

## **C&O Canal, Great Falls National Park, Maryland**

Seventy-six feet is the vertical distance that the water takes over a series of drops and rapids at Great Falls. Over the eons the water has carved the hard bedrock and cut a cliff walled gorge over a mile long below the falls. Great Falls and others on the river frustrated the country's forefathers who wished to use the river to transport raw materials. The falls however, also prompted their dreams of canals that would connect the then distant Ohio valley settlements. The dreams were set into motion and decades passed before the great projects were completed. When finished, the canals were profitable for a time. Very soon however they were replaced by the invention and construction of railroads which were faster and cheaper. Left over, the towpaths and canals became quiet and eventually were placed under the care of the National Park Service.

### **Getting There**

Take the Capital Beltway (I-495), to the Cabin John Parkway headed west, outside the beltway. After 1.7 miles, at a T-intersection with MacArthur Blvd., turn left. Continue another 2.2 miles and turn left into the entrance of Great Falls Park. About a mile later, near the bottom of the hill, pay the entrance fee (\$4 per vehicle in 1999). The routes start on the left side of the circle, near the Tavern, but most of the parking is on the right side

### **Area Routes**

#### Gold Mine Trail (4.25 or 3.5 miles, IV)

Most visitors to Great Falls, Maryland, even long-time residents of Washington, don't get away from the canal or the river. What they are missing are cool woods with wide paths away from the crowds. The trails are excellent for running, though some hills may be steep for short distances. Rocks also occasionally mine the path. Mining of a different sort was labored over near the intersection of Falls Rd. and MacArthur Blvd. Gold, over 5,000 ounces worth, was mined there and extracted through a chemical process. The mining went on from 1900-1939. Passing by the site, you can see the remains of the old building used, and also a water tower. It's all off-limits for direct exploration and enclosed within a chain-link fence for safety's sake. The mine shaft itself can be very dangerous.

This mostly tree covered route starts by taking the path between the restrooms and the old Tavern. Just past the Tavern, look for the trail head sign for the Gold Mine Trail and turn left on it into the woods. It's blazed in blue and climbs steeply at first. Bear left where the trail intersects the old trolley line. The trolley and tracks, long ago removed, took visitors to the falls from the city. Keep your eyes open to turn right, leaving the old trolley line, before hitting the road. After doing so, you'll soon hit the loop portion of the Gold Mine Trail. Bear a little left at this intersection, but go straight across. The left most trail at this intersection takes you to the park entrance/exit road. A little further and you'll reach the high point of the route, around 180 feet higher than at the traffic circle. The Falls Rd. Spur Trail will eventually appear on your left. If you wish to actually see the gold mine site, take this to detour further up the hill. Otherwise, continue on the Gold Mine Trail and head downward. The regular route turns left at the Angler's

Spur Trail. Going straight to finish the loop out as an option, the trail drops more before climbing back to the spur portion of the Gold Mine Trail. You can return the way you came via the trolley line. On the longer route, the Angler's Spur Trail descends along a ridge before steepening at the bottom. I spotted several deer and a fox near here. Upon hitting the gravel road, turn right. It's flat. Good views of the Widewater are visible through breaks in the trees. Turn left going over a bridge for the canal and head back to the start on the towpath.

Blockhouse Point Conservation Park, Southern Approach (14.25 miles; X)

This route is mostly on the towpath. While on it, it is fairly flat. Headed northwest, you'll pass Swain's Lock where portable outhouses and snacks are available. Sometimes the towpath is enclosed under a canopy of trees, other times it is very near the river and offers good views of it. The marked mile between mile posts 17 and 18 actually measures 1.07 miles. The mile between markers 18 and 19 offers good views of rocky cliffs along the canal and river. After 5.5 miles of towpath, at Pennyfield Lock, Lock 22, cross over the canal, continue northwest and pass through the parking lot. Staying to the left take an informal trail along the canal after Pennyfield Lock road turns right, and go into Blockhouse Point Conservation Park by crossing over the Muddy Branch creek with the canal. The park offers horseback riding and hiking trails but does not allow cycling. After crossing over the creek, the trail soon leaves the canal turning right, into the woods. It emerges quickly at a fenced-in pumping station and a gravel road. Take the gravel road, headed due north, away from the Potomac river with Muddy Creek on your right. Turn left onto a horse trail that climbs gently except for the initial switchback. This horse trail is excellent for running being wide with generally good footing. At the top of the hill, emerging near the parking area, turn left on a second double-track gravel road. This parking area is an alternative starting point that can be accessed via River Rd. This gravel road is in a large clearing cut for a petroleum pipeline. It gradually drops back down to the canal. Because there is no bridge over the canal here, you must turn left onto a dirt road which parallels it. The road follows a buried water/sewer pipeline through the trees and can be overgrown in some places. It sometimes gets far enough away from the canal so as to not be able to see the canal. It's flat, deteriorates to single track and can be wet in places before reaching the clearing at the pumping station and gravel road to complete the loop. Turn right on the trail you came out on to reach the canal and cross the Muddy Branch again. Return as you came over Pennyfield Lock and back down the towpath to Great Falls.

