



COURTESY OF CHRIS HANNESIAN/C&O CANAL TRUST

LOCKHOUSE 22 in Maryland is one of three historic homes offering overnight accommodations to park visitors.

WATERFRONT VIEWS

Historic lockhouses on the C&O Canal are now hosting bikers and hikers on overnight trips.

And you can stay there, too.

The Park Service manages dozens of historic homes whose former residents range from Abraham Lincoln to Clara Barton, Frederick Douglass, and Thomas Edison. If you were bold enough to hop into a bed and jump under the covers, you'd probably find yourself escorted out by security in a matter of seconds. But that's not the case for a series of historic homes along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, which winds its way through forested land just north of Washington, D.C. You can book a room online today and, with a little luck, you might slip between the sheets tomorrow and immerse yourself in the history of one of the nation's busiest commercial waterways.

On July 4, 1828, the Chesapeake & Ohio Company began construction of a 184.5-mile canal that would parallel the Potomac River and transport goods from Pennsylvania through Maryland and into

Washington, D.C. The Potomac itself was too difficult to navigate, so its waters were diverted into the canal instead, which was an engineering marvel of sorts. Because the route begins in Cumberland, Maryland, with an elevation 605 feet higher than D.C., the canal required a series of locks, which basically acted as liquid steps—separate chambers that were filled or drained of water to raise or lower boats eight feet at a time along the canal's length. Boats plied the route delivering farmers' crops, local seafood, and other goods, including nearly a million tons of coal each year to fuel Washington throughout the 1870s, the canal's most prosperous era. Dozens of employees operated the locks day and night, and made sure they were maintained and repaired when needed. Most of the lock operators lived in one of the 57 homes that lined the canal—modest two-story

homes with two bedrooms above humble living quarters, generally built of stone or brick. But all of those homes would eventually be empty, as the railroad overtook waterways as the most effective way to ship goods in the late 1800s. The C&O Canal ceased operations in 1924, a victim of several floods and competition from the growing Baltimore & Ohio Railway. Now the Park Service and the C&O Canal Trust are turning the homes into quaint, rustic reminders of a bygone era.

"All of the lockhouses were already on the National Register of Historic Buildings, but most of them were slowly falling apart, and the park didn't really have any use for them, but the agency still had the expense of maintaining the homes and protecting them from vandals," says Robert Mertz, a board member with the C&O Canal Trust. "The question was what could be done to protect these buildings and also help tell the story of the canal and the park? So the idea was to open them up to the public. We've furnished the homes in a way that's consistent with the way lock tenders and families would have lived in them at the time, and we've added historic materials like photographs, maps, and books that tell the story of the canal, turning a visit into an interpretive experience, rather than just a stay in a motel room."

"Occupied buildings generally do better than buildings that have been mothballed or those that lie vacant," says Sam Tamburro, the park's cultural resource program manager. "Now that we've partnered with the C&O Canal Trust, its cadre of volunteers are in buildings all the time, checking on them and reporting on their condition. This program has provided us with an opportunity for a really solid partnership with the Trust, and it provides visitors with an experience that we hadn't been able to offer them."

Given that 26 of the 57 original lockhouses still stand, the expedient move was to re-open the ones that required the least effort. So the park scraped up funds from its operating budget to make sure the buildings were structurally sound, took care of basic repairs, and removed

any lead paint, then slapped on a new coat of paint. Volunteers with the Trust researched each era and obtained all the furnishings, from rope beds and futons in Lockhouse 22 meant to mimic horsehair mattresses from the 19th century to the Formica tables and Naugahyde beds that reflect the 1950s in Lockhouse 6.

Volunteers living in nearby communities make sure the buildings are kept in good working order and do basic cleaning and maintenance. Visitors can register online and get access to a code that opens a lockbox. The costs range from \$70 to \$100 per night; all the revenue goes to the Trust, which pours the funds back into the program.

The first three lockhouses are just the beginning. In June, the park began an environmental assessment to evaluate how many buildings might eventually be included in the project, with the idea of potentially opening as many as 19 to overnight visitors. The hope is to offer a linked experience along the canal's entire distance, with accommodations every

20 to 30 miles, so bikers and hikers can get from one end to the other and have a comfortable place to rest their weary legs every step of the way.

"The lockhouses have been booked for 300 visits and seen more than 600 guests since opening last fall," says Tamburro. "With word of mouth and some press in big media markets, those numbers will continue to grow. Since our park gets more than 3.8 million visitors a year, you could say that's a drop in the bucket. But the typical person walking into our visitor center spends fifteen minutes looking at exhibits, asks a few questions of a ranger, and goes on a short hike, whereas the people staying in the canal quarters are there for an entire night, surrounded by the park's history. Guests have told us it's almost impossible not to think about the canal and the resources being in that building, so they're getting a really high-quality interpretive experience."

To learn more or book a lockhouse, visit www.canalquarters.org.

—Scott Kirkwood



© KAREN MINOT

National PARKS

FALL 2010

FREE INFO FOR YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE!

Learn more about the advertisers featured in *National Parks*. Simply fill out the attached card and return to us. We'll handle the rest! For faster service, fax toll-free to 888.847.6035 or visit www.npca.org/magazine and click "search advertisers."

Circle the number on the attached card that corresponds to your categories and advertisers of interest.

Circle #	Page #	300. Outdoor Gear	500. All Collectibles & Jewelry	
100. All Resorts & Hotels		9. Camping Maxx.....25	15. International Coin and Currency... 48	
1. Kennicott Glacier Lodge.....	57	10. Celestron Telescopes..... 23	16. Uncover Corporation..... 49	
200. All Travel & Tour		11. Gravity Defyer.....5	17. Mystic Stamp Company..... 48	
2. Alpine Adventure Trail Tours.....	57	12. Nature Valley.....Inside Front Cvr.	600. All Home	
3. American Cruise Lines.....41		13. Nestle Waters.....Inside Back Cvr.	18. Country Home Products..... 11	
4. Hallo Bay..... 57		400. All Education		
5. Key Largo Chamber of Commerce....	19	14. PBS Distribution..... Back Cvr.	19. Hearing Help Express..... 13	
6. Mammoth Lakes Visitor Bureau.....7			20. Gorilla Glue.....21	
7. NPCA Parkscapes.....25				
8. Outer Banks of North Carolina..... 33				

ADVERTISING SALES CONTACTS:

Jason Vranich
800.501.9571 x185
jason.vranich@theYGSgroup.com

Marshall Boomer
800.501.9571 x123
marshall.boomer@theYGSgroup.com