

NORTH RIVER CANAL SYSTEM, PEDLAR  
GAP RUN AQUEDUCT

HAER No. VA-61-B

Located in the canal path running parallel  
to and on the east side of the Maury  
(North) River on the west side of the  
town of  
Buena Vista  
Rockbridge County  
Virginia

HAER  
VA  
82-2011  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
Northeast Region  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NORTH RIVER CANAL SYSTEM, Pedlar Gap Run Aqueduct

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**Location:** Located in the canal path running parallel to and on the east side of the Maury (North) River on the west side of the town of Buena Vista, Rockbridge County, Virginia.

**UTM:** Pedlar Gap Run Aqueduct 17.644060.4176290

**Quad:** Buena Vista, Virginia

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1858

**Present Owner:** CSX Transportation, Inc.  
Real Estate Division  
500 Water Street, SC J350  
Jacksonville, Florida 32203

**Present Use:** Canal abandoned. The abutments for the Pedlar Gap Run Aqueduct were reused to support railroad bridges during the 1880s. Much of the canal tow path serves for this now abandoned rail line.

**Significance:** The North River Navigation represents a rare example of stone lock construction in Virginia, exhibiting remarkable similarities to earlier structures of the Potomac Canal at Great Falls, Virginia. It was, moreover, an unusually late example of canal building, erected in an era when these systems were being rapidly superseded by railroads.

Part of a state-sponsored project to connect the James and Ohio Rivers, the canal extended navigation northward from the James River to Lexington, Virginia, transforming the area's economy. Furthermore, the presence of the canal seems to have been an important factor in determining the trajectory of the railroad which, in the 1880s, superseded it, incorporating the old path towpath and aqueduct abutments in its construction.

It was over the North River Navigation that General Stonewall Jackson's body was conveyed after his death in May of 1863 from wounds received at the Battle of Chancellorsville. One of the best preserved canal systems in the state, these features reveals much about lock and aqueduct construction seen only in fragments elsewhere. Additionally, the technology used here is much the same as that found more than a half century earlier and attests to the soundness of design adopted by early canal engineers in Virginia.

**Project Information:** This documentation was undertaken in 1991 in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement by the Army Corps of Engineers, Norfolk District, to mitigate the affects of the Buena Vista floodwall/levee project. Charles M. Downing was responsible for the historical research, and Donald W. Linebaugh provided administrative oversight. Downing and Linebaugh are employees of the Center for Archaeological Research, College of William and

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Mary. Willie Graham and Mark R. Wenger, consultants to the Center for Archaeological Research, undertook the physical analysis, recordation, and photographic documentation of the canal system. The Center for Archaeological Research subcontracted with Telemark, Inc. to perform this work for the Corps of Engineers.

Donald W. Linebaugh  
Co-Director  
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With construction underway in 1858, this aqueduct carried the North River Navigation canal over Pedlar Gap Run. A wooden trough spanned ten feet three inches between the two stone abutments. At the upstream end, these abutments splayed somewhat to facilitate the flow of the stream. Under the timber span, the two abutments ran parallel to one another. Beyond the span they splayed back rather more drastically, acting as a retaining wall to secure the banks of the stream.

The surviving stonework of this aqueduct is dry-laid, yellow-gray limestone, roughly dressed on the exposed faces and pointed with a yellowish mortar dating from the initial period of construction. No evidence of tool marks or wedges used in the quarrying process is visible here, unlike the stones at the Indian Gap Run structure.

On the north end of the western abutment, pockets in the stonework and traces of mortar provide evidence for a vanished, frame trough. At the base of the span was a sill member, the slot of which is still visible on the northeast abutment. The sill carried a series of girders which spanned the watercourse. Positioned slightly inward from the end of this sill was the first girder which extended into the stonework to a point about 20 inches past the face of the sill. On the north end of the west abutment is a regular patch of mortar which reveals the presence of a ten inch vertical member placed snug against the stonework without the stone shimming observed on the Indian Gap Run feature. It seems that this post was merely the last in a series of vertical members that once formed the sides of the timber span, for mortar ghosts on the northeast abutment and the cutting back of the stone indicate that the post in that corner was ten inches square, with a spacing to the next post of 1 foot 2 inches, measured inside to inside. A similar condition is evident on the south end of the eastern abutment at Indian Gap Run, but here the evidence is much clearer.

The canal seems to have tapered as it approached the aqueduct, since the one remaining section of revetment angles back toward the railroad on the northeast quadrant of the crossing, even though the center-line of the canal remained parallel to the tow path (presently the railroad bed). To achieve a transition between the sloping earthen sides of the canal and the narrowed, rectilinear channel of the aqueduct, it was necessary to splay these cheek walls outward in plan and in section as they moved away from the aqueduct.

Only the north portions of the abutments on the east and west sides of the stream survive, these being now a portion of the underpinning and abutment for the C&O Railroad bridge at Pedlar Gap Run. These remaining sections of stonework may have lost one or more of their uppermost courses. The south end of the west stone abutment survives in fragmentary condition; that on the east has been completely pulled down. Portions of these features were evidently salvaged for use in landscaping of the Secrist Athletic Field nearby. All traces of the wooden span have disappeared.

The wooden span of the canal may have been dismantled when portions of the abutment were used in bridging the stream for what is now the C&O Railroad in the 1880s. The present timber bridge probably dates to the period immediately after World War II. The stream bed has been filled with large gravel to an elevation nearly level with the bottom of the canal. Likewise, a substantial deposit of fill has sealed the end of the canal at this point. Immediately north of the aqueduct, an access road and concrete bridge have been built over the creek. Just south of the aqueduct, a concrete bridge for the Norfolk and Western Railroad was built, this dating to the post-World War II era.

Site Plan

