

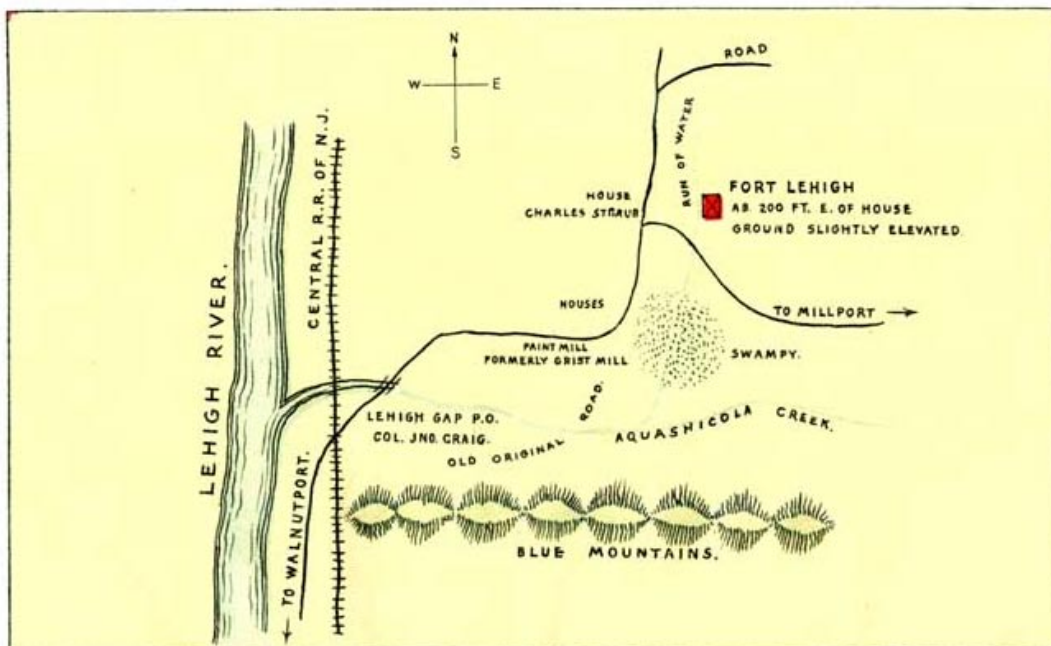
# The History of the Lehigh Gap

By Wendi Blewett, DLNHC Museum Collections Manager

LEHIGH - There are many fascinating geological features in the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, but you don't need to be a geologist to appreciate them! Every time you walk on the D&L Trail, you are walking on something only made possible because of one of those geological features. The D&L Trail roughly follows the towpaths of the Lehigh and Delaware Canals, waterway transportation systems built to carry coal from coal fields in the anthracite region to market in major cities. Anthracite coal exists in this region because of the mountain building events that also gave us the Appalachian Mountain range. If you're walking near Lehigh Gap, you're walking through yet another fascinating geological feature — a water gap!

Lehigh Gap is a water gap located at the junction of four townships (and three counties): 1) Lehigh Township, Northampton County, to the southeast; 2) Washington Township, Lehigh County, to the southwest; 3) East Penn Township, Carbon County, to the northwest, and 4) Lower Towamensing Township, Carbon County, to the northeast. The gap was created by the Lehigh River cutting through the Appalachian Mountain range. A water gap is usually indicative of a river that is older than its current topography, meaning the river existed before the mountain range did, so as the mountain grew, the flowing water eroded any land growth before it accumulated. Lehigh Gap is part of Kittatinny Ridge, a 250-mile-long ridge that extends from New York State to northern Maryland. In Pennsylvania, the ridge is also called Kittatinny Mountain or Blue Mountain.

There are hundreds of water gaps along this section of the Appalachian Mountains. In 1930 Karl Ver Steeg researched these gaps and identified 34 major water gaps in the Northern Appalachians, but we are most familiar with the water gaps created by the Delaware River, Lehigh River, Schuylkill River, Susquehanna River, and/or Juniata River. Wind gaps are also very prevalent throughout this section of the range and were created in the same fashion as water gaps, but by ancient rivers that no longer exist along the same path.



SITE OF FORT LEHIGH.

the area around Lehigh Gap, including the Iron-Ore Metallic Paint Company and later, the Prince Metallic Paint Company. The paint ore resembled blue limestone, and a partial analysis of the ore from the Prince Metallic Paint Company showed significant amounts of metallic iron, silica, and carbon dioxide. It was also described as pyritic. The first cement mill in the region was built at Lehigh Gap after a pocket of cement rock was discovered nearby. Hydraulic cement was manufactured here from 1826 to 1830, but after resources became depleted, production moved to Siegfried's. Four kilns built against the bank of the Lehigh Canal remained after the mill was abandoned but were destroyed in the flood of 1841. This cement was essential in repairing leaks in the Lehigh Canal.

The landscape of Lehigh Gap also made it a prime vacation destination and industrial site. This unfortunately led to the degradation and destruction of the environment there, but over the past 40 years efforts have been made to revive the area there and encourage the re-establishment of flora and fauna. A future blog will go into detail about the effects of human activity at the gap, both negative and positive.