## **Nearby and Connecting Zones**

C&O Canal, Carderock Recreation Area  
C&O Canal, Riley's Lock

## **What to do Afterward**

### Food and Drink

Angler's Inn - Fine Dining 301 365-2425

Potomac Pizza - 301 299-7700

Potomac Village Deli - 301 299-5770

Starbucks - coffee, lunch and desserts - 301 299-9226

Vie de France - soups, salads and sandwiches - 301 299-0904

Fortune Garden - Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Malaysian, Singapore 301 299-2022

### Entertainment and Edification

Great Falls Visitor Center, Old Tavern/Museum - 301 413-0720

Canal Boat - 301 299-2026

canoeing and kayaking

## Gold Mine Trail

Distance: 4.25 or 3.5 miles

Rating: IV ; unpaved wide trails w/hills in the woods; flat crushed gravel on the return

### 4.25 Mile Route

- |     |  |   |     |   |
|-----|--|---|-----|---|
| 0.0 | from the traffic circle near the entrance gate, go through the parking lot and past the restrooms w/the Tavern on your right | L   | 1.8 | Angler's Spur Trail (yellow blaze)  |
|     |  |   | 2.2 | Woodland Trail on R   |
|     |  | BL  | 2.3 | Valley Trail merges from L; BL after it at the fence for the pump station |
| L   | 0.05   | Gold Mine Trail head (blue blazed)  |     |   |
| BL  | 0.3  | onto old trolley line bed (dirt; tracks removed); Lock 19 Loop Trail on R (unmarked)    | R   | 2.3   |
|     |  |   |     | gravel road/trail is an alternate detour route for the towpath            |
|     |  |   | 3.3 | Lock 16 Spur Trail on R   |
| R   | 0.55   | to stay on the Gold Mine Trail; leave the trolley line                                  | L   | 3.55  |
|     |  |   |     | bridge over the canal, down stairs  |
|     |  |   | L   | 3.6   |
|     |  |   |     | L onto the towpath at the end of bridge; Billy Goat Trail on L            |
| BL  | 0.95   | loop portion of the Gold Mine Trail (don't take left most trail; follow the blue blaze) |     | 3.85  |
|     |  |   |     | Lock 17   |
|     | 1.25   | Fall Rd Spur Trail on L (uphill to the gold mine site)                                  |     | 3.9   |
|     |  |   |     | Great Falls Overlook Trail on L   |
|     | 1.6  | Rockwood Trail on L   |     | 3.95  |
|     |  |   |     | Lock 18   |
|     | 1.65   | Valley Trail on L   |     | 4.0   |
|     |  |   |     | Lock 19   |
|     |  |   | R   | 4.1   |
|     |  |   |     | bridge over Lock 20 toward Tavern   |
|     |  |   |     | 4.25  |
|     |  |   |     | traffic circle  |

