

PREHISTORIC TRAILS IN THE UPPER CUMBERLAND RIVER BASIN

CHARLES MAYER DUPIER, JR.



INTRODUCTION

Prehistoric Native Americans were mobile peoples. They traveled widely for the purposes of warfare and trade. Originally, their thoroughfares were the trails made by herds of woolly mammoth, mastodon, and bison.¹ Since these animals were seasonal migrators, their trails were almost necessarily north-south routes. One of the best known of these trails is the Athiamio wee, or "path of the armed ones," which is better known as the "Warriors' Path."²

Beginning in the fourteenth century, an increase in warfare and the beginnings of new, larger tribal groupings (which resulted in greater social and political complexity) became more and more a part of life for Native Americans in eastern North America, especially among the Iroquois of central New York.³ The trails may have begun to offer greater dangers than simply the threat of wild animals.

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¹ William E. Myer, *Indian Trails of the Southeast* (Nashville: Blue and Gray Press, 1971), 1.

² Neal Hammon, "Warriors Path," in John E. Kleber, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 933.

³ The advent of warfare as an important factor in the life of the Iroquois and the development of the tribe as a defensive organization are discussed in Brian Fagan, *Ancient North America: The Archaeology of a Continent* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 421-23. The spread of Iroquois warfare into southeastern North America and its effects on the economy and social organization of the Mississippian peoples are discussed in *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (Washington: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1910), Bulletin 30, Part 2, pp. 800, 802.

Trading in exotic goods and materials has existed since the Late Archaic Period (2,000-1,000 B.C.) in eastern North America.⁴ By the beginning of the Mississippian Period (A.D. 800), other goods, such as ceremonial and prestige items, were common in trade inventories. As the complex chiefdom form of social organization moved toward its climax in the Late Mississippian Period, trade in prestige goods grew in importance to the point of necessity.⁵ With this growth, the trails over which these commodities were carried became busier and more interconnected.

During the eighteenth century, explorers from the Atlantic colonies pressed beyond the Allegheny and Appalachian mountains into the new West. Men such as Dr. Thomas Walker and Christopher Gist, upon entering Kentucky in 1750, used these trails to their advantage and often noted in their journals that they were traveling "Indian roads."⁶ Later, in 1775, Daniel Boone, on behalf of Colonel Richard Henderson, was employed to "cut a path to Kentucky."⁷ This road, called the "Wilderness Road," often followed Native-American trails. From the Cumberland Gap to Flat Lick, Kentucky, Boone's Trace followed a well-defined Indian road. From that point Boone followed what is believed to have been, for the most part, a prehistoric trail which led northwest from Flat Lick, in Knox County, to the Bluegrass region. Boone departed from this trail in Rockcastle County and blazed a new trail northward toward the settlement of Boonesborough, in Madison County.⁸

DELIMITATION OF THE UPPER CUMBERLAND BASIN

This paper will explore the prehistoric trail network in one comparatively small area—the drainage basin of the upper Cumberland River in southeastern Kentucky. The upper Cumberland is that portion of the river which extends

⁴ Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 333-54.

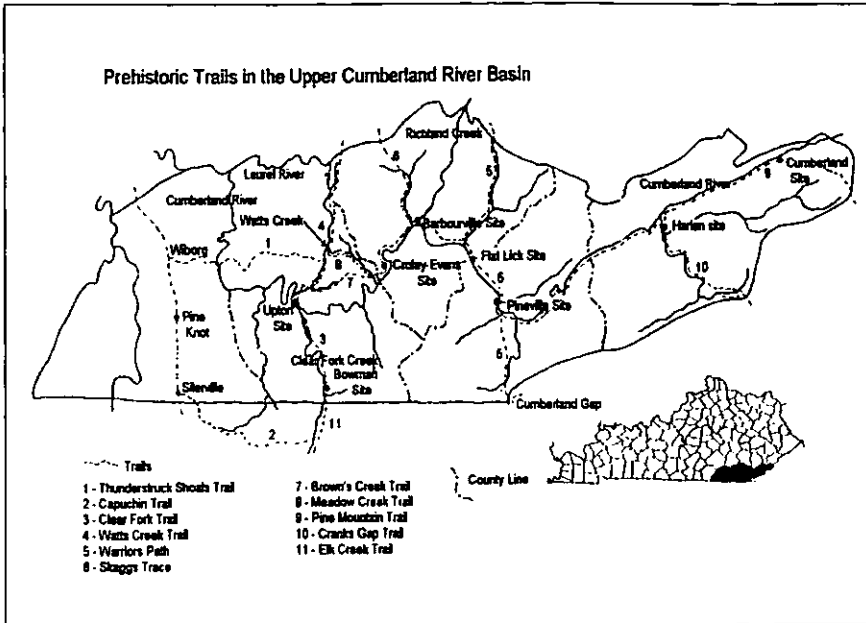
⁵ Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic" Age Reconsidered* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1985), cited in Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 422.

