

ALONG THE TOWPATH

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE

CHESAPEAKE & OHIO CANAL ASSOCIATION

An independent, non-profit, all-volunteer citizens association established in 1954 supporting the conservation of the natural and historical environment of the C&O Canal and the Potomac River Basin.

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September 2026

Number 3



North of Fort Frederick, Big Pool, and Licking Creek Aqueduct is Little Pool. This view is from the lower end of Little Pool. Photos by Tim Snyder

2026 Heritage Hike Events in Hancock

By Tim Snyder

The Association's annual Heritage Hike will take place on Saturday, October 24, 2026, with all events in the Hancock, MD, area. The day's activities will include hikes of approximately 9, 7.5, and 3 miles. The program will be a guided tour of the Hancock Town Museum, followed by social hour and dinner at St. Peter's Catholic Church's dining hall.

All hikers will meet at the Western Maryland Rail Trail (WMRT) parking lot located at 237 E. Main St. (MD Rt. 144) that is opposite the American Legion building (the one with a missile and artillery piece on the front lawn). Long and medium hikers will meet at 10 a.m. Short hikers will meet at 11 a.m. Note: all hikes are loop hikes (no buses) that will begin on the Western Maryland Rail Trail,

include the canal towpath, and circle back to the rail trail parking lot. All hikers must sign a waiver to participate in an Association hike. Members and guests who do not sign a waiver are hiking independently and are not considered part of an Association hike.

Hikers will proceed downstream on the Western Maryland Rail Trail and will pass over a bridge that crosses Tonoloway Creek. After about 0.75 mile, all hikers will come to the road that leads to the Bowles House to the right, the former seasonal park visitor's center that is now closed. Short hikers will turn right on the road and follow the gravel path through the canal channel to the towpath and turn right (upstream), passing the Bowles House. After about 1.5 miles on the towpath, short hikers will come to the Little

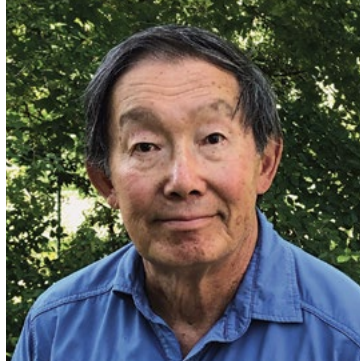
Continued on Page 6

President's Notes

By Arthur Tsien

I'm writing this piece in mid-July to meet our *ATP* editing and production deadlines. We've had recent days with a heat index in triple digits and days with warnings to avoid outdoor activities due to wildfire smoke. Such weather is far from ideal for enjoying the outdoors (in fact, outdoor volunteer activities like level walking are officially proscribed by the National Park Service when the heat index is in triple digits). But, by the time you read this in September, fall will be right around the corner and more pleasant weather should be with us for enjoyment of the C&O Canal, towpath, and Potomac River.

Our Programs Committee has been working hard with two new events this summer. First, we had a successful Friends and Family Summer Picnic at Fort Frederick State Park. We had a good turnout of new and old faces despite a rainy day and a massive traffic bottleneck on Interstate 70. Second, I'm looking forward to the summer field trip, a journey on the steam-powered Western Maryland Scenic Railroad from Cumberland to Frostburg



and back, with a visit to the recently opened Coal Miners Memorial in Frostburg during the layover.

If you are in the Williamsport area, please stop in and visit the recently relocated C&O Canal National Historical Park Visitor Center at the Cushwa Basin Trolley Barn. The Association funded the photographic murals in the outer room of the Trolley Barn, featuring the photography of long-time *ATP* editor and producer Steve Dean. The murals look fantastic!

Thanks to the generosity of our current and former members, we are fortunate to have a very well-funded treasury. Unfortunately, spending that money in pursuit of our mission is not as simple as it might appear. There are practical limits and priorities to consider, and our Board of Directors will hopefully start addressing that problem at its next meeting. Stay tuned!

That's it for now. I hope to see you at one of our activities or on the towpath.

The Association Welcomes New Members

Joseph Wagner

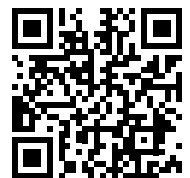
Jack Machel

Thank you for your continued support of our organization! If you have questions, please contact the Membership Chair at membership@candocanal.org. Membership information is available at candocanal.org/membership.

Become A Member

Joining the C&O Canal Association is a simple way to turn your love for the canal into tangible support for the park.

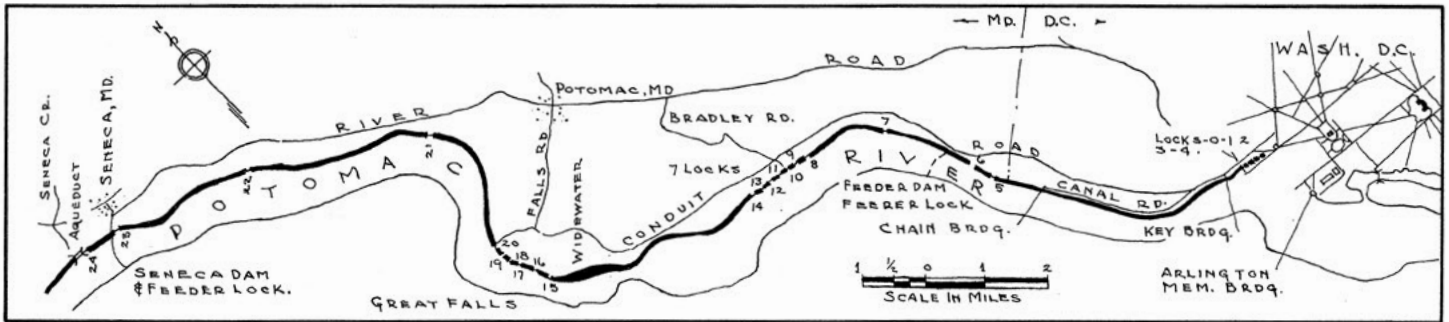
As a member, you'll receive the quarterly *Along the Towpath* newsletter with updates on park issues, history, nature, hikes, and volunteer activities, plus opportunities to join guided walks, bike rides, and paddling trips along the 184.5-mile canal corridor. Members can also take part in hands-on stewardship through programs like Level Walkers and Volunteers in Parks, helping to keep the towpath safe, accessible, and welcoming for everyone. To join, visit candocanal.org.



*Visit to start your
membership*

Currents of History: The C&O Canal and America's 250th Anniversary

By Bob Carpenter



A 1930s survey map shows the C&O Canal in Montgomery County, MD. Map courtesy Library of Congress

The Association is cosponsoring a multimedia exhibit that celebrates America's 250th anniversary through a tour of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal NHP. The exhibit "Currents of History: The C&O Canal and America's 250th Anniversary" will be held in the Goldman Art Gallery at the Jewish Community Center, located on 6125 Montrose Road in Rockville, MD. The exhibit will be open to the public daily between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. from Sunday, September 13 through Saturday, October 24.

This engaging exhibit brings the canal to life through landscape paintings, photographs, postal images, sculpture, and a 3D relief map. The exhibit is curated by Joel Cohen, a biologist, research scholar, and Association member; Jean Hirons, a pastel artist; Wendy Ross, an artist and sculptor; and Jon Wolz, a canal historian and Association member.

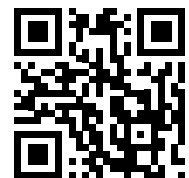
We hope you can visit this exhibit and explore the Canal's engineering feats, biodiversity, and its place as a National Historical Park since 1971. See how this 184.5-mile corridor, that we members of the Association care for so deeply, continues to offer a rare blend of history and wilderness while sitting in or near a densely populated region.

We plan on having a special viewing of the exhibit for Association members only; the date and time of this viewing will be communicated via email and on the Association website. For additional information on the exhibit, contact Joel Cohen at cohenji@comcast.net.

Submission of Content for *Along the Towpath* –

Please review the submission guidelines posted at candocanal.org/submission. Submit questions, comments and content to editor@candocanal.org or the following address:

Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Association Inc.
Attn: *Along the Towpath* Editor
P.O. Box 366
Glen Echo, MD 20812-0366



*Submission
Guidelines*

Board Meeting Highlights – June 7 and August 2, 2026

By Jane Hanna

Christiana Hanson of the C&O Canal National Historical Park (NHP) treated us to a grand tour of the new Trolley Barn exhibits in Williamsport, MD, on June 7. The entryway features an array of brick arches—formerly windows—displaying photographic murals by our own Steve Dean. The murals represent points of interest along the length of the canal: Cumberland, Paw Paw, Williamsport, Great Falls, and Georgetown. Benches provide seating for about 30. The Trolley Barn was built in 1896 to generate electricity for the trolley line between Williamsport and Hagerstown.

The adjoining room has frames for changeable exhibit banners. Nearby is a scale model of a working lock, a lifesize model of a mule, and a sales area.

The business meeting was held afterwards in the town hall. The board approved \$20,000 for water fountain repairs at Canal Place in Cumberland, \$300 for exhibit panels for the “Currents of History” exhibits in September and October (see page 3), and \$3,000 for production and printing of a new membership brochure.

On August 2, the board met via Zoom. Shaun Lehmann of the C&O Canal NHP updated us on projects including lock repairs in Georgetown, improvements on the Billy Goat Trail, continuing work on the Potomac Interceptor cleanup, construction work on the Byron Bridge at Harpers Ferry, and removal of invasive aquatic plants at Hancock.

The Board approved the closure of the Cumberland Repair and Maintenance Fund, Davies Legal Fund, Rachel Stewart Swains Lock Area Fund due to inactivity. The funds can be reactivated as needed. The board also approved \$9,500 for a monument to canal workers who died in the 1832 cholera epidemic, to be erected at St. Mary’s Parish in Barnesville, MD, and \$600 to sponsor the local portion of the American Discovery 250 Relay.

Upcoming projects include a redesign of C&OCA website, a redesign of our logo, in time for the 75th anniversary in 2029, and strategizing how best to support canal-related projects.



*Inside the Trolley Barn at the Cushwa Basin in Williamsport, MD.
Photo by Jane Hanna*



Photo by Steve Dean

2026 3M Challenge

By Denny Sloppy

This year, the C&OCA will sponsor a team for the 3M Challenge race where bicyclists try to beat the time of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad train from Cumberland to Frostburg. The Challenge takes place on Saturday, September 26, 2026.

The six-member team is made up of Patrick Pope, Joe Hayes, Carol Hayes, Alice Massey, Robert Carpenter, and Len Komsa.

All proceeds and funds raised from the event directly support critical maintenance, infrastructure development, and expansion projects on the Maryland portion of the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) Trail, and other recreational trails in and around Allegheny County, including the C&O Canal NHP. Join us at the start of the race, at 8 a.m., and cheer on the team!

Donors to Association Funds

Donations May 1 through July 31, 2026

C&O Canal Association donation policy. The Association is grateful for the generous support provided by donors over the years. If a donor specifies one of the special-purpose funds listed below, we add the donation to that fund. With the exception of the General Fund, we will use the money in accordance with the goals of the fund and not for administrative costs.

General Fund. If a donor doesn't specify a fund, we add that donation to the general fund, which can be used for any purpose, including the Association's administrative costs.

Help the Association by paying online. The Association website makes it easy to pay online using your credit card. Processing online payments is more secure and easier for our volunteers. You can renew your membership, purchase event meals or bus tickets, or make donations. We use PayPal to process our payments, but you don't need a PayPal membership. You can use your credit or debit card. *Note: You don't need to sign up for PayPal. You can deselect the button "Save info and create your PayPal account."*

Association Funds

A – Nancy C. Long Aqueduct Fund

Supports restoration and preservation of the 11 aqueducts on the C&O Canal. The fund was established with a generous donation made by C&O Canal advocate Nancy Long.

C – The Cumberland Repair and Maintenance Fund

Donations specifically identified for repair and maintenance of the historic canal boat replica in Cumberland.

D – Davies Legal Fund

Supports the Association's involvement in activities such as the opposition to the transfer of public land to any individual or enterprise for private use.

G – General Fund

General funds that are used for any purpose.

R – Ken Rollins C&O Canal Fund

Supports current projects and programs in and for the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

S – Rachel Stewart Swains Lock Area Fund

Funds improvements around Swains Lock as they are identified in conjunction with the National Park Service.



Donate, or find more information about donations at candocanal.org/contributions

Donations

Donations to the Association from May through July 2026

C&O Bicycle Hancock – **R**

Philip Clemans – **G**

Estate of Dorothy J. Ipavec – **R**

Estate of Nancy C. Long – **A**

Kenneth Fisher – **R**

Ta-Mao Hwang – **R**

David Krane – **R**

Michael Marmer – **A**

Lorraine Minor – **R**

Mary Moen – **R**

Rodney Rempt – **R**

Jon Wolz – **A**



Dam 4 near Williamsport, MD. Photo by Steve Dean

Heritage Hike Events in Hancock – Continued from Page 1

Tonoloway Recreation Area on left and will cross the bridge over the canal on the right. Short hikers will then turn right onto Berm Road (unmarked), then take an immediate left onto Pennsylvania Ave and pass C&O Bicycle on their left. Just beyond C&O Bicycle, short hikers will turn right onto the paved WMRT for about 0.75 mile until they reach the ramp on the left that leads back to the WMRT parking lot to complete their 3-mile hike.

Long and medium hikers will continue on the WMRT past the road leading to the Bowles House. After a total of about 3.75 miles on the WMRT, long and medium hikers will come to a wayside sign on the right entitled, “Little Pool.” The linkage between the WMRT and the canal towpath is on the right just past the wayside. Go down the stairs that lead to the lower end of Little Pool and take the bridge across the canal to the towpath (Mile 119.84) and turn right, upstream toward Hancock.

After traveling about 3 miles on the towpath, medium hikers will turn right onto the gravel path that leads through the towpath just before the Bowles House. Continuing up the hill, medium hikers will turn left at the WMRT and proceed another 0.75 mile to the ramp on the right leading to the WMRT parking lot, completing their approximately 7.5-mile hike.

