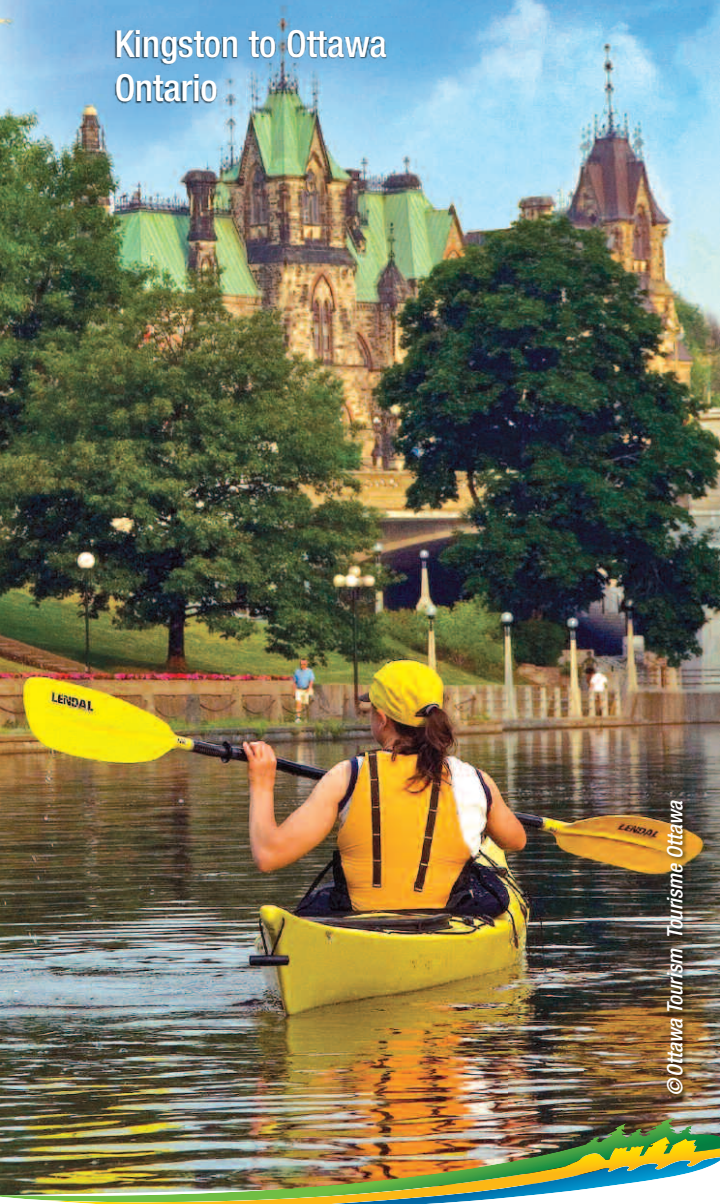




Rideau Canal

National Historic Site

Kingston to Ottawa
Ontario



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Welcome to the Rideau Canal

The Rideau Canal waterway is a boater's paradise, attracting pleasure boats from across North America to travel its 202 km length. The Rideau Canal; a National Historic Site, a Canadian Heritage River and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, consists of a series of beautiful lakes and rivers connected by canals. It stretches from Kingston, to Ottawa, Canada's capital.

Maintained and operated by Parks Canada, it is the oldest continuously operated canal in North America. The locks are operated today much as they were when first opened in 1832. Each lock is unique and the lock staff are always ready to offer assistance. Whether you visit by boat, car, bicycle or on foot, the Rideau Canal has something for you.



UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Rideau Canal is considered of universal value by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is Canada's 14th and Ontario's only World Heritage Site.

Like Versailles in France, the Acropolis in Athens, Greece and Machu Picchu in Peru, the Rideau Canal is of sufficient importance to be the responsibility of the international community as a whole.

Through a stroke of brilliance, Lt. Col. John By envisioned and built a canal that would join the Cataraqui and Rideau Rivers. The 'slackwater' technology avoided the need for extensive excavation. The Rideau Canal is the best-preserved 'slackwater' canal in North America, and the only canal from the great 19th-century canal-building era that still operates along its original route and with most of its original structures intact. This engineering marvel and the fortifications built at Kingston to protect it was constructed at a time when Great Britain and the United States of America vied for control on the north of the American continent.