⁶ "Doctor Thomas Walker's Journal" and "Colonel Christopher Gist's Journal," in J. Stoddard Johnston, ed., *First Explorations of Kentucky* (first publication series, no. 13; Louisville: The Filson Club Historical Society, 1898), 50, 57, 146, 155, 156.

⁷ Robert L. Kincaid, *The Wilderness Road* (Middlesboro, Kentucky, n.p., 1966; originally published in 1947), 99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 102-103. For Boone's Trace, see Neal Hammon, "Boone's Trace" in Kleber, ed., *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 101-102.

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from the Cumberland Falls, on the present boundary of Whitley and McCreary counties, eastward to the river's source near Oven Fork, in southwestern Letcher County, located only a few miles northeast of the Harlan County line. The upper Cumberland watershed is almost completely contained in the counties of Harlan, Bell, Knox, Whitley, and McCreary.

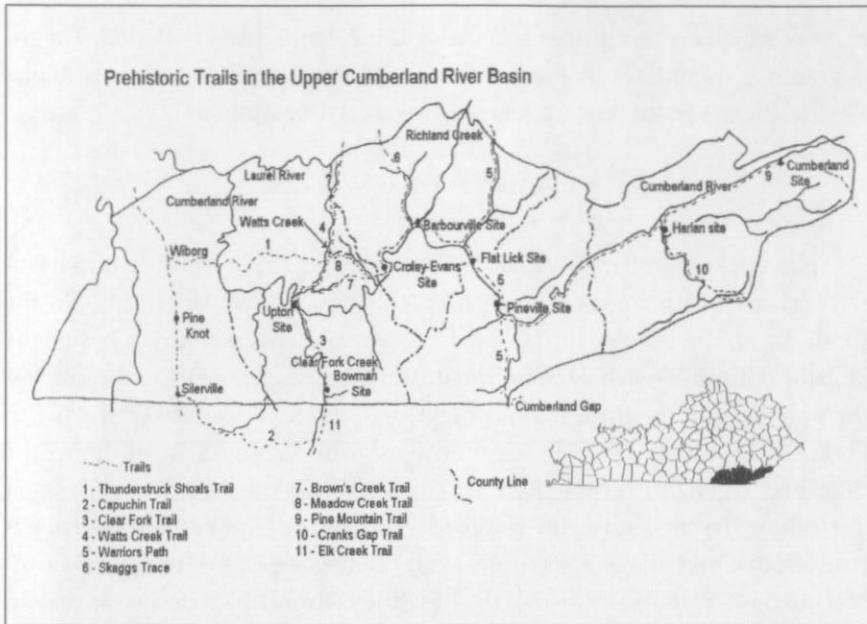
DESCRIPTION OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The upper Cumberland River basin is in the Cumberland Plateau section of the Cumberland-Allegheny Plateau Province.⁹ The Cumberland River drains portions of three subregions of the province: the Cumberland Mountains subregion, the Mountain and Creek Bottom subregion, and the Undissected Plateau subregion.¹⁰ This area is a maturely dissected plateau, the

⁹ Nevin M. Fenneman, *Physiography of the Eastern United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938), 333-42.

¹⁰ Joseph R. Schwendeman, *Geography of Kentucky: An Environmental and Social Science* (6th ed.; Lexington, Kentucky: Kentucky Images, 1987), 25-26. Fenneman in his *Physiography of the Eastern*

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rocks of which are sandstones and shales of the Pennsylvanian Period. The topography is dominated by low mountains. The creek valleys and river valleys are classified as in the mature stage of erosional development."

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER WATERSHEDS

The upper Cumberland River basin lies in the midst of other important river basins which were occupied by prehistoric Native Americans. To the south are the rivers which compose the upper Tennessee River basin: the Holston, Clinch, Powell, French Broad, and Tennessee rivers. On the north is the watershed of the three main tributaries of the Kentucky River: the North Fork, the Middle Fork, and the South Fork. The Kentucky River drains the Bluegrass region of central Kentucky and empties into the Ohio River at Carrollton. To the west is the middle section of the Cumberland, which extends from Cumberland Falls to Nashville, Tennessee. East of the upper Cumberland basin is the watershed of the Big Sandy River, which drains far eastern Kentucky and empties into the Ohio River at Catlettsburg.