\*<

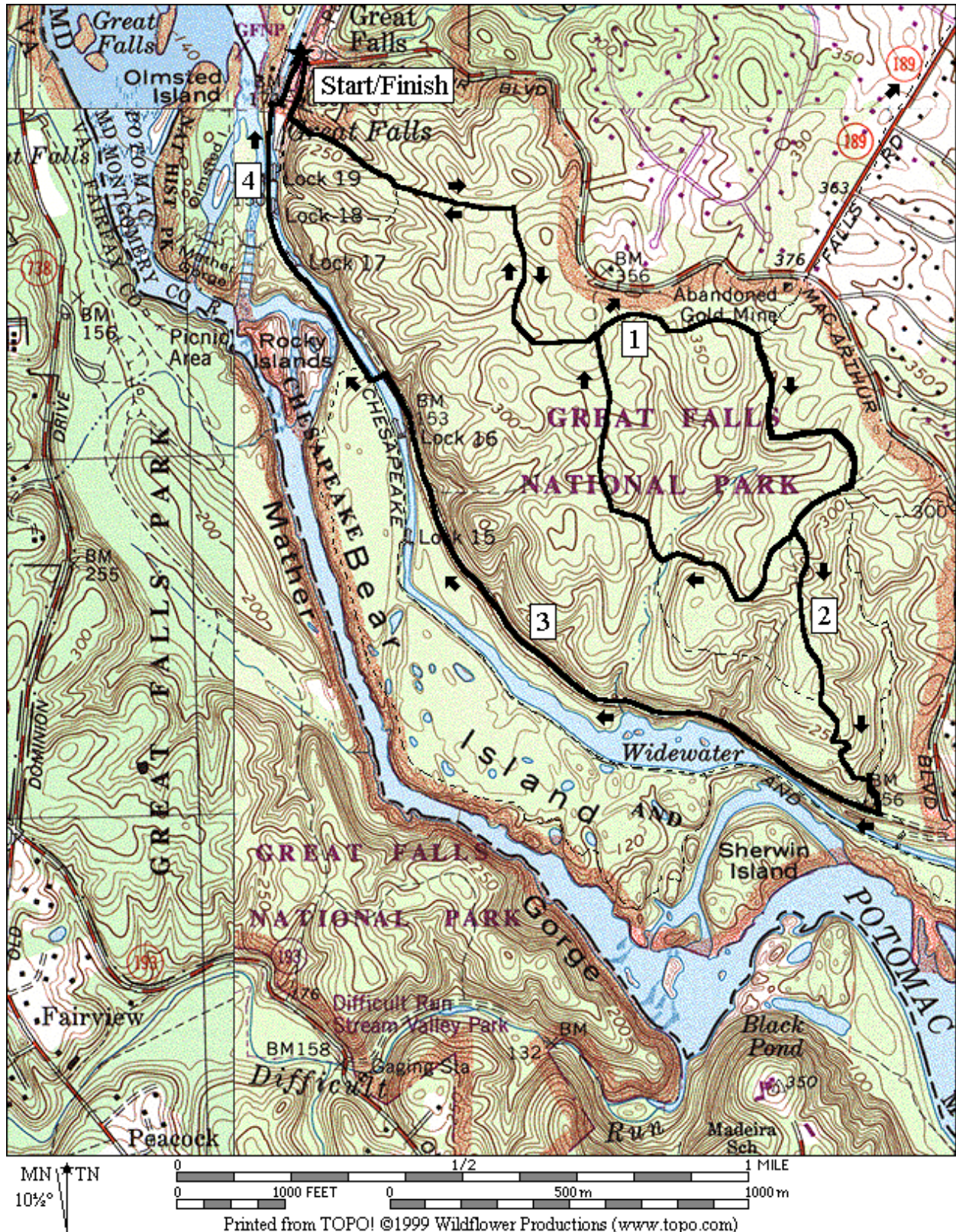
---

### \*3.5 Mile Route

- |     |                                  |   |      |                      |
|-----|----------------------------------|---|------|----------------------|
| 1.8 | Angler's Spur Trail on L         | R   | 3.4  | footpath near Tavern |
| 2.1 | Woodland Trail on L after bridge |   | 3.45 | parking              |
| 2.4 | Lock 16 Spur Trail on L          |   | 3.5  | traffic circle       |
| L   | 2.6                              | Gold Mine Trail; leave loop portion   |      |                      |
| L   | 2.95                             | old trolley line bed at T (to stay on Gold Mine Trail)                                      |      |                      |
| BR  | 3.2                              | leave trolley line bed to stay on the Gold Mine Trail; Lock 19 Trail is on the L (unmarked) |      |                      |



