

MARYLAND HEIGHTS TRAIL GUIDE

1. Bridges. The old stone piers across the Potomac River originally carried a covered timber railroad and wagon bridge erected in 1836 by the B&O Railroad. John Brown entered Harpers Ferry via this bridge when he led his famous raid in 1859. Nearly two years later, on June 14, 1861, Confederate troops blew it up—the first of nine times it was destroyed during the Civil War. An iron “Bollman bridge,” completed in 1870, survived for 66 years, until the record Flood of 1936 swept it away.

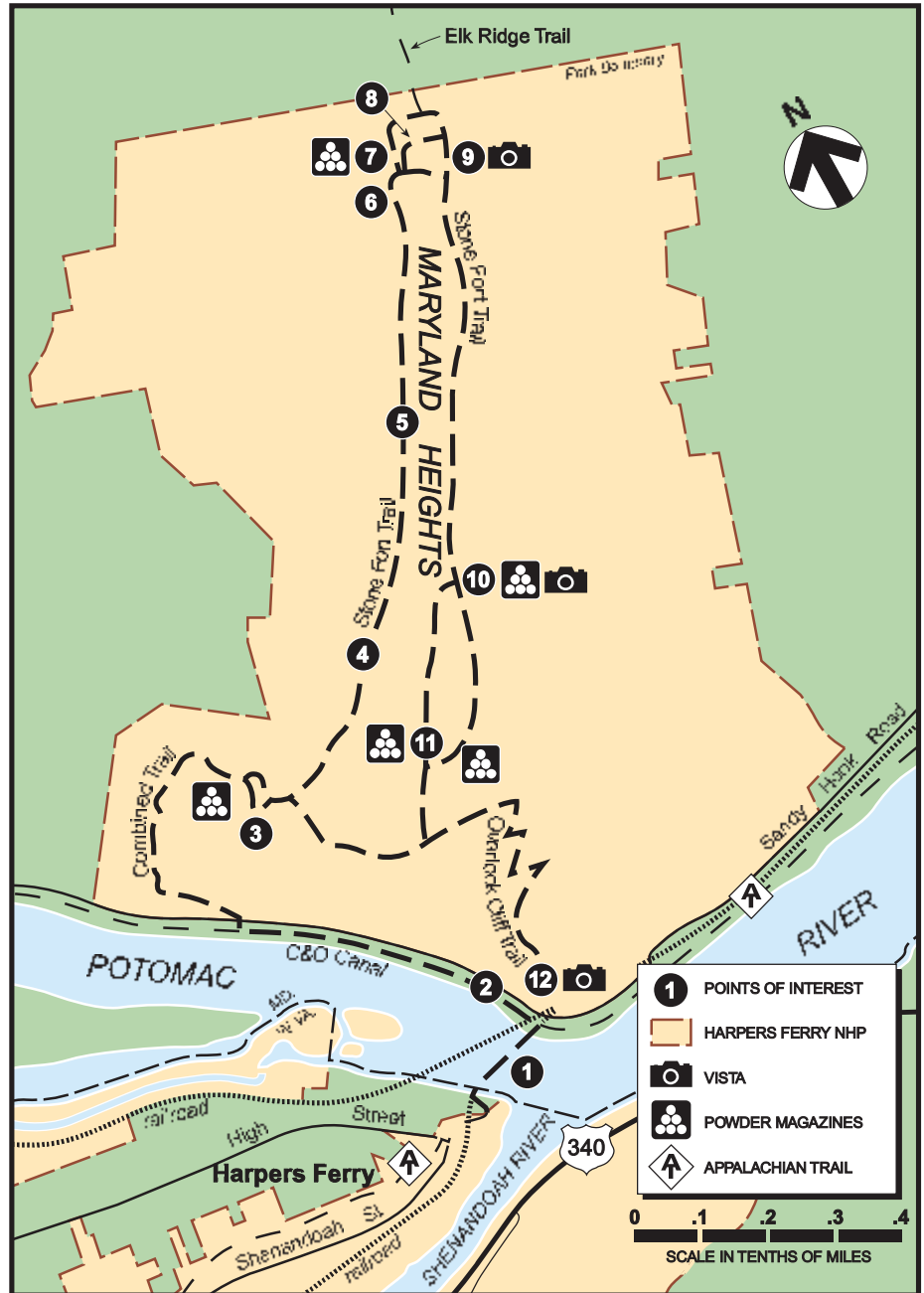
2. Lock 33 and the C&O Canal. The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, which extends 184½ miles from near Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Md., was completed in 1850. Indebted by the capital costs of construction, impaired by winter weather, damaged by frequent flooding, and unable to compete with the railroad, the canal finally was closed by the Flood of 1924. Lock 33, one of 74 lift locks along the canal, was completed in 1833.