KNOWN PREHISTORIC SITES IN THE UPPER CUMBERLAND BASIN

It is not possible to discuss the numerous archaeological sites in the upper Cumberland basin in detail. The Kentucky Archaeological Survey files show that there are more than three hundred sites, representing all archaeological periods, in Whitley County alone. For the purposes of this paper, only the most prominent of the Mississippian Period sites will be noted, since the development of the trail system was completed during this time.

As the result of an intensive search of the files of the Kentucky Archaeological Survey, Richard W. Jefferies noted five Mississippian rockshelter sites in Whitley County, two in Bell County, and one in Harlan County. Jefferies

United States gives subregional names only to the Cumberland Mountains and the Crab Orchard Mountains of the Cumberland Plateau (331, 339). Schwendeman designates others: the Mountain and Creek Bottom subregion, the Undissected Plateau subregion, and the Escarpment subregion (24-27).

¹¹ William Morris Davis, *Elementary Physical Geography* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1902), 269-70. Mature dissection is the result of differential or random erosion by running water on horizontal or nearly horizontal rock strata which has produced deep valleys separated by steep hills.

places four habitation sites without mounds in Whitley, fourteen in Knox, three in Bell, and two in Harlan. He noted six mortuary sites in Knox and one in Bell. He located two mound sites in Whitley, two in Knox, one in Bell, and one in Harlan. He also noted three "other" unspecified sites—one in Whitley and two in Harlan.¹²

Constantine S. Rafinesque, a professor of natural history at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, toured the state in 1823 describing what he called ancient sites and monuments.¹³ Rafinesque wrote of many prehistoric sites in the counties of the upper Cumberland basin. In Harlan County, along the Cumberland River near its source (probably indicating the area where the Poor Fork and Clover Fork rivers join to form the Cumberland), were two sites with a total of five monuments (probably indicating mounds).¹⁴ In his *History of Kentucky* Lewis Collins elaborated on Rafinesque's work. Collins stated that the town of Mount Pleasant (present-day Harlan) was built on a "high mound or Indian graveyard" from which "have been taken a large quantity of human bones, pots curiously made of blue earth and muscle shell, and dried in the sun."¹⁵ This is probably the site of a Mississippian platform mound, which is evidenced by the occurrence of shell-tempered pottery. Sources in Harlan have informed me that the county courthouse now sits atop the site of the mound, which had been excavated for the courthouse basement. The courthouse is located on Mound Street.¹⁶

Rafinesque recorded three sites and seven monuments in Knox County.¹⁷ It is possible that one of these sites and monuments is the one located in Pineville, but neither Rafinesque nor Collins mentions that there was a town with a mound at the site of Pineville.¹⁸ The files of the Kentucky Archaeological

¹² Richard W. Jefferies, "Mississippian Settlement in Southeastern Kentucky: A Preliminary Assessment," *Current Archaeological Research in Kentucky* 4 (1996): 115-37. The map is figure 2 in the article. The locations of these sites have been gleaned from the files of the Kentucky Archaeological Survey.

¹³ Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, *Ancient History, or the Annals of Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1824), appendix I, 33-37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵ Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky* (Lexington: Henry Clay Press, 1968; originally published in 1847), 340.

¹⁶ Two colleagues provided me with this information. They are Prof. Norman J. Cox (geology) and Prof. Thomas Frazier (English).

¹⁷ Rafinesque, *Ancient History*, 33.

¹⁸ Pineville is the county seat of Bell County. Bell County was created from Harlan and Knox counties in 1867 and did not exist when Rafinesque and Collins wrote their histories.

Survey contain information, however, that testifies to there being one (Site 15Be15), but the location of this mound is in the built-up area of the city, and there is currently no evidence of it.¹⁹ Thomas Walker does not mention this site either, though he did describe the mound and houses on the Croley-Evans site (discussed below).²⁰

Collins records that, "Three miles from Barbourville [*sic*] on the north bank of the Cumberland, there are the remains of an ancient fortress, around which a circular ditch is discernible, enclosing about four acres of ground."²¹ The precise location of this Knox County site is not presently known.

Downstream, about fourteen miles from Barbourville, on the west bank of the Cumberland River, is a small mound (15Kx26) that appears to be from one to three meters high. As far as is known to me, the site has never been excavated either by professional or amateur archaeologists. The Cobb family, which owns the farm on which the site is located, fiercely defends it against intrusion.

