Lockhouse 22, at Pennyfield Lock near Potomac, Md., is refurbished in the style of the 1830s, with vintage dishware and straw mattresses, and no running water.

CHRIS HANESSIAN

MARYLAND

Lock, Stock and Three Guesthouses

When the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal was in active commercial use long ago, goods-laden barges floated along the canal, pulled by mules on the adjacent towpath. Resident keepers helped usher the boats through the many locks along the 184.5-mile route. Today the canal is a tranquil relic of American history, but a bit of that history has come alive.

More than 20 of the original, white-stone C&O Canal Company lockkeeper cottages, many built in the 1830s, remain standing. In November 2009, three were opened to the public as fully refurbished, rentable guesthouses.

A joint project of the National Park Service (NPS) and the nonprofit C&O Canal Trust, the lockhouse restoration was the result of years of planning. "Finding a use for the lockhouses that is appropriate in a national park setting, enhances the visitors' experience and restores the property had been a challenge," says Matthew Logan, president of the Trust, which helps promote the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park. The NPS and Trust ultimately decided on the Canal Quarters Interpretive Program to educate park visitors and revive the canal's history.

That unique history stretches back to the early career of George Washington. As a surveyor in his late teens and 20s, Washington explored the Potomac River Valley on horseback. His vision of a commercial canal route gained traction on July 4, 1828, when President John Quincy Adams turned the first shovelful at the groundbreaking for a canal between the nation's young capital and Pittsburgh.

Construction began the same day on the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad, touching off a race to determine the most effective transportation, railroad versus canal. Railroad technology was evolving rapidly, and B&O tracks easily beat the canal to Cumberland, Md. By the time the canal reached town in 1850, it was clear the corridor could not compete and never would be built all the way to Pittsburgh.

Canal service between Cumberland and D.C. continued until 1924, and now that lock-tending life is on display in the guesthouses. "We're allowing people to be in buildings that were built by the C&O Canal Company, and that were part of the functioning canal," says Sam Tamburro, project manager for the program with the NPS.

Each lockhouse has been refurbished to tell the story of a different era in canal history, from period furnishings to the available utilities. Lockhouse 49, for instance, reflects the 1920s. Located south of Clear Spring, Md., it has iron beds, a telephone and electricity, but no running water. Lockhouse 22, at Pennyfield Lock near Potomac, Md., evokes the 1830s with vintage plates and cups and straw mattresses, but also without running water. "You very much feel like you're in the 19th century," says Robert Mertz, who sits on the board of the C&O Canal Trust.

Lockhouse 6 is by far the most modern. "It's been furnished in the 1950s to tell the story of the origin and preservation of the park," says Mertz. Overnighters at this house near Bethesda, Md., will find a bathroom equipped with shower, tub and toilet, and a kitchen with refrigerator and stove.

The guesthouses all sleep eight people and have some kind of restrooms, but with the exception of Lockhouse 6, you'll need to bring your own water. So come prepared for an unadorned snapshot of life along the C&O.

For more information about pricing and amenities for the lockhouses, visit **www.canaltrust.org** or call 301.714.2233.

MASSACHUSETTS

A Bridge in Bloom

Unsightly weeds quickly covered the 400-foot Trolley Bridge over the Deerfield River in Shelburne Falls, Mass., after the Shelburne Falls & Colrain Street Railway (SF&C) ended service, but more beautiful flora took root almost as fast.

The trolley stopped running on the line in 1927, and by 1928 the Shelburne Falls Area Women's Club had decided to sponsor the garden project. Local residents Antoinette and Walter Burnham had sprouted the idea when they looked at the weed-tangled bridge and fancied a novel community garden in its place.

Club members raised $1,000 for the project with the help of other local organizations. In April 1929 volunteers poured 80 loads of loam and piles of fertilizer onto the bridge. After countless hours of weeding, planting and clipping, the bridge was transformed into a community showpiece, christened as the Bridge of Flowers.

"The women's club rallied and donated all the plants and time and has been managing the garden ever since," says Julie Petty, co-chair of the Bridge of Flowers Committee. Once a symbol of neglect, the bridge is a flourishing walkway, featuring more than 500 kinds of plants. "The plants are what anybody can acquire," says Petty. "But the level of design and attention to detail is what makes it such a showy garden."