3. Naval Battery. Built in May 1862 in response to Stonewall Jackson’s Valley Campaign, this was the first Union fortification on Maryland Heights. With two 9-inch Dahlgren naval guns and one 50-pounder gun, an observer wrote this battery “commands the town of Harpers Ferry and all its approaches. Its fire rakes the summit and side of Loudoun Heights, and sweeps the crest of Bolivar Heights most effectually.” The three-sided earthwork was added in June or July 1863.

4. Military Road. Old Civil War military roads like the one you’re hiking on criss-cross Maryland Heights. Major Frank Rolfe of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery left us this description: “...the batteries were situated from 250 to 1,065 feet above the river and the roads leading to them very rocky, steep and crooked and barely wide enough for a wagon. Over these roads the guns, ammunition and supplies of all kind were hauled.”

5. Charcoal Hearth. Between 1810-1840s, more than 50 charcoal hearths like this one were built on Maryland Heights. At each hearth, a collier stacked 30-50 cords of wood around a triangular chimney filled with wood chips. The pile was covered with leaves, dirt, charcoal dust, and then ignited. During a 10-day burning period, this pile reduced to 1,750 bushels of charcoal.

6. Military Camp. Union camps transformed Maryland Heights into a temporary military city during the Civil War. Scattered stone



foundations and circular earthen platforms indicate the locations of tents or log shelters.

7. Exterior Fort. A “double line of rifle-pits,” erected here in June 1863, defended against possible attack from the north. These parallel rock walls extended more than 500 feet down the western slope.

8. Interior Fort. In late June 1863, Union commanders raised the height of this line of trenches by 9-10 feet. The resulting parapet

was the largest earthwork constructed on Maryland Heights. Five embrasures were cut through this wall for 30-pounder Parrott Rifles.

9. Stone Fort. Union engineers originally designed this fortification as an infantry blockhouse. The fort straddles the crest of Maryland Heights at its highest elevation—1,448 feet. The fort was never completed, and by Sept. 1863, served as a commissary and storage area.

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10. 100-pounder Battery. A 9-inch Dahlgren gun weighing 9,700 pounds and capable of hurling a 100-pound shell over two miles was placed here in June 1863. The gun was mounted on a raised earthen platform and could be rotated 360 degrees on a circular iron runner about 11 feet in diameter. The Dahlgren gun was later replaced with a 100-pounder Parrott.

11. 30-pounder Battery. Completed in the fall of 1862, this battery's 30-pounder Parrott rifles could fire a 29-pound projectile 1½ miles. Colonel William F. Reynolds, in June 1863, wrote that the battery's six Parrotts "commanded perfectly the summit of Loudoun Heights as well as Bolivar Heights."

12. Cliffs. This site affords one of the best views of Harpers Ferry. Over the years floods, Civil War, re-alignments of the railroad, and the march of time have brought considerable change to the town below.

Powder Magazines

Thirteen powder magazines, used to store gun powder and artillery shells, were located on Maryland Heights during the Civil War. They were generally 30 by 20 feet and eight feet deep. A heavy timber superstructure covered with earth and sod protected the explosive contents.

Trail Information

From the railroad bridge to the Overlook Cliffs is 4.1 miles (about 3 hours) round-trip. From the railroad bridge to the Stone Fort is 6 miles (about 4 hours) round-trip. The Combined Trail is marked with green blazes; the Overlook Cliff Trail is marked with red blazes; and the Stone Fort Trail is marked with blue blazes. There is no water supply and no restroom on Maryland Heights. The trails include some strenuous uphill sections.

Protection of these irreplaceable ruins is your responsibility. Please leave them undisturbed.