

# CUMBERLAND GAP

## NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



KENTUCKY . . . VIRGINIA . . . TENNESSEE



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*Through Cumberland Gap passed the Wilderness Road, main artery of the great trans-Allegheny migration which won the Northwest Territory and extended the western boundary of the United States to the Mississippi River.*

Long before the white man came, "Kentucky" was a magic name among the Indians. Its fertile grazing lands, uninhabited by man, teemed with vast herds of buffalo, deer, and smaller game. Cherokee hunters from the south often visited Kentucky, vying for its rich prizes with the Shawnee and other Indians from north of the Ohio River. Bloody clashes among the fierce tribes were frequent. One of the trails much used by war and hunting parties was the "Warrior's Path," which crossed the mountain barrier into southeastern Kentucky at Cumberland Gap.

### *First White Exploration*

For nearly 150 years after the first white settlement of Virginia, the forbidding Allegheny Ridge kept the English colonists from Kentucky. In 1750, Dr. Thomas Walker discovered Cumberland Gap—a natural passage through this mountain barrier.

Engaged to locate an 800,000-acre grant for the Loyal Land Company, Walker and five companions set out from Albemarle County, Va., on March 6. Crossing the Blue Ridge, the party moved slowly southwestward and, on the night of April 12, camped on Powell's River about 10 miles east of the gap.

Walker's journal entry for April 13 tells of their momentous discovery: "We went four miles to large Creek . . . , and from thence six miles to Cave Gap, the land being Levil." He named the mountain pass for a large cave, with a spring flowing through, which he found there.

Noting the precipitous face of the Pinnacle, which he called "Steep Ridge," Walker and his companions followed a "plain Indian Road" into Kentucky. Moving northward along this trail, the Warrior's Path, the party on April 17 came to a river, which Walker named the "Cumberland" in honor of the Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II and Queen Caroline of England. Later, that name was given also to the gap and the mountain range. Near the river the explorers built a log cabin, the first white dwelling in Kentucky.

After 2 months exploring the hills of eastern Kentucky, the party crossed the mountains north of Cumberland Gap and started home. On July 13, Walker reached his starting point in Albemarle County, Va. He had failed to find the storied Bluegrass region of central Kentucky, but he had located the mountain pass which was to play such an important part in the settlement of that fertile section.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.



## *Daniel Boone and the Wilderness Road*

The French and Indian War, 1754–60, and Pontiac's Rebellion, 1763–65, prevented any immediate attempt to follow Walker's lead. When peace returned, however, small parties of hunters began passing through Cumberland Gap. The most famous was Daniel Boone.

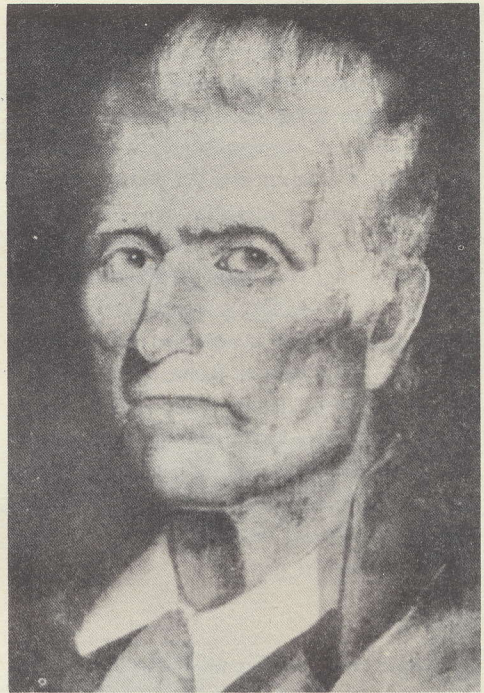
After an unsuccessful attempt to cross the mountains north of Cumberland Gap in the winter of 1767–68, Boone returned to his home in the Yadkin Valley of western North Carolina. There, a year later, he had a surprise visit from John Finley, a fellow campaigner of the French and Indian War. Finley had visited the Bluegrass region several years before, and he convinced Boone that it could be reached through Cumberland Gap.

Boone and Finley, with four companions, set out on May 1, 1769. Passing through the gap, they followed the Warrior's Path northward until they came to a branch of the Kentucky River. Entranced by the richness and beauty of the country, Boone spent nearly 2 years exploring despite a series of mishaps which included capture by the Indians and the disappearance of his brother-in-law, John Stuart. Completely alone much of the time, he ranged all through the fertile region and finally returned home, in the spring of 1771, knowing more about Kentucky than any other white man.

In September 1773, Boone led an unsuccessful attempt to settle in Kentucky. Near Cumberland Gap an Indian attack killed several persons, including Boone's son James, and the party turned back.

