



Conversation Starters

Stories Ideas Centered Around the Canal Quarters Program

FEATURE IDEAS

A Place in History

The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal played an integral role in the development of the United States. Ground was broken on the canal on the nation's 52nd anniversary – July 4, 1828 – and the ceremony was presided over by then-president John Quincy Adams, indicating the level of importance the United States put on the project. Cargo moved east and west via the canal, ensuring that pioneers heading west had the supplies they needed to settle in the new frontier and that Americans living in the population centers along the East Coast had coal from the mountains and fresh food from farmlands. This was how trade and growth were accomplished in the young nation. The National Park Service acknowledged the canal's role in American history by making it a National Historical Park so that history lovers and outdoors enthusiasts alike can explore its 184.5 miles. The Canal Quarters, which are 200-year-old lockhouses that have been preserved and converted into guest lodging, offer these visitors a chance to spend the night in history.

The Intersection of History and Recreation

Part of the beauty of national park sites is that they work to preserve history and natural resources at the same time. The Canal Quarters give history lovers unparalleled access to walk or ride along the canal and see how easy it is to also fall in love with the outdoors. In addition, they give people who are hiking or cycling a glimpse into the history of the canal and the stories of the people who lived and worked along the C&O. In short, the Canal Quarters can help convert one type of traveler into another by immersing them in both sides of this equation ... history and recreation.

Who Were the Lockkeepers?

The canal wouldn't have existed without the hard work of many people ... and plenty of mules! Among the people who ensured that passage along the canal operated smoothly were the lockkeepers who helped all those boats navigate the elevation changes as they traveled the waterway. When you book a stay at the Canal Quarters, you get to see what it would have been like to live as a lockkeeper, though you won't be expected to open and close the locks around the clock. Lockkeepers lived and worked in these houses, raising their families and being a part of the community. To help develop this story, the grandson of the former lockkeeper at Lockhouse 21, Bert Swain, is available for interviews.

ROUNDUP IDEAS

Old Buildings Have Found New Life

The Canal Quarters program allows travelers to spend the night in an old lockhouse and understand what life would have been like during the canal's heyday. The lockhouses are just one example of historic buildings that have been redefined as modern-day lodging. Elsewhere around the country, historic lighthouses, former stores and even old farm buildings have been converted into hotels and vacation rentals. This could be a fascinating roundup story about the transition of old buildings into modern lodging options, with examples coming from across the country, along the East Coast or even just around the state of Maryland.



Booking a Bunk at a National Park

Spending the night in a national park doesn't necessarily mean you're camping under the stars ... though there are plenty of opportunities to do that. The Canal Quarters offer one type of lodging, but a roundup story about other opportunities could encompass Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, the famed Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone, Volcano House perched next to an active crater in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, or Cavallo Point at the base of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Unique Experiences at National Parks

Staying overnight in a historic lockhouse is one of the many unique experiences visitors can have at America's national parks. Other experiences in this roundup could include witnessing the synchronous fireflies work their magic at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, watching the Northern Lights dance at Denali National Park, welcoming a new day when sunrise arrives at Acadia National Park, or shimmying through Mammoth Cave on your hands and knees.

Photo: Lockhouse 6, "Brookmont" / Credit: C&O Canal Trust