



9 LOCK NO. 48 E.

This is the site of lock No. 48 E. Union Canal locks either lifted or lowered barges by water a difference of five (5) feet in elevation. The property adjacent to the lock was owned by the Machemer family (1830). In 1846, Captain Machemer operated the Union Canal Barge named the "Citizen" which transported cargo from Van Reed's Mill (Stop 10) to Reading.

The locktender's home, a 1 1/2-story frame building with ornate wooden trim, was located at the lock adjacent to the towpath, as indicated by the foundation stones on the ground.

10 VAN REED PROPERTY

Turn left and travel to the end of the bridge abutment of the former Van Reed's Covered Bridge. Here, until 1964, a 144-foot, single-spanned covered bridge crossed the Tulpehocken Creek. In 1959, the bridge was damaged when a 5 1/2-ton tractor trailer loaded with 16 tons of shingles crashed through the 4-ton limit bridge. It had been partially repaired, but was finally removed in 1964.

Across the creek is the land originally settled by the Van Reed family around the time of the Revolutionary War. They owned and operated one of the oldest paper mill industries in the County of Berks. In past history, the Van Reeds were owners of three paper mills, a fulling (wool) mill, a saw mill, and a Union Canal warehouse all of which were located in this immediate vicinity along the banks of the Tulpehocken and Cacoosing Creeks.

11 LOCK NO. 47 E.

In 1976, this lift lock, No. 47 E., received restoration efforts including stonework realignment and installation of four new yellow pine mitre gates.

When the canal was in operation (1827-1884) the locktender's home would have been located on the land between the hill and the lock. Some of the men who lived in this locktender's home were Edwin Ball, Jacob Grubb, William Adies, Samuel Werner, and John Moyer. Their job assignments included operation and maintenance of this lock. Locktenders' salaries ranged from a maximum of \$10.00 a month to a low of \$1.00 a month, which they received in the later days of operation of the Union Canal.



12 REBER'S MILL AND BRIDGE

At this stop, where Plum Creek flows into the "Tully," Union Canal boats crossed the "Plum" by means of a stone and wooden aqueduct. This canal aqueduct can best be described as a wooden bridge filled with water which transported canal barges over the creek. A few of the original red sandstone blocks which supported the wooden aqueduct can still be observed north of this marker.

In 1951, the steel highway bridge which spans the creek today replaced Reber's Covered bridge (1837) which was 129 feet in length. This bridge provided access to Reber's Grist Mill, which was first named Hiester's Mill after having been built by Gabriel and Jonathan Hiester in 1760. The Hiesters and Rebers intermarried and around the time of the Civil War, Joseph Reber enlarged the mill to its full capacity. Little of the mill remains today.

The trail crosses Plum Creek on Rush's Iron Truss Bridge (1905), which was moved here from the Oley Valley, and concludes at the junction of Reber's Bridge. Crossing Reber's Bridge Road, a 2 mile connector trail to the Blue Marsh Lake trail system follows a portion of the Union Canal on US Army Corps of Engineers property to the Stilling Basin trailhead parking lot.

LEGEND

UNION CANAL
 WALKING PATH
 STOPPING POINTS OF INTEREST
 GUARD LOCK
 LOCK

Approx. Length of Trail from Stonecliffe to Stilling Basin: 6 miles

**C. Howard Hiester Canal Center
and
Gruber Wagon Works**

Open for Tours
May through October



UNION CANAL

Bicycle & Walking Trail



*Designated as a
National Recreation Trail*

Berks County Parks & Recreation Dept.
2083 Tulpehocken Rd.
Wyomissing, PA 19610
610-372-8939 or 610-374-8839
www.countyofberks.com/parks



UNION CANAL BICYCLE AND WALKING TRAIL TOUR

Welcome to the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department's Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail. The trail follows along the Tulpehocken Creek, named by the Lenni-Lenape Native Americans, the earliest inhabitants to the area. Tulpehocken means the "Land of the Turtles." This secluded valley trail has witnessed the successive arrival of farmers, millers, canal men, real estate developers, and now park visitors. Today, a 306-acre county park traces a 4.5 mile stretch of the creek from Stonecliffe Park to Reber's Bridge. In addition, a 1.8-mile connector trail links the Union Canal Trail to the Blue Marsh Lake trail system. Along these paths, the natural and historic heritage of the area has been preserved for future generations. Many of the old structures you see have withstood the test of time. Others can only be recognized by the rubble ruins that remain.

① STONECLIFFE



Stonecliffe Park is situated on land that formerly was Gring's Limestone Quarry (late 19th to 20th century). Across the stream and slightly to your left stands the home of former canalman John G. Withers, built in 1856.

The Union Canal, which paralleled the stream to the opposite shore, was 79½ miles in length and ran from Reading on the Schuylkill River to Middletown on the Susquehanna River. The Union Canal's first engineer, William Weston, copied the narrow and shallow construction methods used in building canals in his native England. The canal, completed in 1827 at a cost of over six million dollars, was never an economic success because of the reluctance of boatmen to use the narrow channel and locks. Near the confluence of Tulpehocken Creek and the Schuylkill River (below Stonecliffe), a weigh station was built adjacent to lock No. 52 E. to determine the net weight of the cargo transported by the barge liable for a toll charge. The average toll assessed was 1½ to 2 cents per ton per mile (1830).