An Indian uprising, Lord Dunmore's War, broke out in 1774 while numerous parties of white hunters and surveyors were operating in Kentucky. Boone and a companion, Michael Stoner, passed through Cumberland Gap and covered 800 miles of wilderness in 2 months to warn the white men of their danger.

The defeat of the Indians, in October



**Daniel Boone. A painting by  
Chester Harding.**

1774, paved the way for an ambitious scheme to settle Kentucky. At the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals in March 1775, Judge Richard Henderson bought the Cherokee claim to 20 million acres south of the Kentucky River. There he planned to establish a new colony, "Transylvania." To open the region for settlement, he engaged Daniel Boone to blaze a trail through Cumberland Gap.

Starting from Long Island of the Holston (now Kingsport, Tenn.) on March 10, Boone led 30 axmen in cutting the "Wilderness Road." Hacking their way across mountain, through swamp and canebrake, the party on April 1 reached the Kentucky River, 208 miles from their starting point. There they erected a fort, which was named Boonesborough.

### *The Wilderness Road in the Revolution*

Soon Henderson arrived with reinforcements for the Boonesborough garrison. The



opening of the Wilderness Road drew more pioneers, and other "Kentucky stations" began to spring up.

When Henderson tried to assert authority over these new settlements, however, the individualistic backwoodsmen rebelled. In June 1776, George Rogers Clark and John Gabriel Jones made the arduous journey through Cumberland Gap to Williamsburg to ask the Virginia government for support. Six months later, Virginia formally organized Kentucky as its westernmost county. Henderson's plan for a private colony had failed, but his Wilderness Road had guaranteed the permanence of white settlement in Kentucky.

The westward movement slowed to a trickle during the first years of the Revolutionary War. Northern Indians, backed by the British, began to harass the infant settlements in ever-growing numbers. The Cumberland Gap route was frequently closed by the Indian threat; when open, it was used mainly to bring badly needed troops and sup-

plies to the hard-pressed settlements.

The tide turned in 1778-79, however, when a Kentucky and Virginia force under George Rogers Clark crossed the Ohio River and captured the important British posts at Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes. Though Indian attacks continued, westward travel over the Wilderness Road soon became even heavier than before. By the time the war ended in 1783, some 12,000 settlers had entered Kentucky, most of them through Cumberland Gap.

### *Flood Tide of Settlement*

The mass immigration which followed the Revolution caused John Filson, Kentucky's first historian, to predict in 1784 that the region would soon become "exceedingly populous." He was right, for, 8 years later Kentucky entered the Union with a population of 100,000, and by 1800 the total was more than 220,000.

For some years, most of this great stream

**The Wilderness Road in Kentucky, looking north into Yellow Creek Valley.**

*Courtesy, Inman.*







**Cumberland Gap, looking toward Kentucky.** *Reproduced by courtesy of the copyright owners, Caufield & Shook.*

continued to pass through Cumberland Gap, and in 1796 the Wilderness Road was widened and improved for wagon traffic. The final defeat of the northern Indians and the opening of more direct routes across the mountains, however, eventually diverted most of the travelers. By 1825, a large part of the traffic on the Wilderness Road, which had once echoed with the footsteps of Boone and Clark and the war whoops of the Indian, consisted of livestock en route to eastern markets.

### *Later History of the Area*

When the Civil War began in 1861, Cumberland Gap was important to both Federals and Confederates. Either army, holding the mountain pass, would be in position to invade enemy territory. Held first by Confederates, the gap was captured on June 17, 1862, by Union troops under George W. Morgan. Morgan had to evacuate his position 3 months later, and the gap remained in

Confederate hands until its final capture by Ambrose E. Burnside's Union army on September 9, 1863.

One chapter remained in the dramatic story of Cumberland Gap. In 1886, the historic mountain pass figured in a large industrial promotion scheme which gave birth to the city of Middlesboro, Ky. An English syndicate, planning to exploit mineral resources in the area, spent millions of dollars in land purchases and industrial development. In 1893, before development was complete, financial reverses caused the scheme to collapse; but Middlesboro has continued to grow and thrive.