Long hikers will continue past the Bowles house for a little more than 1.5 miles until they see the Little Tonoloway Recreation Area to their left and the bridge over the canal on the right. Long hikers will cross the bridge, turn right onto Berm Road (unmarked), then take an immediate left onto Pennsylvania Ave. and pass C&O Bicycle on their left. Just beyond C&O Bicycle, long hikers will turn right onto the paved WMRT for about 0.75 mile until they reach the ramp on the left that leads back to the WMRT parking lot to complete their 9-mile hike.

Sights along the trails: While walking along the WMRT, hikers will notice period line poles in the woods just to the right of the trail. These poles once carried telegraph and/or telephone line along the tracks between railroad stations. As hikers continue on the rail trail, they should be aware that they are walking amidst five historic modes of transportation. They will hear the roar of the modern automobile from Interstate 70; beyond it, farther north, is the historic Baltimore Pike, once a series of privately-funded toll roads that led to Baltimore; the rail trail once contained the tracks of the former Western Maryland Railroad; the canal and its towpath is just below to the south; and the Potomac River just to the right of the canal.

For long and medium hikers, scenic Little Pool is nearly a mile in length. Canal engineers created Little Pool



by utilizing a long and narrow island parallel to the shore to form a portion of the canal towpath. At Mile 120.60, hikers will pass the Little Pool Hiker-Biker Campsite. At the upper end of Little Pool (Mile 120.75), the island ends and a levee carries the towpath to a point where it continues along the river. As hikers continue back toward Hancock, they will pass over culverts 172–175, the biggest of which is 173 with an 8-foot span to accommodate Barnetts Ditch Run. At Mile 122.59, hikers will encounter Lock No. 51, which was built by William Storey in the fall of 1838.

Long and short hikers will pass the Bowles House (Mile 122.85), the former seasonal park visitor's center. It was originally a one-story structure built in the 1780s. It was owned by William Yates until 1875, at which time it was acquired by the Bowles family who lived there until 1905. At Mile 122.89, long and short hikers will see Lock No. 52, which gives the appearance of being a continuous structure with the Tonoloway Aqueduct just beyond it. Both the lock and aqueduct were completed in 1839. The foundation of a building opposite the lock may be the remains of a store dating from 1865. The Tonoloway Aqueduct (Mile 122.96) took the canal over Tonoloway Creek. It consists of a single arch that is irregular, four feet above the creek on the west side; 16 above the creek on the east side. Both parapet walls are no longer in place. A mile farther (Mile 123.95), a 12-foot road culvert passes under the canal that once led to the ferry. At Mile 124.10, hikers will pass by a steel and concrete bridge that goes over the canal to town.

Continuing up the towpath, long and short hikers will come to the Little Tonoloway recreational area. Little Tonoloway culvert, at 36 feet, is the largest on the canal. It is often called "the culvert that wanted to be an aqueduct." Back on the WMRT, long and short hikers will enjoy a pleasant walk through Hancock. Hikers will notice that the back sides of many buildings are adjacent to the rail trail and harken back to the mid-nineteenth century when a local diarist wrote that all the town's businesses faced the canal rather than the road. Hikers will notice a "Railroad Siding & Coal Trestle" wayside on the right and may make out the decaying structure in the woods just off the trail.

The Heritage Hike program will take place BEFORE the social hour and dinner. The program will be a guided tour of the Hancock Town Museum, conducted by docents from the Hancock Historical Society. The tour will begin at 3 p.m. and is expected to last 30–40 minutes. The Town Museum is in the lower level of the Municipal Building, 126 W. High St., Hancock, MD. Donations are appreciated.

Dan Murphy, president of the historical society, provided this description of the museum's collections: The collection contains artifacts and memorabilia pertaining to colonial times, early settlement, life along the National Road and C&O Canal, Civil War history of a border town, the Western Maryland Railway, the orchard industry, and much more. The museum houses a Wildlife of Western Maryland exhibit which is very popular. Another feature is our Military Room which is full of pictures and memories from men and

women who have served in the service from Hancock. Our historic Post Office is on display along with a remarkable postcard collection illustrating Hancock through the years. Lots to view for a few minutes or several hours.

The social hour will be held in the dining hall at St. Peters Catholic Church, 16 E. High St., beginning at 4 p.m. Snacks and non-alcoholic drinks will be provided and are included with a paid dinner reservation. NEW: Paid members are

permitted to bring their own beer or wine (BYOB) for consumption in the church dining hall. The Association will not provide alcoholic drinks for this event.

Beginning at 5 p.m., dinner will begin in St. Peters dining hall. Black Rock Catering will provide sliced watermelon, traditional Greek salad, grilled chicken with oregano and lemon rice pilaf, Greek green beans with tomatoes, tzatziki, and pita bread. The vegetarian entrée will be eggplant parmesan. The dessert will be carrot cake.

For the first time, we are providing price options for adults and children aged 6–12, and 5 and under. Young families with children, or older members with grandchildren or great grandchildren are welcome to make dinner reservations for children.

All registrations must be received by Friday, October 16 and can be done on the Association's website or using this issue's paper insert. We look forward to seeing you in Hancock on October 24.



Primary access point of the towpath from Hancock, MD.



Across the Berm – Remembering Our Friend the “Reverend” Thomas Lee Perry

By Denny Sloppy

I first met Tom in 2005 through the C&OCA and *Along the Towpath*. Tom was the contact for an annual through bike ride from Cumberland to Georgetown. I called him to see if he had room for me on his ride—and he did. One thing led to another, and I met Tom and the other leaders, Jim Heins and Norman Liebow, at the mule statue in Cumberland, along with the other bikers.

I had earlier sent Tom a little report I had written about a family through-ride we had done on the C&O Canal. Little did I realize that every year someone had to write a trip report for *ATP*. Somehow, I ended up with the job. My report began: “The days of October sixth through the eleventh of 2005 were a time I had looked forward to with great anticipation as it was to be my first through bike ride with the C&O Canal Association. Although I had ridden the towpath before, this time I would be with 19 people I had never met, other than talking to Tom Perry by telephone. Tom was very reassuring, however, and from our first conversation I felt as if we were old friends.” Take notice of that last sentence. I’m sure many people felt the same way when they met Tom. We did become very good friends. In fact, I returned every year for the ride for the next 19 years.

Back when Tom and Linda were in good health, we were all invited to their home on Conococheague Street in Williamsport in the middle of our six-day ride. Campers in the group were even able to spend the night there. We became a “biking” family. I wasn’t the only one who kept

coming back year after year. In Jim Heins’ photo from that year (*below*), Pam Lantz, Jon Wilson, JoAnn Condry, Tom Perry, Bill Trippel, Deborah Poole, Barb Trippel, Paul Leatherman, John Betting, Norman Liebow, as well as Jim and I, returned many times. The rest of the group that year was made up of five members of the Gordon Brooks family and Paul Petersen and his son-in-law, Bob Drage. Over the years we added more friends to our biking family and began doing regular through rides on the Great Allegheny Passage Trail also. I tell people we owe it all to Tom Perry and his friendship and leadership.

Photo by Jim Heins





Summer Field Trip on the Frostburg Flyer

On August 1, C&OCA members rode the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad from Cumberland to Frostburg. We reserved seats ahead and had our choice of cars: coach, lunch, lounge, or dome. The round-trip, including plenty of time in Frostburg, was about 4½ hours. Most of us watched as the diesel engine was turned around for the trip back. We also visited the new Coal Miner Memorial honoring those who lost their lives in the mines.

*(Top) Diesel Engine No. 539 of the Western Maryland Scenic Railway rounds the bend at the Frostburg station. Photo by Denny Sloppy
(Bottom) C&OCA members at the Coal Miner Memorial. Photo by Tina Bacas Gibson*

Inaugural Friends and Family Summer Picnic

By Tim Snyder

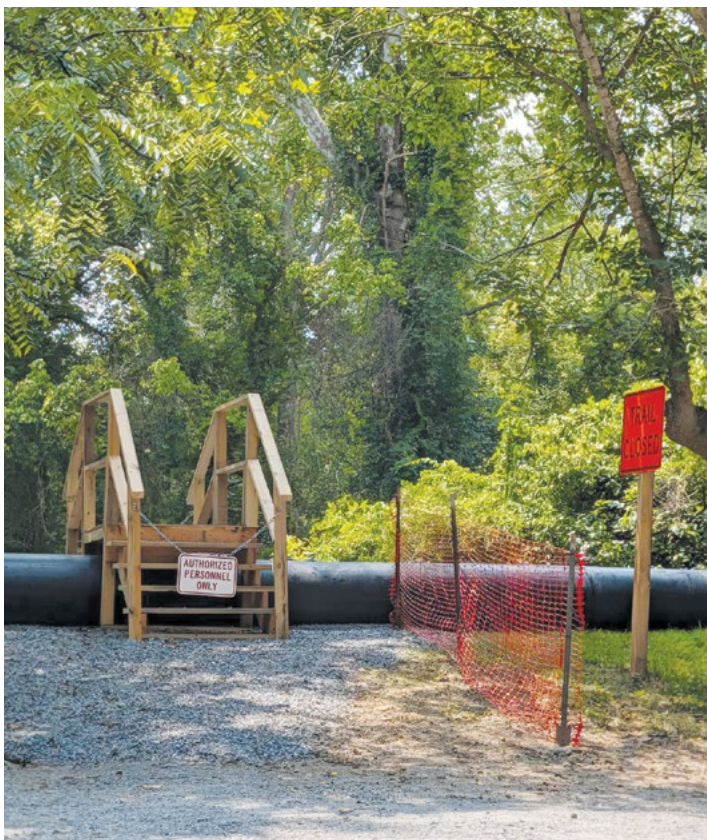
On Sunday, June 29, the C&OCA held its first Friends and Family Summer Picnic at Fort Frederick State Park, Big Pool, MD. Despite light rain and a traffic accident on I-81, about 34 members and guests arrived, including six non-members and five children.

We enjoyed a delicious picnic lunch of fried chicken, side dishes, desserts, and drinks. After the meal, we played a rousing game of C&O Canal Jeopardy, a canal trivia game modeled after the TV game show. The contestants were Jane Hanna and Dorothea Malsbary, with Jane coming out on top. Non-contestants played along on a paper score sheet. Although there was no prize, Jane maintains bragging rights until the next picnic is held and a new contestant can challenge her reign as C&O Canal Jeopardy champion!

The light rain let up by midafternoon, and six attendees took a short hike on the Park's Beaver Dam Trail.



*C&OCA members and friends at Fort Frederick State Park.
Photo by Debbie Muldoon*



(Left) Bypass pipeline at Pennyfield (Lock 22 near Potomac, MD). This large pipe runs along the berm side of the canal. (Right) Construction of the bypass pipeline at Pennyfield. Photos by Jon Wolz

Potomac Interceptor Update

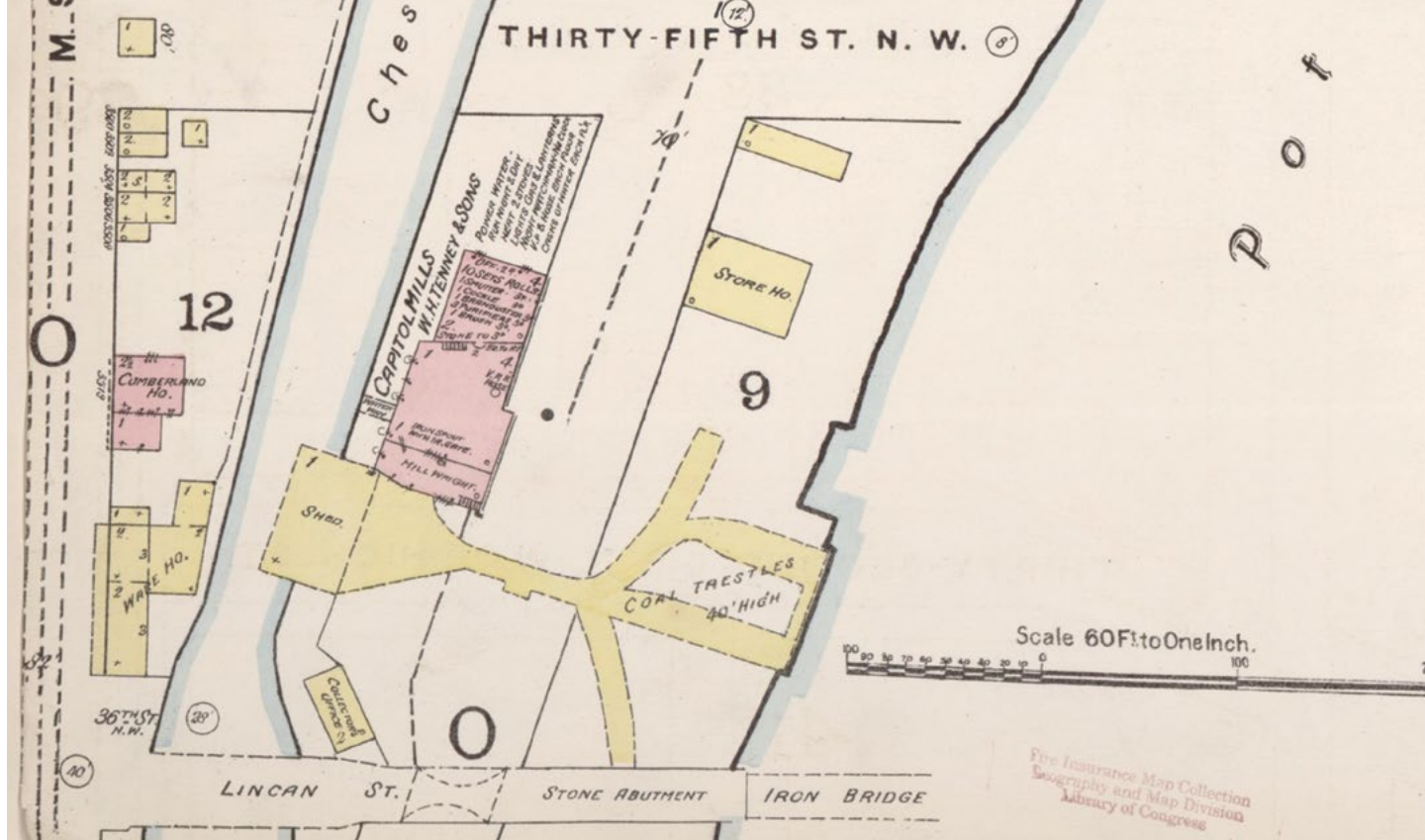
By Rod Mackler

Evidently spurred by the collapse in the massive sanitary sewer in January, DC Water has accelerated the systematic inspection of the entire 54-mile reinforced concrete pipeline. One of the priority sites is at Muddy Branch, near Lock 22, Pennyfield. DC Water's inspections found "structural deterioration, including significant corrosion and exposed rebar." Construction began in mid-June with brush clearing and will rehabilitate about 1700 linear feet (less than a third of a mile) of the interceptor. Construction is expected to be finished by the end of September.