About three miles south of the Cobb site, on the west bank of the river, is the Croley-Evans site (15Kx24) mentioned above. This site was excavated during the summers of 1993 and 1994 by Richard W. Jefferies. I participated in the 1993 excavation. This is a Mississippian town with a platform mound. The habitation area covers about five hectares (twelve acres).²²

While visiting Whitley County, Rafinesque wrote that there was "a town on the Cumberland, above Williamsburg, with 20 houses, and a teocalli [a truncated pyramidal mound] 360 feet long, 150 feet wide, 12 feet high . . . Remains of towns with houses on the waters of Laurel river and Watts creek."²³ The site at Williamsburg (15Wh64) is located on the C.B. Upton property about one-half mile upstream from the town's center. The mound has been extensively cultivated during the past one hundred and seventy years and is now only about one and a half meters high. I have taken several soil probes to a

¹⁹ Site designations are interpreted as follows: "15" is the number for Kentucky (the fifteenth state in a chronological listing), "Be" is Bell County, and the last number is the site number within the county.

²⁰ Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, 54-55.

²¹ Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 396.

²² Richard W. Jefferies, "Preliminary Assessment of Mississippian Settlement at the Croley-Evans Site (15Kx24), Knox County, Kentucky," paper presented at the Kentucky Heritage Council Archaeological Conference, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, Kentucky, 26-27 February 1994.

²³ Rafinesque, *Ancient History*, 34.

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depth of ninety centimeters and found no evidence of stratification or habitation. Mrs. C. B. Upton says that her children used to pick up many chert pieces and projectile points between the mound and the river when the land was plowed.

There is a large, two-stage platform mound with a habitation area of about four hectares (ten acres) on the Bowman property in southern Whitley County, a few hundred meters from the Tennessee line. Jim Railey of the Kentucky Heritage Council surveyed this site (15Wh61) in 1985 and recorded his findings with the Kentucky Archaeological Survey. The shell-tempered ceramics and triangular projectile points on the surface indicate that it is a Mississippian site.

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Two main north-south prehistoric trails passed through the upper Cumberland basin area. Both ran north and south. The better-known Warriors' Path passed approximately through the middle of the area. The other, called the Tennessee, Ohio, and Great Lakes Trail by William E. Myer, passed just to the west of the upper Cumberland basin.²⁴ It was from these two principal routes that east-west trails connected the native towns of the upper Cumberland.

THE WARRIORS' PATH

The Warriors' Path in Kentucky extended north from the Cumberland Gap through the eastern edge of the Middlesboro Basin, down Yellow Creek to the point where that creek turns east. It then followed an overland route to the Pine Mountain water gap at Pineville. At Pineville, the path crossed the Cumberland River and followed along the east bank to Flat Lick, about six miles north of Pineville.²⁵ At Flat Lick, which is at the confluence of Stinking Creek and the Cumberland River, the trail turned northeast, up Stinking Creek and then followed the tributary called Trace Branch northward to its head; it then

²⁴ Myer, *Indian Trails of the Southeast*, 105-110.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47-48. The Pine Mountain water gap at Pineville is the place where the Cumberland River cuts through Pine Mountain. This distinguishes the water gap from the gap in Cumberland Mountain (Cumberland Gap) through which no stream flows. The Cumberland Gap is called a wind gap.



Cumberland Gap
The Filson Club Historical Society

crosses Kentucky Ridge at Paint Gap into the headwaters of Goose Creek which is in the watershed of the South Fork of the Kentucky River.²⁶ On 1 May 1750 Thomas Walker approached the future site of Barbourville from the west and went northeastward up Little Richland Creek, across the ridge and down the Collins Fork of Goose Creek.²⁷ Walker noted in his journal on that day that they “got to Powell’s River [Goose Creek] in the afternoon and went down it along an Indian Road, much frequented . . . and I think it is that Which goes through Cave Gap [Cumberland Gap].”²⁸

