

“Drive-thru” History A Self-Guided Auto Tour

Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (NRA) has hundreds of fascinating historic structures built over three centuries, hopefully more than enough to arouse the interest of even the most casual tourist.

Included within the park’s boundaries are three Dutch colonial stone dwellings from the mid-18th century, one of the first solar houses in the country and the homes of artist Marie Zimmermann and philosopher Charles S. Peirce. However, visitors and staff are often unaware of these treasures, or may not understand and appreciate their value. After all, this is a national recreation area, we are reminded, where people come to hunt, fish, canoe, and hike.

You may not need boots or paddles, but “windshield touring” and heritage tourism are forms of recreation as much as hiking and canoeing. Visitors to Delaware Water Gap NRA were enjoying the scenery, but had little idea what they were looking at. To enhance this recreational pursuit, we needed to find a way to introduce the historic buildings of the park to our visitors.

The introduction offered its own challenges. At places like Independence Hall or Lincoln’s Home, visitors generally come with at least some knowledge of the events or people whose stories are told there. They expect this history to be preserved. At Delaware Water Gap NRA, the stories are less well-known and the value of preserving that dilapidated house down the road may be harder — at first — to grasp. But the park has a special responsibility to tell these stories and preserve these places.

The park was established in 1965 to operate a recreation area surrounding a 36-mile long reservoir to be created by the construction of a controversial dam across the Delaware River. To make way for the dam, many historic homes — and even whole communities — were demolished. The decision to build the dam was reversed, but the decision to demolish the homes and villages could not be. Preserving what remains of the tangible evidence of the history of this area and sharing the region’s stories is a commitment the park has made to its neighbors.

So what to do? Somehow we needed to provide information on the historic structures in the park and, hopefully, raise awareness of, and support for, historic preservation. All of which had to be done at little cost. The idea of a self-guided auto tour book that would educate the public (and staff!) and promote casual windshield touring as a legitimate form of recreation surfaced.

The Tour — Take it Yourself



62. BRODHEAD-HELLER FARM

Established in 1770s
Frequently altered and expanded
Private Residence

Garret Brodhead, a Revolutionary War soldier, originally settled this farmstead. The current house was probably constructed in the mid-1800s in the Greek Revival style with some Italianate style details. Evidence of the original structure is still visible within the present house. Like roads, farmhouses were built close to the hills in order to avoid using land suitable for agricultural use. Note, too, the springhouse behind the main house. The fertile, broad river flats enabled Delaware Valley farmers on the Pennsylvania side to take greater advantage of agricultural technology and to prosper more than their neighbors across the river. Except for a brief period, this farm remained in the family.

Retrace your route back to Route 209.

Turn right and continue 1.0 miles to a farmstead with a large two-story house on your right. Pull into the gravel pullout on the left to view the farmstead across the road.

Along the next stretch, some clearings are peppered with small Eastern red cedar trees, “planted” by birds that consume the tree’s berries (and thus spread its seeds). Notice how the Delaware River on your left appears and disappears as you travel. Often you are not looking at the entire river width, but a meandering branch that is separated from the main “stem” by an island. The Delaware River is a “braided” river; branching and coming together as it surrounds numerous islands and forms wetlands. This provides diverse, peaceful habitat for wildlife such as great blue herons, Canada geese, common egrets, and common mergansers.

In 1993, the decision was made to produce the tour book. But what to include? Natural features such as waterfalls and geologic formations? Cultural landscape features such as rock walls and remnants of old orchards? All historic buildings, the most important or significant ones, or the most accessible and visible ones along the main roads?

The original draft had 33 stops and included just the most significant buildings that were visible and accessible from the two main park roads — Old Mine Road along the New Jersey side and Route 209 along the Pennsylvania side. A cultural landscape specialist then supplied additional information, and a couple of dedicated volunteers revised and edited the draft adding even more. The result is an auto tour and field guide that also serves as a park reference. There are 84 stops and optional side routes. For simplicity's sake, the guide was organized as a single tour allowing visitors to stop and start as they wished. Prior to publication, the guide was reviewed by local historical societies in a series of small, informal meetings. A designer was hired to do the layout and final edit. The attractive end product has a lively narrative and a comprehensive collection of historical photos.

“Exploring Delaware Water Gap History, A Field Guide to the Historic Structures and

Cultural Landscapes of Delaware Water Gap NRA” was finally published in September 2000. Now all we had to do was get the word out.

Fortunately, our timing was great. Three major special events — the Peters Valley Craft Fair, Millbrook Days, and Van Campen Day — were already scheduled and provided the opportunity for book signings to promote and sell the guide. Sales got off to a good start and jumped again thanks to media coverage of the guide's publication in the local newspapers, television, and radio spots. By spring 2002, we had sold almost 1,000 copies and were revising and reprinting the guide. In addition to serving our recreational auto-touring visitors, the field guide works as a park reference for both park staff and prospective historic property lessees.

In the future, we hope to make an audio recording of the field guide available — something for windshield tourists and farsighted motorists alike.

Susan A. Kopczynski is the park historian at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. She wrote “Exploring Delaware Water Gap History, A Field Guide to the Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes of Delaware Water Gap NRA,” in cooperation with Eastern National, with book layout and design by William G. Dobe, Archemie Planning and Architecture.

Barbara A. Campagna

Sympathy, Harmony, and New Architecture

Can sympathy, harmony, and new architecture live happily ever after in a national park setting? This is the question designers and administrators have been debating since the National Park Service was created in 1916, and even as early as 1872 when Yellowstone became our first national park. Although national recreation areas like Delaware Water Gap are a relatively new concept in National Park Service history, its architects have also struggled with this question. The park's search for the elusive “appropriate” architectural style for new buildings is perhaps more complicated than for typical

national parks because of the diverse collection of both architectural styles and social conventions that are found within its boundaries. With no dominant architectural style in the park, is it acceptable to introduce a new style? Is it better to blend with the natural resources and reflect another time? Should only buildings that are functionally pure and apparently “low cost” be allowed?

The architectural cultural heritage of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (NRA) does not constitute a style as much as a vernacular. Its form is inseparable from its content — from an authentic country village at