With the earlier break near Lock 12, DC Water stressed in its press releases that the dumping of raw sewage into the Potomac River did not threaten drinking water because it occurred below the major intakes for the Washington area. Pennyfield, however, is just above the WSSC intake (near Lock 21, Swain's) and the Washington Aqueduct (at Lock 20, Great Falls). WSSC (formerly Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission) provides drinking water to Montgomery and Prince George's County, MD. The Washington Aqueduct supplies the District, Arlington, and Falls Church City.

DC Water says it will build a bypass pipeline around the work area to carry the roughly 60 million gallons a day of sewage of sewage per day. Much of the work will take place in Montgomery County's Blockhouse Point Conservation Area. Evidently, DC Water is not planning to use the canal prism as a temporary sewer. DC Water and its contractors will also avoid impacting known archaeological sites or historic culvert 30 at Muddy Branch.

More Park-relevant information is available at: parkeplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?ProjectID=136861



An 1888 map shows the Tenney & Sons mill complex beside the canal. Map courtesy National Park Service

Georgetown Canal Prism Repairs

By C&O Canal National Historical Park

The park proposes to repair a leak in the canal prism located at milepost 1.17, which is behind the east bay of the Washington Canoe Club boathouse located at 3700 Water Street, NW. The leak first appeared in 2022. A substantial stream of water was noted flowing out of the earthen berm of the towpath, across the Capital Crescent Trail, and through the Washington Canoe Club grounds, to include the building itself. Upon further investigation by the National Park Service (NPS), it was determined that the leak was associated with an abandoned headrace that once provided water to power the Tenney and Sons feed mill. This historic headrace had not been noticed nor documented by the NPS in recent decades but had been recorded on past documents predating the 1971 establishment of the canal as a national historical park.

The NPS attempted to stop the leak in 2023. Park maintenance staff and archaeologists manually excavated the soils to expose the headrace headwall. The headwall is comprised of concrete with a wooden sluice gate in front of a cast iron pipe measuring two feet in diameter. This pipe passes under the towpath where it daylights as a riveted iron flume that had been concealed by dense vegetation. Park staff, upon exposing the feature, documented it using

a combination of LiDAR scanning, measured drawings, and photography. After it was documented, the headwall was then reburied using compacted Bentonite chips to make the earthen prism wall watertight.

This repair functioned for about a year. However, upon filling the canal with water, the leak reappeared in 2025, apparently following the headrace pipe as a path of least resistance. To resolve this problem, park engineers are proposing to mechanically excavate into the towpath to expose the pipe and the back side of the inlet headwall. A small segment of the pipe will then be removed and a concrete plug poured behind the headwall. The towpath will then be reestablished by backfilling the trench with impervious fill. Both the inlet headwall and the exposed pipe outfall on the riverside of the towpath will be preserved as is.

Although a portion of the historic iron pipe will be removed, it constitutes only a small portion of historic fabric and the remaining headwall and iron outfall pipe on the riverside of the berm will be retained.

Questions or comments can be directed to Park Headquarters at 142 W. Potomac Street, Williamsport, MD 21795 or 301-739-4200.



John Bettig and Barbara Sheridan on the Fifteenmile Creek Aqueduct. Photo by Denny Sloppy

The Hike that Created a Park

By Barbara Sheridan

The information below was contained on the fourth of 14 handouts created by the NPS for the C&O Canal Association thru-hikers in 2004 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1954 hike by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. These information sheets were handed out daily and covered some history on the area of that day's hike and pointed out things to see along the way.

Day 4 – Stickpile Hill to Cacapon Junction

What do you do with a property that is 80 feet wide and 184.5 miles long? This was the dilemma faced by the National Park Service in the late 1940s. Concerned about protecting the Potomac River from the pressures of development, the National Park Service found itself in a difficult situation. Laws at the time severely limited the National Park Service's ability to purchase land and the old Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was simply not wide enough to serve as an effective buffer. In many places the land between the canal and the river was still in private ownership and could be developed in any way the owner saw fit.

The 1954 Douglas hike changed the playing field by demonstrating to the National Park Service, President Eisenhower and Congress that public support existed for the preservation of the C&O Canal and the protection of the Potomac River. Today the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park and its governmental and private partners continue to protect the health of the Potomac River.

The health of a river is dependent on the land surrounding it. Riparian areas along waterways act as sponges, filtering out pollutants and absorbing excess rainfall. Roots of plants and trees hold the soil and help control erosion. The unique environment along the Potomac River's edge supports a variety of rare and endangered plant species and specialized natural communities. Floodplain forests depend on periodic floods to create habitat for animals and plants.

What to See

Miles 147 to 143–Upland Shale Barren: Located up on the slope above the canal is one of the most unique habitats along the Potomac. Made up of exposed Devonian shales that have a low water holding capacity, the Shale Barrens provide habitat for many rare plant species like Kate's Mountain clover, dwarf skullcap, shale aster, shale evening primrose and mountain pimpernel.

Miles 146.5 & 144–Locks 59 & 58: Composite locks built of inferior stone and lined with wood. As the wood deteriorated much of the walls were replaced with concrete.

Mile 140.9–Fifteen Mile Creek Aqueduct/Little Orleans: Completed between 1848-1850 has a single 110-foot arch. During canal construction this site was the scene of a brutal attack. On August 11, 1939, Irish laborers from near the Paw Paw Tunnel struck a camp of sleeping German workers. The camp was looted, men beaten and one man burned alive.

Mile 136.7–Sidling Hill Aqueduct: Canal Company officials referred to the aqueducts as "works of art." Finished in 1840, Aqueduct No.8 waited 10 years before water flowed through it.

Mile 134.1–Dam 6: One of seven dams built to supply water to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Completed in 1839, Dam 6 diverted water into a newly constructed section of the canal, extending the canal's navigable route west by 27 miles. Financial troubles prevented the Canal Company from completing the last 50 miles of the canal to Cumberland until 1850, making Dam 6 the last stop on the canal for 11 years.

Something New from Something Old – the Transition from Canal to Conservation: Part 1

By Joel Cohen

One of the lesser-known elements, but of growing importance, to America's inland water system is its canals. Built primarily for transport and trade from 1820 to 1900, these canals are undergoing a revival, leaving us to consider future incantations. Will their focus be to convert historic waterways into new canals? Or will canals depart from past roles in commerce and become places where one finds “wilderness at the back door,” or new avenues for recreation and exploration? Besides being a place for reflection, canals can also harbor unique configurations of plant and animal biodiversity, leading to new programs in conservation, research, and education.

Such areas can enable parks, like the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park (C&O Canal NHP), to become part of a wildlife corridor or greenway. In so doing, the national park could increase continuity and counter effects of fragmentation. To explore and answer these questions, begin by establishing an agreed-upon definition of a “corridor.” For this paper, a corridor is “a strip of natural habitat connecting a pair of larger areas surrounded by developed land to allow the migration of organisms from one of those areas to the other” (Park 2007). Such pathways are being established across the country and abroad.

One example of such an area is the Yellowstone to Yukon corridor. It is on target to connect 3,200 kilometers of habitat, stretching from the Grand Tetons to the Arctic Circle in Yukon.

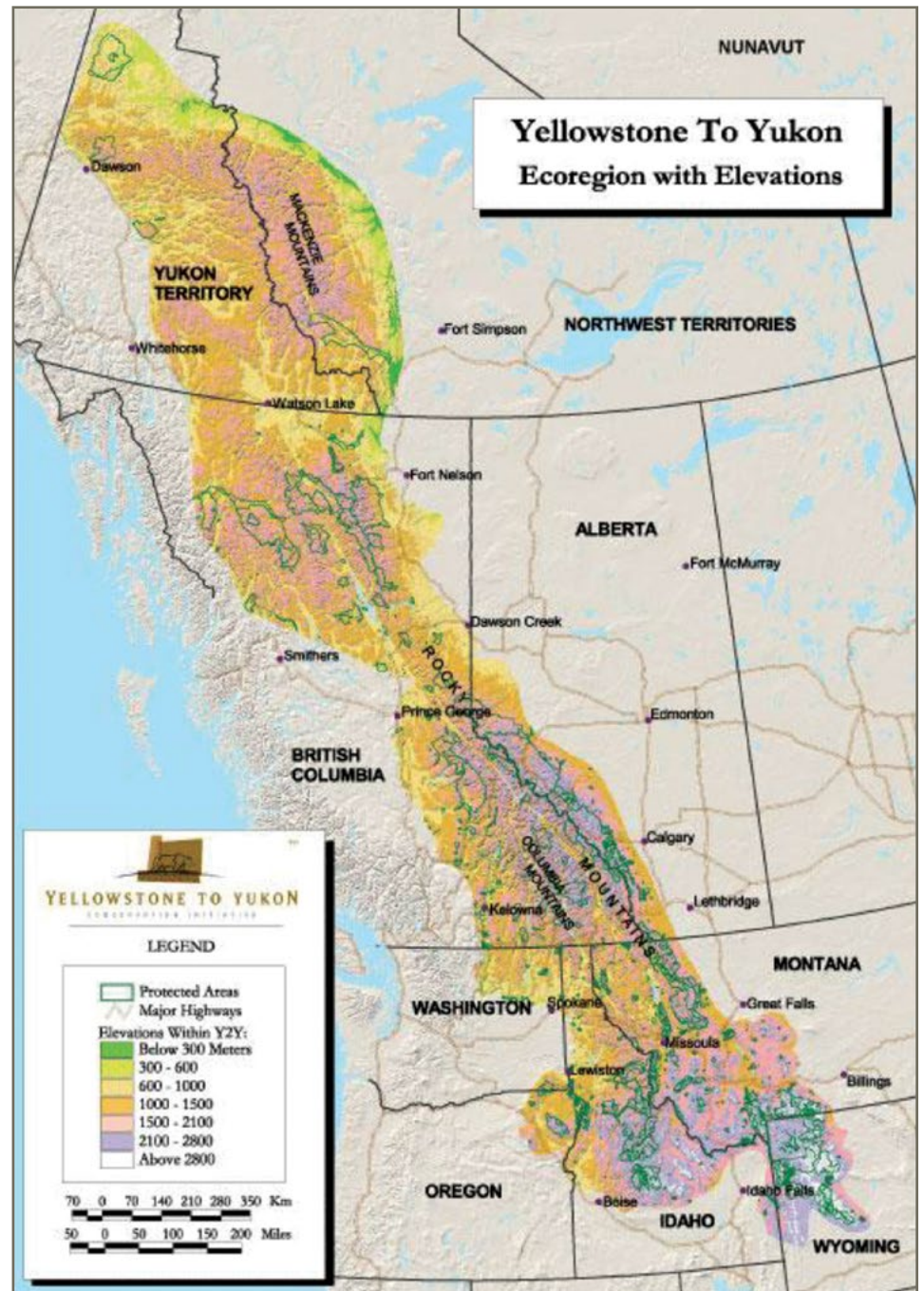


Figure 1: The Yellowstone to Yukon Corridor: “a strip of natural habitat connecting a pair of larger areas surrounded by developed land to allow the migration of organisms from one of those areas to the other” (Park 2007). This shows the continuous range sought for by the Yellowstone to Yukon conservation initiative, involving three national parks in the U.S.

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Title of Era	Nation Building and Industrial Revolution	Canal Mania	Canals in Decline	Canal Renaissance and Environmentalism	Sustainability, Restoration and Engagement
Era Number	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.
Timeline in Years	1760–1840	1820–1870	1890–1950s	1960–1970s	2019–2030
Directly Related Events	Washington's Patowmack Canal opens.	American civil engineering begins. A total of 2,617 miles of U.S. canals are completed by 1835.	Many canals began to cease operations. 1931–1941 Civilian Conservation Corps restored many damaged areas along Canal.	1964 – Congress approved Wilderness Act 1970 – First Earth Day, April 22nd 1973 – Endangered Species Act	Conservation, habitat restoration, and public engagement expands.
C&O Canal Specific Activities	-----	C&O Canal construction begins.	C&O Canal is closed permanently.	C&O Canal became a National Historical Park.	Five-year strategic plan, from 2019–2023
Year of Activity	1785	1828	1924	1971	2018
Key Individuals	George Washington	Benjamin Wright, Nathen Roberts, James Geddes	1954 – William O. Douglas led 8-day walk to support the Canal.	Richard Nixon, President, signed into law many important environmental initiatives, including making the Canal a member of the NPS.	Ray Sauvajot, National Park Service, introduced the “scaling up” imperative to the parks.

Table 1: Five historical eras marking the transition of American canals from commerce to conservation.

Continued from Page 13

Presently, this corridor includes active partnerships with 12 national parks, with three in the United States and nine in Canada. The USA is represented by Yellowstone, Teton, and Glacier national parks, with the remainder in Canada (Hilty 2026; Figure 1). Could such interests and responsibilities be adapted to those for a national historical park? If so, then the canal could be part of a broader wildlife corridor while supporting its mandate for wildlife conservation.

This paper explores such transitions for the C&O Canal NHP from past to present, focusing on transitions for the canal in light of current conservation practices

and perceptions, the canal's role as a national historical park, and implications of maintaining such a park sustainably.

Prelude – An Evolving Canal

In 1949 the word *terraform* was introduced to the English. While it is taken to mean “to transform a landscape to make it suitable for supporting human life,” as applied in the future, to another planet or moon, it could be used on Earth as well. For as the C&O Canal was built, stretching out as it did for 185 miles, settlements and towns that grew alongside it, and it was even able to incorporate a railroad line.

