

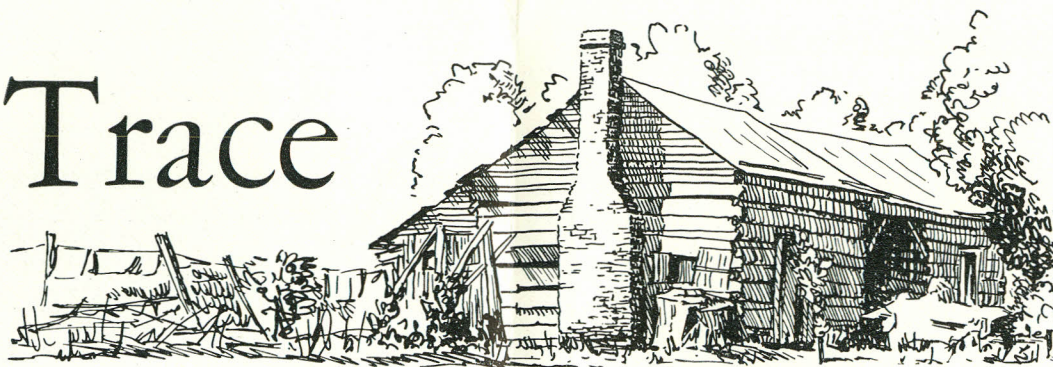
Natchez Trace

PARKWAY

TENNESSEE • ALABAMA • MISSISSIPPI



Natchez Trace Parkway



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, J. A. Krug, *Secretary* • NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Newton B. Drury, *Director*

★ *The Natchez Trace Parkway memorializes a series of Indian paths that became a wilderness roadway between Natchez and Nashville and during 1800–1830 successively a post road and highway binding the Old Southwest to the Union.*

ORIGINS OF THE NATCHEZ TRACE

When the white man began to explore the southern part of the United States, he found a network of beaten paths, perhaps first made by buffalo or other wild animals in quest of salt licks or food. The Indian added others and turned many of the older ones to his own use as warpaths, hunting courses, or trails linking village with village and tribe with tribe. Use of these trails by prehistoric Indians is suggested by physical remains—mounds, village sites, cemeteries, and fortifications—located along the various routes. Pioneer settlers frequently called such a trail a *trace*, a word which in old French suggests its origin as a line of footprints or animal tracks.

These traces, or trails, showed a marked tendency to follow watershed divides in an effort to avoid stream crossings and swamps, even though the distances were greater. Several of these trails, though individually unimportant, when joined to-

gether led in a northeasterly direction from present-day Natchez, Miss., to Nashville, Tenn. Thus the Natchez, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and probably the Cherokee Indian tribes were linked together. This trail system became increasingly important after the coming of the white man, who used it in his military, political, and commercial activities while pushing into the region from the Gulf of Mexico or from the Atlantic Seaboard. Later, it was known as the Natchez Trace.

THE NATCHEZ TRACE— EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The area through which the Natchez Trace ran was first explored by Frenchmen during the early 1700's. Their first permanent settlement in this region was made at Natchez in 1716. In 1733, a map of the region had been made showing the Indian trail, which later was called the Natchez Trace, running from Natchez to the Choctaw villages and thence to the Chickasaw villages in northeast Mississippi. The French settled on the Gulf Coast and along the Mississippi River at New Orleans and Natchez and established forts and trading posts elsewhere. They were interested in Indian trade and made little effort to colonize the interior.

In 1763, France ceded the region to Eng-

land which occupied it until ousted by the Spanish in 1779. After the American Revolution, the United States acquired the English claims to the region. From 1783, both Spain and the United States claimed the region, with the Spanish occupying the southern part, their most important outpost being at Natchez. Americans had already begun to move into the northern part of the area, and, in 1780, they established Nashville as their southwestern-most outpost.

During the eighteenth century the Natchez Trace came to be used more and more by white men. French traders and missionaries traveled over it; later the English, and then the Spanish. After the middle 1780's, men from Kentucky and adjacent parts of the old West returned to their homes over the Natchez Trace afoot, after having floated flour and other farm products to New Orleans on flatboats.

In 1798, Spain, while retaining the lands west of the Mississippi and along the Gulf Coast, surrendered Natchez, along with all lands north of the thirty-first degree, north latitude, to the United States. Mississippi Territory was immediately organized, with its capital at Natchez. The new territory had a population of more than 8,000 people, mostly English-speaking, who had settled there during the period of British control, 1763–79.

