



THE ROANOKE CANAL MUSEUM AND TRAIL

ROANOKE RAPIDS AND WELDON, NORTH CAROLINA



ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES



The 7.5 - mile Canal Trail is a great place to hike, jog, or take a leisurely trail bicycle ride. You can experience history, nature, and wildlife, while having the chance to improve fitness and relieve stress.

Welcome to The Roanoke Canal Museum and Trail

Step back in time with us toward the end of the 18th century. Imagine, if you will, our forefathers. Their fight for independence behind them, they now turned toward the task of developing this country, not only socially and politically, but also economically.

At that time, the Roanoke was the most important river in the state. With "proper encouragement," this river could be used to transport goods to market.

However, there is a granite shelf in the river here in Halifax County. This shelf creates a fall line which also creates the "great falls," a major obstacle in transporting goods.

The realization that man would have to intervene to move goods around these falls to market led to one of the greatest engineering feats of the 18th century...The Roanoke Canal.

Follow the river now and experience the creation of the canal, the development of its industries, the beauty of its wildlife and the determination of its people...



History of the Canal

The Roanoke Canal contains some of the most impressive and best preserved early nineteenth century canal construction in the nation. Begun before 1819 and completed in 1823, the Roanoke Canal was built as the North Carolina segment of the ambitious Roanoke Navigation System. It was designed to connect the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and Norfolk over a distance of 400 miles.

The initial plans for the canal show how ambitious the project was, particularly before modern machinery. The navigation system was composed of three parts; the lower (tidewater) Roanoke was over 100 miles long and was to be cleared for large craft such as steamboats and barges from Norfolk; the Great Falls above Weldon, a major obstacle where the river dropped 100 feet in a few miles, was to be overcome by a nine-mile batteaux canal with locks; the upper Roanoke, Dan and Staunton, over 300 miles long, were to be made navigable for batteaux by clearing and sluicing the river bed.

The Roanoke Navigation Company used slave labor and hired others to complete this very difficult and arduous work. The Canal was used by "freedom seekers" during this era and therefore is designated as part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom by the National Park Service.

When completed, the canal provided an economic boost for the area and the farmers of the interior. Goods and produce were carried on the canal. A large profit was never realized for the company due to the major repairs needed especially after frequent flooding. A new transportation development - the railroad - signaled the beginning of the end for the canal. Trade continued into the 1860s. In 1885 the canal was purchased by the Roanoke Navigation and Water Power Company. This company deepened and widened the canal for use as a source of water power. In the early 1900s brick generator houses were built on the canal to produce the area's first electricity. This building on the National Register of Historic Places has been developed into the Roanoke Canal Museum.

Now maintained in partnership by the nonprofit Roanoke Canal Commission, Inc., City of Roanoke Rapids, Town of Weldon, Halifax County Tourism Development Authority and others, the more than seven-mile trail along the old canal has been preserved for the enjoyment of the public.



THE ROANOKE CANAL MUSEUM AND TRAIL

15 Jackson Street Extension
Roanoke Rapids, NC 27870
(252) 537-2769
www.roanokecanal.com

Days/Hours of Operation

Tuesday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Roanoke Canal Trail is open seven days a week from sunrise to sunset.

Plan Your Visit

For details on accommodations and dining near the trail or for assistance planning your trip, visit www.visithalifax.com or call 1-800-522-4282. Please visit the Halifax County Visitors Center along I-95 off exit 173.



Special Thanks to Our Partners:



Hiking Times

Walkers can estimate about 30 minutes per mile with the idea of taking time to enjoy the sites along the trail. With this in mind, the following point to point time estimates are given. Each segment offers scenic opportunities for experiencing the history and natural beauty of the trail. Bicyclers can estimate 8 to 12 minutes per mile with the idea of taking time to enjoy the sites along the trail. The Riverside Mill Bike Barn is in Weldon ½ mile and less than 5 minutes bicycling time from beautiful River Falls Park.

Suggested Walks/Rides	Distance	Walk Time*	Bicycle Time*
RR Lake to Canal Museum	1.5 miles	45 minutes	15-20 minutes
Canal Museum to River Road	1.5 miles	45 minutes	15-20 minutes
River Road to the Aqueduct	3.2 miles	90 minutes	30-45 minutes
Aqueduct to River Falls Park	1.5 miles	45 minutes	15-20 minutes

*Approximate time based on average speed.

