Potomac Heritage

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail

Northumberland, Westmoreland, Lancaster and Richmond counties, Virginia

Explore Virginia's Northern Neck by Bicycle

The Northern Neck is a peninsula bounded by the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers, an area steeped in history and rich in scenic beauty. A network of bicycling routes connecting the birthplace of President George Washington, waterways that ushered in the steamboat era, and evolving landscapes chronicling ancient geology, allow you to explore from the slow lane.

Fish, Farms and Forests

The Northern Neck Heritage Trail Bicycling Route network embraces four counties on the Northern Neck and four centuries, weaving together the history of Captain John Smith's explorations and native sons George Washington, Richard Henry Lee, Robert "King" Carter and James Monroe; the growth and demise of the steamboat era of the late 18th and early 19th centuries; and the lifeways evolved from an economy built upon fishing, farming and forestry and tourism.

During your journey, you will enjoy sandy beaches, wildlife preserves, nature trails, charming villages, historic mansions, museums, vineyards, sailing adventures, boat cruises to small islands, bike ferries, state parks, and the incomparable hospitality of the citizens. Prepare to slow down, relax, and learn about our nation's timeless Potomac heritage, where American Indians maintained a rich culture before Captain John Smith first sailed these waters.

Stratford Hall

Christ Church

Reedville Fishermen's Museum

Colonial Beach pier

Merry Point ferry. Below, vineyard.

Bicycling on the Northern Neck

The route network, part of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, includes a 95-mile "through-route" and eight connecting routes, or loops, of approximately 125 miles. Starting/end points are the historic town of Colonial Beach on the northwest and the Town of Reedville on the southeast where the Potomac meets the Chesapeake Bay.

As a whole, the route network invites you to create your own itinerary focusing on different parts of Northern Neck heritage. The map on the back, the list of references, and the Virginia highway map provide additional information to help you plan your itinerary.

The through-route includes the towns of Heathsville, Kinsale and Montross; the birthplaces of George Washington and of James Monroe; historic Rice's Hotel/Hughlett's Tavern, Stratford Hall and former steamboat landings, as well as Westmoreland State Park, vineyards, and numerous creeks, rivers and public landings. Additional attractions along the loops include Hughlett Point and Hickory Hollow nature preserves; the Sunnybank and Merry Point ferries; several vineyards; Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge lands; historic Christ Church (1735), Menokin (c. 1769) and Leedstown; the Steamboat Era Museum and Mary Ball Washington Museum; and the towns of Kilmarnock, Irvington and Warsaw.

Northern Neck Heritage Trail Bicycling Route Network

Connecting People and Places

The Northern Neck Heritage Trail Bicycling Route network is a segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, a developing network of trails between the broad, gently flowing Potomac River as it empties into the Chesapeake Bay and the Allegheny Highlands in western Pennsylvania. The "braided" Trail network offers opportunities for hiking, bicycling, paddling, horseback riding and cross-country skiing. Other segments of the network include the Mount Vernon Trail and various Potomac Heritage Trail routes in Northern Virginia; the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Towpath; a bicycling route in Southern Maryland; and the Great Allegheny Passage.

Primary Road

Secondary Road- Paved

Secondary Road- Unpaved

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Route

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Route (planned)

Local Loops (and Spurs)

Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail (accessible by permit)

North

0 4 Kilometers

0 4 Miles

Boat launch Ferry Food service

1 Leedstown loop

2 Stratford Hall/Currioman Landing loop

3 Montross/ Naylors Beach/ Warsaw Loop

4 Kinsale/ Sandy Point loop

5 Heathsville Loop

6 Reedville/ Vir-Mar Beach/ Smith's Point Loop

7 Lancaster/ Morattico/ Belle Isle State Park Loop

8 Kilmarnock/ Irvington/ White Stone/ Windmill Point Loop

Mileage for the Northern Neck Heritage Trail Through Route

The route depicted on this map uses public roadways. All bicyclists should wear a helmet; follow all laws and regulations; and use caution, especially on roadways without bicycle lanes. Food and water are available in the towns along the route. This map also shows a few locations where there were convenience stores as of 2013.

Northwest → Southeast

0.0	Colonial Beach
8.0	James Monroe Birthplace
17.2	George Washington Birthplace National Monument
28.1	Westmoreland State Park
30.0	Stratford Hall
35.0	Montross
64.5	Heathsville
77.8	Vir-Mar Beach
79.6	Sunnybank Ferry
83.2	Smith Point
88.1	Reedville

Southeast → Northwest

0.0	Reedville
4.9	Smith Point
8.5	Sunnybank Ferry
10.3	Vir-Mar Beach
23.6	Heathsville
53.1	Montross
58.1	Stratford Hall
60.0	Westmoreland State Park
70.9	George Washington Birthplace National Monument
80.1	James Monroe Birthplace
88.1	Colonial Beach