② KISSINGER HOMESTEAD AND BLACKSMITH SHOP

In 1867 Henry and Angeline Kissinger erected at this point a handsome stone home. Adjacent to the house stands a blacksmith shop which was used to service horses and mules of the Union



Canal. A narrow mule bridge near here afforded access to the blacksmith shop from the canal on the other side of the stream. The Kissinger Bridge piers are still visible in the creek. The Kissinger family was one of the most prominent to settle in the lower reaches of the Tulpehocken. The Kissinger's Church (1852) and Schoolhouse were on a hill to the west of this point. New buildings now stand on the site.

Between this stop and stop No. 3, you will pass the structures of the Jacob Bushong Farmstead. The first foundation along the path (traveling from Stonecliffe) represents the site of Bushong's home, followed by his barn and barnyard. The stone wall remaining enclosed the barnyard at one time.

The stone building dominating the opposite shore is part of the Berks Leisure Area and was built by William Sheeler.

③ UNION CANAL MULE BRIDGE AND LOCK NO. 51 E.

This marker is located on a support structure for a slackwater dam. This site was last known as Strunk's Dam (1850), named after the last locktender at lock No. 51 E. The dam provided smooth water for canalboats to cross the creek from the guard lock on the opposite side, to lift lock No. 51 E. whose retaining stones can be seen as you walk through the lock along the path. A new bridge has been built across the creek where a mule bridge once stood. Under the middle of the bridge you can see a tree stump on the old mule bridge support.

④ FISHER HOMESTEADS AND WASTE CULVERT

The area along this section of the stream was owned and inhabited by the Fisher family. Henry B. Fisher built homes located across the stream in 1843 and 1861. Proceeding upstream about ¼th of a mile, one can find an arched stone structure under the towpath. This is one of 43 waste culverts built into the canal bank to drain high and surplus water into the creek during lock operations. The use of the waste culvert was an automatic means to preventing towpath erosion as well. Continuing upstream on the path, you can see a 2½-story stone house which was built in 1820 by Peter Fisher, lockkeeper for lock No. 50 E., located near the concrete bridge at Gring's Mill.

⑤ GRING'S MILL AND HOMESTEAD

Looking downstream from this marker you will notice a stone building adjoining a concrete bridge and dam which was built around 1931 by C. Scott Althouse, a successful Reading chemical dye manufacturer, to provide direct current electricity to be used in a paint making process.

When the Union Canal was in operation (1827-1884), lock No. 50 E. and a 2½-story brick locktender's house were located near the site of Althouse's bridge. Across the stream one can see the grist mill constructed by David Gring in 1811. The barn (1826) has been converted into a visitor's center while the stone house (1831) serves as the County Parks and Recreation office. The dam for the mill was located further upstream and remnants of the mill race are still noticeable at the island next to the mill.

On your way to the next stop, be on guard for the ghost of Mrs. Philip Bissinger. Reacting to her husband's advances toward other women, Mrs. Bissinger took her life and those of her four children by jumping into lock No. 49 E. (stop 6), about 5 p.m. on August 17, 1875. Following the tragedy, the bodies were taken to the Gring's home to await the coroner's inquest.

⑥ LOCK NO. 49 E.

This is lock No. 49 E., one of the 93 stone lift locks on the Union Canal. The small size of the locks, 8½ feet by 75 feet originally (1827-1855) and 17 feet by 90 feet later (1855-1884) required the use of smaller and lighter boats than were common on Pennsylvania's other canals. Directly across the stream is the mansion of miller David Gring (1803).

As you continue to the next stop, look for ripples in the water, caused by the remains of a dam breast which once supplied water power to the former Wertz's Mill (1813-1898) and Kulp's Mill (1898-1916) which were located on the opposite bank.

⑦ SITE OF J.B. WINTER'S GRIST MILL

On this bend was located J.B. Winter's Grist Mill originally owned by a man named Lash. The mill's water power came from a dam upstream from the Red Bridge. At this point also, a road came from the property of J.S. Herbine on the right and crossed the stream joining the Old Tulpehocken Road on the other side. The park across the creek is the County's Red Bridge Park.

As you move on to Stop No. 8, notice on the north side of the towpath, the Deppen Cemetery, part of the Berks County Heritage Center. The Deppen Cemetery was an early Catholic burial ground and included the graves of 20 to 30 Irish immigrants who died of "canal fever" while building the Union Canal.

⑧ BERKS COUNTY HERITAGE CENTER AND WERTZ'S COVERED BRIDGE

This area has been developed as an historical interpretive area and includes the Gruber Wagon Works (1882), a National Historic Landmark, the Bicentennial Eagle Memorial; Melcher's Grist Mill; the Police Memorial; and the C. Howard Hiester Canal Center, which is located in the barn. This interpretive area will offer visitors an educational opportunity to discover Berks County's transportation heritage.

Wertz's Covered Bridge (Red Covered Bridge), built in 1867, is the longest of Pennsylvania's surviving single-span covered bridges, measuring 204 feet. The bridge was added to the National Historic Register in January, 1979. (Note the cable car and gage-house, on the west side of the bridge, used by the United States Geological Survey to measure the stage and discharge of the creek.)