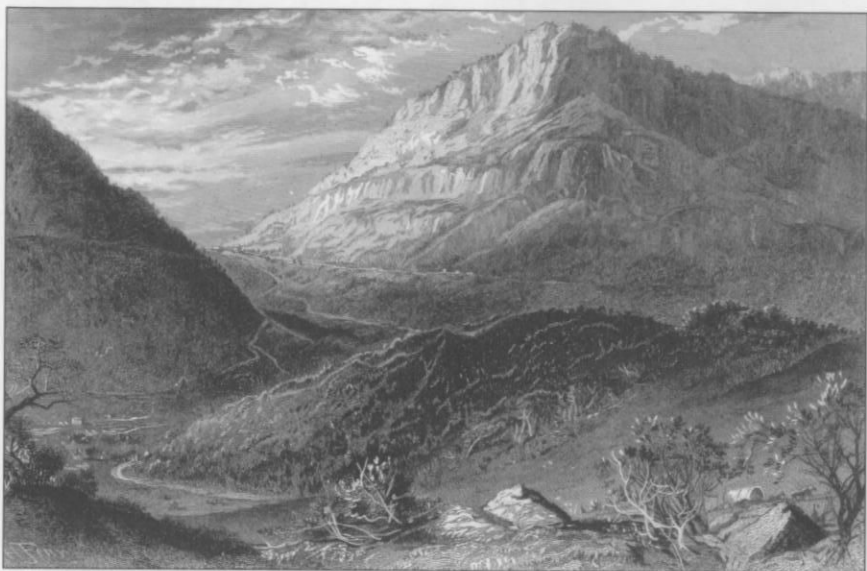
THE TENNESSEE, OHIO, AND GREAT LAKES TRAIL

The Tennessee, Ohio, and Great Lakes Trail began at the site of Chattanooga, Tennessee, went up the west side of the Tennessee River past Hiawassee Island and followed the east flank of Wallen’s Ridge to Rockwood, Tennessee. From there, it passed through the present site of Wartburg, Tennessee, on the

²⁶ Norm Isaac, *The Warrior Trail of Kentucky* (Dublin, Indiana: Printit Press, 1980), 25.

²⁷ Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, 56-57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.



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²⁶ Norm Isaac, *The Warrior Trail of Kentucky* (Dublin, Indiana: Printit Press, 1980), 25.

²⁷ Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, 56-57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

Cumberland Plateau, northward through Oneida, Tennessee, and into Kentucky. In Kentucky, it followed the level land of the undissected plateau through the present locations of Pine Knot and Whitley City in McCreary County and on to Burnside on the Cumberland River, well below the Cumberland Falls.²⁹

THE THUNDERSTRUCK SHOALS TRAIL

This east-west trail is mentioned, but not named, by Myer as a connector between the prehistoric settlements near Williamsburg, Kentucky, and the settlements to the west on the middle section of the Cumberland River in Wayne County, Kentucky. It crossed the Tennessee, Ohio, and Great Lakes Trail in McCreary County at the community of Wiborg, about six miles north of Whitley City.³⁰ I have named it the "Thunderstruck Shoals Trail" because it crosses the Cumberland River at Thunderstruck Shoals.³¹ On 24 April 1750, Thomas Walker and two companions were exploring the area west of their campsite on the Cumberland River south of Barbourville. Walker records in his journal that, "This day we Came on the fresh Track of 7 or 8 Indians, but could not overtake them."³² I have traced Walker's steps of 23-25 April 1750, using the journal, maps, and on-site reconnaissance, both forward and reverse (which is often the only way his exact location can be determined). Walker's position was on this trail about six to eight miles east of Young's Creek (Walker called it Rocky Creek), which he later turned down to reach the Cumberland River.³³

The Thunderstruck Shoals Trail is probably the one shown on the 1894 topographic map of the area as being the only uninterrupted road leading from the area north of Whitley City across the Cumberland River to State Highway 26 northeast of Williamsburg, where it intercepted the Watts Creek Trail discussed below.³⁴ It led east from Wiborg along Beulah Heights Ridge, which was

²⁹ Myer, *Indian Trails of the Southeast*, 105-110.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

³¹ See map on page 269.

³² Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, 53. These Native Americans were following a trail, and were not unfamiliar with the route.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ U.S. Geological Survey Reconnaissance Map, Williamsburg, Kentucky—Tennessee, 1894 edition, reprinted 1921, Department of the Interior. This route can be followed on the modern topographic maps of the Wiborg, Cumberland Falls, and Wofford 7.5 minute quadrangles. These are

referred to by old locals by the now-obsolete name of Bullet Mold Ridge, to Indian Creek. It generally followed Indian Creek to the Cumberland River at Thunderstruck Shoals about a mile above the mouth of the creek. One and a half miles from the mouth, the trail turned north about a mile, to avoid extremely rugged terrain, before descending to the river. Once across the shoals the trail led eastward along a crooked ridge to "The Steps," an erosional feature involving a number of strata of sandstone which are arranged like ascending stair steps. From "The Steps," the trail made a U-shaped swing to the south to avoid the breaks of Calf Pen Fork Creek, then resumed its eastward direction crossing Young's Creek and Blake's Fork Creek and on to State Highway 26.

