

# Cruising the Canal

## “DO THE DISMAL”

We highly recommend it!!!

Cruise the oldest continually operating hand-dug waterway in the country. Enjoy beautiful scenery, free dockage, and “convenience” stops.

The Deep Creek, VA, lock is located about 11 miles from Hospital Point and Waterside Marina, off the southern branch of the Elizabeth River. There is an anchorage in a cove about 2 miles north of the lock and a FREE DOCK between the lock and the highway bridge. On the south side of the bridge, there are cleats on the east bulkhead. A nearby shopping strip offers various shopping opportunities



From Deep Creek to the southern lock at South Mills, NC, is 22 miles, where boats can tie up to the west bulkhead and visit a convenience store with food service.

The Welcome Center, located 17 miles south of Deep Creek and 5 miles north of South Mills, offers FREE DOCKAGE, potable

water, picnic tables, grills, and clean restrooms open 24 hours/day. A friendly staff, Book Exchange, Boater’s Log, *NC Coastal Boating Guide*, videos on the Dismal Swamp Canal, and a small GIFT SHOP are also available.

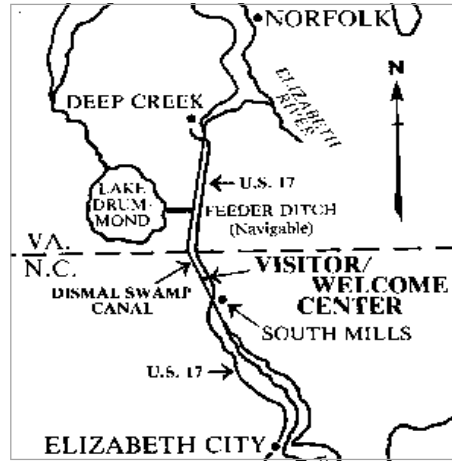
An 18-mile trip along the beautiful Pasquotank River ends at Elizabeth City, “Harbor of Hospitality” and home of the famous Rose Buddies. The City offers 48 hours of FREE DOCKAGE.

### **BOTH LOCKS OPERATE ON THE SAME SCHEDULE:**

**8:30am, 11:00am, 1:30pm and 3:30pm**

*NOTE: Locking times vary in times of drought.*

*NOTE: Welcome Center monitors channels 13 & 16 for navigation*



## **DISMAL SWAMP CANAL WELCOME CENTER**

*“Your Information Center for  
Northeastern NC”*

The Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center is located in Camden County on US Highway 17, approximately 18 miles north of Elizabeth City, NC, and 3 miles south of the NC/VA line.

Camden County is adjacent to the Hampton Roads, VA, metropolitan area (Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Newport News, and Hampton), only a short distance from Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown. The county is conveniently located near the beaches of North Carolina’s Outer Banks (Corolla, Duck, Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills, Nags Head, Hatteras, and Ocracoke).

