A Water Route to National Unity and World Trade

New York State Canals

1797-1798: Erie Canal routes include the Western Reserve Inter-Antiqua Canal, the Western Reserve Inter-Midland Canal, and the Western Reserve Inter-Lake Erie Canal.

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1817-1818: New York State canals include the New York State Canal, the New York State Canal, the New York State Canal, and the New York State Canal.

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A New Kind of National Park

Eric Cavender National Heritage Corridor is one of nearly 30 federally designated national heritage areas. Its purpose is to help preserve and interpret the historical, natural, scenic, and recreational resources reflecting its national significance and to help restore revitalization of canal-side communities.

Eric Cavender National Heritage Corridor includes 940 miles of navigable waterway that make up the New York State Canal System. It includes the Erie, Champlain, Seneca, Oswego, and Seneca canals, as well as their historic alignments and the 32 cities, towns, and villages that touch the canal system. The Corridor encompasses 3,954 square miles in 21 counties and is home to 3.4 million people. It protects New York’s largest population center—Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and the state capital Albany—all grow up along the canal and are within the Corridor today.

The Federal Government does not own or manage national heritage areas and does so with traditional national parks instead: people, businesses, non-profit historical and environmental organizations, towns, cities, counties, and the State of New York work together to protect the Corridor and prepare for its future. This partnership helps ensure that canal-side communities, structures, and other historical and natural features remain preserved and accessible to you and to thousands of others who visit every year.

Things to Do

More than 90 miles of interconnected canal-side trails, river, and lakes are open to navigation from May 1 through November 30. On-water activities include canoeing, rowing, canoeing, kayaking, row boating, and fishing. Watercraft ranging from canoes and small rowboats to fully equipped canal cruisers may be rented throughout the canal system. You don’t need a boat to enjoy the Canandaigua Canal. Waterfront parks and communities and canal locks across the state offer many opportunities to picnic, play, fish, or just sit on the bank and watch the boats go by.

Nearly three-quarters of a 350-mile-long, off-road Canadensis Trail has been completed between Albany and Buffalo. When finished, it will be the nation’s longest multi-use trail. The finished trail is a great access to communities and many connecting trails. The Canadensis Trail is open to hikers, joggers, and cyclists as well as cross-country skiers in winter. Some sections are suitable for in-line skating. The Champs-Élysées Canal Trail is running from the confines of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers at Watervliet to Lake Champlain at Whitehall, is still being developed. The navigable canal system and Canal Trail are operated by the New York State Canal Corporation, a state agency.

Historic sites and museums throughout the Canandaigua Corridor welcome visitors. Four are national parks: Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site and Winter Home, Fort Niagara in Youngstown, and Niagara Battlefield in St. Lawrence and Oswego. These are New York State Heritage Areas in Glens Falls and Utica, the Erie Canal, and the Letchworth State Park. These sites are open to visitors year-round.

To explore the canal system, take some time to stroll through canal towns. Building and public spaces from the heyday of canal commerce still give many communities a distinctive character. Take a look at the historic buildings and public spaces visited by the canal system, including the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor website: www.epaco.gov and www.canalway.org.

Annual events include the Waterfront Highway, downtown Buffalo and Auburn, and the Erie Canal Waterway Week held in May. Each offers a unique opportunity to experience the living heritage of New York’s waterways.

How to Get There

Several intercity highways cross the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. The New York State Thruway (I-90) roughly parallels the Erie Canal route from Albany to Buffalo. Still, the best way to explore canal country by car along roads and by roads that hug the water is to plan your route closely and thread through the hamlets, villages, and cities that grow along the waterway. There are: N.Y. 293 in western New York, N.Y. 35 in the center, N.Y. 54 along the Champlain Canal, N.Y. 46 along the Oswego, and a host of smaller roads in between. The Lakes to Lake Niagara Path along the Champlain Canal and the Mohawk Trail along the eastern end of the Erie have been designated National Scenic Byways. Amtrak provides passenger rail service through the Canandaigua Corridor.