# Gold Mine Trail





## Blockhouse Park, Southern Approach

Distance: 14.25 miles

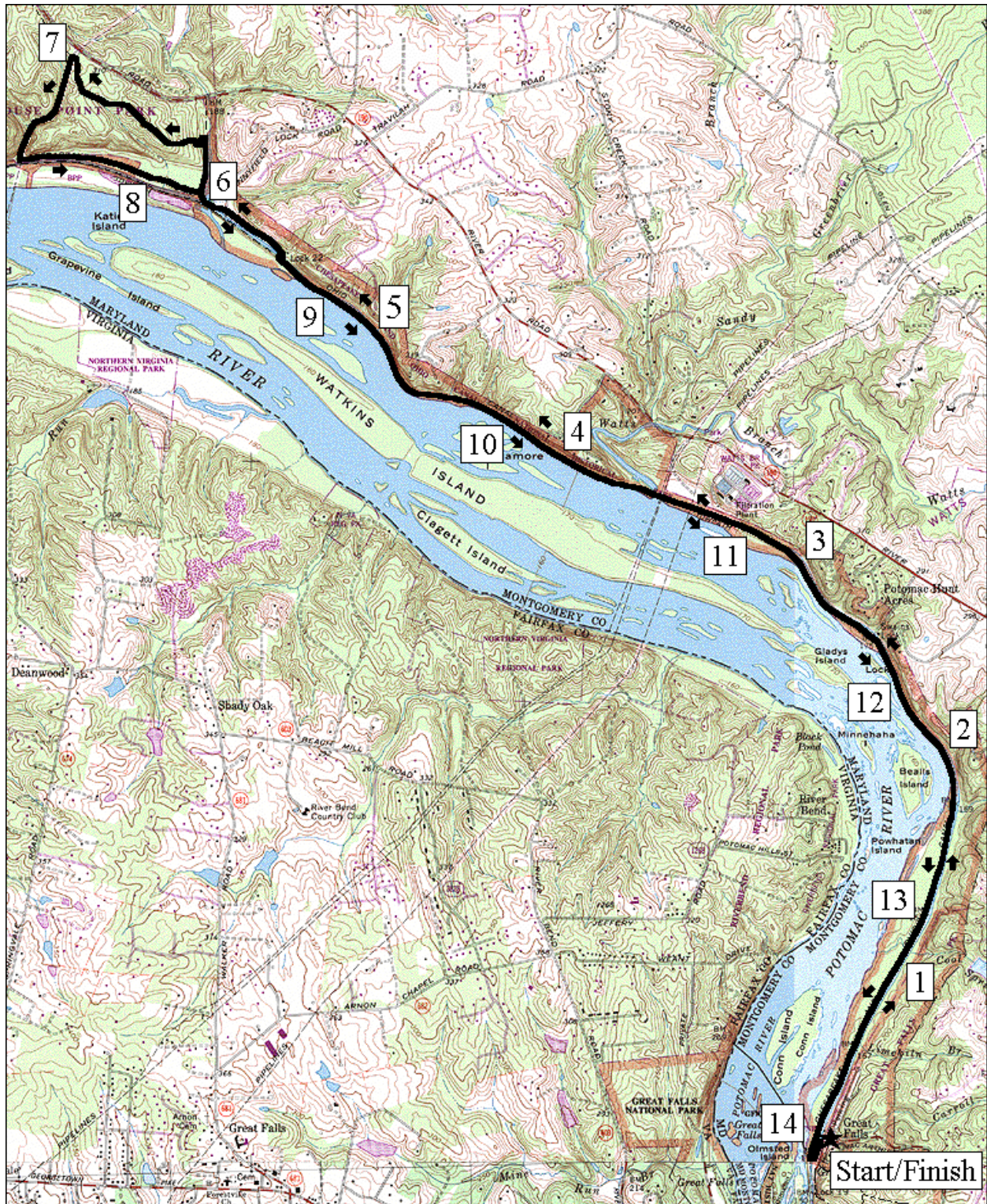
Rating: X flat shaded towpath and one hill; unpaved trails

### 14.25 Mile Route

- 0.0 from the traffic circle near the entrance gate, pass the Tavern on your L and cross Lock 20 to the towpath
- R 0.15 C&O towpath
- 1.7 metal bridge crosses canal
- 2.5 Swains's Lock (snacks, portable toilets)
- 3.3 water filtration plant
- R 5.5 Lock 22, follow the path past the parking lot & onto Pennyfield Lock Rd
- S 5.8 into parking as Pennyfield Lock Rd turns R up hill
- L/R 5.85 to canal & over Muddy Br Creek
- 5.95 trail turns R and leaves canal
- S 6.0 at pumping station clearing, go S to the gravel road w/creek on R (note the concrete block here to find the location of the trail on return)
- L 6.2 trail X on L; begin the hill
- 6.6 trail bears L at wood fence
- 6.9 trail on L merges
- L 7.0 gravel road in pipeline clearing; downhill; (parking on R for alt Start)
- L 7.5 double track road at T before canal
- R 8.25 2<sup>nd</sup> trail on R in the clearing to return to the canal (near the pumping station and concrete block)
- L/R 8.4 leave canal for the road at parking
- 8.45 Pennyfield Lock Rd joins from L
- 8.65 gate at end of parking
- L 8.75 onto the C&O towpath at Lock 22, Pennyfield Lock
- 10.95 water filtration plant
- 11.75 Swain's Lock, Lock 21, (snacks, portable toilets)
- 12.55 metal bridge crosses canal
- L 14.1 cross over Lock 20
- 14.25 traffic circle near the entrance gate



# Blockhouse Conservation Park, Southern Approach



MN TN  
10 1/2°