THE NATCHEZ TRACE— A POST ROAD

A post road between Natchez and Nashville was established by Congress in 1800. The Postmaster General complained that it would be used only "at a great expense to the public on account of the badness of the road which is said to be no other than an Indian footpath very devious and narrow." He then suggested to the Secretary of War that United States troops stationed in the Southwest be used "in clearing out a wagon road and bridging the creeks and causewaying the swamps between Nashville and Natchez."

Late in 1801, permission to improve the road was secured from the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians. Gen. James Wilkinson, commanding the United States Army in the West, then prepared a map of the Natchez Trace. He ended his description of the survey with a penetrating analysis of the diplomatic and military importance of the Trace: "This road being completed, I shall consider our Southern extremity secured, the Indians in that quarter at our feet, & the adjacent Province laid open to us."

Work on the road began late in 1801. Whether the troops actually cleared all the road from Duck River Ridge, 30 miles south of Nashville, to Grindstone Ford, near Port Gibson, Miss., is not known. Increased traffic, after the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803, called for further improvement. In 1806, Congress provided money, and additional improvements were made under the direction of the Postmaster General. Michaux, a French traveler, estimated that work done by the Army reduced the distance from Natchez to Nashville by 100 miles. The Postmaster General estimated that the 1806 improvement would reduce the distance by an additional 50 miles.

THE NATCHEZ TRACE— A PIONEER HIGHWAY

After the year 1800, the Natchez Trace became a colorful, dramatic, and vital segment of the American experience. The fig-

ures of the Indian, the explorer, and the hunter were followed by the Kentucky boatmen, the circuit riding preachers, soldiers, agents of government, and the settlers passing this way.

Meriwether Lewis, the great explorer of the West, traveled over a section of the old road in 1809 and met death at Grinders Stand in Tennessee. Shortly after the beginning of the War of 1812, a brigade of Tennessee militia was ordered to Natchez, and, on arrival early in 1813, received orders to disband. The commander, Andrew Jackson, refused to obey the order. Subsequently, he and his men marched home over the Natchez Trace. Because he shared their hardships, it was on this march that his men admiringly called him "Old Hickory." Two years later a large number of the victorious army at the Battle of New Orleans triumphantly marched homeward over the Natchez Trace. Aaron Burr and other names and events of the history of the old Southwest are associated with the Natchez Trace.

D'Evereux on the Natchez Trace near Natchez, Miss.



The Choctaw Indians by the treaties of Doak's Stand, 1820, and Dancing Rabbit, 1830, and the Chickasaws by the Treaty of Pontotoc Creek, 1832, surrendered all claim to lands occupied by their ancestors for centuries and moved west. Soon these lands were settled and the wilderness character of the road was lost.

By the beginning of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century this old road had entered into decline. The development of the steamboat as a means of transportation induced travelers to choose other routes of travel. Thus was closed a brief chapter of the frontier epic. Some sections of the Trace were abandoned and the ground itself given over to the growing of cotton, corn, or tobacco. Instead of the Indian war cry or the clanking of spur and sabre, the creak of the loaded wagon or the rumbling of a carriage was heard. The old Natchez Trace had now become a series of local roads connecting newly established farms or thriving new communities.

Prior to 1798, the existence of the Natchez Trace put considerable pressure on Spain to surrender her claim to Natchez and later to West Florida, as that part of Louisiana east of the Mississippi, except New Orleans, was then called. After the lower Mississippi Valley became American, the Natchez Trace provided the surest means of communication between the eastern United States and the outlying communities of Mississippi and Louisiana. For a full generation the Natchez Trace was the mostly heavily traveled, and thus the most important, highway of the old Southwest.

THE PARKWAY

The Parkway, which is to be 450 miles long, with an average width of 800 feet, is now under construction and will memorialize the old Natchez Trace. Like the Trace, it will extend from Natchez, Miss., to Nashville, Tenn., and will follow fairly closely the route of the old road. It will feature a motorway along which places of historic interest, such as parts of the old Trace, "stands" or inn sites, ferry sites, and Indian mounds, will be preserved and suitably marked to explain and illustrate the use of the old route.

Congress by an act approved May 21, 1934, authorized the "survey of the old Indian Trail known as the Natchez Trace, with a view of constructing a national road on this route to be known as the Natchez Trace Parkway." Later, Congress approved the establishment of the Parkway as one of the areas administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. Acquisition of lands and construction of the motor road were started in 1937. Shortly after the outbreak of war, in 1941, all parkway construction was stopped; 105 miles of grading, with minor drainage structures and a few bridges, had been completed.

