

GREAT BRIDGE LOCKS AREA

General Description:

The Great Bridge Locks area consists of the area adjacent to the Corps of Engineers locks, which is located slightly to the west of the bridge crossing the canal on Battlefield Boulevard. The locks serve as a transition from the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River to the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal which is a component of the Intracoastal Waterway. The canal was constructed in the 1850's to connect the upper part of the North Landing River to the Elizabeth River, a major tributary to the James River and the Chesapeake Bay. The North Landing River drains south to the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina.

The town of Great Bridge came into existence in 1729, and was located just south of the Southern Branch along what is now Battlefield Boulevard. Just to the north of the bridge, American troops defeated British forces in the first battle of the Revolutionary War fought on Virginia Soil in 1775. The battlefield site is slated to become a future visitor center and park.

The Albemarle-Chesapeake Canal carries heavy commercial and residential boat traffic all year long. Great Bridge is a popular stop-over spot for boaters, due to the presence of boat-related services, restaurants, grocery stores, and laundromats.

Specific Points of Interest in the Great Bridge Locks Area

(1) Great Bridge Locks

Where: Take Battlefield Boulevard (either north or south depending upon departure) to the Great Bridge Bridge. A good viewing spot is the area adjacent to the old fire station, now home to Chesapeake Youth Services on Reservation Road.

Significance: Note that the locks are physically located to the west of the Great Bridge Bridge. Looking to the east you will see the high rise bridge span of the Great Bridge Bypass / Chesapeake Expressway. The Great Bridge Locks Park is located to the north of the canal, and to the west of Battlefield Boulevard.

(1) Great Bridge Locks Park

Where: Take your last right from Battlefield Boulevard South onto Locks Road, right before you cross the Bridge.

Significance: This 19-acre park is owned by the City. The Park provides a two-lane boat ramp, picnic shelters, and a pedestrian trail. There is a large play area, provisions for indoor toilets, and fishing and crabbing areas. There is a set of risers to permit spectators to view the locks' operations.

(2) Museum/Visitor Center

Where: Although this site is not currently accessible due to the construction of the new bridge, it is located on the east side of Battlefield Boulevard on the north side of the canal. It is located just south of the Island Warf Shopping Center.

Significance: The goal of the proposed museum and visitor's center is to preserve the battlefield site and to promote the historic significance of the region.

(2) New Bridge

Where: The new bridge will replace the existing bridge which crosses the Albemarle-Chesapeake Canal.

Significance: The existing 10-foot high, 2-lane bridge was built in 1943 and is operated by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Army Corps projects the new five-lane bridge to be complete in September 2003. After completion, the City will take possession of the Bridge. Estimated annual maintenance costs for the bridge are \$300,000 a year.

(2) Trail

Where: The proposed trail will be located along the north shore of the Canal.

Significance: The 8-mile long trail will utilize land to the east of Battlefield Boulevard and along the north shoreline of the canal. The trail will be implemented through an agreement between the Corps of Engineers and the City. The trail will begin at the Visitors Center and extend along the shoreline east towards the Virginia Beach city line.

(3) Bells Mill Park

Where: The proposed park is located on the site of an old City landfill on the north side of Albemarle Drive behind the municipal center. Access to the site is limited. Anyone wishing to tour the site should contact the Parks and Recreation Department for a key to the fence and a list of available times.

Significance: The park site is currently under review by the City for use as a public park. The park would be located on a former landfill site and would be available for passive recreational uses only in order to minimize disturbance to the landfill's cap. Currently, the site is utilized by school running teams for practice. The park has extensive waterfront and offers commanding views of Bells Mill Creek and the Southern Branch.

Great Bridge Locks Area Tour