To fully appreciate the transitions that have come before and those yet to come for the C&O Canal NHP, it is prudent to understand the canal's past and how and why it changed over time. To do so, and for this study to facilitate subsequent commentary and reference, the waterway's history is seen as divided into five eras, ending in the present day and beginning with the C & O Canal Company charter in 1824 (Table 1).

To begin this report, though, first full credit must go to George Washington for conceptualizing the canal, explaining how it might be made, and the roles canals could play in American commerce. This in turn led to his founding of the Patowmack Company and the development of

the first Potomac River-based canal system. Washington had long before imagined the value of the nation's waterways, and navigating or working around them made canals a necessity.

In Figure 2, Washington is pictured from 1987 on a U.S. Postal Card cachet appearing with an imprinted stamp indicating the postage for the card has been pre-stamped. Here, the cachet informs the reader that Washington was also elected president of this Convention. It was from this group that the Constitution of the United States emerged and established a new democracy. But there was something else on the mind of the forthcoming President.

After the Revolutionary War, Washington feared more than ever that the loose allegiances forged during the War for Independence would be lost among the now sovereign states. Yet, there was also still a great desire to continue acquiring land and finding a pathway to the western frontier. The Ohio River valley west of Pennsylvania's Allegheny Mountains was the goal. Washington's Patowmack Company was one of the Founders' first attempts at using the building of a canal to "...bind those people to us by a chain which can never be broken."

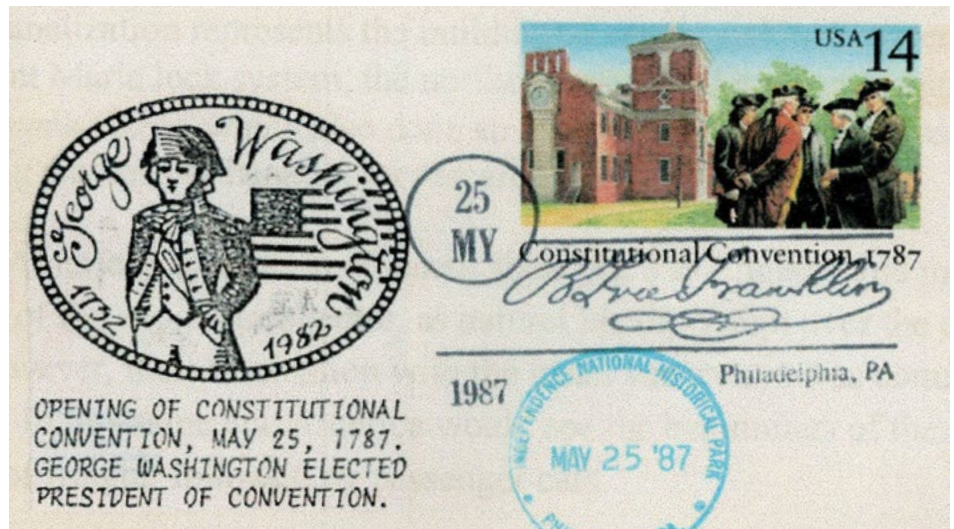


Figure 2: A postal stationery stamping, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the convening of the Constitutional Convention, for which Washington was elected President. Photo courtesy Joel Cohen

It was from such ideas that additional waterways began to take root.

From its humble start, canal builders, engineers, and investment bankers, by 1835 over 2,600 miles of waterways were operating in the U.S. (Kapsch 2004). They ran from the bays of the Atlantic Ocean as far west as Ohio and Indiana, as far north as Maine, and as far south as Louisiana and Georgia, amounting to 48 waterways in total.

The first such waterway to become a national park, in 1971, was

the C&O Canal. When telling of this event, the full requirements allowing it to occur are often overlooked. Because four major factors arose at the same time (Figure 3), the C&O Canal became the only national park inducted solely as a canal. As such, the C&O Canal is the only national historical park that includes so much of its intact cultural history while providing a waterway passing through the center of a major urban area, skirting the Potomac River to reach the western peaks of Cumberland.

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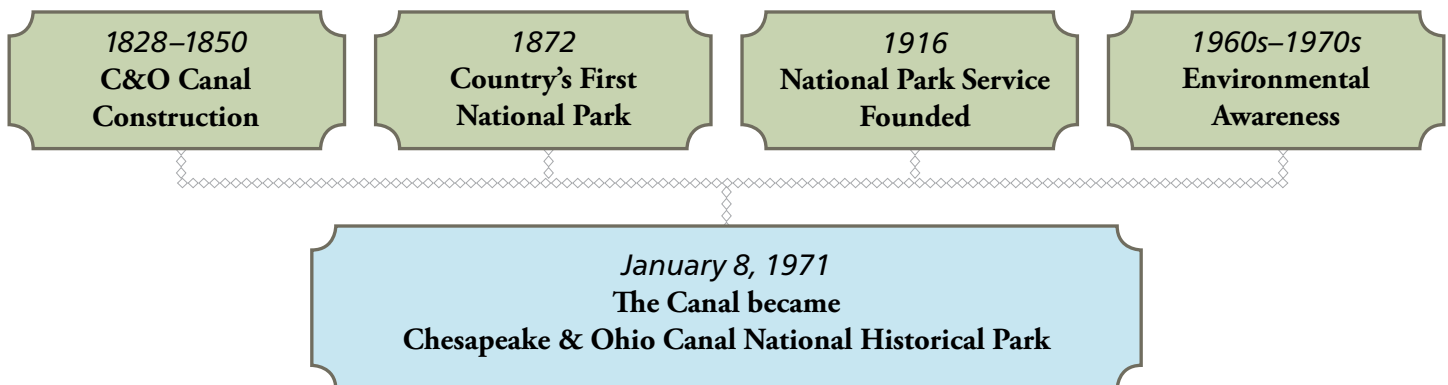


Figure 3: The Canal became a national historical park as it was consistent with the importance of conservation and citizen efforts to save the park, and the four agreements below were in place.



Figure 4: Blue violet (*Trillium*) in flower along the River Walk in June.
Photo by Joel Cohen

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The National Park Service acquired over 1,100 historic structures, 74 lift locks, and 11 aqueducts, just to mention a few of the many pieces of antiquity that led to it becoming a “historical” national park, which separates it from what became the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Subsequently, a second set of resources became apparent, these being the park’s natural resources located in various habitats throughout the canal. Once the natural resources are identified and their rarity or endangerment noted, they then require a maintenance program as with the park’s equipment, facilities, and historical buildings.

More Recent Considerations

Finally, building upon this natural greenery and its maturity over the past decades, is the recognition that unlike other waterways and rivers, the banks

of its neighboring Potomac River are mostly devoid of human intrusion. For most of its entire length alongside the Canal, the Potomac riverbank provides a relatively undisturbed riverine ecosystem, even though it passes through a highly urban setting. At certain places, as an example, an abundance of wildflowers can be seen in bloom (Figure 4), some of which are classified as rare or endangered. In recognition of the growing knowledge and understanding of such areas, a new term has come forward, “the accidental ecosystem” (Alagona 2022). This focuses on wildlife habitats that have grown up in or around cities even though cities were not built with such a goal or intent in mind. This is relevant for the Canal, as it passes through and around urban areas.

Another opportunity is “rewilding” within various habitats found along the Canal, especially as understanding of native plants increases and contributes to the next generation of replanting. A focus on rewilding means conservation approaches to restore ecosystems and biodiversity

by allowing nature to reclaim areas previously altered by human activity (Fraser 2009). For the Canal, this means identifying plants native to locations along the Canal and then finding ways to ensure their propagation and ensure they can compete against invasives, for example.

The ability to focus on its historical, cultural, and maintenance responsibilities comes foremost in planning annual activities and expenditures for the Canal Park. However, with efforts made to target “environmentalism”¹, increased ecological and conservation needs would be needed. This consideration was captured in its most recent five-year plan². As part of Goal 1, is Strategy 4 (protect resources of special concern), Action 1, which reads as:

Develop and implement a resource management plan that prioritizes critical areas and species of special concern.

Please look for Part 2 to this article in the forthcoming December 2026 issue of *Along the Towpath*.

¹Here, *environmentalism* is defined as “people who share concern about solving problems of environmental pollution and natural resources,” with a formative point being the first Earth Day, convened in 1970 by Gaylord Nelson, the Wisconsin U.S. Senator who founded Earth Day.

²Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Strategic Plan 2019–2023 by the National Park Service.

Book Review:

Stonewall Jackson's Winter Operations

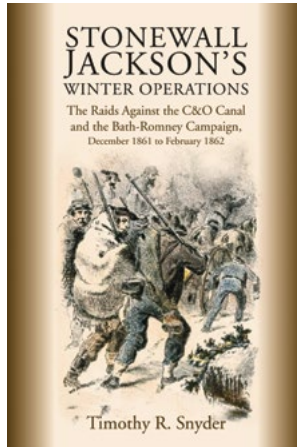
by Timothy R. Snyder

Review by David Johnson

Several years ago, Tim Snyder published *Trembling in the Balance*, his first book about the C&O Canal during the Civil War. That work focuses on the complex political relationships and conflicts between the canal company and the army and government. Military operations are covered but are incidental to the primary narrative. His new book, *Stonewall Jackson's Winter Operations*, is a traditional military chronicle, covering in detail the winter of 1861–62 when Stonewall Jackson, commanding Confederate forces in the Valley District of Virginia, undertook a campaign in frigid weather to permanently break the C&O Canal.

Two companies in the Potomac valley linked Washington with Cumberland and the west: the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and the C&O Canal. They were vital for military and commercial transportation, particularly for the delivery of coal. Only the canal came directly to D.C. From Point of Rocks the railroad went to Baltimore, where the Washington Branch connected it to the capital. (The Metropolitan Branch was not built until the 1870s.) Furthermore, the compromise reached during construction in the 1830s placed the railroad on the Virginia side of the river from Harpers Ferry to Cumberland, and early in the war it was either in Confederate-controlled territory or the target of rebel sabotage, leaving only the canal in Union control. Confederate raiders crossed the river to cut the towpath and embankments of the canal, but since that could be quickly repaired, these incidents resulted in only temporary interruptions to canal traffic.

Jackson recognized that to permanently shut down the canal, he would have to destroy one or more of the dams that fed river water into the prism. The logical targets were Dams 4 and 5, which were most accessible to his position. They also created the ponds which held the two slack-water sections of the canal. If these pools were drained, the canal could not be restored. If he could break Dam 5, the canal would be dry for 18 miles from Lock 45 through Williamsport and down to



Lock 41. If he could also break Dam 4, the canal would be drained all the way to Harpers Ferry. It could close the canal for the duration of the war.

Tim takes us through the four raids to breach the dams from the Virginia shore in December 1861 and early January 1862. All of the attempts failed. Union sharpshooters on the Maryland side drove the rebels off the dams during daylight and the icy waters and inadequate tools denied their efforts after dark. Jackson's attention then turned to the campaign against Union positions in Bath (Berkeley Springs) and Romney. Following the occupation of Bath, he moved up to the Potomac opposite Hancock, bombarding the town and canal twice before turning back to move south to Romney.

Tim describes all of these operations with great detail, drawing on an impressive collection of official Union and Confederate records, newspapers, memoirs, and letters by soldiers. We also get insights into many other leaders on both sides who are generally less well-known.

Stonewall Jackson's leadership during these operations is subject to significant criticism, and Tim examines this in detail, exposing the general's personal shortcomings that contributed to the failure of his winter adventure. These included bad tactical decisions, disputes with both superiors and subordinates, and disregard for intelligence reports. These faults are generally overlooked or omitted from the literature that concentrated on his subsequent exploits, leading to his enshrinement as a deity in the mythology of the Lost Cause. Tim notes in his introduction that the C&O raids and Bath/Romney campaign "provides readers a perspective by which to reconsider Jackson against the backdrop of the 'Lost Cause' and the attendant myth of Stonewall."

Whether readers' interests are limited to the C&O Canal or to the wider field of Civil War scholarship, this volume will not disappoint them.

Tim Snyder is a native of Washington County and a regular contributor to Along the Towpath.



*The Private Soldier Monument, also known as "Old Simon."
Photo by Carol Highsmith, courtesy Library of Congress*

1879–1880: C&O Canal Delivered Private Soldier Monument to Sharpsburg Landing

By Tim Snyder

Sitting on high ground in the middle of Antietam National Cemetery is a large granite statue of a soldier, facing north. Standing atop a large pedestal, the entire monument is 47 feet, 7 inches high and weighs almost 240 tons. The Private Soldier Monument—known informally as “Old Simon”—overlooks the graves of Union soldiers who died during the Civil War. Few know that, in 27 separate pieces, the statue was delivered to Sharpsburg over the C&O Canal.

In 1865, the state of Maryland appropriated funds to establish Antietam National Cemetery. It was intended as a place to inter the Union dead from the September 17, 1862, Battle of Antietam, still America’s bloodiest single day’s battle with 23,000 killed, wounded, or missing. The cemetery was to be located near Sharpsburg, MD, where the battle was fought. Later, officials authorized Union soldiers who died in other battles to also be buried there. Additional states that had remained loyal to the Union were invited to participate, and they contributed additional money to the effort.

By September 25, 1865, the cemetery’s board of trustees had purchased the land for the cemetery. It consisted of 11.25 acres and was obtained for \$1,161.75. Efforts then turned to converting the ground into a cemetery, which included the building of a substantial stone fence around it. On October 4, 1866, the burying of the dead began.

By the summer of 1867 work on the cemetery was nearly complete. The border walls, fence, and gates were up or nearly complete; workers had laid out roads and walkways; grave diggers had interred most of the Union dead; and a superintendent’s lodge was nearly finished. The cemetery was dedicated in a ceremony held on the fifth anniversary of the battle: September 17, 1867. During the ceremony, a cornerstone was laid for a future monument.