APRIL 2013

Places of Interest

Reedville-Colonial Beach Route

Reedville and Reedville Fishermen's Museum Walk this fisherman's village and admire the stately sea captains' homes. Learn about the Chesapeake Bay "deadrise" fishing boats and sail on an historic skipjack. Enjoy the museum galleries. www.rfmuseum.org

Vir-Mar Beach A small sandy beach on the Potomac offering strolling, relaxing, and birding opportunities. On clear days, the Smith Island Lighthouse can be seen, as well as the shores of Maryland. www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/siteasp?trail=1&loop=CNN&site=CNN10

Rice's Hotel / Hughlett's Tavern Restored 18th century tavern shows how people lived and traveled in the 18th and 19th century. Now operated as a store and restaurant. www.rhhtfoundation.org

Stratford Hall (1738) Birthplace of Robert E. Lee and home to two Lee signers of the Declaration of Independence. Visit the Great House, the Mill, and the rare Miocene cliffs formation, the last found in only three other places in the world. www.stratfordhall.org

Westmoreland State Park Located on the Potomac, the park includes hiking trails, a variety of campsites (some with water and electricity), fully equipped cabins, water craft rentals and, seasonally, a pool, gift shop and snack bar. www.virginiastateparks.gov

George Washington Birthplace National Monument A site managed by the National Park Service, the complex includes a visitors center with a film, a memorial house, a kitchen house, a farm with a colonial herb and flower garden, and hiking trails. www.nps.gov/gewa

James Monroe Birthplace Markers identify the birthplace of James Monroe, 5th President of the United States. There is also a small museum with Monroe artifacts. www.monroefoundation.org

Colonial Beach Historic town on the Potomac River. Widest point of the Potomac River – 7 miles wide. www.colonialbeachva.net

Loop Tours

Belle Isle State Park Located on the Rappahannock River, the park includes hiking trails, campsites (with water and electricity), a modern bath house, a guest house for overnight rental, a camp store, and kayak, canoe, bicycle and motor boat rentals. www.virginiastateparks.gov

Menokin (c. 1769) Home of Francis Lightfoot Lee, signer of the Declaration of Independence. Visitors center depicting architectural conservation, hiking trails on a 325 acre wildlife refuge. www.menokin.org

Mary Ball Washington Museum & Library Named in honor of Lancaster native and mother of George Washington, the museum features local history exhibits in the old jail, clerks office, Lancaster House, and an extensive genealogy research collection. www.mbwm.org

Christ Church (1735) The best preserved and least altered of Virginia's Colonial parish churches, the church is interpreted along with the life of the builder, Robert "King" Carter. www.christchurch1735.org

Morattico Waterfront Museum Housed in the Morattico General Store building (1901), this local museum focuses on the cultural history of a working watermen's village. www.morattico.org

Steamboat Era Museum Learn about the romantic and exciting era of steamboats and how they impacted life on the Chesapeake Bay and the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers, which served as primary transportation routes. www.steamboatmuseum.org

Planning Your Visit

This overview map shows a through-route and associated loops within four counties on the Northern Neck of Virginia, a network intended to function as a portal to the communities, history, culture, geology and ecology of the region. The list under "More Information" provides additional information to plan your journey.

Seasons to Visit The weather is "bicycle friendly" from April to November, although the temperate climate allows bicycling all year long. Spring and fall are ideal. An occasional summer day can be hot and muggy, but cooling breezes off the rivers mitigate the heat and humidity.

Type of Bicycle All of the routes are on paved surfaces. Either a road bike or hybrid would be appropriate. Give your bike a check-up and make sure it is in good working order.

Traffic Most of the routes are on lightly traveled secondary roads that criss-cross the Northern Neck. Some short sections of the routes are on Route 3 and Route 360 — very busy highways. Use caution when traveling on these portions.

Terrain The terrain is flat to gently rolling. Short hills are encountered when biking first down and then up occasional stream valleys.

Camping There are a dozen campgrounds, including two state parks, scattered throughout the four counties. You are never more than 20 miles from a campsite.

Lodging A variety of options include bed & breakfasts, four-star inns, hotels and marinas. You are never more than 20 miles from overnight accommodations.

For More Information

Northern Neck Tourism Commission, 800-393-6180, www.northernneck.org

Virginia Tourism Corporation, www.virginia.org

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Tidal Potomac River Water Trail Map Set, state parks & preserves 800-933-PARK (cabin and campground reservations) www.dcr.virginia.gov

Northern Neck RiverRide, (last Saturday in September) www.riverride.org

BikeWalk Virginia, www.bikewalkvirginia.org

Northern Neck Planning District Commission, www.nnpdc.org

Virginia Department of Transportation www.virginiadot.org/programs/bk-default.asp

Adventure Cycling Association, Tidewater Potomac Heritage Bicycling Route, a loop connecting Smith Point, VA.; Washington, D.C.; and Point Lookout State Park, MD http://www.adventurecycling.org/routes/index.cfm

National Park Service, George Washington Birthplace National Monument, 804-224-1732, www.nps.gov/gewa

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, www.nps.gov/pohe

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail www.nps.gov/cajo

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