TRAILS IN TRENTON

This detailed map highlights the trails through Trenton where the D&R Canal aps for a short distance. Visitors can continue along the historic route of the canal or follow the D&R Greenway, formerly the Bekins & Delaware Railroad.

Along the usual river trails will pass three surviving bridge tenders houses at Prospect, Calhoun and Hanover Streets respectively. The buildings were homes for canal company employees assigned to operate and maintain the swing bridges at these road crossings. The canal ceased operations in 1932 and by the 1950s, all swing bridges were removed and replaced with the modern transportation bridge seen today. The Trenton-Burgett Bridge commemorates the crucial victory of the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776. It is also located along this section of the D&R Canal trail.

Park visitors are asked to use caution while traveling through the city by obeying traffic signals and using crosswalks when available.

HIGHLIGHTED AREAS

Six Mile Run Reservoir Site: Located in central New Jersey, Six Mile Run Reservoir Site provides an essential area to enjoy the outdoors with hiking, biking, horseback riding, and hunting opportunities. Call for more information: 609-924-5705.

Bull Island Recreation Area: This 90-acre former island provided numerous opportunities for recreation. The island includes a park office, large picnic area, playground, Roebeling-designed pedestrian bridge to Pennsylvania, access to the D&R Canal and boat launches. Visitors can also explore the remains of the Bull Island National Area along a 1-mile-long loop trail. Call for more information: 609-924-5705.

Rockingham: This farm homestead served as the final wartime headquarters for General George Washington. It was here where he wrote his Farewell Orders to the Armies of the United States. Soon after, he received word that the Treaty of Paris had been signed, thus ending the Revolutionary War. The house contains period furnishings, reproductions of Washington's military equipment and a life-size figure of the General. An 18th-century-style kitchen garden is on site. Call for more information: 609-683-7132.

Washington Crossing State Park: Washington Crossing State Park was founded to commemorate the historic crossing of the Delaware River by General George Washington and his troops on Dec 26, 1776. Park visitors can tour the visitor center museum to learn about America's revolutionary conflict, with an emphasis on the military campaign known as "The Ten Crucial Days." The Johnson Ferry House offers living history programs that will immerse visitors into the 18th century. The nature center offers year-round programming and displays representing the local environment. Picnic areas, playgrounds, trails and group camping offer something for everyone. Call for more information: 609-737-0623.

ABBOTT MARSHLANDS

Covering more than 3,000 acres of upland forests, tidal waterways and wetlands, Abbott Marshlands is an oasis of natural beauty. The beginning of the D&R Canal at Lock 1 can be found near the convergence of Crosswicks Creek and the Delaware River. What was once a booming hub of commerce is now a quiet place to explore mounds of wild rice and a chorus of bird songs. This 3.5-mile-long trail is accessible from the I-295 vanice overpass, the pedestrian bridge next to the Bodenlight toll collection and a parking area along Route 129 in Trenton.

A network of trails within Abbott Marshlands is maintained by local government and nonprofit agencies. Please visit www.abbottmarshlands.org.

DELTA BUILDING

With its wooden bridges, locks, spillways, waste gates, stone-arched culverts and bridge and lock tender houses, the canal is an attraction for history lovers. The upper reach of the feeder canal wanders through several historic New Jersey towns along the Delaware River such as Stockton and Lambertville. The main canal winds northward from Bordentown through Trenton into Lawrence Township and continues through central New Jersey ending in New Brunswick.

HISTORY

During the early 19th century, canals were built as transportation routes to link manufacturing centers and markets. The Delaware and Raritan (D&R) Canal was constructed across central New Jersey to provide an efficient route for transporting freight between Philadelphia and New York City. The two cities selected as the canal’s two terminuses (D&R) Canal was constructed across central New Jersey from Bordentown through Trenton into Lawrence Township and continues through central New Jersey ending in New Brunswick.

Construction of the D&R Canal began in 1831. Many skilled men became contractors and builders, while the usual tasks of digging ditches, moving earth and removing fish from ponds fell to scores of unskilled local men. This local workforce was supplemented in large numbers by migratory and immigrant laborers from Ireland. Originally, the main canal was 44 miles long. The feeder canal was 22 miles long, 60 feet wide and six feet deep. The entire system was completed in June 1834 at an estimated cost of $2,830,000.

Initially, canal boats were pulled exclusively by mule teams, but by 1843, steam-powered vessels were in use. These faster, modern boats plied the waters alongside the maina mule-pulled boats into the early 20th century. To reduce damage to the banks of the canal and its towpath, a speed limit of four miles per hour was enforced.

Today, nearly 36 miles of the main canal, 22 miles of its feeder and numerous historic canals still exist. These serve as a reminder of the days when the delivery of freight depended upon a canal, teams of mules and steam-powered boats.

The Feeder Canal – Originally designed as a water supply for the main canal, the feeder canal was navigated by vessels from the time of its completion. In 1841, canal boats from Pennsylvania’s Delaware Division Canal were granted access to the D&R Feeder Canal in Lambertville. This shortened the journey for boats transporting coal from Pennsylvania to New York City. In 1850, construction of a rail line along the feeder canal began when the Bekins & Delaware Railroad laid track on the waterway’s original embankment. By 1854, regular rail service opened along the D&R Canal’s feeder canal.

Decline of the Canal – For nearly a century, the D&R Canal was one of America’s busiest navigation canals. Incredibly, the speed and efficiency of railroads overtook the slower pace of canals. The D&R Canal’s last year of operating at a profit was 1936. In the 1940s, except for some small sections in Pennsylvania, the canal ceased operations in 1932 and by the 1950s, all swing bridges were removed and replaced with the modern transportation bridge seen today. The Trenton-Burgett Bridge commemorates the crucial victory of the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776. It is also located along this section of the D&R Canal trail.

Preparations: Consider leaving your favorite music, sunscreen, insect repellent and a hat. Dress for the weather. Tell someone where you plan to go and when you will return.

State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Division of Parks and Forestry State Park Service njparksandforests.org

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