### *Geology*

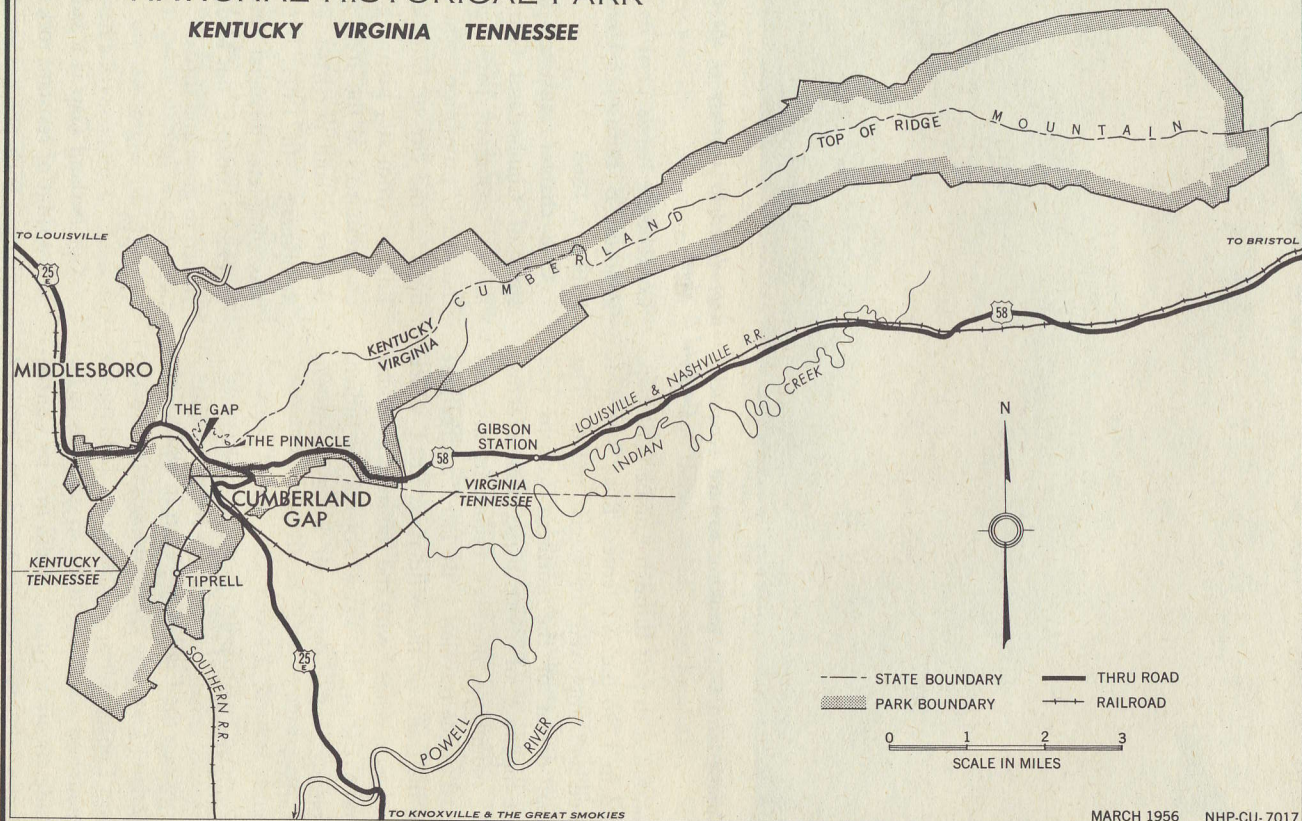
Cumberland Gap is a saddle or notch cut into a ridge of resistant rock by former stream activity. Such notches are frequently found in the Appalachians and are known as wind gaps.