THE CAPUCHIN TRAIL

Myer writes that, "There is a prominent [east-west] trail crossing the railroad at Silerville [Kentucky]." It connected the Jellico Creek and Elk Creek Indian towns with the Wayne County [Kentucky] towns.³⁵ Elk Creek is a tributary which enters the Clear Fork River near Jellico, a town in both Tennessee and Kentucky. The name "Capuchin" is selected for this trail because it followed Capuchin Creek for a longer distance than any other creek. It is proposed that this is the true path of the Capuchin Trail because it followed the path of least topographic resistance, is the shortest distance between Silerville and Elk Creek, in Tennessee, and is shown as an uninterrupted route on the 1894 United States Geological Survey (USGS) reconnaissance map cited above.

The trail followed Kentucky State Road 1470 east and south to Murphy Creek and down the creek to Marsh Creek where it left the state road. The trail continued south, up Marsh Creek for about one and a half miles until it crossed the creek. Then it went upward on an unnamed ridge and followed it south-eastward. It crossed into Tennessee, then down into the headwaters of Childer's Creek. The trail continued southeastward down the creek to the Gum Fork of Jellico Creek and followed that creek eastward, past the community of

large-scale (one inch equals two thousand feet), very detailed topographic maps which cover 7.5 minutes of latitude and longitude. One minute of latitude is equal to 1.15 miles and one minute of longitude at the average latitude of Kentucky equals approximately three-fifths of a mile. This kind of detailed map coverage is available for all Kentucky.

³⁵ Myer, *Indian Trails of the Southeast*, 109.

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Ketchen, where Gum Fork joins Jellico Creek; then it followed Jellico Creek about two miles to a point opposite Thomas Hollow. The trail then turned south through Angel Gap and down to Capuchin Creek. It followed Capuchin Creek, generally eastward, to where Capuchin turns north, then crossed the creek and went up Trammel Branch, southeastward, to the top of Jellico Mountain. Then the trail descended to the headwaters of Burnt Pine Creek and went eastward down that creek to the community of Newcomb on Elk Creek. It then crossed Elk Creek, turned northeastward and followed the east side of Elk Creek for approximately four miles, crossing the Kentucky line, to the Bowman site in southern Whitley County.

THE CLEAR FORK TRAIL

The Clear Fork Trail was a north-south continuation of that part of the Capuchin Trail which descended to Elk Creek. It ran from the Bowman site (about a fourth of a mile north of the Tennessee line) to the present site of Williamsburg. Thomas Walker and Captain Daniel Smith traveled this route on 22-25 November 1779.³⁶ On Saturday, 20 November 1779, they arrived at the point they believed to be 36 degrees, 30 minutes north latitude along the Clear Fork River. (They were actually at 36 degrees, 35 minutes, 30 seconds north.) On Sunday, 21 November, Smith made the following entry in his journal: "This morning a party of Cherokee Indians and a White Man of the name of Springstone came to us."³⁷ Upon leaving their camp and heading northward, they stopped by the Indian camp and recruited three of the Cherokees to guide them to the Kentucky Road (Boone's Trace).³⁸ The Indians led them down the east side of the Clear Fork, keeping to the edge of the flood plain. They crossed the river at the present site of the community of Pleasant View. From there they kept going down the west side of the river until they came to the Cumberland River, about a half mile below the confluence of the Clear Fork and the Cumberland. On 25 November they "traveled across the river to Indian Cr. [Watts

³⁶ Daniel Smith, *The Journal of General Daniel Smith, August 1779 to July 1780*, Lyman C. Draper Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 46J18.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ It is possible that Springstone and the Cherokees were camped at the Bowman site, which was about a fourth of a mile north from Smith's camp.

Creek].”³⁹ This last, short three-mile leg of the trail, from the Cumberland River to Watts Creek followed the river downstream for about a half mile, then it forked. The left fork continued to follow the river to a shoal that is easily forded. Upon crossing the shoal, one would be at the Upton site in Williamsburg. This was the path of the earliest road into Williamsburg when it became the seat of Whitley county in 1818. The right fork led up what is now known as King’s Mountain to an erosional terrace about one hundred feet above the river (the Highland Park district of Williamsburg), and along that level terrace northward for about two and a half miles, and down a small branch to Watts Creek, about a fourth of a mile above its confluence with the Cumberland River. The route of this trail is also depicted on the reconnaissance map of 1891.⁴⁰

