

Map guides way on the Jones Falls Trail



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Over this past summer I learned about something that surrounded me throughout my years in Baltimore: the Jones Falls Trail.

It all began when Janet Felsten handed me a fold-out map one Saturday at the Waverly Farmers Market off Greenmount Avenue. She told me I needed to see it, and she was correct. Maps are fascinating documents, and this one piqued my interest. She also created the document.

She explained that a series of walkways and pedestrian bridges had been constructed that allows a Baltimore-curious walker/hiker to explore the watersheds of Jones Falls and Herring Run, which are components of the greater Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The map Felsten produced, and got local philanthropic organizations (Abell, Roswell and Cape foundations and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy) to financially underwrite, is a welcome and helpful guide to exploring Baltimore.

I do not pretend to have traversed all the paths listed here. If nothing else, this combined map/guide is worth a good read. It's a marvelous guide to wandering all the lesser known parts of Druid Hill Park and other destinations.

"This 12-mile walking/running/biking trail joins on-street bike routes ... [and] gives access to varied neighborhoods with homegrown assets. Think of the trail as the spine from which to discover recreation, culture, commerce and community features," the guide suggests.

The map boils down Baltimore history concisely: "The Jones Falls helped power Baltimore's industrial revolution. ... By the 1800s, the falls was home to 12 merchant mills. By the late 1820s, Baltimore had become the largest flour market in the world."

If you wander through the Jones Falls Valley in Baltimore, say under the Cedar Avenue Bridge, you might spot a few remnants of these old mills that

helped put bread on the table for so many people.

More evident are the later mills, the textile mills that wove the cotton for the canvas sails used on ships and so many other industrial uses.

I wonder how much military-grade canvas made along the Jones Falls during World War II made it across the Atlantic Ocean and the Allied D-Day landing on the coast of Normandy in 1944?

So what are some of the recommendations? Don't look for any national grocery chains to be listed on this map. It's all about places like Motzi Bread at Guilford and 28th (a bit off the leafy trails, but not so far) and the Open Works maker space at Greenmount and Oliver.

This map tells the reader where to find the Enoch Pratt Free Libraries from downtown to Pennsylvania Avenue and Roland Park. As you might expect, there are four bicycle shops listed. The map details that while the Jones Falls is lush, luxuriantly overgrown and downright bucolic for much of its run, not all of it is a romantic stream winding through a busy city.

"Beginning in 1915, the stream was buried [under] a 29-foot wide concrete tunnel so that the Fallsway Boulevard could be built on top," the map states. "In 1956, Baltimore captured federal highway funds to build I-83, the tunnel was extended to Charles Street [and] sections of I-83 were elevated above stream, hiding it from easy view and from public consciousness."

Indeed, the elevated highway subjugated the Jones Falls to the status of a semi-hidden stream.

Over the past decades, walkers, runners and cyclists have become aware of the Jones Falls presence, even if so much of it downtown is now encased in concrete and masonry.

I've been told that intrepid kayakers have dared to sail down the tunneled portions of the Falls all the way from Pennsylvania Station to the Inner Harbor. This would be a trip along a dark cavity straight out of the final scenes of the film "Phantom of the Opera" or the sewers of Vienna in "The Third Man."

It's also likely to be illegal and dangerous. But something makes me want to try it. Maybe.



A boardwalk extension of the Jones Falls Trail. **JERRY JACKSON/BALTIMORE SUN**