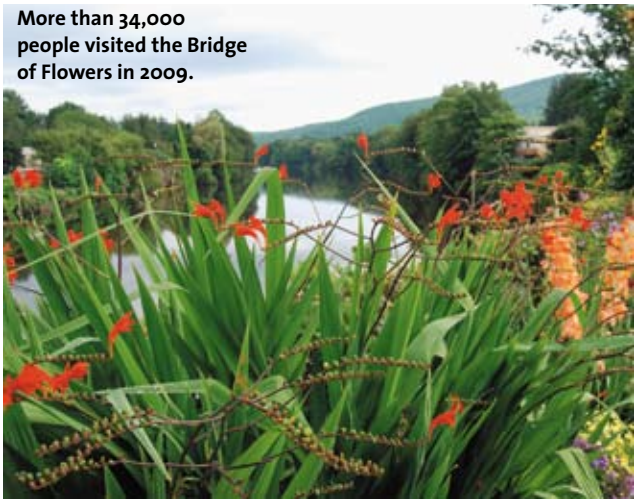
In charge of those details are two part-time gardeners, whom the club employs, and dozens of volunteers. The club raises funds at an annual sale of surplus plants—this year, scheduled for May 15. Yet most of the garden budget comes from the donation box, which feeds off the bridge's enormous foot traffic. Last year, 34,000 people from all 50 states and more than 90 countries and islands visited the Bridge of Flowers—and that's with the bridge only open from April 1 through the end of October.

"The bridge is an important anchor for the community, not just aesthetically but economically," says Petty.

As a dynamic attraction, the garden is also a fitting tribute to the Trolley Bridge. When built in 1908, the 6.5-mile trolley line connected villages along the Deerfield and North rivers, carrying cotton mill workers and apple farmers, weekend shoppers and schoolchildren. "The trolley really was the lifeblood of this area," says Polly Bartlett of the Shelburne Falls Trolley Museum.

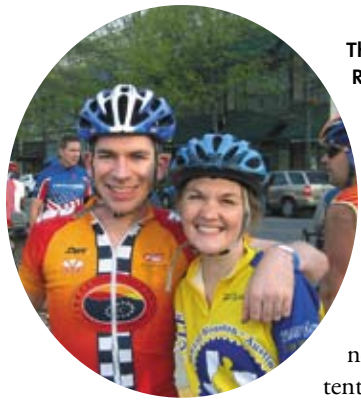
Highway construction eventually absorbed the trolley street corridor. Nearly all the cars were burned for metal salvage except one—the No. 10. Today, you can still take short rides on the original No. 10 on 1,200 feet of track at the Trolley Museum. Yet while the rest of the trolley tracks are gone, the SF&C did leave behind 400 feet of bridge that have helped Shelburne Falls bloom for more than 80 years.

For more about the Bridge of Flowers, visit **www.bridgeofflowersmass.org**.



More than 34,000 people visited the Bridge of Flowers in 2009.

CAROLYN HALLORAN



Thomas Burnett and friend Rebecca Tuuri after a ride on the Capital Crescent Trail in Bethesda, Md.

COURTESY OF THOMAS BURNETT

NEW YORK & WASHINGTON, D.C.

A Movement on Wheels

In its second year, Brita Climate Ride's mission to "inspire and empower" people to seek new energy solutions for themselves and their planet showed no signs of slowing down. The pedal power that propelled 240 riders and volunteers 300 miles from New York to Washington, D.C., generated more than $250,000 in donations and an increased awareness of the transformative nature of a simple bicycle ride.

Money raised from last September's five-day ride went to beneficiary organizations including Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC). RTC fielded a team of seven cyclists who took on the Climate Ride challenge of promoting the bicycle as a viable, carbon-free, healthy and fun method of transportation. For those involved in Climate Ride, though, the personal challenge was just as empowering.

"The doctors told me I'd never ride a bike again," says 32-year-old Thomas Burnett, a member of "Team RTC" on Climate Ride. Two and a half years ago, Burnett broke his back in a diving accident; he thought his lifelong passion for cycling had come to an end. Though he beat the odds and was eventually cleared to ride, he was unable to bend at the waist to use his racing bike. He turned to "a super-upright, old-man bike" and started out slowly. "It was frustrating at first, but it also enabled me to meet a whole different world of cyclists—people new to cycling who were tentative, business people commuting, people I never noticed when I was riding before."

A rail-trail rider for years, Burnett regularly commutes on Maryland's Capital Crescent Trail to his job as a teacher. When he learned about Climate Ride—and RTC's connection—he saw a personal challenge and the chance to promote a cause. "I was looking for ways to improve the world that weren't a drain on resources, but rather about repurposing resources and turning them into something for everyone." He believes rail-trails, and access to them, is an ideal way to give back.

"Bicycling as a lifestyle is fun," Burnett says. "When getting people excited about a cause, they don't want to hear a message of 'less'—do less, use less, enjoy less. Bicycling is about 'more'—ride more, go outside more, have more fun."

Climate Ride co-founder Geraldine Carter is very familiar with that level of enthusiasm. "Many riders find renewed inspiration in Climate Ride and come away committed to redoubling their efforts," Carter says. "We had a rider last year who was not a cyclist at all. She bought a bike for Climate Ride, trained and did wonderfully on the ride. She's in her 50s and now she rides her bike all over the place."

Carter says plans are under way to hold the third Climate Ride in California this September, with a return to the East Coast in 2011. It's one step closer to the dream of having a Climate Ride in every state—with thousands of riders converging on each state capital and in Washington, D.C., carrying on their wheels the same message of a healthier climate and the rewards of cycling.

For more information, visit **www.climateride.org** or call 406.241.1111.