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THE NATCHEZ TRACE

THE OLD TRAIL

THE NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY is one of the units of the National Park System. Its birthday, May 18, 1938, represents a climax in the history of the Natchez Trace rather than the beginning.

At the mention of roads through Mississippi and especially through Madison County, one of the first names that comes to mind is the Natchez Trace. The word trace was a relatively common one in the 1700's and 1800's; it described slightly worn paths made by animals going to sources of salt and water.

"Going West" is our national epic. During the years 1783 to 1819, while diplomats and statesmen were arguing over our national boundaries, pioneer homeseekers were crossing the mountains into the Old Southwest. They settled and populated the lands to and beyond the Mississippi River. Within a generation, they had created five new Commonwealths: Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. All had been admitted to the Union as States by 1819.

Peopling of the Old Southwest left many landmarks, high points in the historic process which transformed a region larger than France.

From a "howling wilderness" to a land of farm or plantation, village or city, trail or road, a land which millions of Americans call home, these landmarks are many and various. One of the best remembered is the Natchez Trace, a road which for two decades was used by the men and women who created the Old Southwest and made it an imperishable part of the Union. Long before the white man came to the Old Southwest, Indians used the trail which was to become the Natchez Trace. Indians who lived in what is now middle Tennessee traded with tribes of the lower Mississippi. In so doing, they beat out a trail which the white man found useful.

Eventually, it became a segment of the most important means of overland communication between the National Capital and the distant frontier outposts in Mississippi and Louisiana. For more than two decades, it was the most significant highway of the Old Southwest, and one of the more important in the nation.

It was an avenue of exploration, international rivalry, warfare, trade, settlement, and development. This old road, with its distinctive landmarks, forests and canebrakes, ridges and swamps, recalls an early and heroic chapter in our national epic.

Today the old pioneer road is being paralleled by a national parkway, an elongated park wherein are preserved some existing parts of the old trail and many landmarks associated with events and people who used it during a stirring and eventful period of American history.

Despite the color, drama, and adventure associated with it, the Natchez Trace, except for those who lived along its torturous course, for a century was all but forgotten. Tennesseans, Mississippians, and Alabamians who had heard exciting and gory tales from the lips of men who had adventured along the Old Trace, added to and passed them on. In such a fashion, its history became a part of the folklore of the region, but never elicited nationwide popular interest. Singularly enough, it was neglected by writers of western fiction and by the movies and radio.

Why then did Congress choose to commemorate the Natchez Trace rather than one of the better known historic roads? The answer is, as will appear later in this history, that an ambitious and alert Congressman happened at a propitious time to "hit on an idea".

Alfred Galloway left North Carolina about 1830, heading Southwest. He was in a wagon train of some five families, and he brought with him five sons. One of those was Dr. James Hervey Galloway who was my great grandfather.

The trip down may have taken more than a year, and the wagon train probably stopped at least once to make a crop before continuing. Its course from Lockwoods Folly River was southwest through South Carolina and into Georgia, then west through North Alabama. It probably hit the Natchez Trace somewhere near Tupelo, Mississippi.

The original Galloway house was built a mile North of the Trace and was west of the Galloway Cemetery. If so, another large farmhouse was later built. The one dad pointed out to my older brother was well

beyond the cemetery.

From the wilderness tracks of wild animals it came, this road to somewhere they referred to, through clenched teeth, as the Devil's Backbone. It was the vital link from Natchez to Nashville, a trail of sickness and of death alone, a pathway through canebrakes and forests, the road back home.

Many feet walked here, some bare, some clad in moccasins and boots. The surrounding countryside had once been the territory of the Natchez, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Indians. The Choctaws, thanks to the treaty of Ft. Adams in 1801, were persuaded to sell 15 million acres of their land for a single dollar. After the boundary was further surveyed, the tribe was paid more: "15 pieces of strouds (blankets), 3 rifles, 250 pounds of powder, 250 pounds of lead, one bridle, one mare's saddle, and one black handkerchief". By 1834, the Indians had moved onto the West, but they had given permission to open a road through their lands and beat out a trail that the White man found useful.

In 1713, a French trading post established at Natchez and Ft. Rosalie was built by Bienville. In 1730, the Choctaws went to Natchez to help the French, and thus the first recorded trip was made over any part of the Natchez Trace.

It really was not until the coming of the "Kaintucks" that the trace was actually trampled into a crude sort of roadway. This early venture in interstate road building produced little more than a snake infested, mosquitoe beset, robber-hounded, Indian-pestered passageway through the forest. A man gambled his most important possession -- his life -- when

he dared to journey it.

The Kaintucks were hard drinking, hard-working, hard fighting boatmen from Ohio and Kentucky who floated flour, pork, tobacco, hemp, and iron down the mighty Mississippi to Natchez and New Orleans. Once downriver, they would dismantle their great rafts, sell the logs for building material, and begin the arduous six week march to Nashville toting a belly full of liquor, a head full of hope, and a fat dollar bag over their shoulder. They had to walk or ride those four hundred and fifty miles.

Andrew Jackson once said, "I never met a Kentuckian who did not have a rifle, a pack of cards, and a bottle of whiskey". Yet it was their footsteps and sweat that carved a passage where Andrew Jackson himself would march bodly into the folklore of America. In 1812, he marched his troops down the Trace to Natchez to protect New Orleans from a Spanish attack which never came. On the bitter cold and hungry march back to Tennessee, he acquired his nickname "Old Hickory". Then three years later, he did defeat the British in New Orleans and marched up the Trace again, this time triumphantly, to his home, the Hermitage, in Nashville.

