



The Mudcat

The Mississippi History Newsletter for Students

Vol 2. No 4.

Fall 2014

The Natchez Trace Parkway

The Early Trace

Once a foot path used by pre-historic American Indians, the Natchez Trace became the preferred route to travel the length of Mississippi. By the early 1800s “Kaintucks” had joined the native Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez tribes traveling the Trace. These farmers and traders from the north would float their crops and wares on flatboats down the Mississippi River to sell in Natchez and New Orleans. When they arrived, they would also sell the lumber from their boats before beginning the 500-mile, 35-day trek back to Nashville, Tennessee.



The sunken Trace. MDAH Museum Division Education.



Daughters of the American Revolution monument commemorating the Natchez Trace, presented to the city of Port Gibson on November 25, 1913. MDAH Archives and Records Services.

The Trace in the 20th Century

The invention of the steamboat as well as the creation of new, more efficient roadways and railways in the early 1800s led to the decline in use of the Natchez Trace. Then, in 1905, an article in a popular magazine brought national attention to the historical significance of the Natchez Trace and its importance to travelers

of the Old Southwest. Soon, women’s groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the War of 1812 began erecting monuments along the Trace.

When the **Great Depression** began, the preservation of the Natchez Trace became a way to put people back to work. Surveyors,

construction workers, and historians teamed up, not only to build a safe national parkway, but also to create historical markers, nature trails, picnic areas, and campgrounds along its path. The project, which began in 1934, was finally completed in 2005 and is today run by the National Park Service.

Living Along the Trace



One of the oldest buildings along the Trace is Mount Locust, located just north of Natchez. Built around 1780, the cabin served as a stand or inn where early travelers could buy a hot meal and stay for the night. Descendants of

the original occupants of Mount Locust lived there until 1944. Now owned by the National Park Service, tours of the restored home are available daily.

Forty miles north of Natchez, the town of Rocky Springs was established about the

same time as Mount Locust, but after the Civil War the small town began to decline. Its population decreased after an 1878 **yellow fever epidemic**, followed by a **boll weevil** infestation in the 1920s. In 1930 the spring the town was named for dried

up and the remaining residents left. Today there is only a small church, walking trail, and graveyard left for visitors to explore.

Interior of Mount Locust (left). Church at Rocky Springs (right). MDAH Museum Division Education.

The Trace Is a Greenway



American alligator, tanager, and squirrel. Images courtesy of NPS Photo.

Because the Natchez Trace is a **greenway** that spans 444 miles north to south, a wide variety of animals inhabits the area. The 52,000 acres of forests, fields, and water bordering the parkway give ample opportunity for hiking and learning about the plants and

animals of Mississippi. In fact, more than 2,200 species of plants are found along the Trace, as well as 15 species of frogs, 134 types of birds, and 33 mammals. The Trace is also home to 25 species of snakes, including 3 **venomous** varieties! You never know what you may

see along the Trace — a visit may yield sightings of such diverse animals as foxes, coyotes, black bears, armadillos, alligators, herons, pelicans, Canada geese, newts and salamanders.

Not Everything Along the Trace Is Good

Sometimes bad things happen to good greenways in the form of non-native or invasive species of plants. These plants disrupt the natural habitat along the Trace. One of these invasive weeds is kudzu, a plant originally from Japan. It grows up to a foot a day in the summertime and kills trees and other plant life that animals depend upon to survive. Invasive plants such as kudzu can lead to the **endangerment** and **extinction** of native plant and animal species.

Investigate More

You can visit sites all along the Natchez Trace to learn about the people, plants, and animals that have lived in Mississippi!

The first stop for exploring the Natchez Trace Parkway is the website for the National Park Service! Go online to get maps, find cool places to explore, and learn about the wildlife and history along the Trace. <http://www.nps.gov/natr/index.htm>. Then, when in the Tupelo area be sure to stop at the Parkway Visitor Center to see exhibits about the history of the Natchez Trace and ask park rangers all your questions!



The Cypress Swamp just north of Jackson features a boardwalk and nature trail through a water tupelo/bald cypress swamp. It's a great place for bird watching and lucky visitors have even spotted alligators!



Between Kosciusko and Tupelo is Jeff Busby Park, a campground with nature trails, picnic areas, and an overlook situated at one of the highest points in Mississippi.

Visit the Loess Bluff north of Natchez to see bluffs of windblown topsoil created during the Ice Age!



No journey along the Trace would be complete without a stop at Emerald Mound. Built by the Mississippian Indians around 500 years ago, this mound was a ceremonial center where burials, dances, and religious rituals took place. It is one of the largest mounds in the United States — over 3,300 school buses could fit inside it!

All photos MDAH Museum Division Education.

Show What You Know!

Vocabulary

Boll Weevil: beetle that attacks cotton and ruins crops, most famously throughout the South in the 1920s.

Endangered Species: plants and animals that are in danger of becoming extinct.

Extinct Species: plants and animals that have died out and are no longer in existence.

Great Depression: a severe economic crisis in the U.S. lasting from 1929 through the 1930s when many people were out of work.

Greenway: a scenic trail or route set aside as a habitat corridor and recreational area.

Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878: a disease spread by mosquitos that is often deadly and which killed thousands of Mississippians in 1878.

Venomous: an animal that can inflict a poisonous bite, sting, or wound.

Design a Sign

What's your favorite spot along the Natchez Trace? Write a sign saying what it is and why!

My favorite spot along the Natchez Trace is...

Famous Folks Along the Trace

Many interesting people have lived or traveled along the Trace. Match the name with the description and then check your answers below.

Choctaw

Kaintucks

Meriwether Lewis

Andrew Jackson

Chickasaw

1. Future American president who traveled the Trace during the War of 1812.

2. Exploring partner of William Clark who died at a stand along the Trace of a gunshot wound in 1848.

3. A Southeastern tribe that lost its Mississippi land to the United States with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830.

4. A tribe of fierce warriors, they were forced to cede their Mississippi lands to the United States with the 1832 Treaty of Pontotoc Creek.

5. Boatmen who floated supplies down the Mississippi River and then returned North via the Trace.

Answers: 1. Andrew Jackson; 2. Meriwether Lewis; 3. Choctaw; 4. Chickasaw; 5. Kaintucks

Create a Catfish Competition

How would you like to see a catfish of your own creation on the cover of the *Mudcat*? If you're an artist — or even if you're not — craft a cool catfish graphic, send it in to the *Mudcat*, and YOUR catfish could win a coveted spot on the cover of the next issue! Send all entries via mail or email to:

Outreach Programs Coordinator
Museum Division, MDAH
P.O. Box 571
Jackson, MS 39205-0571
Phone: 601-576-6997 outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov

Congratulations
to Grady H. of
Madison for his
winning Mudcat!