*This issue is dedicated to the memory of John Seabury Thomson*



*Photograph courtesy of Peggy Thomson*

-----  
Cut and mail by 24 October 1998  
-----

DINNER RESERVATIONS HERITAGE HIKE 31 OCTOBER 1998

Cost \$15.00 per person

Names:


Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: C&O Canal Association  
P.O. Box 366  
Glen Echo, MD 20812-0366





C&O Canal Association  
P.O. Box 366  
Glen Echo, MD 20812-0366

**FIRST-CLASS MAIL**

U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

Woodbridge, VA  
PERMIT NO. 70

JOHN C FRYE  
3122 KAETZEL RD  
ROHRERSVILLE MD 21779-1219