

C&O Canal National Historical Park

Paw Paw Tunnel Rock Scaling and Pinning Project

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

What is the history of the Paw Paw Tunnel?

The Paw Paw Tunnel is one of the most significant engineering features on the Canal. To save building six miles of canal along the river, the C&O Canal company decided to construct a tunnel through a steep topographic ridge now called Tunnel Hill. When work began on the tunnel in 1836, the builders estimated the project would be complete within two years. The tunnel ultimately required 14 years to complete due to labor issues and violence, funding shortfalls, work stoppages, and the challenges of digging a 3,118-foot tunnel through the hard, loose shale. The tunnel opened in October 1850 with rock slides continuing to be a challenge throughout the tunnel's history.

What is the need for the project?

Loose rock above the towpath at the "cut" and north portal (downstream entrance to the tunnel) presents potential safety hazards to visitors. This rock also threatens to damage the boardwalk section of the towpath. This project provides for visitor safety from rock fall as well as protection for the boardwalk/towpath.

What does the project include?

The project includes "scaling" or removing loose and unstable rock and debris from above the towpath/boardwalk in the "cut" approaching the north tunnel portal. Additionally, rock will be "pinned" in place to provide further stability and long-term protection. Rock scaling and pinning has occurred in this area before. The project also includes temporarily storing rock debris on the berm side of the Canal for future removal. To provide thru-access for bicyclists during the project, a trail will be opened using an old logging road on the berm side of the Canal upstream of the south tunnel portal. A temporary "bridge" will be installed across the Canal prism that connects with an abandoned logging road that provides a gentler grade to the top of Tunnel Hill. This temporary by-pass then connects with the existing Tunnel Hill Trail. The existing Tunnel Hill Trail will remain open during the project but for safety reasons, cyclists will be required to dismount and walk their bikes across the mountain using the signed bypass trail detour.

To facilitate the work, construction equipment staging will require closing a section of the Paw Paw Tunnel picnic area parking lot. Additionally, temporary delays on the towpath approaching the south portal should be expected as work crews and equipment move to/from the work site. Work crews will use the tunnel to gain access to the site.

When will the project begin and end?

Construction staging and work will begin mid-to-late-February 2017 and go on for 90-120 days. We anticipate completing the project in June 2017. During the work, the tunnel will be closed to thru traffic but visitors will still be able to access most of the tunnel through the south portal

and walk to a barricade within the north/downstream portal entrance. The National Park Service is doing everything possible to minimize closure time and impacts to visitors.

Why is it necessary to close the north portal area and towpath during the project?

Workers will be removing rock and debris directly above the towpath resulting in significant safety issues for anyone below. Visitor access to the tunnel will continue to be available through the south (upstream) portal throughout the project. The towpath will be closed from just inside the north (downstream) tunnel entrance to the where the Tunnel Hill Trail intersects with the towpath (Mile 154.8)

How will this project benefit park visitors?

Visitor safety will be improved by removing loose rock and debris from above the towpath and by stabilizing the remaining rock to reduce potential for future rock fall. This work will also protect the boardwalk section of the towpath from potential rock fall.

How will this project impact natural and cultural resources?

The project helps protect the north tunnel portal stone and brickwork along with the towpath itself. The temporary Canal prism crossing upstream from the south tunnel portal will also be designed to minimize impacts to the wetland species and function. The temporary crossing will be removed and restored once the project is complete.

What is the park doing to protect those resources during the project?

National Park Service resource protection experts will be monitoring the stone and brickwork in the tunnel, along with contractor's operations and visitor safety during the project with the goal of safely protecting this unique cultural resource and the environment surrounding the project. Every project undertaken by the National Park Service is conducted in compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other regulations.

How do I visit while thru-passage of the tunnel is closed?

Visitors will be able to access most of the tunnel entering through the south/upstream portal throughout the project. Long distance Canal hikers and bikers will continue to have access either across the existing Tunnel Hill Trail (hikers) or using the temporary bypass connecting the towpath across the Canal prism with an old logging road upstream of the tunnel to the top of Tunnel Hill to the existing trail (bikers and hikers).

How much does the project cost?

The project costs just over \$750,000.00 and is funded by the National Park Service's National Recreation Fee Program

Who can I contact if I have further questions or concerns regarding the project?

Matt Graves at 240-625-2931 or Catherine Bragaw at 301-491-6265



The North Entrance of Paw Paw Tunnel & Towpath will be closed.

What is the PLAN?

Purpose? [Why are we closing the Tunnel's north entrance and towpath?]

To protect visitors from the threat of rockslides and to prevent damage to the tunnel portal masonry and boardwalk now and in the future.

Length? [When will it close, and for how long?]

The north entrance is expected to close mid-to-late February 2017 and remain closed until late June or early July.

Alternative Activities? [What can I do instead?]

Walk through the tunnel from the Paw Paw Campground to the closure near the end of the north entrance of the tunnel.

Hike over Tunnel Hill on the Tunnel Hill Trail or use the temporary detour trail for bikers upstream of the south tunnel entrance to access the top of Tunnel Hill and the existing trail. Camp and picnic at Paw Paw campground and picnic area.

Next Step? [What are the future benefits?]

These repairs will make sure the tunnel "cut" and boardwalk are better protected and will provide our visitors with a safe, accessible, and enjoyable Paw Paw Tunnel and Canal experience.



Do you still have questions? Check out our website at www.NPS.gov/choh, or give us a call at 301-739-4200.