During the same month and year as the dedication, the executive committee was granted authority to enter into a contract to construct a monument for the cemetery. In 1869, the board of trustees noted, “it is the Colossal Statue of an American Soldier standing guard over the remains of the loyal dead, and when completed, will be the largest work of its kind in the country.” A contract to build and install the statue wasn’t completed until 1871. For \$30,000, James G. Batterson of Hartford, CT, who owned the New England Granite Works in Westerly, RI, was to design the statue and

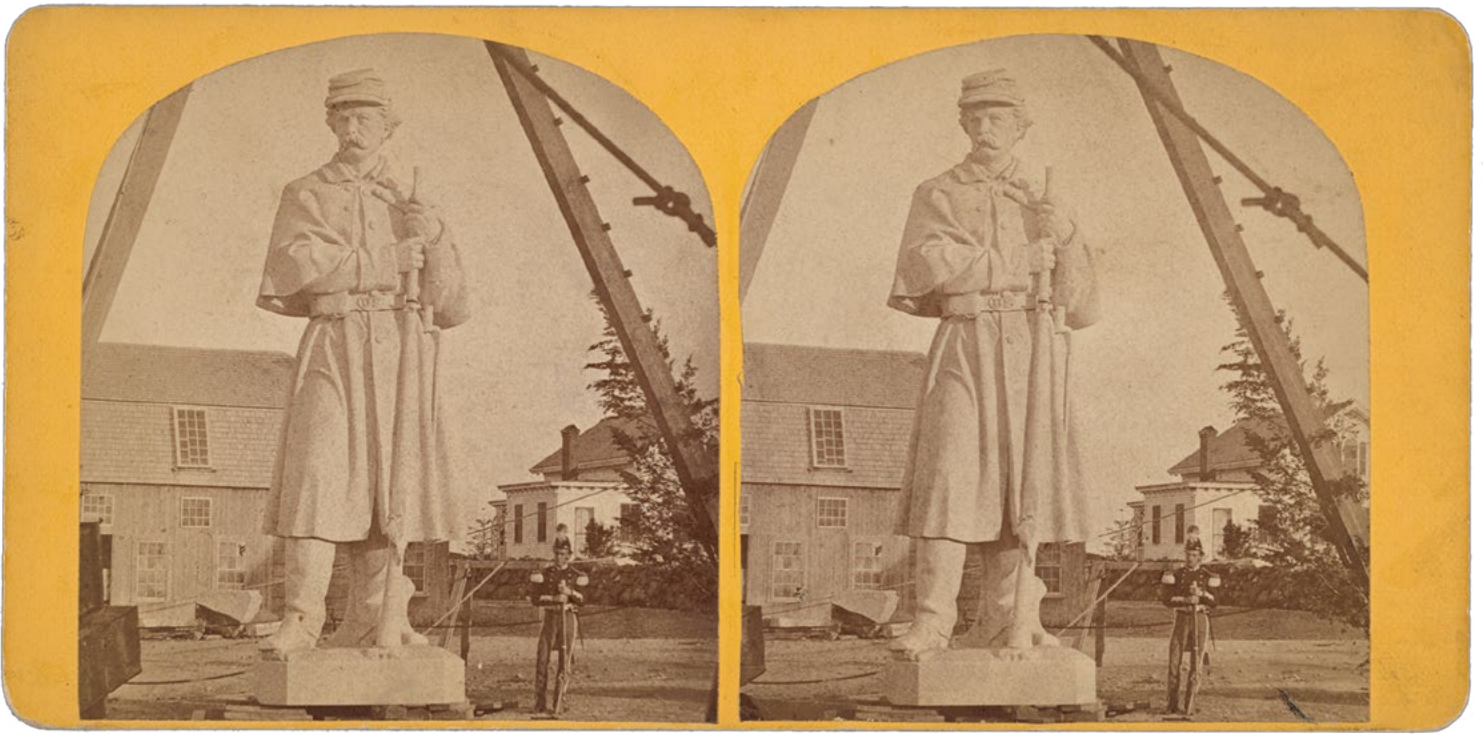
arrange for its sculpting, delivery, and installation within two years. Batterson had overseen the construction and installation of the Soldiers National Monument in Gettysburg, which was dedicated on July 1, 1869. The executive committee specified that the monument at Antietam was to be made of white granite. When complete, it would sit on a foundation that was 22 feet square at the base and 6 feet high. The base or pedestal upon which the statue rested would consist of 5 courses of stone that totaled 25 pieces. The height of the entire monument would be 47 feet, 7 inches high from the foundation to the top of the statue. The statue alone was to be 21 feet, 6 inches high. Its design was to be that of a soldier “in place rest.” The Antietam National Cemetery Association was charged with building the monument’s foundation.

The sculptor, James W. Pollette, completed the statue within the timeframe stipulated in the contract, although work on the base was suspended when the final installment payment wasn’t forthcoming. Difficulty procuring funds for the monument delayed its completion and delivery. While awaiting final payment, the statue was sent to the U.S. Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1876. It was placed on display at the main entrance to the grounds. When the event was over, the statue was sent to Stonington, CT, where it was stored.

Out of money, and without a prospect of receiving more, the board showed interest in transferring the cemetery to the U.S. government. On March 2, 1877, Congress passed an act that transferred ownership, care, and maintenance of the cemetery to the U.S. War Department, which also included a provision to liquidate the debt of the board. The board approved the transfer in June 1877. In 1879, the U.S. paid the last \$10,000 installment, plus interest and additional sums, to Batterson. The final cost paid for the monument was \$32,806.04.

Once the U.S. took title to the cemetery, Batterson resumed work on the base of the monument. He provided plans for the design of the foundation of the monument, which, by October 15, 1879, local contractors completed in the cemetery. Later that month, a ship was secured to transport the boxed statue to the wharves at Washington, D.C. The plan was to send the monument in pieces up the C&O Canal to Grove’s Landing [Sharpsburg Landing] and then transport

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Stereocard of the soldier sculpture without its pedestal, taken in 1876 in Westerly, RI, before its shipment to the U.S. Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Note scale to actual soldier. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

Continued from Page 19

the stones to the cemetery over local roads, nearly two miles away. The weight of just the statue, which consisted of two pieces joined at the waist, was 27 tons while the base was another 212 tons.

Although the precise date that the ship arrived at Georgetown isn't known, it likely occurred in late November. On December 11, 1879, the *Baltimore Sun* reported on the status of the work:

Portions of the monument to be erected at Antietam National Cemetery have been received at Grove's Landing, on the Chesapeake & Ohio canal, and are being conveyed to the cemetery on wagons particularly adapted to the carrying of heavy weights. The road has been widened, graded and otherwise improved to afford passage for the heavy blocks of stone required for the monument, the lightest of which is estimated at 18 tons. For the purpose of placing these blocks in position, a derrick has already been erected on the cemetery grounds, the pole of which is 75 feet in height and three feet at the base.

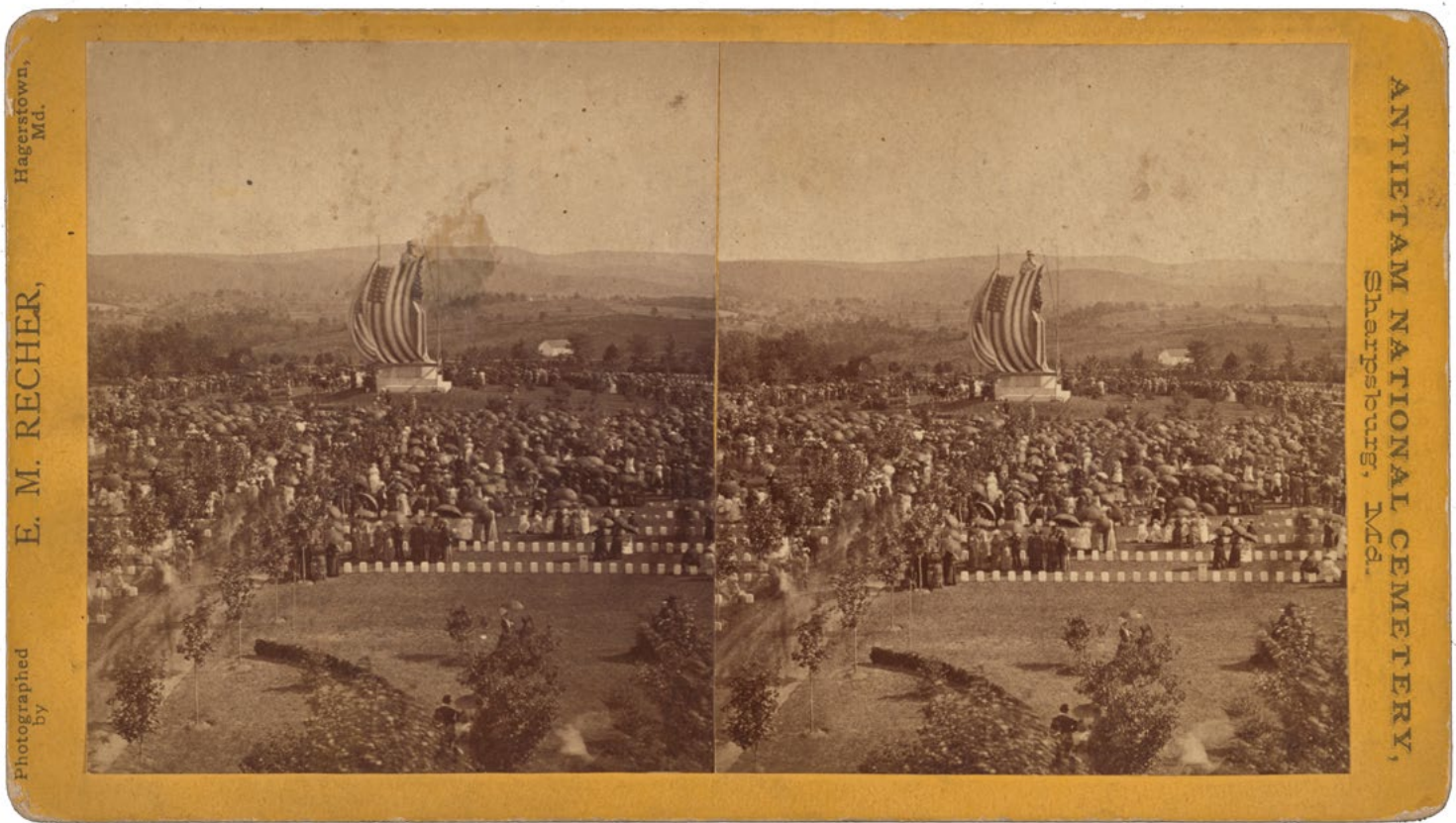
By December 13, the *Washington Post* reported that two "scow loads" had already been sent up the canal from Stover's wharf at the corner of G and Twenty-Sixth Streets in Washington, with other shipments to come. Workmen ran into trouble, however. After they had unloaded the torso of the statue and placed it on rollers, they began to

move it from the steamship toward the deck of the canal scow. In an instant, the tackle gave way and the huge, sculpted granite piece rolled down the incline and into the river, clearing the scow completely. It was estimated that the piece rested in about twenty feet of water.

By December 19, workers had made several attempts to raise the piece, but all failed. The *Washington Evening Star* reported, "Repeated efforts have been made to raise it. Several times it has been brought to the surface of the water but has broken away each time and gone back to its bed in the mud. To-day it was again brought up, but the falls gave way and it sank again." The paper indicated that it was in a mere fifteen feet of water, however.

On December 19, the cemetery's superintendent reported that building the monument progressed slowly. Workers had put eight stones in place, and eight others were on the cemetery grounds. The remaining stones were sitting on the landing along the canal, while the final piece remained in the Potomac River at Washington.

On December 20, the workmen's effort to remove the last piece from the riverbed bore fruit. The workmen successfully raised the torso of the soldiers' monument and placed it on the scow for transport up the canal to Sharpsburg Landing. Most likely the remaining piece of the monument reached the landing by the end of year. On January 5, 1880, a newspaper reported that the removal of the pieces from



A close look at this stereograph image shows the Private Soldier Monument flanked by American flags, as crowds look from Antietam National Cemetery during its dedication. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

the scow to the cemetery was almost complete. Only two heavy stones remained on the banks of the canal.

The same article also described the difficulty a local contractor had moving the heavy stone from the landing and through Sharpsburg to the cemetery: "Heavy wagons particularly adapted to such work were brought on with the monument. To these wagons as many as 30 horses have been attached, and in the progress of removal heavy chains attached to the wagons have been snapped asunder. How to transport the lower part of the statue, 18 tons, is a problem which puzzles the contractor."

The contractor solved the dilemma by placing the heaviest pieces on heavy oak planks set on small rollers and, in this manner, moved it to the cemetery. It took seven days to move the largest pieces from the landing to the cemetery. By the third week of January, newspapers reported that all pieces had been delivered to the cemetery grounds.

On January 24, 1880, the Private Soldier monument was completed. Officials planned a dedication ceremony for September 17, 1880, the eighteenth anniversary of the Battle of Antietam. Additional work to the cemetery grounds was completed over the intervening months.

In the week prior to the ceremony, dozens of northern veteran organizations embarked on trains and headed to Maryland. Both the B&O Railroad and the Western Maryland Railroad offered reduced rates to the veterans. From Monocacy Junction, the track headed south to Point of Rocks, adjacent to the C&O Canal. A reporter accompanying Washington, D.C., veterans to the event wrote that while on the train, some of the men pointed out places they had been during the war. "In the midst of this agreeable conversation," he added, "the road brought them parallel with the Chesapeake & Ohio canal, and within a few feet of its bank. At this juncture a boat came along flying the American flag. That was the signal for loud hurrahs." The train took them to Hagerstown and their encampments at the fairgrounds. The next day they would go to Sharpsburg.

On the date of the dedication, a gathering of dignitaries, veterans, and the public gathered in Sharpsburg's public square and processed to the cemetery. Over 8,000 attendees crowded onto the grounds to hear the dedication. The monument was covered by cloth, but at the opportune moment a dignitary pulled a string and the veil dropped to reveal the statue to astonished onlookers. And there at the cemetery today the monument remains, a silent sentinel overlooking the graves of those who gave the last full measure of devotion to their nation. It is inscribed, *"Not for themselves, but for their country."*

President's Lunch

By Tim Snyder

The 2026 President's Lunch will be held on September 26 at 11 a.m., at Captain Bender's Tavern, Public House and Eatery, 111 E. Main St., Sharpsburg, MD.

The tavern was originally founded in 1936 by former canal boat captain Raleigh Bender and has been a town mainstay ever since. Attendees will order from the menu and are responsible for their own checks.

