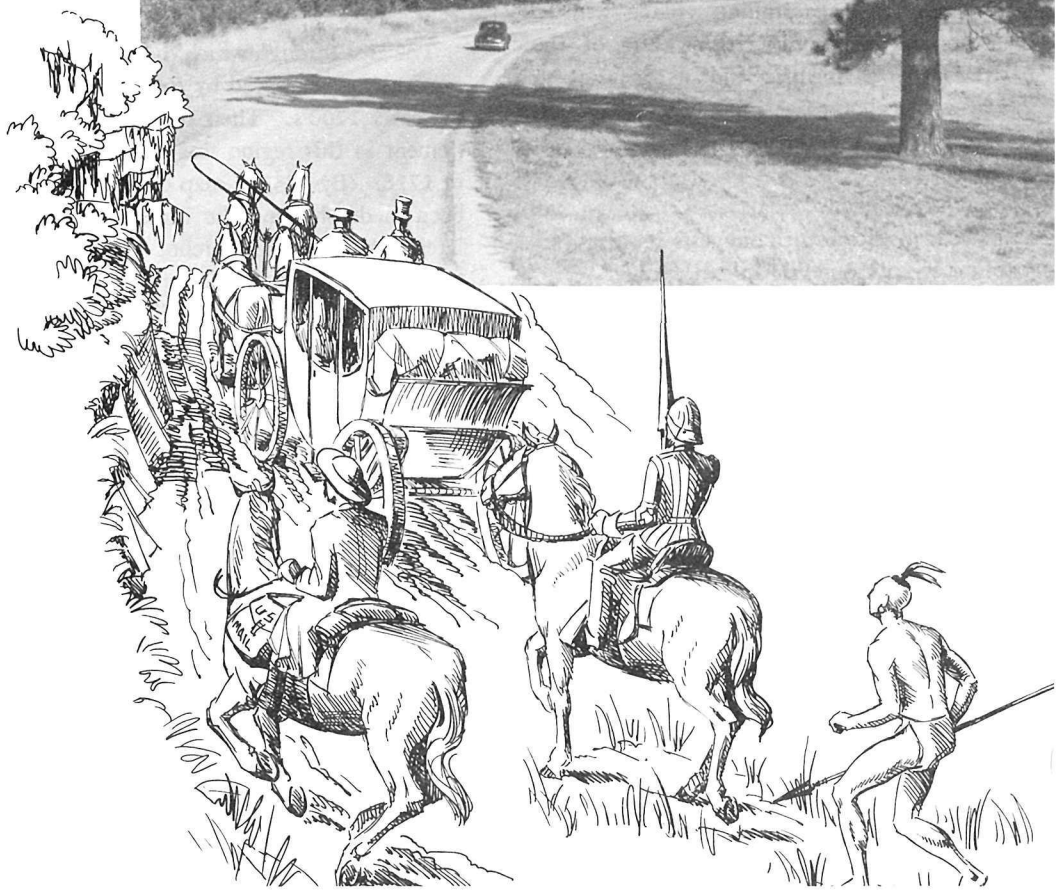


# Natchez Trace

## PARKWAY

TENNESSEE • ALABAMA • MISSISSIPPI



# Natchez Trace Parkway



★*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.*

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 together 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 increas-

ingly 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.

## 18TH-CENTURY NATCHEZ TRACE

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. By 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.

During the 18th 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.

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.

In 1763, France ceded the region to England 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 southwesternmost outpost. 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.

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.

In 1798, Spain, while retaining the lands west of the Mississippi and along the Gulf Coast finally surrendered Natchez, along with all lands north of latitude 31° N., 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.

## 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."

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.

## A PIONEER HIGHWAY

After the lower Mississippi Valley became American, the Natchez Trace provided the surest means of communication between the eastern United States and the outlying com-

munities of Mississippi and Louisiana. For a full generation the Natchez Trace was the most heavily traveled, and thus the most important, highway of the old Southwest.

After 1800, the Natchez Trace became a colorful, dramatic, and vital segment of life in America. The figures 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.