The Trace was for a long time an important link for communication between the Mississippi Territory and Washington, D.C. Mail service was begun in 1800. Two week service took four weeks and too many times the report said "mail failed to arrive" or "the rider is presumed lost".

So Thomas Jefferson, who was President in 1801, ordered the U.S. Army

to clear a road. Seven years later, Congress appropriated six thousand dollars for improvements, and the trail suddenly became an important frontier highway.

The government encouraged the construction of inns or stands as they were then called, along the Trace. With the signing of the Choctaw Treaty in 1805, the first stand was built and by 1820, fifty were in operation. These stands,operated by both Indians and Whites, were crude structures with the exception of Mount Locust and Red Bluff.

. Connelly's Tavern was perhaps the first of the overnight stands. Its rules were simple: four pence a night for bed, six pence for supper, no more than five to sleep in a bed, no boots to be worn in bed, organ grinders to sleep in the wash house, no dogs allowed upstairs, and no beer allowed in the kitchen.

The other stands, however, weren't nearly as comfortable as that. There was only the occasional crude home of a pioneer, by the side of the road. In self defense and against their wishes, they became inn-keepers. Some of the names of these lusty inns were She-boss (because the Indian owner answered every question by pointing to his white wife and muttering,"she, boss", Buzzard Roost, French Camp, Old Factors, and Red Bluff. Only one remains, Mt. Locust. It has been restored, looking very much as it did when a Swiss soldier of fortune built it around 1780. It is about 15 miles from Natchez and is open to the public.

The villages and the stands and the glory of the Devil's Backbone

died with the coming of the steamboats to the Mississippi River. They were slow, but they beat walking.

The Natchez Trace Parkway runs through Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi and is administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. A superintendent with offices in the Tupelo Visitor's Center, is in charge. When completed, the 450 mile parkway will roughly follow the route of the original Natchez Trace.

The first humans to live in what is now Madison County, Mississippi, were pre-agricultural Indians and preferred to live near rivers and streams, their sources of food and life. Those original Indians lived to the east of the present day Natchez Trace Parkway, an area now covered by the waters of the Ross Barnett Reservoir. Later, groups of Indians lived on the opposite side of the Trace; it is believed that those Indians began to farm the land around the Pearl River.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, white missionaries and explorers probably began to come to the area we now call Madison County. The history of the Choctaw Indians in Madison County, though, was already hundreds of years old by the time the first white men came to the area. The Choctaws, Indians closely tied to the Chickasaws and more distantly to the Creeks and Seminoles, came to Mississippi from the North. It is difficult to examine Choctaw history closely, though, since they had no written language, but passed their heritage along by word of mouth alone.

The lifestyle of these first Choctaw Indians was a simple one, based

largely on fishing and deer hunting and the cultivation of corn and other crops. With grass and mud, they constructed their huts and with deerskin, wood and stone, they made their clothing and tools.

The time line marking the end of the Choctaw culture and the beginning of the White man's history in Madison County has grown somewhat unclear. But accounts of the pride and strength of the Choctaw culture remain even today; perhaps one of the most moving descriptions of the Choctaw Indians was one written by J. F. H. Claiborne, a Mississippi historian who grew up in close contact with the Choctaws.

Slowly, the influence of the White man began to bring change to the Choctaw's lifestyle. The Indians became less nomadic and they borrowed concepts of tools, weapons, and clothing from the White people.

In 1820, at a place called Doak's Stand along the Natchez Trace, General Andrew Jackson represented the U.S. and Chief Rushmatataha of the Choctaws in the signing of the Treaty of Doak's Stand. The preamble of this landmark treaty read as follows:

> "Whereas it is important object with the President of the United States, to promote the civilization of the Choctaw Indians, by the establishment of schools amongst them; and to perpetuate them as a nation, by exchanging, for a small part of their land..."

The Treaty of Doak's Stand also went on to say of the Indians that a blacksmith shall also be settled amongst them at a point most convenient to the population; and a faithful person appointed, whose duty it shall be

to use every reasonable exertion to collect all the wandering Indians belonging to the Choctaw nation, upon the land hereby provided for their permanent settlement.

The site of the Treaty of Doak's Stand was a waystation along the Natchez Trace. In early Madison County were four of those stopover places. Turner Brashears did some advertising in Mississippi newspapers about his stand, and he called it, "a House of Entertainment", on the road leading from Natchez to Nashville, about 40 miles from William Smiths at the Indian lines.

The last single thread between yesterday and today is the Old Country Store in Lorman, Mississippi. It hasn't changed much since those long-leaf pine floors were nailed down in 1890, and neither has the merchandise. You can still find a barrel of flour, a tub of lard, a hank of rope, a jug of molasses, a horse collar, and even some of those four-for-a-penny jaw breakers. The Old Country Store exudes the spirit of Mississippi. It is neighborly, homey, and a good place to relax for a spell. It's a lot like finding a friend on a long, long journey -- sort of a modern-day stand on a new Natchez Trace.

A bill was introduced in the House by Congressman Thomas Jefferson Busby to pave the highway. It was backed by influential Mississippians and the entire membership of the Mississippi legislature. Senator Hubert D. Stephenson introduced the bill in the Senate. It was strongly supported by Senator Pat Harrison and President Roosevelt, and was passed in 1934.

Today, 375 of the 450 miles are completed with twenty-seven more miles funded but not necessarily under construction. It is hoped that a good part of the remaining 48 miles will be funded before they are complete.