After lunch, the group will walk to Sharpsburg's new Historical Park and view the six interpretive panels, one of which is entitled, "Canals and Turnpikes Fuel Economic Growth." We will then walk back toward the center of town. A visit to the town museum may also be arranged. Lastly, we will walk to the town mural, which features a canal boat and mule team that reflects the town's canal history. For those who have room for a sweet treat, town landmark Nutter's Ice Cream is just across the street.

RSVP is required so that we can reserve the correct amount of seating. Please email the number in your party to programs@candocanal.org. On your email's subject line, enter "lunch." The deadline to secure reserved seating is September 19. We hope to see you at Captain Bender's!



(Below) The town mural in Sharpsburg, MD. (Above) Streetside view of Captain Bender's Public House & Eatery. Photos by Tim Snyder



Canal Boating Was the Perfect Life: Captain Raleigh Bender of Sharpsburg

By Tim Snyder

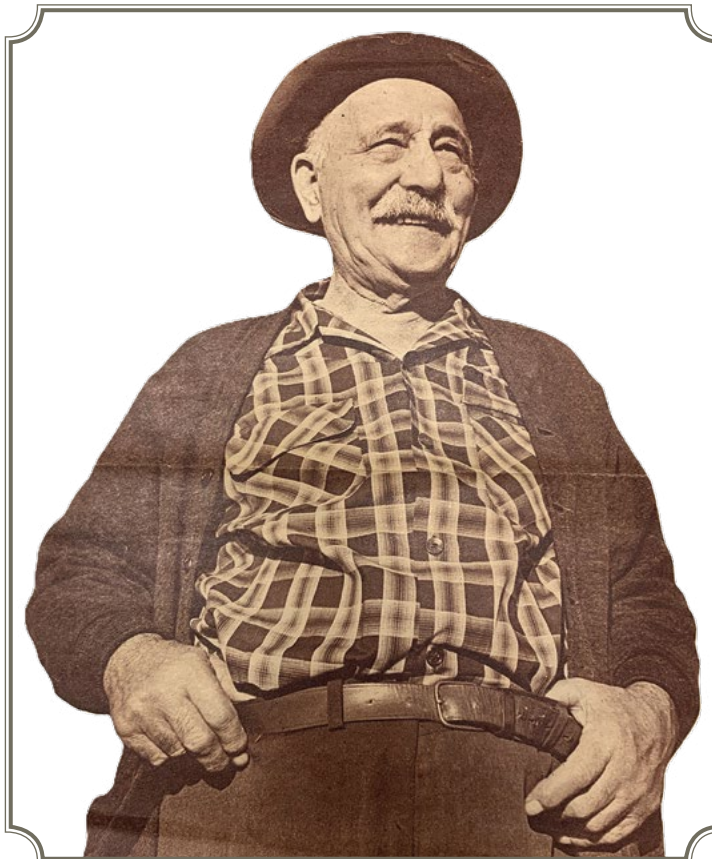
When Raleigh “Cap” Bender passed away on January 20, 1971, at age 97, he was one of the last C&O Canal boat captains to depart this earth. During his 36 years on the canal, Bender achieved several remarkable feats and held the respect of his fellow boatmen. He holds the record for the fastest ascent of the canal in a light boat: 62 hours. In addition, he owns the distinction of being the last captain to bring a boat of coal down the canal before a major flood in early 1924 closed the waterway for good. In his book, *I Drove Mules on the C and O Canal*, former mule handler George “Hooper” Wolfe wrote of Bender, “He seemed always to be trying to get one more mile out of each twenty-four hours of boating. . . Usually he would run night and day, and very few captains made more round trips a season than he did.”

Raleigh Bender was born on February 2, 1873, in Sharpsburg, MD. He was the son of Benjamin and Elizabeth Highbarger Bender. Raleigh learned the business of canaling at the elbow of his father. The 1860 census for the Sharpsburg District of Washington County, MD, shows that Raleigh Bender’s father, 22-year-old Benjamin Bender, had an occupation of “Boatman,” even while he still lived in his parents’ household. By the 1870 census, Benjamin was 33 years old, married, with an occupation of “Boating

on Canal.” By 1880, Benjamin, still a boatman, had four children, including fourteen-year-old son William, whose occupation was “works on boat.” Six-year-old Raleigh appeared in the census for the first time.

Due to his father’s occupation, young Raleigh Bender grew up around boats. Other than working on the canal, there were few jobs in Sharpsburg, he later said. As he got older, he went to school in the winter and worked on boats in the warmer months. In 1957 Bender explained,

Eighty-four-year-old Raleigh S. “Cap” Bender of Sharpsburg. Source: Baltimore Sun, Dec. 8, 1957, “Sunday Magazine,” p.16



“My father owned his boat and his mules, and when the season closed about December 1, he would tie up at Snyder’s Landing, under the hill at Sharpsburg. Then the mules would be used for farming until navigation opened again April 1.”

Raleigh Bender’s brother, Charles E. Bender—six years his junior—was also a boatman. It is believed that Charles Bender started boating around 1900 and continued until 1923. Under the Canal Towage Company’s management of the boats, teams, and boatmen, which began in 1902, Charles operated Boat No. 55, while Raleigh captained Boat No. 1.

Although the 1890 census was lost to fire, Raleigh Bender later stated that he began to work on the canal by age 15 or 16, which equates to 1888 or 1889. He first began his career on the canal as a tow boy, driving the mules. Working on his father’s boat, he didn’t get any wages for his labor. “I got nothing. I didn’t get anything,” he said. “Another a pair of cord pants in the fall of the year.” At some point, Raleigh Bender’s father began work as a mason and young Bender worked on boats for other captains. Bender estimated that of his 36 years on the canal, he was a boat captain for about 25 to 30 years.

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In the 1900 census, Bender is recorded for the first time as a head of household, married to Bessie Lee Grove Bender, and the couple shared a rental of house with the Otho Grove family. Bender may have met his wife through boating. Otho Grove was Bessie's father and both men's occupations were recorded as "boating." A decade later, Raleigh Bender's exertions on the canal were bearing fruit. His family lived in a home he owned free and clear of debt. By that time, the Benders had seven children, of whom five were living. Bender's occupation was, of course, "boatman." The 1920 census would be the last in which the enumerator recorded Bender's occupation as "boating." Canal navigation would cease for good before the 1924 season due to a major flood.

The Benders would have a total of seven children who lived into adulthood, five daughters and two sons. The sons, Ray and Otho, both worked on the boat with their father, at least for a time. As a boat captain, Raleigh Bender once said, "All day long you'd be trying to make time, beat someone else's record for the trip downstream or up." His son Ray confirmed that his father was always pushing the boat forward, trying to make time. "When there were only two of us," he said, "we worked twenty-four-hour tricks. I spent more time on a mule's back than I did in bed." The elder Bender told an interviewer that Ray—16 at the time—was with him on one trip down the canal, but when they arrived at Georgetown, the young man decided he wanted to take a job on a tugboat, which his father granted. Otho also worked on a canal boat with his father for several years

and was with him on the final voyage to Georgetown in 1923. Like many boat captains, Bender never owned his own boat, but piloted boats for others.

Of his record-setting trip on a light boat from Washington to Cumberland, Bender said that the trip was timed by canal general manager and superintendent George L. Nicolson. He added, "The mules stood it better than us."

After the canal closed, Bender worked at a variety of jobs. He was a section hand on the railroad for a time, then worked for the State Roads Commission for twelve years. He later said that he helped build many of the roads in the county. In 1936 he had acquired what would become Bender's Tavern, which Hooper Wolfe described as a "tavern and pool hall." In a September 29, 1936, newspaper notice, Raleigh Bender's application for a Class B (on site) beer license was published for an establishment called "Mar-Vir Restaurant" on Main Street in Sharpsburg. This suggests that Bender intended to open a restaurant that sold beer. It is unknown if the business ever operated as a restaurant that he later converted into a tavern or was only ever a tavern. At some point during his ownership of the business, Bender acquired a model of the last canal boat he captained, which he displayed in the tavern.

In 1937 the *Baltimore Evening Sun* published a series of five articles about the now-abandoned canal. In a visit to Sharpsburg, reporter Lee McCardell wrote that anywhere you go in Sharpsburg, you'll run into an old boatman. He identified 21 men by name, one of whom was Raleigh Bender. He noted that Bender and his son Otho brought the last boat

of coal out of Cumberland in the autumn of 1923. Their mules were Tom and Rose, and Frank and Pete, "as good mules as you ever saw. . . . You never had to bother with those mules," Bender told him. Visiting Bender's Tavern, McCardell described Raleigh Bender as "a heavy, hospitable host, his black mustache now almost gray." He added, "But he is not a man to bore you with unsolicited details. He wastes no words. He goes to the point and quits there." A sign hanging over the bar, he noted, said, "If Not 21, Don't Say Beer." Another above the pool tables said, "If Not in the Game, Keep Your Mouth Out."

Another reporter interviewed Bender, who was then 78, for an article published on November 19, 1951. About his time on the canal, the former captain said, "It was good work, and they were the best days of my life. Often there were just two of us working on the boat." Of his wife, Bessie, who had died on July 8, 1943, at age 65, he said, "For years my wife used to work on the boat, cooking and doing as much work as two persons. Then when my son got a little older, I let him steer the boat." Bender then related an amusing incident where he was on the towpath with the mules, while his 10-year-old son steered the boat. Approaching a lock, the frantic lockkeeper couldn't see anyone at the tiller and began to shout, concerned that no one was steering the boat. Bender added, "There were lots of veteran canalmen who never did know how to steer into those locks." Bender said that traveling downstream with a full load, his boat used to travel about two miles per hour; upstream with an empty boat, about three and a half miles per hour.

Bender hoped that the canal would be preserved from development. He didn't think that a continuous parkway would be built over it, but he

anticipated that short roads would be built around significant points, such as Four Locks and the Paw Paw Tunnel, that connected to “small parkways.”

In March 1954 Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas led the famous 1954 hike that is credited with marshaling public sentiment in favor of saving the canal. On March 24th of that year, at one of the stops along the hike route, the *Hagerstown Morning Herald* published a photograph of Douglas examining Raleigh Bender’s canal boat model at the Conococheague Sportsmen’s Club. Bender is pictured to the right of the justice.

On December 8, 1957, the *Baltimore Sun* ran a multipage insert that was focused on the C&O Canal. It appears that most, if not all, of the information was provided by 84-year-old Raleigh Bender. Its opening paragraph quoted him: “If I were to hear that the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was opening again...I’d be first in line, demanding my boat and my mules. Canal-boating was the perfect life.” Bender went on to

describe life on the canal, which included boatmen sleeping in bunks and doing their own cooking. “If the skipper’s wife decided to make a trip,” he added, “there would be more fancy dishes and the pots would get a fine scouring and the quarters a brooming out.” During the hunting season, boatmen shot wild game for meals—turkey, opossum, and deer—as much as the law allowed,” and caught fish by casting a line over the stern.

Upon arrival at Georgetown, the boat crew would tie up for the night on the berm side of the canal to wait their turn. Occasionally a steam tug would take a boat to “shipside in the roadstead, and the coal transferred to the ship’s bunkers by the crew.” Bender added, “When we laid over in Georgetown we had the mules to take care of and we sat and played poker. Maybe get a bottle of beer for ten cents.”

Return cargoes to Cumberland included hard coal (anthracite), fertilizers, animal feed, and “goods from city stores.” Benders’s boat averaged 20 trips a season. If the

boat traveled continuously, day and night, he arrived at Georgetown in 72 hours. “When we Sharpsburg men needed clean clothes,” Bender explained, “we would leave the boat at Snyder’s Landing, go up the hill to home, pick up the laundry basket and catch the boat again at the lock near the brickyard that used to be under the bridge to Shepherdstown.”

Raleigh Bender identified several “hangouts” that boatmen frequented. At Georgetown, there was Pat Cook’s and Mike Cook’s, Happy Hooligan’s, and Tom Daley’s. At Harpers Ferry, there was Spruce Weaver’s; at Cumberland, Billy Westbrook’s, Jim McKelvey’s, and Ed Cooney’s. “With 700 boats,” he added, “there were crowds and sometimes fights.” Another reporter later wrote that Bender had many stories about “brawls and shootings,” some of which occurred in Sharpsburg.

In March 1960, National Geographic published an article called, “Waterway to Washington: The C&O Canal,” by Jay Jonston. The author interviewed Bender—

Continued on next page



Life as a boat canaler was a career for the whole family. (Left) A boat canaler similar to Captain Bender is shown holding his children’s hands. (Right) A child walks two mules along the towpath of the C&O Canal. Photos courtesy National Park Service



Boat being towed along the C&O Canal, early 20th century. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

Continued from Page 25

now 86—and other canalers for his article. “Call me Cap,” Bender instructed Johnston. “Everybody does; and besides, I like it.” Bender went on to say, “Thirty-six years I worked on the boats. They were the hardest, and happiest, days of my life.” During the days that he wasn’t running his boat all night, he would put the mules on the bank, set out feed troughs, and let the mules graze and rest. The boat crew sat around, smoking and talking before retiring to sleep so that they could rise at dawn to resume the voyage. He told the author that one of his boat crew used to wake him in the morning by tickling his face with a straw. “One day when I wasn’t feeling so good, he did it once too often,” he continued. “I grabbed him by the seat of his pants and pitched him off the boat, right into the middle of the canal.” The

unfortunate crewman couldn’t swim, but with a desperate effort he made it to the bank. Bender added, “I nearly fell over the side laughing.”

Bender showed the author the wooden model of the last canal boat he had skippered, which included three mules. These mules were named Jack, Kate, and Rock. “No one ever saw a better three mules on the strip,” he added. A stellar mule team may have been the key to Bender’s success. A fellow boatman later said, “Captain Bender had the best mule team on the canal. He’d put the bells on them and crack that big old blacksnake wagon whip and them mules was as steady as a clock tickin’ and keep it up.”

After delivering his final load of coal to Georgetown in the autumn of 1923, Bender tied up his boat

at Sharpsburg to await what he thought would be the resumption of navigation in the spring, but boating ceased after flooding early the next year. “So that was the end,” he said. “For me and all the other canalmen.” His Boat No. 1 “Rotted away at the warehouse at Snyder’s Landing.” In another interview, he said, “My boat was tore up. . . . The water tore it up.” It was an inauspicious end to a long career on the canal.