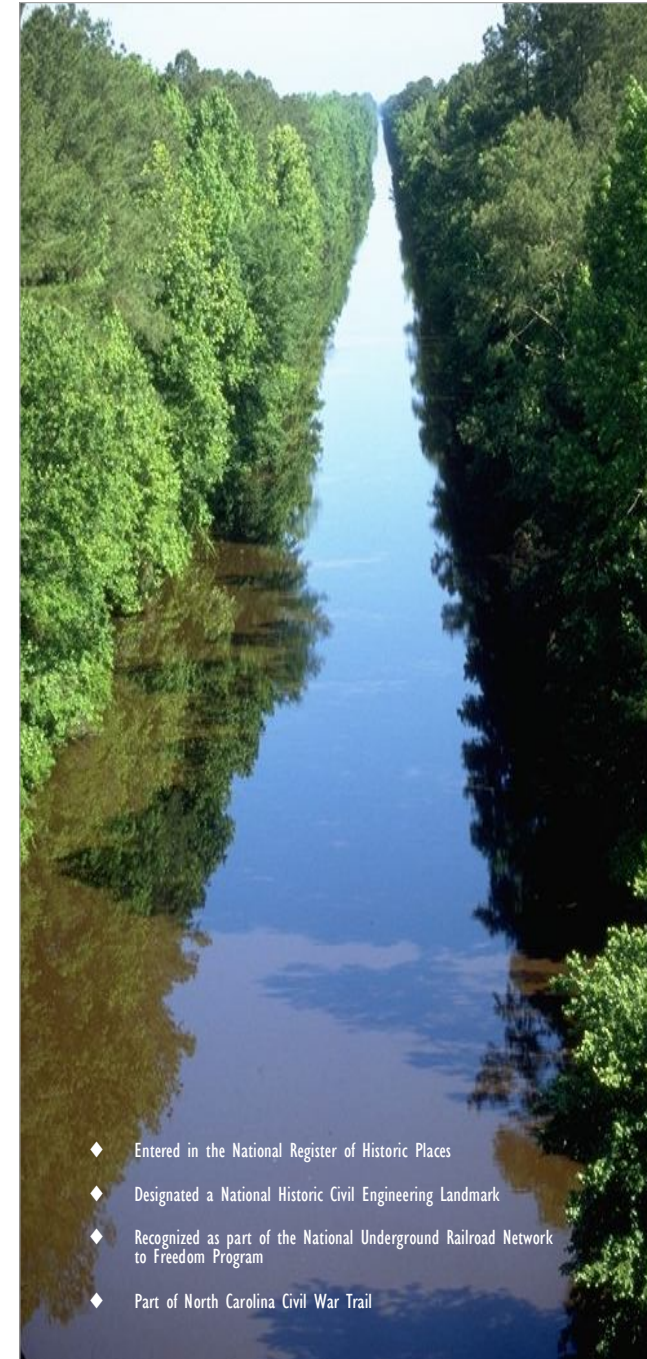
## **CAMDEN COUNTY, NC**

*“An Opportunity Awaits You”*



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## Everything you always wanted to know about the **GREAT DISMAL SWAMP and DISMAL SWAMP CANAL**



- ◆ Entered in the National Register of Historic Places
- ◆ Designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark
- ◆ Recognized as part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program
- ◆ Part of North Carolina Civil War Trail

# History of the Dismal Swamp Canal

The Dismal Swamp Canal, which connects the Elizabeth River in Virginia and the Pasquotank River in North Carolina, is the oldest continually operating canal in the United States. Now a historic landmark, the canal has experienced numerous changes and periods of prosperity and neglect.

The Dismal Swamp posed a formidable obstacle to early settlers and explorers. In 1728, Colonel William Byrd II of Virginia noted the hazards of traveling in the swamp, describing it as a “vast body of dirt and nastiness.” His miserable experience prompted him to consider a canal that would connect the Albemarle Sound to the Elizabeth River.

George Washington and five fellow investors saw the rich potential of Dismal Swamp timber and invested in 40,000 acres of swampland. By 1764, the Virginia Assembly had given this company permission to build a canal, if needed, to remove timber, but only a preliminary ditch was dug. The return on Washington’s investment was not what he had hoped and by 1795 he had withdrawn his interest.

By this time, plans were underway for a canal that would allow trade between Virginia and the relatively isolated region of northeastern North Carolina. In 1784, Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia proposed a canal, and in 1784, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company was created. Digging by hired slave labor began in 1793 and progressed slowly. A road running parallel to the canal was completed in 1804 and by 1805 flat-bottomed vessels could be admitted into the 22-mile long canal. Tolls were charged for road and canal traffic to allay the continual expense of improvements and maintenance. Before the advent of the steam engine, the shortage of laborers to dig the canal was a persistent problem; it was backbreaking work under highly unfavorable conditions.

The first Dismal Swamp roadhouse was established

in 1802, approximately 2-1/2 miles south of the North Carolina/Virginia border. This inn and the Lake Drummond Hotel or Halfway House (established in 1829) became an infamous rendezvous for lovers wanting to take advantage of the lenient North Carolina marriage laws and fugitives seeking the isolation of the swamp. These houses were notorious as sites of duels and lover’s trysts.

By 1820, the canal was recognized as an important part of commercial traffic between Virginia and North Carolina. In 1826, the United States government acknowledged this



by purchasing 600 shares of Dismal Swamp Canal Company stock, which made needed improvements possible. Prior to 1829, the canal was limited to flat-bottomed vessels, but with improvements, enough water could be released to accommodate deeper drafts.

The canal and nearby towns saw a period of prosperity from 1830 -1860. The 1860s and the onset of the Civil War put the canal in an important strategic position for Union and Confederate forces. For Confederates caught in the Union blockade of coastal North Carolina in 1862, the canal offered a convenient supply route to Confeder-

ate strongholds in Virginia.

The wartime activity left the canal in a terrible state of repair. The Canal Company requested assistance from the federal government but this was to no avail, and the canal was sold in 1878. Although the canal had some traffic in the 1870 -1890 period, it could not compare to its previous prosperity. The repairs and maintenance needed by the canal made travel difficult, if not hazardous.

A new era for the canal came in 1892 when the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company assumed operations. This company launched rehabilitation efforts in 1886 and by 1899 the first vessels were admitted into the “new” Dismal Swamp Canal. Once again, a steady stream of vessels carrying lumber, farm products, and passengers made the canal a bustling interstate thoroughfare.

With 20th century improvements in modes of transportation, the canal gradually entered another bleak period in its history. By the 1920s, commercial traffic had subsided except for passenger vessels. The infrequent use and poor maintenance of the canal resulted in its sale in 1929 to the federal government for \$500,000. The canal was then and is today operated and maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Though once a vital commercial link from Virginia to North Carolina, the canal is quieter now and plays host to pleasure boaters on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. Its designation as a National Historic Landmark serves to remind canal visitors of its contributions to the economic and social development of northeastern North Carolina. It’s inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places, designation as a National Civil Engineering Landmark, and recognition as part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, are honors worthy of it’s colorful past.