

The Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal

Before the hydroelectric companies built dams on the river in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the lower reaches of the Susquehanna were shallow, rocky, and virtually unnavigable.

In the 1830s, Baltimore merchants campaigned for funding to build a canal from Wrightsville, Pennsylvania, to Havre de Grace, Maryland. In 1840, construction of the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal was completed.

The canal paralleled the Susquehanna. It was 50 feet wide and approximately 6 feet deep. To overcome the river's steep 233-foot drop from Columbia to the bay, engineers designed 28 lift locks. The locks made it possible for vessels to carry lumber, coal, iron, fertilizer, grain, and passengers to the Chesapeake Bay and Baltimore. From its office in Wrightsville, customers could even purchase a ticket to Liverpool, England.

In 1855, over 8,000 boats used the canal, but competition from the railroads soon threatened the entire system. Boat traffic declined rapidly, and by 1894, the canal was abandoned.

Although much of the canal disappeared under the lakes created by the dams, a few sections are still visible. If you follow the nearby path on your left, you can see the remnants of Lock 1 and the canal bed.

An 1828 Lycoming Coal map showing canals and railroads in the mid-Atlantic. The Lancaster-York Heritage Region is highlighted in the blue circle.
 Courtesy Harold Kramer, www.mapofpa.com



A photo of the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal at Wrightsville, PA, by W.W. Drenning, circa 1878.
 Courtesy York County Heritage Trust



www.baygateways.net

Lancaster - York Heritage Region
 Susquehanna River Water Trail

This project was completed with generous financial contributions from the following project partners:
 National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways & Water Trails Network
 Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation
 PAH Consultants, Consulting Geometer & Land Use Planning
 Lancaster County Planning Commission

East Deming Township
 MDC, Inc. (Maryland)
 PA, Maryland LLC
 Susquehanna
 York Harbor Water Power Corporation
 The John Belton Company

Interpretive Exhibits
 Major Towns

MASON-DIXON LINE
 PA MD

Conowingo Dam
 Safe Harbor Dam
 Hottelwood Dam

Havre de Grace
 Chesapeake Bay

