

CIVIL WAR TRAILS

Discover Waterways to Freedom in Norfolk

Follow the New Trail to Find Important Sites

Whether travelers walk, bicycle, use the city's "Net" bus, their own car — or a tailored Segway tour, Norfolk's new "Waterways to Freedom," which requires approximately one and a half hours, is a must-do tour. Researched, compiled, and written by Cassandra Newby-Alexander, associate professor of history at Norfolk State University, the tour is so new that signage hasn't yet gone up — which makes early-spring visitors aware they are witnessing something exciting still in the making.

With its complex and interwoven waterways, Virginia functioned as the gateway from eastern North Carolina and provided a starting point for slaves seeking freedom. Virginia's Underground Railroad network succeeded in sending hundreds, if not thousands, of runaways to areas as far away as Canada's Ontario province, where most started new lives. Norfolk was a key station in Virginia's Underground Railroad.

To get the maximum from a visit, travelers should download the tour onto an iPod; visitors without an iPod can get one on-site for a refundable deposit. Listen to the 19th-century narrative in Dr. Newby-Alexander's mellow voice at each stop along the tour, and correlate that with what is before you at the sites. Here are some of the stops you'll make.



As seen in this 19th century map, the waterways surrounding Norfolk and Portsmouth provided pathways for slaves to escape to the North.