The Natchez Trace was of great military importance. When, in 1803 it appeared that France might refuse to surrender Louisiana, as provided by the treaty, President Jefferson ordered Tennessee Militia to Natchez—the first military use of the trace. Later, during the War of 1812, Tennessee militia units were ordered to Natchez, and on arrival, early in 1813, received orders to disband. The commander, Andrew Jackson, refused to obey the order. He and his men marched home over the Natchez Trace. Because he shared their hardships on this march, his men admiringly called him "Old Hickory." Two years later the veterans of the Battle of New Orleans triumphantly marched homeward over the Natchez Trace.

The Choctaw Indians by the Treaties of Doak's Stand, 1820, and Dancing Rabbit, 1830, and the Chickasaws by the Treaty of

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



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 third decade of the 19th 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 saber, 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.

## THE PARKWAY

The Natchez Trace Parkway was created by an act of Congress on May 18, 1938, as a unit of the National Park System. When completed, the parkway will run about 450 miles from Natchez, Miss., to Nashville, Tenn., following closely the route of the old Natchez Trace. It is a motor road with a wide parklike right-of-way along which are places of historic interest, such as remnants of the old trace, "stands" (inn sites), ferry sites, and Indian mounds. Many places of historic interest will be preserved and suitably marked to explain and illustrate the use of the old road. Signs direct you to all points of interest.

Parking areas are located at convenient intervals to enable you to stop, inspect parts of the old trace, read the marker texts, and observe the plant and animal life of the region from a nature trail.

Some 148 miles of the parkway have been completed, and 97 miles are in various stages of construction.

*Travel on the Parkway.*—Three sections of the parkway have been completed and are open. Two are in Mississippi. One, 102 miles long, runs from U. S. 51, 10 miles north of Jackson to U. S. 82 near Mathiston. The other runs 12 miles from U. S. 61, 10 miles northeast of Natchez to State Route 553, 6 miles west of Fayette. The paved section in Tennessee and Alabama runs 34 miles from Alabama Route 20, 15 miles northwest of Florence, Ala., to U. S. 64, about halfway between Waynesboro and Lawrenceburg, Tenn.

## REGULATIONS

National Park Service regulations are designed for the protection of the natural features and scenery, as well as for your comfort and convenience. Please help to protect the parkway by observing the following 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.

**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.



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

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

**Commercial vehicles** are excluded from the parkway.

**Picnic** only at designated areas.

**Park 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 trip on the parkway.

## ADMINISTRATION

Natchez Trace Parkway is administered by the National Park Service of the U. S. Department of the Interior. Parkway headquarters are located near U. S. 45, 5 miles north of Tupelo. A superintendent, whose address is Tupelo, Miss., is in immediate charge.












UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary  
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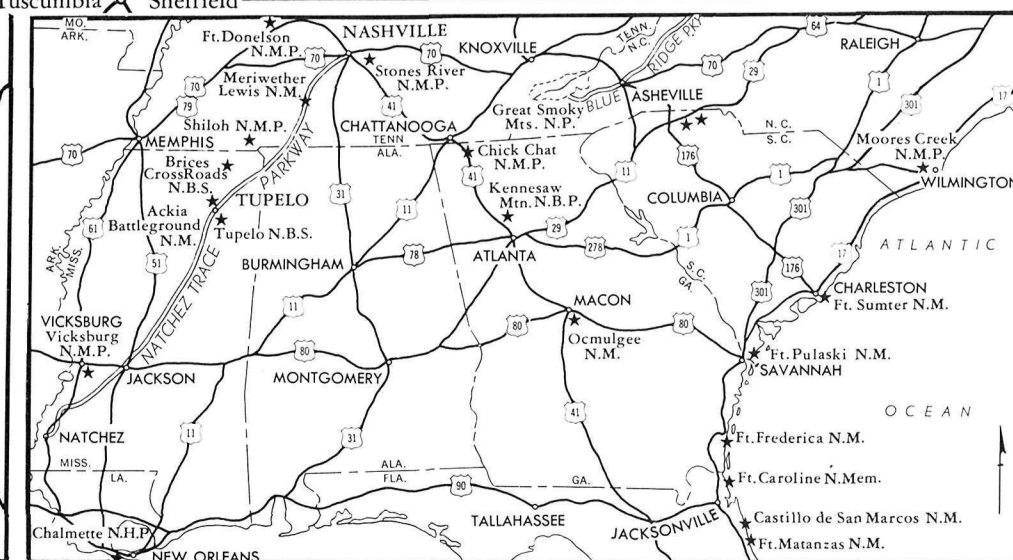
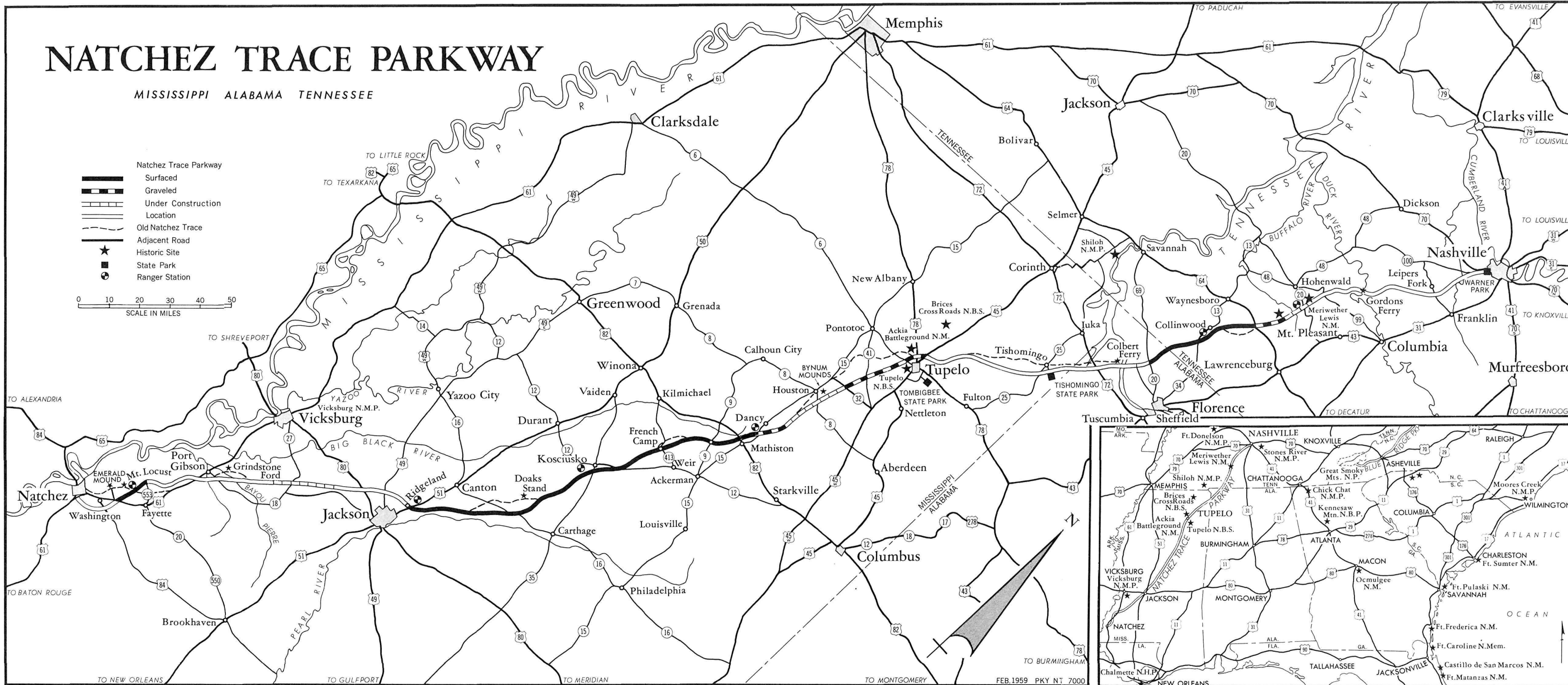




# NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY

MISSISSIPPI ALABAMA TENNESSEE

-  Surfaced
-  Graveled
-  Under Construction
-  Location
-  Old Natchez Trace
-  Adjacent Road
-  Historic Site
-  State Park
-  Ranger Station



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TENNESSEE · ALABAMA · MISSISSIPPI

