



2024

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park

District of Columbia, Maryland



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Overview Following the Potomac River, the C&O Canal Towpath traverses the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park



Overview

Following the Potomac River, the C&O Canal Towpath traverses the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park for 184.2 miles between Cumberland, Maryland, and the Georgetown neighborhood in Washington D.C.

About the Route

Every year, millions of visitors hike or bike the C&O Canal Towpath. Peak season is May–October and weekends from spring through fall are busy, especially around Washington, D.C., and Great Falls Park in Potomac, Maryland.

Across the trail's entire route, hundreds of original features, including locks, lock houses, aqueducts, and other canal structures, are reminders of the canal's role as a transportation system during the Canal Era, which peaked in the mid-19th century. The C&O Canal Towpath was an engineering feat that, unfortunately for investors, was largely outdone by the competing railroad that parallels the towpath in many places.

Today, recreationists of all types can enjoy this mostly level, continuous trail through the spectacular scenery of the Potomac River valley. The towpath is primarily dirt and gravel with about 50 contiguous miles surfaced with crushed stone.

The park provides campgrounds (both private and public), picnic areas, indoor and portable toilets, innumerable historical sites, and lookout points along the way. In adjacent canal towns, trail users can find amenities such as cafés and restaurants, B&Bs and motels, bike shops, museums, and retail shops, as well as additional historical sites. A handful of visitor centers operated by the National Park Service sell guidebooks and provide information about the towpath, its history, and local points of interest. Trail users can even stay the night in one of the restored lock houses.

Most of the trail is heavily wooded, and river views are best during early spring, late fall, and winter when trees are leafless. Don't miss the Paw Paw Tunnel at milepost 155.2 (with MM 0 located in D.C.), a scenic tunnel carved into the mountainside, where the trail passes right through.

The rural character of the path requires regular maintenance, so some sections may be closed for repairs. Visit the National Park Service website for current information on trail detours.

Connections

In Washington, D.C., the C&O Canal Towpath parallels the paved [Capital Crescent Trail](#).



Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park

District of Columbia, Maryland

States: District of Columbia, Maryland

Counties: Allegany, Caroline, Frederick, Montgomery, Washington

Length: 184.2miles

Trail end points: Canal St (Cumberland, MD) to 29th St & Rock Creek Pkwy (Washington, D.C.)

Trail surfaces: Brick, Concrete, Crushed Stone, Dirt

Trail category: Canal

Trail activities: Bike, Fishing, Wheelchair

Parking & Trail Access

The Chesapeake & Ohio National Historical Park runs between Canal St (Cumberland, MD) and 29th St & Rock Creek Pkwy (Washington, D.C.), with parking at the western end in Cumberland.

Parking is also available at:

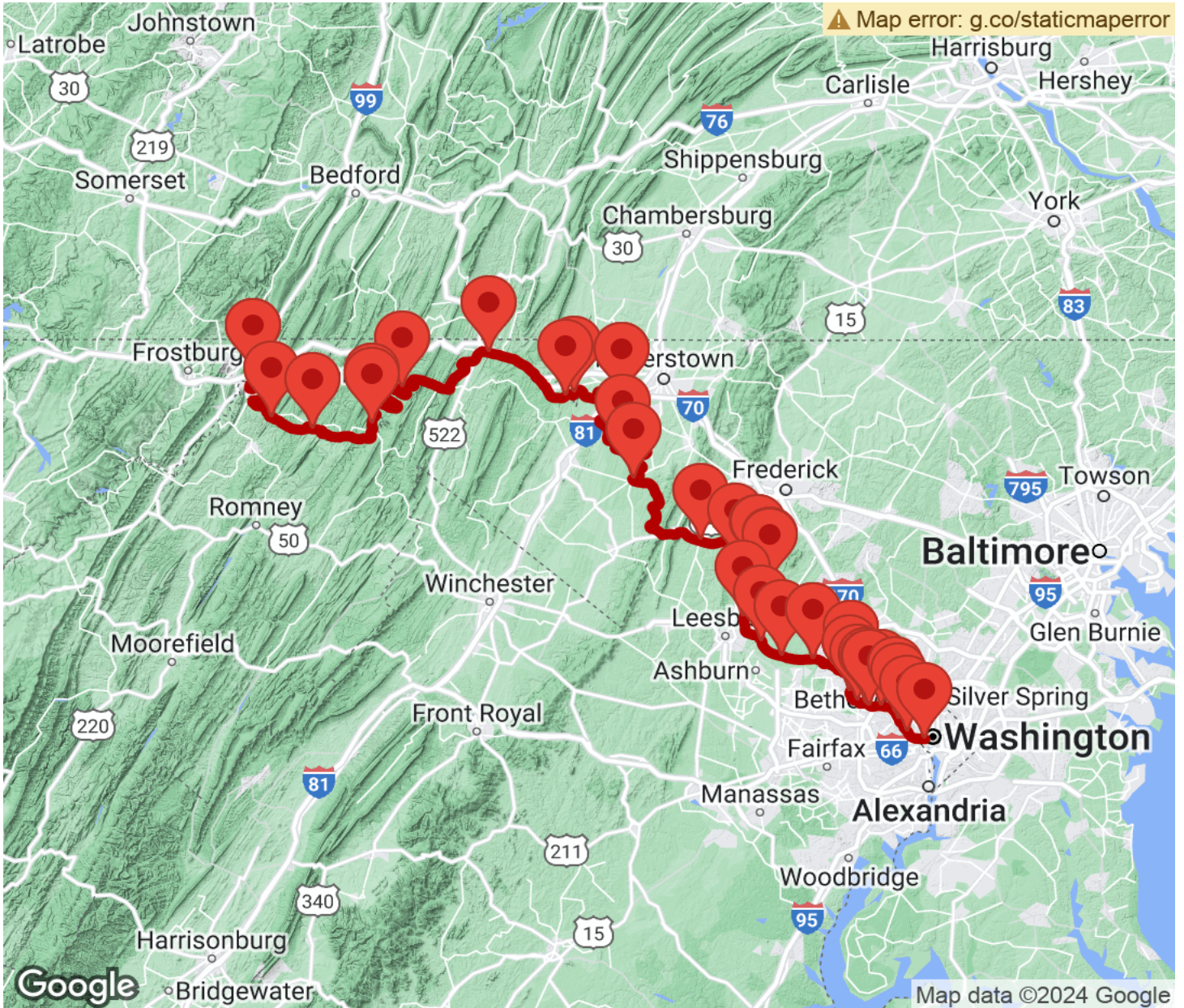
- 273 MD-144 (Hancock)
- 100 S Maple Ave (Brunswick)
- Potomac Palisades Conservation Park, 5001 Wissing Rd (Bethesda)

There are numerous parking options along this route, please see [TrailLink Map](#) for all parking options and detailed directions.



Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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