

Spanning the Gap

Welcome Back to the Delaware, DL&W Railroad!

Exhibit displayed at Point of Gap Overlook
Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area
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The **Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railway (DL&W)** arrived at the Delaware River on May 13, 1856 with a train from Scranton to New York City. The single-track line, called the *Southern Division*, used an old right-of-way to Slateford Junction on the Delaware River. There the line crossed into New Jersey and continued to New York via various existing tracks. The terrain was mountainous and isolated, and needed two tunnels: at Nay Aug, and at Paradise Valley. (now a cut) The route traced the course of major streams, crossed the Lehigh River's headwater at Gouldsboro, and bisected Pocono Summit Lake on *DL&W's* land bridge.

The new rail line was soon upgraded, and its effect on the middle Delaware Valley was great.



DL&W track at the Gap today.

East Stroudsburg (then called *Dansbury Manor*) benefited from the high price of land in larger Stroudsburg, which made *DL&W* Company decide to route its track along what is now Crystal Street in East Stroudsburg. Across the tracks were added a switching tower in 1908, and a water tank in 1914. Both structures are still standing today, and, with the renovated *Dansbury Depot* station-turned-restaurant, form a remarkably intact railroad landscape.

In 1901, the *Delaware Valley Railroad* ran a spur



The *DL&W* station at East Stroudsburg PA. The tracks at the right are for a street trolley. The rail tracks are at the left, behind the station.

from East Stroudsburg station to Bushkill PA, carrying both passengers and freight. The line functioned until 1938. A small section of its railbed is now part of *Railway Avenue Trail* with the recreation area.

In the town of Delaware Water Gap, a resort industry had begun a generation earlier with the *Kittatinny Hotel*, the first large wood hotel overlooking the scenic Water Gap. With railroads now also promoting the Gap as a destination, 16 hotels sprung up in the town by the century's end.

Resort-based agriculture, such as dairying, began to replace subsistence farming. Church, scout, and trade groups lined the banks of the river with rustic summer camps. The remote areas between Scranton and the Stroudsburgs filled with villages and farms.

The brick station in the town of Delaware Water Gap was built to be a grand entry to the resort and its famous hotels, some of which stood directly across the street. A lawn stretched from the station down to the river and boat landing. A footbridge led across to Schellenberger Island in the Delaware River, and its varied amusements.

(Below) A postcard of the town of Delaware Water Gap PA shows *DL&W's* Water Gap station alongside the riverbank on the right, with the town inland and across the roadway from the station. *Kittatinny Hotel*, atop Mt. Minsi on the left, and *Water Gap House* directly above it, look down on the town and the Water Gap. Photo: Courtesy of Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg PA



(Above) This unusual postcard of Kittatinny Hotel at the Water Gap shows **two** *DL&W* tracks along the Delaware River around 1910. One track was lost to the 1955 flood and not rebuilt.



DL&W Water Gap Station.



(Above) Water Gap station looking inland from the river and showing the lawn between the station and the river (*left*) and the proximity of the town across the street (*right*). Water Gap House is atop the mountain.

Despite freight rail connections north to Buffalo and east to New York City, the area never took on heavy industry. Farmers kept busy in winter providing lumber, tanned goods, and ice, and the Water Gap's quarries yielded slate, but most freight trains rumbled right through on the Southern Division. Only the "Milk Train" stopped at local stations to gather its cargo.

The arrival of the automobile then changed the way Americans took their vacations, and the staid old wood hotels of the Water Gap went into decline. Most closed or burnt down by World War I. The Depression years further decreased passenger traffic on the *DL&W*. In 1952, *DL&W* discontinued passenger service to Delaware Water Gap, using East Stroudsburg instead. The completion of the Interstate 80 bridge in December of 1953 then cut Water Gap station off from the town it had once served.

In August of 1955, Hurricanes Connie and Diane slammed into the Poconos. Broadhead Creek rose 30 feet in 15 minutes, and 37 campers, mostly mothers and children, perished in Analomink. In all, 78 lives were lost.

The river rose to the top of the windows of the Water Gap Station. The *DL&W* lost 2 bridges and 60 miles of track; there were 80 landslides. The line re-opened in 29 days, but never fully recovered; the *DL&W* lost a track through the Gap, and it was never rebuilt.

The 1955 hurricane tragedies gave new drive to the longstanding proposal of damming the Delaware River to control its floods. Congress approved the project, and the federal government took over thousands of acres of land, now set aside as this recreation area, to build a dam across the Delaware at Tocks Island and preserve buffer lands around the reservoir.



(Above) Water Gap Station in 1968. The embankment for Interstate 80 is at the right. (Library of Congress photo)



(Above) Detail of Water Gap Station in 1968, when used as a maintenance depot. (Library of Congress photo)



(Above) Woodwork on Water Gap station, track side, in 1968. A flood in 1902 reached the windowsills of the new station; the flood of 1955 reached the top of the windows. (Library of Congress photo)

But the dam was never built!

Today the recreation area preserves nearly 70,000 acres of land and 40 miles of the free-flowing Delaware River, including the Water Gap, for recreational use. The park also preserves numerous buildings, as well as historic cultural landscapes of the river valley.

Of the *DL&W* Railroad and its times, the only remains within Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area are the single track running between the river and PA Route 611 from the Interstate 80 bridge in the town of Delaware Water Gap to Arrow Island overlook at the south boundary of the park. Just north of this section of track, however, and just outside the park, are Water Gap Station, which awaits renewal and can only be glimpsed from the Interstate 80 toll plaza westbound, and the historic railway landscape along Crystal Street in East Stroudsburg (Dansbury) PA, which is easily visited and enjoyed.



(Above) Just beyond Water Gap Station, the *DL&W* track passes under Interstate 80 and enters Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.



(Above, left) The *DL&W* bridge which crosses from Slateford PA to Columbia NJ, seen from the roadbed of Interstate 80 in New Jersey in the 1960s. The Water Gap is in the distance.

(Above, middle) The same *DL&W* bridge seen from the air; this bridge survived the 1955 flood. In the background is the Water Gap, with Mt. Minsi PA to the left, and Mt. Tammany NJ is to the right. PA Route 611 threads along the PA bank on the left, Interstate 80 lines the New Jersey bank at the right. Most of the land in the photograph is within the boundaries of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

(Right, top) The *DL&W* track near Arrow Island, the track splits. The track on the left crosses over the Delaware via the *DL&W*



concrete span (*left*). The train in the photo is on the *other* track, which follows the Delaware River south past Portland PA.

(*Right, bottom*) The same area in 1983.

