

C&O's Conococheague aqueduct restored

The Conococheague aqueduct on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal is one of several that have suffered partial failure (at least one arch collapsed) under the impact of repeated severe flooding of the Potomac River and its tributaries. Its restoration has just been completed by the NPS (National Park Service).

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY 100 YEARS, a canal boat crossed the Conococheague Aqueduct of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Williamsport, on August 8. The National Historical Park, the Town of Williamsport and friends and neighbors of the canal celebrated completion of the restoration project and groundbreaking for a new C&O Canal Headquarters and Visitor Center.

'The Conococheague Aqueduct restoration project, a two-year endeavor to rebuild the historic aqueduct using timber and original stones, creates the first watered, operational aqueduct along the C&O Canal since 1924,' said Kevin Brandt, the National Historical Park's superintendant.

'The Town of Williamsport, long known for its importance during the C&O Canal's operational days, is now the only place in North America where visitors can view multiple canal features in one location, including a lock and refurbished lockhouse, railroad lift bridge, canal turning basin and warehouse, and the watered aqueduct.'

Crowds gathered to hear remarks by Maryland Governor Lawrence Hogan, who was flanked by an impressive number of politicians representing all levels of government, from the town of Williamsport to the US Senate. NPS Deputy Director P. Daniel Smith attended. The new visitor center and park headquarters are projected to be completed in late 2021. The headquarters move from Hagerstown will bring about 70 jobs to Williamsport with an annual payroll of about

\$5 million. The total project cost is \$15 million. Governor Hogan felt that Williamsport was becoming the epicenter of the historic 184.5-mile canal. 'This is the kind of transformative project that only comes along once in a generation, and it has taken years of collaboration, cooperation and hard work by so many people at the federal, state and local levels of government to help make this important project become a reality.'

Canal boats filled with guest speakers and dignitaries took inaugural boat rides across the aqueduct. The crowd cheered as the first boat broke through a ribbon spanning nearly 20 feet across the aqueduct entrance. Boat rides continued the remainder of the afternoon, along with living history activities at Lockhouse 44 and family and youth activities in the historic Trolley Barn.

'NPS is one of the most trusted brands among domestic and international travelers, and national parks are among the most sought-after destinations,' Dan Spedden, President of Hagerstown Convention and Visitors Bureau, said. 'The aqueduct restoration and new headquarters and visitor center will make the C&O Canal synonymous with Williamsport, Md., and establish the town as a preferred destination.'

The appeal of the destination will be confirmed when Hagerstown hosts the **World Canals Conference** in September 2021.



▲ The inaugural launch Katie Dreamer cuts the ribbon as she enters the trough of the aqueduct, with the two Maryland US senators on board, and Joshua Nolen at the helm.

Visit the C&O Canal National Historical Park's website: www.nps.gov/choh. ■

Design by McMullan & Associates

IWI member Denis McMullan is proud to have played a key role in design of the restoration, along with that of the railway lift-bridge and Lock 44. Built from 1833 to 1835, the Conococheague Aqueduct is the second longest of the 11 on the canal, with a total length of 196 feet (59.75 m). It comprises three, 60-foot span circular segment limestone masonry arch barrels that span the Conococheague Creek and bear on stone masonry piers and abutments founded on natural rock. In 1920, the berm parapet dramatically collapsed along with a canal boat into the creek. The parapet was rebuilt using a wood wall and outrigger system and functioned until the canal ceased operations in 1924. The instruction was to design restoration of the aqueduct to working condition with its appearance of the early 1920s. The NPS chose this option with a simulated wood parapet instead of going back to the original all masonry construction. The design team led by Denis and Doug Bond found the mixture of materials and technology to be much more challenging.



◀ Extract from the newly published second edition of the North American Waterways Map, showing the area around Williamsport, roughly half way along the 184.5-mile route from the Tide Lock in Georgetown to Cumberland Basin

▼ The splendid aqueduct viewed from downstream just two months before the inauguration.

