THE POTOMAC RIVER AND THE C&O CANAL
MAP TWO
Pennyfield Lock to Goose Creek

ABOVE GREAT FALLS, the Potomac is a calm and peaceful stream. Behind a rock dam built for the C&O Canal at Seneca (Bender Dam No. 2), the river forms a seven-mile stretch of flat water. Turt farms and quiet villages dot this area, along with the 147-acre McKee Beshers Wildlife Management Area, operated by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. In the summer, the "Seneca Shimmer" is a popular spot for water skiing and power boats, and the little town of Seneca becomes overgrown with boats. But during the rest of the year, the most populous inhabitants of the area are deer, quail, birds, rabbits, and waterfowl.

It was not always thus. During the second half of the 19th Century, thousands of tons of red sandstone were quarried nearby and cut here. The durable stone was used in constructing many buildings and locks along the C&O Canal, and dozens of buildings in Washington, D.C. At Seneca, it was cut by hammers, stone chisels and large saws. By 1900, most of the better-quality stone was cut, and the industry declined.

The deciduous woodlands of this part of the Potomac Valley are called the Piedmont, and lead to the foothills of the Blue Ridge beginning at Point of Rocks on the next map. The Virginia shore of this section of the river is mostly privately owned farmland, except for the Algonquin Regional Park, which includes a public golf course and picnic area.
THE POTOMAC RIVER AND THE C&O CANAL MAP THREE
Broad Run to Point of Rocks

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1828, President John Quincy Adams turned the first spadeful of earth for the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal at Little Falls (see Map One). On the same day, in a much less impressive ceremony, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad began construction of its right of way from Baltimore to Cumberland. The canal met the railroad head-on at Point of Rocks, where both transportation companies fought for the same narrow shelf of land along the Potomac. The canal won the legal battle—but lost the race to Cumberland. Battered by financial and labor problems, the canal construction lagged more than four years behind the railroad in reaching Cumberland, and never fully recovered.

The railroad still runs along the river for most of its length above the Monocacy River. Freight trains travel with coal from the West Virginia highlands run daily along the river, as well as a more recent development: commuter trains from Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg to Washington, D.C. During the Civil War, the area between Lower Maroon Island and the Monocacy River known as White's Ford became one of the most important crossing points for Confederate Armies advancing into the North. Robert E. Lee crossed here from Virginia on September 8, 1862, on his way to Antietam. The river formed an important dividing line between North and South, and was crossed many times by advancing or retreating troops.
THE POTOMAC RIVER AND THE C&O CANAL
MAP FOUR
Catoctin Creek to Harpers Ferry

This scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic," wrote Thomas Jefferson of the view from Harpers Ferry in 1783. Today, it's still as impressive as in Jefferson's time, although the area has seen repeated industrial growth, war destruction, fires and floods. Robert Harper's mills became an important arms-producing center, and east-west transportation link—and the remains of many bridges still stand in the Potomac and Shenandoah. John Brown's raid and the Civil War brought the area into national prominence. In 1859, Brown captured the federal arsenal in an attempt to secure arms for slaves. Brown was eventually captured and hanged in Charles Town, W.Va. The arsenal was blown up in 1862; in 1863, a garrison of more than 10,000 Union troops surrendered to Stonewall Jackson.

Harpers Ferry still has many reminders of its busy pre-Civil War industries. Harper House is the oldest surviving structure in the town, built around 1775, and restored by the National Park Service, which administers the Harper House National Historic Park. Other highlights include Jefferson Rock, St. Peter's Catholic Church, and the Master Artisan's House. Hilltop House is a famous hotel with a view of the town below, and the remains of the Salty Dog Tavern are filled with the memories of Frontier days. Prohibition, and legendary moonshiner operations.
PADDLING THROUGH THE BATTLEFIELD at Antietam Creek is one of the best ways to view the site of the Civil War's "bloodiest day," September 17, 1862. More than 3,000 casualties were reported in this epic battle between North and South. At Burnside Bridge, where southern sharpshooters centered an advance of four Union divisions, National Park Service interpreters today describe the many attacks during that fateful day in September.

The Potomac and its tributaries have many other interesting sites for the canoeist. They vary from the difficult rapids near Harper's Ferry, such as the Shenandoah and Potomac, to long stretches of flat water for easy paddling. A few tips: make sure everyone in your group is familiar with the area, or is an experienced canoeist. Check the river level before leaving, since during summer dry periods, small creeks can be unnavigable. Carry things you want to keep dry in a plastic bag, and wear old shoes, because you may end up wading, or pushing, your canoe out of difficult spots.

Above the Blue Ridge, the Potomac drains a series of ridges and valleys and winds through gorges that caused great difficulty during canal construction. The section of the river from here to Cumberland is far less populous than the lower portion.