THE WATTS CREEK TRAIL

The Watts Creek Trail was a northern continuation of the Clear Fork Trail. The Smith party followed this trail to the present site of the community of Woodbine in northern Whitley County.⁴¹ The trail followed Watts Creek northward for about six miles, where it intersected with the Thunderstruck Shoals Trail at the present community of Rockholds. From that intersection, it continued northward about four miles to the community of Faber. From here, the trail followed northeastward up Eaton Branch of Watts Creek, about four miles, to the east side of Woodbine where it crossed Lynn Camp Creek. The Watts Creek Trail continued northward and intersected the Kentucky Road in the Laurel River valley. This must have been the true path because the descriptions and distances logged in Smith’s journal are easy to follow on current USGS topographic maps (Wofford, Rockholds, Vox, and Corbin quadrangles); the presence of the three Native-American guides also supports the existence of the trail.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ U.S. Geological Survey, Reconnaissance Map, Cumberland Gap, Kentucky—Virginia—Tennessee, Department of the Interior, March 1891 edition, reprinted, 1923.

⁴¹ Smith, *Journal*, 25-27 November 1779.

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THE MEADOW CREEK TRAIL

This east-west trail led from the Watts Creek Trail to the mouth of Meadow Creek in eastern Whitley County. Thomas Walker followed this trail during his exploration of Kentucky in 1750.⁴² There are two possible routes for this trail. One route would make it an eastward extension of the Thunderstruck Shoals Trail. The other, about four miles to the south, would take it up Brown's Creek. The former route would follow Tye's Fork Creek from Rockholds, across a low divide and down a small branch to Meadow Creek (a distance of about five miles). The trail would then have followed the east side of Meadow Creek to its confluence with the Cumberland River.⁴³ The other possible route would have been up Brown's Creek, down Whetstone Creek to a point about a mile from the confluence of that stream with the Cumberland River. Then it would turn overland to Meadow Creek and down that stream to its mouth.

Walker's description of the route he followed leaves much to be desired: "We crossed Indian Creek [Watts Creek] and Went down Meadow Creek to the River."⁴⁴ The brief narrative does not mention going up Watts Creek to the intersection of the trails and then heading eastward to Meadow Creek. But it is logical to assume that, as he came down the Watts Creek Trail several days before and headed westward on the Thunderstruck Shoals Trail, he would have noted that the east-west trail continued eastward, the direction he would later want to go to return to his camp on the Cumberland River. Perhaps he thought that the Brown's Creek route would be a shortcut to his destination.

It should be noted that both these routes appear on the reconnaissance maps cited above. They are, in fact, the only two roads which lead from Watts Creek to Meadow Creek. The Tye's Fork route would be a logical extension of the Thunderstruck Shoals Trail and the shortest distance between the McCreary County settlements and the Croley-Evans site. The Brown's Creek route would have been the shortest distance between the Upton site at Williamsburg and the Croley-Evans site.

It is not known if the trail leading from the Meadow Creek Trail to the Croley-Evans site followed the river upstream or cut across the low divide to

⁴² Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, 54.

⁴³ U.S. Geological Survey, Reconnaissance Map, Cumberland Gap, Kentucky—Virginia—Tennessee.

⁴⁴ Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, 54.

the east of the Meadow Creek Trail. Reason would suggest that a site as significant as Croley-Evans, containing a platform mound and a rather large village, would not have been isolated from communication routes or lie on a dead-end trail. When Thomas Walker reached the mouth of Meadow Creek on 27 April 1750, he probably followed a trail northward along the river to his campsite. He noted in his journal that:

Below the mouth of the Creek, and above the mouth are the remains of several Indian cabbins [*sic*] and amongst them a round Hill made by Art [artificial] about 20 feet high and 60 over the Top. We went up the River and Camped on the Bank.⁴⁵

This is a description of the Croley-Evans site. Whether Walker was following an existing trail or blazing his way through the wilderness is not known, but to have seen the site so clearly he had to have passed very nearby, perhaps on a trail that led through it to points upriver, ultimately to the site that was later Barbourville.

THE BLACK MOUNTAIN TRAIL

The existence of such a large mound and village at the present site of Harlan suggests that the place was connected to other settlements in the region. Though there is a dearth of information concerning prehistoric trails in Harlan County, it is only logical to assume that such trails existed.

There is only one feasible route which would have connected the Harlan site with the Warriors' Path and the site of Pineville. That route had to follow the Cumberland River. The topography outside the river valley is so difficult to traverse that no other logical conclusion can be drawn.

