



Washington Heritage Trail

Driving down the Washington Heritage Trail, it is hard to determine whether the history of the land or the scenery is more amazing. George Washington spent much of his youth surveying the land near the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers and was so taken by the unspoiled beauty of what would become West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle that he and his family bought several acres of land in the area. Thomas Jefferson once said that the view of the Potomac River from Harper's Ferry was "...one of the most stupendous scenes in nature. This scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic." The scenic vista is so popular that it is a stop on the Appalachian Trail, which also happens to be headquartered in nearby Harper's Ferry. But Jefferson and Washington were not the only people that found this region so irresistible; this 112-mile loop (with a 25 mile spur to Paw Paw, WV) passes by more than 100 sites listed on the National Register for Historic Places. Everything from Civil War battle sites to historic spas dot the landscape on this national scenic byway.

A Tumultuous History

Built to commemorate Washington's love of the area, the Washington Heritage Trail is everything a history aficionado could ever ask for. The Harper's Ferry National Historic Park marks the spot of John Brown's failed raid on the town's federal arsenal. Championed in the North and reviled in the South, Brown's raid aimed to arm slaves in the South so they could start their own rebellion.

The Nation's First Spa

A short drive from Harper's Ferry leads to Berkeley Springs which many people believe to be the nation's first spa. After a tiring week of work, visit Berkeley Springs State Park and unwind in a warm bath filled with natural spring water followed by a delightful massage. When your cares have been massaged away, test your luck at Charles Town Races & Slots. Visitors love watching thoroughbred horses pound down the track vying for the win and playing one of over 3800 slot machines.

A Famous Tunnel

While adults love the fun and excitement at the track, the Paw Paw Tunnel is an attraction the whole family can enjoy. By 1836, the C&O Canal Company had grown tired of navigating every bend in the windy Potomac River and decided to build one massive tunnel under Sorrel Ridge to help speed shipping. For over 14 years, men labored to remove the countless tons of shale to form the canal tunnel. When they finished, the tunnel stretched for 3,118 feet and required an astonishing 6 million bricks to line the tunnel walls. Presently, the tunnel's towpath is open to bikers and hikers, (canal boats were long ago replaced by trains), but because of its great length, even in the daytime it can get pretty dark in the middle, so bring a flashlight.

Belle Boyd House

For a tale of intrigue and espionage, look no further than the Belle Boyd House. Belle Boyd, a native of Martinsburg, was an actress turned Confederate spy running coded messages to General "Stonewall" Jackson, another West Virginia native. Belle's childhood home in Martinsburg now serves as a museum for artifacts from the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War.

Yet perhaps the greatest attribute of the Washington Heritage Trail is that visitors can see much of the same countryside that George Washington fell in love with over two centuries ago. Towns like Harper's Ferry and Shepherdstown have made extensive efforts to preserve their historic character so that future visitors will become interested in the vibrant past that surrounds the Washington Heritage Trail. From the awe-inspiring view on Jefferson's Rock to the bubbling water of Berkeley Springs, visitors are sure to have a wonderful time retracing the steps of our nation's first President.