With the closure of the canal, Bender still took time to visit familiar places from the past, including Four Locks and the Paw Paw Tunnel. With Pat Boyer, who has with him on the last empty boat going up the canal in late 1923, he still made yearly excursions to the Paw Paw Tunnel to view the scenery: “We could never forget the spring sunups and the autumn sundowns.”

After the canal closed, Bender said he returned to Sharpsburg and settled down with his wife and seven children. He added, "I've been mighty content and comfortable here, but I'll never forget those old canal days." He said that he still meets up with old canal colleagues. "We were a rough-and-ready lot," he recalled, "and there were a lot of practical jokers."

A reminder of Bender's past life on the canal was always nearby. In December 1961, several communities in Washington County, MD, decorated their shop windows to celebrate "Christmas 1861," a Civil War Centennial event. After first viewing the windows at Boonsboro and Keedysville, a party of admirers came to Sharpsburg. Bender's Tavern was the first stop: "Here Raleigh Bender has put his famous old canal boat in the window at the right (while) Christmas holds sway in the left panel."

As one of several surviving canalers Bender and others played roles in films and documentaries about canal life. In 1961, a film team from Indiana University came to the region to record a short movie that they would call "Canals: Towpath West." Bender was cast as the captain of a packet boat. The production team provided cast members with period costumes and equipment. The National Park Service (NPS) provided boats and technical assistance with the project. The documentary was intended for nationwide viewing by fifth and sixth grade social studies students. Two years later, the 17-minute color film was previewed by NPS staff at the General Services Administration building in Washington.

In 1965 Bender and three other ex-canalmen were featured in a local television documentary called "The Magnificent Ditch." The men were interviewed for a special about the C&O Canal that was broadcast on WMAL-TV in Washington. It is unknown if this recording, or the earlier one, still exists.

In a Hagerstown Daily Mail article published on August 13, 1964, the reporter wrote of Bender, then age 91, "(H)e considers the countless excursions made as a canal boat captain as the golden years of his long lifetime." Bender made as many as 21 trips in a season. Aside from a few loads of lumber, his standard cargo was "coal—always coal." Of his time on the canal, Bender said, "I liked it better than any job I ever had."

Going into his 90s, Bender's health and activity level were surprisingly good. At a gathering of friends at Bender's Tavern to celebrate his 95th birthday, he was presented with a cake decorated with a canal scene, including a canal boat. He told his guests that his days on the canal "were his best." When someone asked about how he lived such a long life, he responded, "You just keep moving, son . . . just keep on going." A year later, at his 96th birthday party, Raleigh was described as "hale & hearty." It was noted that he still tended bar at the tavern, could play a "sharp game of billiards," and still "hold his own over a checkerboard." When again asked about the secret to his longevity, Bender replied, "I was always doing something. I never was much of a hand for lying around."

With his death in 1971, Cap Bender took his place at the tiller to take ol' No. 1 on its final run.

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Graffiti at the Seneca Stone Cutting Mill. Photo by John F. Maclean

Jurisdictional Issues Lead to Delays in Cleaning a Historic Canal Landmark

By John F. Maclean

One gets a timeless feeling looking across the wide pool of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal near Mile 23. Red stone arches, stately ruins from a past era, poke out in the distance among the trees. Taking a path off the canal to approach the site, the anticipation builds. The outlines of the almost 200-year-old Seneca Stone Cutting Mill become clearer. This mill not only quarried and cut Seneca Red Sandstone for buildings like the Smithsonian Castle, but also cut marble and granite that was used in the construction of the U.S. Capitol building and the Washington Monument.

But as one gets closer, the white and multi-colored graffiti that covers most of the present-day comes into view, shattering any aura of timelessness. “It is just sad,” said a visitor. “It is a total lack of respect for history.”

Jurisdictional issues from the ongoing transfer of the mill from the State of Maryland to the NPS have allowed graffiti to accumulate over most of the landmark. Neither entity currently accepts ownership of the responsibility to clean up the site. According to both the NPS and the Maryland Park Police, the State of Maryland acquired the property in 1972 and several years ago started the process to transfer the mill and quarry to the NPS. Maryland Park Police representatives say that due to the transfer, the NPS has jurisdiction over the mill and quarry, and has the duty to clean up the site. But NPS representatives claim that the State of Maryland still has jurisdiction over the site because the transfer is not yet completed.

“While steps have been taken to move that transfer forward, the land transfer has not yet been finalized,” the NPS stated in an email. “Until that process is complete, the Seneca Stone Cutting Mill and quarry remain under state jurisdiction.” The NPS did not state when the transfer process would be complete.

The red sandstone of the quarry was chosen to build the Smithsonian Castle in 1847 because James Renwick, Jr., the architect of the Smithsonian Castle, liked the even color and high quality of the stone, and thought it had “a lilac tint resembling that known as ashes of roses,” according to *The Smithsonian Castle and the Seneca Quarry*, by Garrett Peck. The ability to transport the red sandstone by the C&O Canal was also a factor, according to the book.

The sandstone gets its red color from rust. About 230 million years ago, the area, as part of the Culpeper Basin, in the then-arid climate formed desert flats that, when combined with an ancient ancestral river of the Potomac, slowly condensed into sandstone, according to the book *The Smithsonian Castle and the Seneca Quarry*. The sandstone became red when iron-rich deposits mixed with intermittent groundwater and were absorbed into the rock, according to the book.

The mill is said to have started operation in 1837. It was powered by water diverted by the Seneca Creek. It ceased operation in 1901 when tastes in architecture changed and the red sandstone was no longer in demand.

On average, about 94 reports of graffiti are made a year in the C&O Canal NHP, according park official Christiana Hanson. “At no place is graffiti allowed on the C&O canal,” Hanson said in 2025. “It is pretty consistent, most are on more modern structures, like parts of a porta john,” she said. As of July 2026, the graffiti on the Seneca Mill ranged from biblical references, political comments, to spray paint artists leaving their autograph.

Hanson further noted that cleanup can range from soap and water and staff hours, to carefully applying chemicals to deal with more porous stone. The proper treatment is determined by consulting with experts from the National Institute for Preservation, Technology, and Training.

It is especially important to deal with experts when determining how to clean graffiti on stone structures. “Limestone is naturally porous and can crumble fast, we have the same worries with sandstone,” Hanson said. “Any stone structure with porous material, we don’t want to damage the structure and we have to take that into consideration. It depends on the type of stone, how old it is.”

Until the transfer is completed, it seems canal-goers may just have to deal with the graffiti. Some people are circumspect about it. “It is just there, this a part of life,” said John Ferguson, who lived in the area and walked his dog near the mill. Beth Barbara, who lived about one mile from the mill and had visited the site for 25 years, took it more personally. “The graffiti has gotten bad, it takes away from the enjoyment of visiting it,” Beth said.



Antietam Aqueduct. Photo by Steve Dean

On the Level

By Allyson Miller

This report covers level walker activity from April 2026 through July 2026. Earlier reports are included where applicable. Any reports for activity performed later will be in the next issue of Along the Towpath. Thanks to all who participate in our Level Walker volunteer program! As a team, your efforts make a significant contribution to the park.

The Level Walker program is a long-term Association volunteer activity and the oldest volunteer program in the park. Level walkers periodically visit their levels and assess conditions, pick up trash and perform light trail clean-up. Many level walkers are long-time volunteers. Level walkers must be members in the C&O Canal Association, comply with NPS regulations, and walk at least once a year to remain active level walkers.

Interested in being a level walker? There are several levels without an assigned level walker and we could use your help. Most of the unassigned levels are in the western part of the park. If you are interested or have additional questions, please contact Allyson Miller at lw@candocanal.org.



**Become a
Level Walker**

We continue to have excellent response to the request for additional level walkers and still have some open levels. If anyone is considering level walking, the following levels (name, level #) have no assigned level walker: Swains (8), Taylor's Landing (31), Upper Falling Waters (37), Millers Bend (39), Little Conococheague (40), Cacapon Junction (50), Dam 6 (51), Paw Paw Ferry (59), Little Cacapon (60), North Branch (66), and Evitts Creek (68).

Level Highlight

By David Long

My wife Kristie and I are part of the rookie class of level walkers for 2026. We are not new to the canal in general. I hiked the lower stretches with my family as a child back in the 1960s, and Kris and I, along with our son, have done a lot of biking and some hiking in the past 25 years. We have also both volunteered in a variety of capacities. So the decision to sign on as level walkers came more from a desire for her and I to spend slow quality time outdoors together, and have a reason to do it on a regular schedule.

Our first walk on *Level 65 – Spring Gap to Lock 74*, came in the spring. The towpath here is heavily wooded all along, but it also directly borders MD Route 51, so there is traffic noise. The distance is just a bit over 2 miles and includes several locks and culverts, the steam pump, and

the somewhat famous Blue Spring. We can drop off either a car or bike at the upper end so it is a shuttle hike.

Level 62 – Lock 68 to Oldtown, is entirely watered in an area locals refer to as the Battie Mixon pond. There is no access from the downstream end, so it is a down-and-back hike of about 4 miles. This level is far more open, and the river comes up close to the bank in many places. Wildlife and wildflowers are abundant, and people too, as this is a popular spot on the western end.

The three walks we have planned for this year will provide us with nearly 20 miles of hiking and numerous hours outdoors spent at a slow pace to talk and look at life. Seems like a pretty good deal.

Level Walker Activity, April 16–July 15, 2026

Level 2 – Incline Plane to Lock 5: **Kamile Kay reported over multiple walks, January–May:** The trail has been looking really good, cleaner than normal despite the high usage.

Level 3 – Lock 5 to Cabin John Creek: **Allyson Miller reported in May and June:** I continue to monitor the rebuild of Lock 5 and the inlet lock and guard lock. On my last visit in June, I could see a little more progress—there is a newly reconstructed bridge that goes over the inlet lock. This area is behind a chain link fence, but you can see the construction site very well from the towpath. There is no change in the rest of the towpath between Lock 7 and Cabin John Creek—it is quite rough, and yellow caution tape and an orange cone mark a severely eroded edge along the towpath in this area, both a result from last year's flooding of Cabin John Creek.

Level 4 – Cabin John Creek to Lock 14: **Allyson Miller reported in April through July:** Since the Potomac Interceptor (a DC Water project) collapse on January 19 and the redirected sewage flow in the canal from Locks 14 to 10, I've been visiting this level frequently to monitor the ongoing work and restoration of the canal prism after the sewage was rerouted back into the Potomac Interceptor. From Locks 10 to 14, a fence separates the towpath from the canal and the towpath remains open. The canal has been scoured clear of most vegetation, down to the clay liner, from just above Lock 10 to Lock 14, and all the debris from the sewage removed. Piles of stone are located in some sections—I suspect these might have lined the canal at some point or perhaps fallen into the canal. The locks themselves have become a bit overgrown, since no one can access them to mow the grass or cut the weeds and vines. Just above Lock 10, the three large gashes cut into the prism wall where the sewage was pumped out of the canal have been patched. Much construction equipment is still in the area, most of it located along Clara Barton Parkway. The Lock 10 parking lot and towpath are open.

Level 8 – Lock 21 to Lock 22: **Rinze and Sue Roosma reported in June:** It was a very nice, warm June afternoon spent on the trail. In our level, both sides of the trail were heavily overgrown, which makes spotting any litter difficult. Since it was relatively quiet on the towpath, we were able to spot quite a bit of wildlife. Besides the usual turtles and great blue herons, we also saw an egret, a barred owl with two young owlets, and a surprise visitor: a group of Mississippi kites. Generally the towpath was in good condition, but there is still some damage from the Potomac flooding event in May. The entire prism here is full of water, and pickerel weed is common here.

Level 10 – Seneca Aqueduct to Milepost 25: **Judith Walton reported in May:** Two people thanked me for picking up garbage! I saw a two-foot-long snake cross the canal path with triangle markings. I don't know enough about snakes to know what kind it was. The toilets were clean, and postings indicated that they had been cleaned daily! I saw a C&O bike patroller. First time I've ever seen one.

Level 13 – Edwards Ferry to Harrison Island: **Liz Wagner reported in May:** The level is in good condition. The towpath was clear of debris, and the vegetation along the towpath side is low. The grassy areas around Lock 25 and Broad Run Trunk had been mowed and were free of debris. This level continues to be used mostly by bicyclists. Walkers are rarely encountered, and none were seen during this visit. I noted many flowers in bloom: Star of Bethlehem, multiflora rose, mayapple, yellow iris, Philadelphia fleabane. Numerous small birds were seen and heard, including an eagle seen near the nest near Broad Run Trunk. Also saw turkey vultures, a red-shouldered hawk, a few turtles, and numerous zebra and tiger swallowtails.

Level 13 – Edwards Ferry to Harrison Island: **Ron Tipton reported in June:** It was a beautiful sunny and warm summer day for my wife Rita, friend Barbara, our dog Julie, and myself to walk Edwards Ferry to Harrison Island. We saw many bikers and no hikers. I think the reason is that our section is pretty far from heavily populated areas and is not a major attraction for hikers. In addition, the replacement of the historic surface of the towpath with gravel appeals to bikers. There was a very small amount of trash. There is a large blue drink cup a bit off the towpath behind the Mile 31 marker, but I could not scramble thru the thicket to pick it up.

Level 18 – Nolands Ferry to Point of Rocks: **Ed Crowe reported in May:** It was a crisp day—more fall than late spring for D.C. —with lots of bikers and runners on the towpath. There was an event called One Day Hike, to Harpers Ferry (50K or 100K) with a support station at Point of Rocks. Overall, my experience was positive—a lot of friendly and courteous bikers as well as runners and a couple of hikers. Also pleasant to find very little trash along the way. Main thing to note from the standpoint of improvement is that invasives are really encroaching on the trail most of the way from Mile 46 to Point of Rocks. No major problems and only minor trash in the parking area. The parking lots were full here because of a 50k/100k run that took place on May 2. It was a wonderful day and stretch of towpath for bird song! Spotted an eagle near Point of Rocks. Other birds seen and heard (thanks to Merlin) included many northern red

Continued on next page

cardinals, great crested flycatcher, yellow-throated warbler, tufted titmouse, prothonotary warbler, American goldfinch, hermit thrush, red-bellied woodpecker, eastern warbling vireo, blue-gray gnatcatcher, northern parula, American robin, and Carolina wren. Invasives already out of control and impinging on the width of the towpath. Those spotted and photographed include winterberry, garlic mustard, vinca, lesser celandine, and oriental bittersweet.