As was stated earlier, it is difficult to believe that a town was located on a dead-end trail—especially one that is thirty-five miles long (the distance from Pineville to Harlan). In order to determine the route that this trail might have followed, it is necessary to find a gap across Cumberland Mountain to the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-55. The determination of Walker's exact position on this day is problematic because the mouth of Meadow Creek was much closer to the Croley-Evans site in 1750 than it is today. The last half-mile of the path of the creek has migrated southwestward in the alluvial floodplain in the last two hundred years, and today the confluence of the two streams is about three-fourths of a mile further removed from the Croley-Evans site. I have determined this by examining the vestigial meander paths of Meadow Creek that appear on aerial photographs of the area.

south and the basin of the Powell River in present-day Tennessee. The only gap in Cumberland Mountain south of central Harlan County is Cranks Gap. The trail to Cranks Gap, which would have followed a line of least resistance, would be the present route of U.S. Highway 421. This road leads southeast from Harlan, through Cawood, to a point about one and a half miles west of Mill Creek Church (on the creek of the same name). Here an old trail, which can still be seen on the topographic map for Evarts, Kentucky, led south about two miles, through Cranks Gap into Virginia to Trading Creek, a tributary to the Powell River.⁴⁶ The name "Trading Creek" may suggest that this was an early trade route which crossed Cumberland Mountain. There are other ways out of central Harlan County, but none are so short and direct with so few obstacles.

Richard Jefferies's map indicates that there was a Mississippian habitation site, without a mound, located near the present site of the city of Cumberland, about twenty miles northeast of Harlan, near the headwaters of the Cumberland River.⁴⁷ There may have been a trail which led from Harlan to this site, and perhaps beyond. That trail would, out of topographic necessity, have gone up the Poor Fork of the Cumberland River. If such a trail existed, it would have had to exit the area in a southerly direction by going over Little Black Mountain and through Stone Gap into the basin of the Powell River. State Highway 106 currently follows this route, but it is not known if that highway follows an ancient trail.

CONCLUSION

The existence of prehistoric Native-American trails in the upper Cumberland River basin can be documented historically through such sources as the journals of early explorers who entered the area west of the Allegheny-Appalachian Mountains in the eighteenth century. Men like Thomas Walker and Christopher Gist noted in their journals that they followed "Indian trails" through much of the wilderness. The most noted of these trails in the upper Cumberland area were the Warriors' Path and the Tennessee, Ohio, and Great Lakes Trail. Less well known, but of regional extent, was the trail which I have described in three parts: The trail leading down Elk Creek, in Tennessee, which

⁴⁶ U. S. Geological Survey, Evarts Quadrangle, Virginia-Kentucky, 7.5 minute Series (Topographic), Department of the Interior, 1954.

⁴⁷ Jefferies, "Mississippian Settlement," figure 2.

continued northward as the Clear Fork Trail, and still further northward as the Watts Creek Trail. These were north-south thoroughfares which connected the Native Americans of the Great Lakes region with those of the southeast.

In the upper Cumberland basin there were east-west trails which were feeders to these main north-south routes. There were at least two trails which crossed the Tennessee, Ohio, and Great Lakes Trail and connected to the Clear Fork—Watts Creek Trail. These were the Thunderstruck Shoals Trail and the Capuchin Trail. Another east-west route, the Meadow Creek Trail, was a continuation of the Thunderstruck Shoals Trail and led from the present site of Rockholds, Kentucky, to the Croley-Evans site on the Cumberland River south of Barbourville. Another possible prehistoric route led from the present site of Williamsburg up Brown's Creek to Meadow Creek and the Croley-Evans site.

It is unclear where the trail led from the Croley-Evans site to connect with the Warriors' Path. It may have followed the west bank of the Cumberland to the present site of Barbourville or it may have crossed the river and followed it on the east side. Another trail led from the Warriors' Path to the site of Harlan and beyond to settlements in the Powell Valley of Virginia. I have suggested that such a trail would have followed the Cumberland River from Pineville to Harlan, southeastward to Cranks Gap and into the Powell River basin. An alternate route could have connected the settlement at Harlan with the settlement at Cumberland and then gone southward through Stone Gap into the Powell River basin.

If the descriptions of these trails is accurate, future searches for regionally significant Native-American settlement sites may be enhanced by their use as guides to the movement of prehistoric peoples in the upper Cumberland River basin. If heretofore unknown sites are confirmed along these routes, other connecting trails may be discovered, thus expanding our knowledge of prehistoric communications among Native Americans.