Letters To The Editor

Potomac Sanctuary

The discussion concerning the construction of a Parkway along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal arouses many people. Fishermen, hunters, hikers, campers, ornithologists, and others who like to get acquainted with nature first-hand and on their own are opposed to making a highway out of this sanctuary.

The stretch of 185 miles of country from Washington, D. C., to Cumberland, Md., is one of the most fascinating and picturesque in the Nation. The river and its islands are part of the charm. The cliffs, the streams, the draws, the benches and beaches, the swamps are another part. The birds and game, the blaze of color in the spring and fall, the cattails in the swamp, the blush of buds in late winter—these are also some of the glory of the place.

In the early twenties Mr. Justice Brandeis traveled the canal and river by canoe to Cumberland. It was for him exciting adventure and recreation. Hundreds of us still use this sanctuary for hiking and camping. It is a refuge, a place of retreat, a long stretch of quiet and peace at the Capitol’s back door—a wilderness area where man can be alone with his thoughts, a sanctuary where he can commune with God and with nature, a place not yet marred by the roar of wheels and the sound of horns.

It is a place for boys and girls, men and women. One can hike 15 or 20 miles on a Sunday afternoon, or sleep on high dry ground in the quiet of a forest, or just go and sit with no sound except water lapping at one’s feet. It is a sanctuary for everyone who loves woods—a sanctuary that would be utterly destroyed by a fine two-lane highway.

I wish the man who wrote your editorial of January 3, 1954, approving the parkway would take time off and come with me. We would go with packs on our backs and walk the 185 miles to Cumberland. I feel that if your editor did, he would return a new man and use the power of your great editorial page to help keep this sanctuary untouched.

One who walked the canal its full length could plead that cause with the eloquence of a John Muir. He would get to know muskrats, badgers, and fox; he would hear the roar of wind in thicket; he would see strange islands and promontories through the fantasy of fog; he would discover the glory there is in the first flower of spring, the glory there is even in a blade of grass; the whistling wings of ducks would make silence have new values for him. Certain it is that he could never acquire that understanding going 60, or even 25, miles an hour.

WILLIAM O. DOUGLAS.
Washington.