Trail Note: The trail from Roanoke Rapids Lake to the Canal Museum is generally flat except a steeper hill with a 90 degree turn near the RR Lake Dam; from the Canal Museum to River Road is generally flat; from River Road to River Falls Park in Weldon is generally flat except near the co-gen plant where there are some rolling short hills. Hikers, joggers, and bicyclist should be careful of exposed rocks and roots.

Trail Highlights

(Mileage begins at Oakwood Ave. Parking Lot)

- 1

The western Roanoke Canal Trail head is located at the Roanoke Rapids Lake Day Use Area, which offers picknicking, trails, swimming, fishing and other recreational activities. Roanoke Rapids Lake, constructed in the early 1950s, is used for electricity production and recreation. The original Roanoke Canal continues approximately two miles west under the lake.
- 2

(.4 mile) An original culvert is located here for spring and natural drainage under the Canal. The culvert is made from stacked stone and a stone tunnel.
- 3

(.7 mile) Rochelle Pond and Dam serve as a major storm water retention basin. It is also home to a variety of unique ducks and water fowl.
- 4

(.9 mile) Remnants of the massive bulkhead for the “Power Canal” are located on the left. The power canal was much wider and deeper than the navigation canal and was only 8/10 mile in length. The navigation canal (on the right) was about 9 miles long.



Roanoke Rapids Lake



Roanoke River

- 5

(1.5 Mile) The Roanoke Canal Museum, which is housed in the old power house on the navigation canal, explores the rich history of the canal and the Roanoke Valley. Locks used to lower loaded batteaux can be seen here. The Roanoke Rapids **Bike Barn** is located here.
- 6

(1.6 Mile) A Kraft paper mill, which was the first Kraft pulp mill in the country, began operating as the Roanoke Rapids Paper Manufacturing Company here in 1909.
- 7

(2.9 Mile) A small bridge covers an old stone structure that may have been used for surge control for the powerful flood waters in the canal.
- 8

(3.3 Mile) The River Road Parking Lot/Access Point is an excellent location to enter the trail. Within 1/2 to 1 mile east are outstanding views of the mighty Roanoke River.
- 9

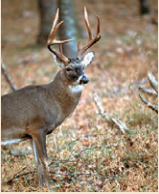
(4.3 Mile) The navigation canal was the “interstate transportation” of the 1800’s. Modern transportation in the form of Interstate 95 intersects the historic canal trail here.
- 10

(4.6 Mile) A spillway was constructed here to allow water to run from the canal back into the Roanoke River during floods.
- 11

(5 Mile) A pond created by gravel harvesting in the mid 20th century is visible here. Scenic vistas of the Roanoke River can be enjoyed at points is along the north end of the pond.



Roanoke Canal Museum



Wildlife on the trail

- 12

(6.1 Mile) The Aqueduct Parking Lot/Access offers a beautiful lush lowland forest walk to the west and the Aqueduct and picnicking just to the east.
- 13

(6.25 Mile) The Aqueduct, just a 4 minute walk from the parking area, was built in the early 1800’s to span Chockoyotte Creek. Best viewed from the observation deck on the south side, the Aqueduct is one of the best preserved examples of early 19th century canal architecture.
- 14

(7 Mile) A Confederate graveyard is located in Weldon just south of the canal near this point. The Town of Weldon, once known as Weldon’s Landing or Weldon’s Orchard, served as a major railroad hub for the Wilmington – Weldon Railroad. Once known as the “lifeline of the Confederacy,” remnants of the old trestles still stand today.
- 15

The Riverside Mill is the location for the **Bike Barn** for the bicycle loaner program in Weldon. Riverside Mill is the renovated and restored early 1900s ‘Cotton Mill’ that originally was powered by the Roanoke Canal. It is now the location of unique collection of ‘eclectic’ shops of antiques, crafts, and outlets to explore and enjoy.
- 16

(7.8 Mile) River Falls Park/Access point is rich in history. The terminus of the Roanoke Canal ended here and entered the Roanoke River just east of the rapids. Grist mills, an iron foundry, and two cotton gins used the old locks. In 1890, a large corn mill was constructed in this area and is still standing. Today, a NC Wildlife Commission Boat Landing, River Falls Park, and an observation deck overlooking the massive Weldon Rapids are located in the area.



The Aqueduct



Weldon rapids