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History

The Rideau Canal was conceived in the wake of the War of 1812. It was to be a war-time supply route providing a secure water route for troops and supplies from Montreal to reach the settlements of Upper Canada and the strategic naval dockyard at Kingston.

In 1826, England sent Lieutenant Colonel John By of the Royal Engineers to supervise canal construction. Thousands of Irish immigrants, French Canadians and Scottish stonemasons were among the labourers who helped push the canal through the rough bush, swamps and rocky wilderness of Eastern Ontario.

Opened in 1832, the Rideau Canal was one of the greatest engineering feats of the 19th century. When the fear of war passed, the canal soon became a major artery for regional commerce. This role continued for several decades but began to decline with the completion of the St. Lawrence canal system and the introduction of the railway and steamboats. Today, the log rafts, barges and steamers have given way to pleasure boats, while roads provide easy access to lockstations by land.

The Tay Canal, an addition to the Rideau was a private venture built by enterprising settlers of Perth. Connected by five wooden locks, it linked up with the Rideau Canal in 1834, ensuring Perth's participation in the commercial trade of Upper Canada. It was later replaced by a second Tay Canal.



Setting

From Lake Ontario at Kingston, the Rideau begins its ascent of the Cataraqui River system. It passes through the Cataraqui Marsh, an extensive wetland in the St. Lawrence Lowlands. At Kingston Mills, the most southerly lockstation, boats climb the flight of locks, past towering granite cliffs, onto the Frontenac Axis, part of the rugged Canadian Shield. From lake to lake, the canal rises to its highest point, near Newboro, in Upper Rideau Lake.

At the summit, the scenery changes. The canal gently descends through the Rideau Lakes and the Rideau River. It passes through farmlands of the Smiths Falls limestone plain and meanders through shallow marshes, alive with birds and wildlife.

Equally interesting are neighbouring towns and villages. The architectural heritage reflects years of canal history, which includes country hospitality and numerous festivities for visitors to enjoy.

The remaining portion of the canal provides a pleasant transition from rural Ontario to the urban setting of the Nation's Capital, culminating in the majestic staircase of eight locks at the foot of Parliament Hill.



Operation and Water Management

Careful water management is crucial to safe boating and the abatement of serious flooding.

The Rideau system relies on natural rivers, lakes and 19 km of canal cuts to provide a navigable channel with an available water depth of up to 1.5 m (5 ft.) at chart datum. Canal staff maintain this water level throughout the navigation season.

Starting at Kingston, 14 locks raise vessels a total of 50 m to Newboro, the highest point in Upper Rideau Lake. From Upper Rideau Lake, 31 locks lower vessels 83 m to the Ottawa River. From Lower Rideau Lake, two locks raise vessels 7.6 m into the Tay Canal.

Lockmasters and their staff continue the tradition of hand-operating the locks at most of the 24 lockstations. The exceptions are Newboro, Smiths Falls Combined and Black Rapids.

Locks can accommodate boats up to 27.4 m (90 ft.) in length and 7.9 m (26 ft.) in width. The navigation season extends from Victoria Day weekend in May to mid-October.



Visitor Facilities

Lockstations provide washrooms, parking, first-aid, overnight mooring and picnicking. Several lockstations also offer ice and/or shore power. Boaters may camp overnight at or near all lockstations, except Ottawa Locks.

Short trails are located at Hogs Back, Smiths Falls, Merrickville, Beveridges, Newboro and Jones Falls lockstations and on Colonel By Island. Burritts Rapids features the Tip-to-Tip self-guiding trail, while Hartwells is connected to the Canal Promenade trail, with its attractive, on-site signs. Most lockstations feature barrier-free access to their facilities for disabled persons.

Visit the Rideau, North America's oldest operating 19th century canal and through exhibits, museums, restored historic buildings, publications and trails, experience Canadian heritage.