Level 19 – Point of Rocks to Catoctin Aqueduct: **Karlen Keto and Don Peterson reported in June:** We saw around 30 cyclists and a few walkers. There was very little trash.

Level 22 – Lock 31 to Lock 33: **Paul Durham reported on two walks in May:** Cool, bright sun. I observed 8 walkers and 12 bikers. Campers with bikes observed near the Keep Tryst Road gate but were on CSX railroad property. I walked around the Lock 31 lockhouse, and no issues were observed. The area was recently mowed. Lush greenery after almost a week of sorely needed rain in the area. On my second walk, I noted 13 walkers and 16 bikers. The river had been high the previous week due to the heavy rains. It is still a bit high in the vicinity of the Route 340 bridge. No damage observed on the canal. Overall, this level had little trash and the towpath surface is in decent shape.

Level 23 – Lock 33 to Dam 3: **Paul Durham reported in April and May:** In April: Nice beautiful cool spring morning, towpath looked to be in great shape. Visitor levels picked up starting around 9:30. Increase in songbird activity and waterfall. Towpath was very clean! I observed 18 walkers, most heading to Maryland Heights, and 10 bikers. There were 10 to 12 Anne Arundel County Fire Department staff conducting swiftwater rescue training just south of Dam 3. In May: Nice beautiful cool spring morning, towpath looked to be in great shape after recent heavy rains. Observed 35 walkers and 17 bikers. There were about 50 school students with 5 or 6 teachers preparing to launch whitewater rafts at Lock 34. Numerous types of butterflies observed, as well as a snapping turtle laying eggs along the towpath upstream from Lock 34.

Level 23 – Lock 33 to Dam 3: **Arthur Tsien reported in June:** I walked relatively early in the morning, my third walk of this level in 2026. It was an exquisite late spring/early summer day, seasonably warm but no humidity. The resurfaced towpath continues to be in good condition, with no impediments to foot or bicycle travel. Usage was moderate, but growing quickly as increasing numbers of walkers were headed to Maryland Heights. I saw and heard the usual sights and sounds of nature, but nothing unusual.

There were about a dozen people at work on a footing for the new stairs for the Goodloe Byron Footbridge. The towpath was quite clean. I picked up only part of an NPS bag of trash.

Level 30 – Snyders Landing to Lock 40: **Charles Connolly reported in April:** Gorgeous day to be out on the canal. I biked my level. I did not see any canal walkers; however, there were far more cyclists than usual. The area around Mile 78 is in need of a top coat; it has a very rough surface with coarse gravel, which makes that section uncomfortable on a bicycle. I heard a piliated woodpecker and saw a deer.

Level 31 – Lock 40 to Marsh Run Culvert: **Dennis Kubicki reported in June:** The most noteworthy observation was the excellent condition of the towpath surface. There were no ruts or potholes and little centerline vegetation. Additionally, almost no trash was found on or near the towpath. However, there were a significant number of locations where large piles of tree debris (I call them “tree trash”) were observable adjacent to the towpath. They were predominantly “man-made” by crews sent to cut down dead/dying trees or where dangerous overhanging limbs existed. I note them because I consider all to be an “unnatural eyesore.”

Level 45 – Ernstville to Licking Creek Aqueduct: **Dennis Kubicki reported in June:** The condition of the towpath surface was excellent! There were no ruts or potholes and almost no centerline vegetation, although there was a stretch of ground about 100 yards long near Mile 115 where there was a deep indentation in the soft earth adjacent to the towpath caused by the wide tires of a tractor. There was almost no trash, and the vegetation adjacent to the towpath had recently been cut back. One negative observation: the numerous locations where the wind has split branches of some tree trunks and caused them to fall adjacent to and near the towpath, although none blocked travel.

Level 49 – Mile 127.4 to Round Top Cement Mill: **Paul Petkus reported in July:** It was a hot and sunny day. Visitation was very light in the morning. No change was noted to the condition of any of the structures. The campground, the area near the lock, and the area near the cement mill ruins were well maintained. Herbicide has been applied in the area within the past few weeks to remove unwanted plants. Dragonflies were active. There weren't many butterflies, but I managed to see nine species. Reptiles and amphibians were seen and heard. Spotted lanternflies were present in the area. There were signs indicating that herbicide was being applied approximately between Miles 128.4 and 129. The EPA code on the sign was for AquaNeat Aquatic Herbicide. Per information on the internet, it's a non-selective, broad-spectrum weed killer that controls almost 200 species of broadleaf weeds, sedges,



The Western Maryland Railway Doe Gully trestle is 2 ½ miles above Little Orleans. Photo by Steve Dean

and grasses. It warned that people and pets must be kept off treated areas until the foliage is completely dry. Birds seen or heard were bald eagle, crow, robin, cardinal, blue heron, wood duck, Carolina wren, red-eyed vireo, and American goldfinch. The last three were identified from their calls using the Merlin app on my phone. Robins foraged in the vegetation along the edges of the towpath. A family of wood ducks moved to hide in the vegetation on the berm side of the culvert after detecting my presence. A blue heron flew from the prism to parts unknown before I was able to get a photo of it. I heard a bald eagle calling from the tree canopy downstream from the culvert. Butterflies from eight species were seen along the level: red-spotted purple, northern pearly-eye, tiger swallowtail, variegated fritillary, great spangled fritillary, banded hairstreak, cabbage white, and eastern comma.

Level 54 – Lock 59 to Lock 60: Paul Petkus reported in May:

The towpath was in good condition overall. A few puddles were present, but they were small. There might be more erosion in the hill above Culvert 207, but it was difficult to determine with certainty. No change in the condition of any of the structures was detected. The campground was in good condition. A pair of campers arriving at the campground mentioned that they were happy with its condition. Birds were plentiful. Butterflies were not active due to the cool and overcast weather. Plants in bloom included dames rocket, woodland stonecrop, dandelion, white violet, daisy fleabane, garlic mustard, ground ivy, yellow rocket, Indian strawberry, Japanese honeysuckle, golden ragwort, wild geranium, common dewberry, northern blue flag, lesser hop trefoil, white clover, and aniseroot. Mayapple was present, but not blooming. Birds were active throughout the afternoon, including cardinals, wood ducks, pileated woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, red-winged blackbirds, red-eyed vireo, goldfinch, green herons, crows, and geese. The day was cool and overcast, which wasn't good for butterfly activity. I only saw a couple of tiger swallowtails and one zebra swallowtail. I chatted with one of the solo bicyclists who now lives in Reno, Nevada. He was biking on a multiday trip from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C., and stopped to chat while I was attempting to get photos of an indigo bunting. He grew up in the area. When he was a child, he used to ride in the park on his 10-speed bike and spend the day exploring. We

chatted about the park. He was happy with the condition of towpath and with the cleanliness of the porta-johns.

Level 62 – Lock 68 to Oldtown: David and Kristie Long reported in May:

The towpath is in excellent condition. Trash minimal, although some floating in the canal itself that was unretrievable. Quite a few cyclists out, mostly through riders, and we met two men from Baltimore who were hiking the canal in sections. Observed geese with young, wood duck with thumb-sized young, bass, bluegills, turtles, and one muskrat. The canal is watered for the entire level. Very heavy lily pad growth in much of the prism.

Level 65 – Spring Gap to Lock 74: David and Kristie Long reported in May:

Our first-ever level walk! Towpath in very good condition throughout, with the small exception of some erosion at the mule rise on Lock 73. We also noted what looked like some subsidence holes in the berm at the first culvert above Spring Gap, but we did not wade the soft prism to inspect. Locks 72 and 73 very heavy with emergent vegetation. Saw just one walker and a few cyclists, including a group of young boys who were probably scouts. Wiped off the wayside at the steam pump.

Level 67 – Mexico Farms to Evitts Creek Aqueduct: Sue Rudd with dog Rusty reported in June:

May I start by saying I love the C&O Canal! I usually walk some portion of it three days a week. I was so very excited when the resurfacing finally reached the western end, and I am pleased with the general maintenance performed by the park service and the independent contractors. Unfortunately, nature is reclaiming much of the resurfaced towpath. As of this morning, there are parts between Miles 177 and 178 that are back to less than a foot wide. The surface itself is holding up well. No ruts! But the vegetation is back with a vengeance. I was hoping the towpath would have remained clear a lot longer. Obviously, this is not stopping people from riding and walking the canal, as I rarely walk without encountering many other people. However, people are starting to grumble again. It won't stop us from enjoying the canal and all the beautiful scenery, birds, and other animals that we see along the way, and again, I appreciate all the maintenance that is being done. It's just sad to see all the regrowth taking over so quickly.



Sunflowers at McKee-Beshers Wildlife Management Area in Maryland. Photo by Marjorie Richman

C&O Canal Association Calendar of Events

C&OCA Business	
C&OCA Hike and Dinner or Other Event	
Non-C&OCA Event	
C&OCA Hike	
C&OCA Volunteer Event	
C&OCA Paddle Trip	
C&OCA Bike Trip	
Sept. 13–Oct. 24, 10 a.m. Currents of History: The C&O Canal & America's Bicentennial The Goldman Art Gallery, in the Jewish Community Center (JCC) at 6125 Montrose Road, Rockville, MD 301-881-0100 Contact: Joel Cohen cohenji@comcast.net	Oct. 10, 11 a.m. Continuing Hike Lock 23, Violette's Lock to Pennyfield Lock and return. This hike is approximately five miles. Contact: Jon Wolz wolzjon@hotmail.com
Sept. 26, Sat., 11 a.m.–3 p.m. President's Lunch Note new date and location: Captain Bender's Tavern 111 E. Main St., Sharpsburg, MD <i>See page 22 for details.</i>	Oct. 11, 2 p.m. The Monocacy Aqueduct: Past Stories and Fresh Findings Presented by Jon Wolz Lovettsville Historical Society St. James United Church of Christ 10 East Broad Way, Lovettsville, Va.
Sept. 26, Sat., 8 a.m.–5 p.m. 3M Bike Challenge Cumberland, MD A timed challenge between cyclists and the train locomotive organized by Mountain Maryland Trails, the 3M Challenge will follow a 15.3 mile stretch of the Great Allegheny Passage alongside the WMSR railroad tracks, from Cumberland to Frostburg. <i>See page 4 for details.</i>	Oct. 24, Sat., 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Heritage Hike, Program, and Dinner Hancock, MD <i>See details on page 1 and signup form on yellow insert, in middle of newsletter.</i>
Oct. 4, Sun., 1 p.m. Board Meeting, Town Hall, Williamsport, MD	Nov. 15, 11 a.m. Continuing Hike Big Slackwater boat ramp parking lot to Dam 4 cave and return. This hike is approximately four miles. Contact: Jon Wolz wolzjon@hotmail.com
	Dec. 6, Sun., 1 p.m. Board Meeting, Glen Echo Town Hall, 6106 Harvard Ave., Glen Echo, MD
	Dec. 13, 11 a.m. Continuing Hike Great Falls Overlook Trail to the crossover at Old Angler's Inn and back up the canal, stopping to view the falls. Round trip is approximately five miles. Contact: Jon Wolz wolzjon@hotmail.com
	Feb. 7, Sun., 1 p.m. Board Meeting, Zoom meeting

Visit Facebook and the Association website and check upcoming issues of Along the Towpath for additional event listings and for further details of scheduled events. Contact programs@candocanal.org with questions.

C&O CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
C&O Canal National Historical Park Headquarters

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Cultural Resources Manager and HistorianJustin Ebersole
Safety OfficerJohn Adams
Supervisory Park Ranger (Law Enforcement)Joshua Cunningham

Palisades District

Mile 0 (Tidelock) to Mile 42.19 (Monocacy River)

Interpretive Supervisor.....Nicolette Talley
Supervisory Recreation Fee Specialist Evan Costanza
Georgetown Partnerships Coordinator Shaun Lehmann

Western Maryland District

Mile 42.19 (Monocacy River) to Mile 184.5 (Cumberland)

Interpretive Supervisor.....Joshua Nolen

Visiting the Park

The C&O Canal NHP is open 365 days a year, but may be closed entirely or in sections at times due to weather conditions, towpath issues or repairs. Park visitor centers are located at Georgetown, Great Falls, Brunswick, Williamsport, Hancock, and Cumberland. They may be closed seasonally or due to staffing limitations.

Check park status before visiting.

www.nps.gov/choh/planyourvisit/index.htm
provides information about park facilities, towpath closures, NPS events, canal boat programs, visitor centers, camping, and other visit-related information. The park information phone number is **301-739-4200**.



NPS
Plan Your Visit

Other Useful Contacts

Canal Quarters Program – canaltrust.org/programs/canal-quarters
Canal Towns – canaltrust.org/programs/canal-towns

24-HOUR EMERGENCY:

911 or 866-677-6677

REPORT SAFETY HAZARDS OR TOWPATH ISSUES:

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C&O CANAL ASSOCIATION

Membership in C&OCA is open to all persons with an interest in the C&O Canal, the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the Potomac River Basin. Annual membership dues are: \$25 for individuals, \$35 for families, and \$50 for patrons, assessed on a calendar-year basis, and include a subscription to the newsletter.

Dues should be mailed to the C&O Canal Association or paid online. C&OCA is a non-profit organization as defined by section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and all contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. A copy of our current financial statement is available upon request by contacting the C&OCA at the address above or emailing inquiries@candocanal.org. Documents and information submitted to the State of Maryland under the Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are available from the Office of the Secretary of State for the cost of copying and postage.

C&OCA maintains a web page at **www.candocanal.org**. The webmaster is website@candocanal.org. Inquiries can be directed to the Association at inquiries@candocanal.org.

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C&O Canal Association



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C&OCA members on the first annual summer field trip (left to right): Jack Machtel, Denise Machtel, Donna Sloppy, Denny Sloppy, Jane Hanna, Nan Johnson, Arthur Tsien, and Tim Snyder. Photo by Tina Bacas Gibson

Bronze statue of a miner reading by the light of his headlamp, part of the Scenic Railroad and Coal Miner Memorial. Photo by Tim Snyder



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