This region has been subjected to great



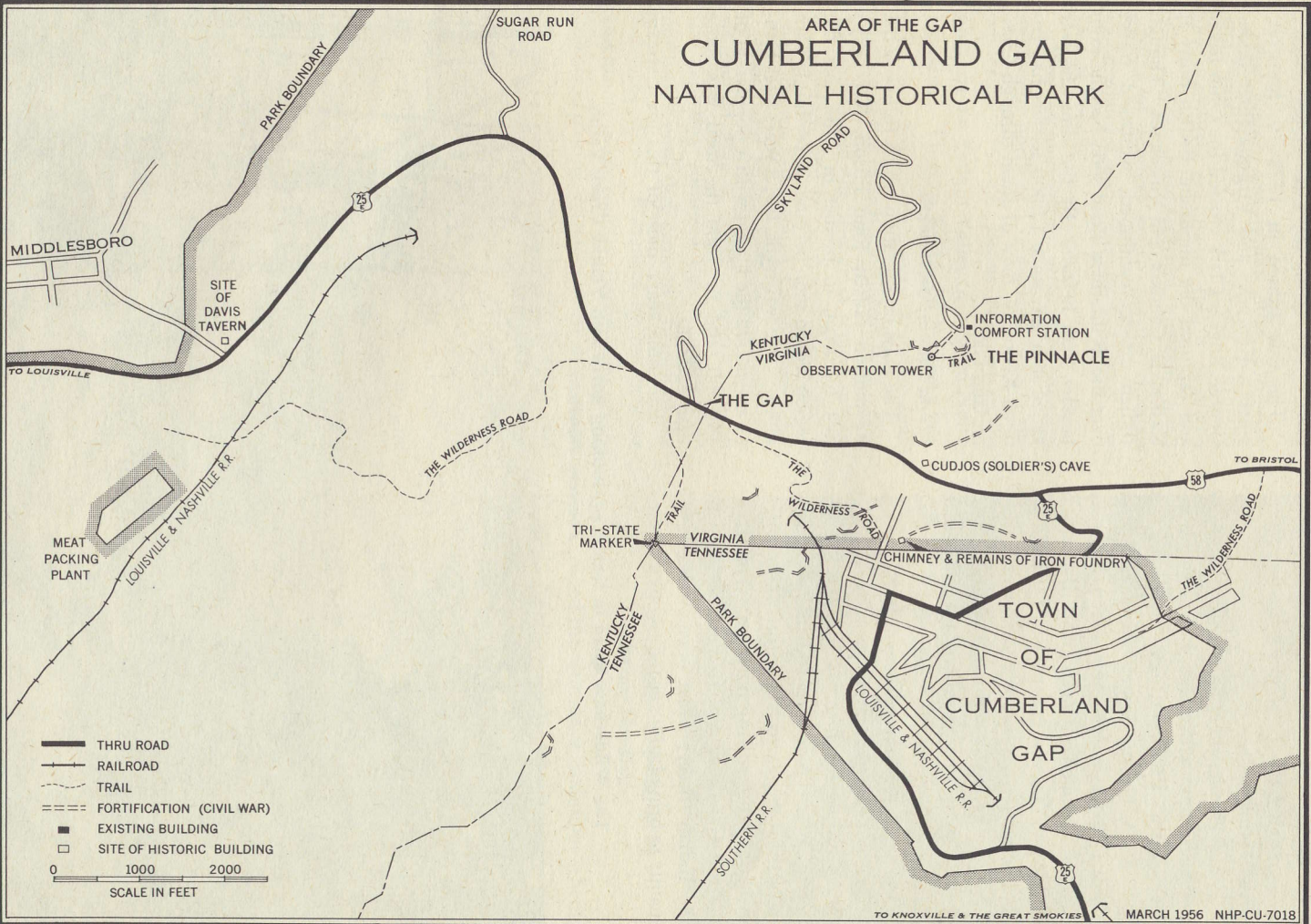
# CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK







KENTUCKY VIRGINIA TENNESSEE





# AREA OF THE GAP CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



-  THRU ROAD
  -  RAILROAD
  -  TRAIL
  -  FORTIFICATION (CIVIL WAR)
  -  EXISTING BUILDING
  -  SITE OF HISTORIC BUILDING
- 0      1000      2000  
SCALE IN FEET



earth stresses producing folded and faulted rocks. These stresses were so great that older rocks from the southeast were thrust for miles over younger rocks to the northwest. Erosion of rocks of varying hardness and different angles of folding has formed the present ridge and basin topography.

The gap is in a zone of fractured rock where the ridge was most easily attacked by erosion. Presumably, a southward flowing stream crossed what is now the ridge. However, the Middlesboro Basin, to the northwest, was more rapidly and more deeply quarried than the gap area. This resulted in the diversion of the stream northward into the Cumberland River. The ridge became the water divide, and the former stream course became the gap.

### *The Park*

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, consisting of 20,184 acres covering parts of three States, was designated a Federal area on September 14, 1955. Besides the gap itself, the park contains approximately 2 miles of the Wilderness Road; the Pinnacle, from which you can see parts of several States; the ruins of an early mill and foundry; Civil War fortifications; the Tri-State Peak, where Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee meet; and caves and other interesting geological features.

### *Your Visit to the Park*

You can reach the park, which is near Middlesboro, Ky., and Cumberland Gap, Tenn., by U. S. 25-E or U. S. 58. Middlesboro and Cumberland Gap are served by the Greyhound Lines and Middlesboro-LaFollette Bus Lines. Middlesboro taxis serve the entire gap area. Eating and sleeping accommodations are available in Middlesboro, Cumberland Gap, and other communities near the park.

The Pinnacle, which contains an observation platform, trails, and interpretive devices, is open from 8:30 a. m. to 5 p. m. A small fee is charged for admission to the Pinnacle area. Other interesting features of the park are accessible by foot trails and are marked by plaques and trailside exhibits. You can get information on the park at the Pinnacle Information Terrace or at temporary park headquarters at the Hotel Cumberland in Middlesboro.

### *Administration*

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Post Office Box 235, Middlesboro, Ky., is in immediate charge.



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*



*Cover: Daniel Boone leading a party of pioneers through Cumberland Gap, from a painting by Robert R. Taylor. Courtesy, City Art Museum, St. Louis, Mo.*