Travel on the Parkway.—Although the Parkway is under construction, it is open to travel for short distances. One such



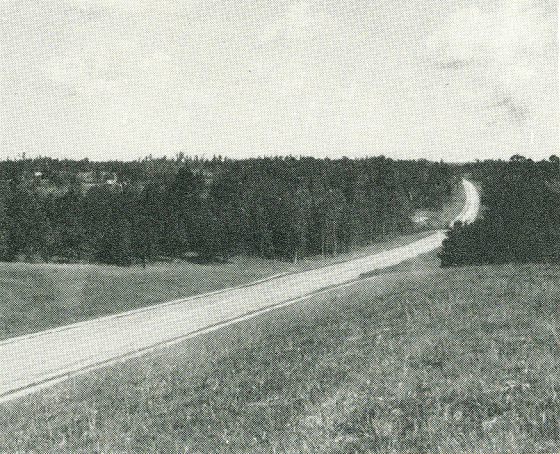
The Natchez Trace, after more than a century of use, has become a sunken road shaded by overhanging trees.

section may be entered from United States Highway No. 61 at Selma, 12 miles north of Natchez, Miss., and another from United States Highway No. 51, 6 miles north of Jackson, Miss. Before entering the Parkway, local inquiry should be made as to travel conditions.

REGULATIONS

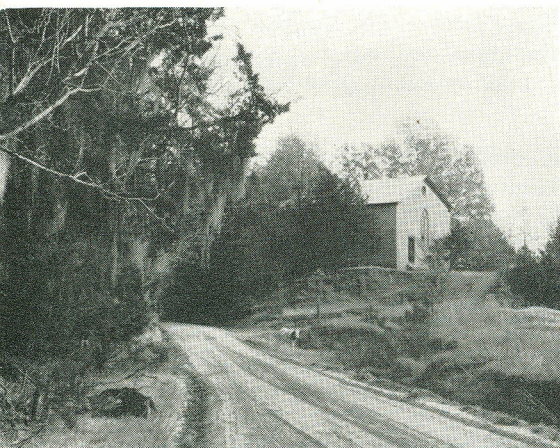
The National Park Service regulations are designed for the protection of the natural features and scenery, as well as for the comfort and convenience of the visitors. You are requested to assist in protecting and administering the Parkway by observing the following simple rules and regulations.

Fire.—The Parkway's greatest enemy is fire. Campfires must be built only in designated spots. Cigarettes, cigars, and matches must always be extinguished before they are thrown away. They should never be thrown from cars or trucks. Fires should be reported immediately to the nearest National Park Service employee.



Natchez Trace Parkway, Attala County, Miss.

Rocky Springs Church, Claiborne County, Miss., on the Old Natchez Trace.

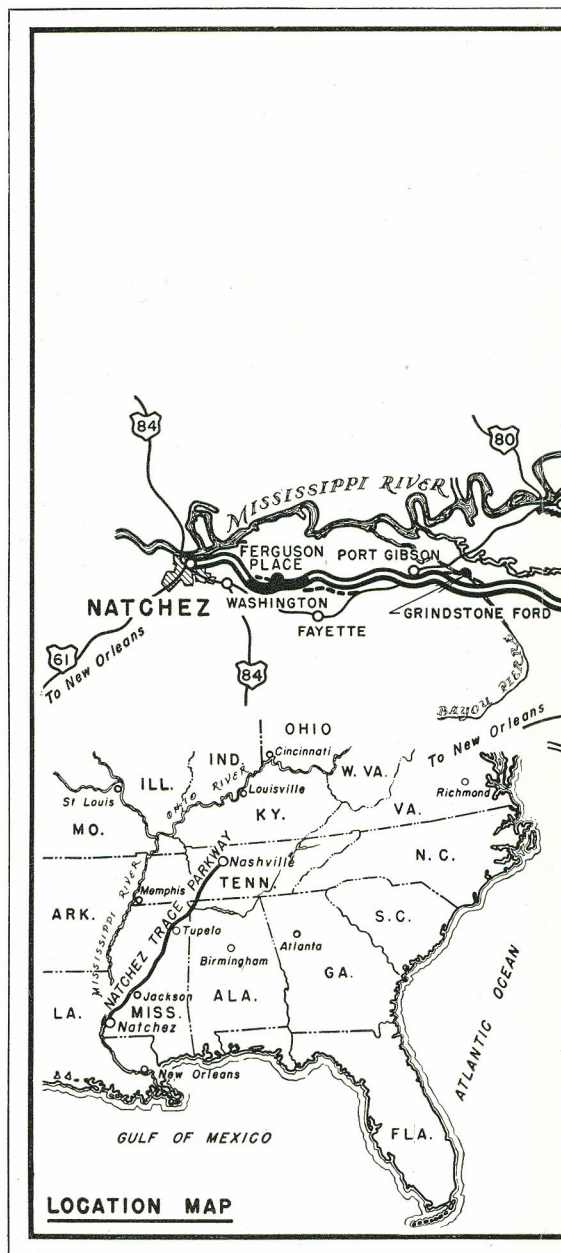


Natural, historical, and archeological features.—Trees, shrubs, flowers, and historical and archeological features are protected at all times. Please help us to preserve them for others to enjoy. Birds and all other animals are protected and may not be molested in any way.

Firearms.—The discharge of firearms is prohibited.

Sanitation.—This is your Parkway. Please help to keep it clean.

Drinking water.—Many of the streams are polluted and cannot be used safely as a source of drinking water.



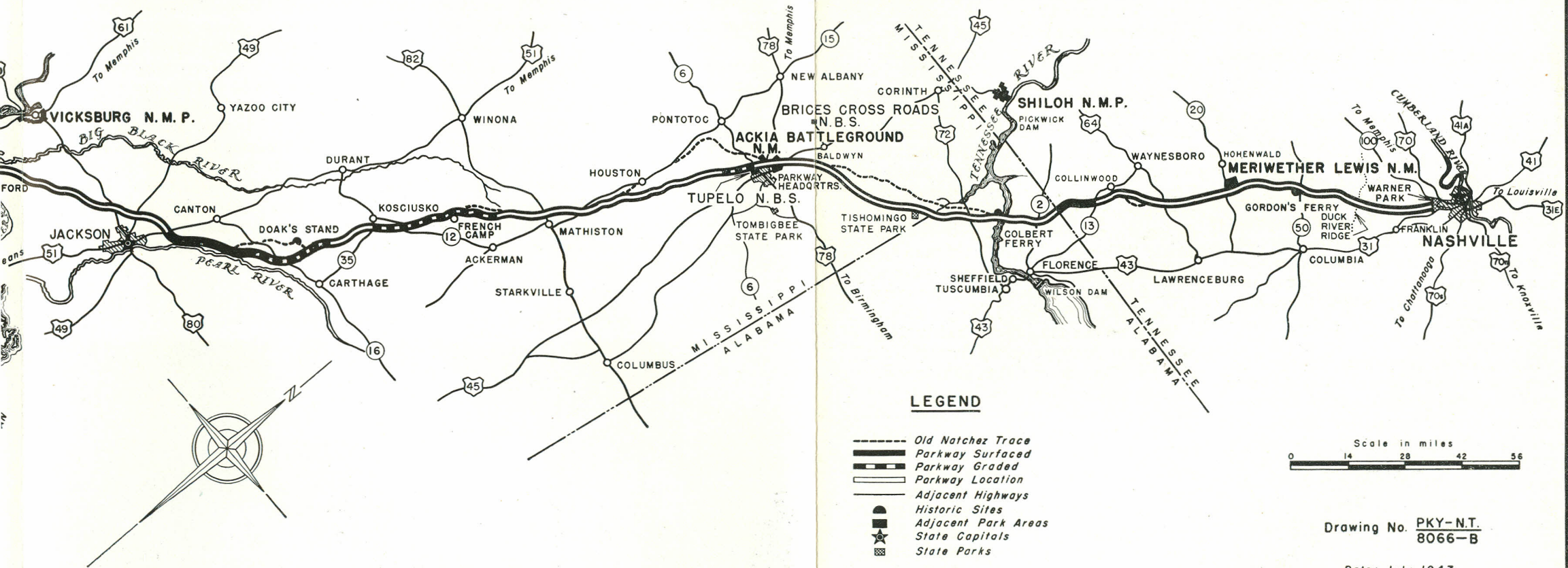
Speed limit.—Please drive carefully. Slower driving means more enjoyment.

Commercial vehicles are excluded from the Parkway.

Picnics may be held only at designated areas.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY



Rangers.—National Park Service rangers are here to assist and advise you, as well as to protect life and property. They will be glad to furnish information and help in any way so that you may get the most enjoyment from your visit to the Parkway.

ADMINISTRATION

The Natchez Trace Parkway is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service

of the United States Department of the Interior. The Parkway headquarters are located near United States Highway No. 45, 5 miles north of Tupelo. Inquiries should be addressed to the Superintendent, Natchez Trace Parkway, Tupelo, Miss.

Revised 1948

