

The Natchez Trace – The DAR and its Tishomingo County Connection

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Since the time pre-historic tribes roamed the hills and hollows of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi, the Natchez Trace has been used for travel. At first, the Trace was probably a series of hunters' paths that slowly came to form a trail from the Mississippi over the low hills into the valley of the Tennessee.

Over the years, as the tribes and animals used regular paths for their travels, the paths became beaten. When early explorers arrived in the Southeast, they used parts of the Trace during their journeys. The explorers found many of the well-beaten paths made by wandering herds of buffalo and Indians traveling between villages.

Over it rode in the early days John Lee Swanney, the mail rider who could make the trip from Natchez to Nashville, Tennessee in ten days and four hours, if the horses were good. He was the only human in that vast wilderness, a blanket to shed off the cold ground, food for his horse and himself, and the mail he carried, undaunted by flood, sleet, cold or heat, he carried the mail. The only touch the Citizen of the remote settlement of the deep south had with the outside world for about eleven years.

In 1806, Congress, at the direction of President Thomas Jefferson, appropriated funding to clear the Trace from Nashville to Natchez to a width of 12 feet to make the entire route passable by wagon.

It was in the early 1900s that the Mississippi Society Daughters of the American Revolution decided that something needed to be done to preserve the old road or it would be forever lost. The state regent, Mrs. Egbert Jones (from 1907-1909), initiated a project to place markers along the original roadway. The first marker was placed by the DAR in 1908. Over the next 20 years, 15 similar monuments told the story of the historic pathway and marked the location of the old road from Natchez to the Mississippi-Alabama state line. Because of the work of the DAR, public interest was directed in preserving the Old Trace and the Natchez Trace Highway Association was formed to promote its reconstruction.

The Alabama-Mississippi state line (marker 308.9) is the starting point for Tishomingo County's attributes.



Two sites on the Natchez Trace Parkway were excavated during the summer



of 1965. These sites had been proposed as interpretive features, and their investigation was undertaken to provide information for this purpose. The first, called the Bear Mound site (308.8), consists of the damaged remnant of a small temple mound and a village area.

The other, the Cave Spring Site (308.4), is situated approximately one-half mile to the west of the Bear Creek mound. When first recorded in 1950 by the archeological survey of the Natchez Trace Parkway, the Bear Creek mound was described as being 12 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. In the meantime, it had been badly damaged by cultivation, and when excavation began, the mound was a low rise, a mere 4 feet high. Roughly oval in outline, it measured about 140 by 180 feet. South and east of the mound scattered flint chips, shards, and bits of burned daub indicative of village remains were strewn over the surface of an area measuring some 350 and 450 feet.



In summation, the builders of the mound and village found an excellent location for their settlement. The rich soil and an amenable climate would have made agriculture a



productive enterprise and the surrounding forests offered many potential food sources, both wild plants and game.



The Tishomingo State Park (304.5) is an area abundant in natural beauty. Tishomingo State Park, like the Chief Tishomingo Chapter DAR, was named after the Chickasaw Indian Chief. Tishomingo State Park was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s. Many of the original buildings and hand-forged irons works are visible

today.



The huge boulders and the rustic cabin near the park entrance are just a couple of my favorite photo spots inside the park.



Bay Springs Lake (293.4) offers access for the lake and dam. Many years ago before North Mississippi was settled, there lived a tribe of Indians on Mackey's Creek, the head waters of the Tombigbee River, which is near Bay Springs about nine miles west of Belmont. Back in those days, there was plenty of good hunting grounds and game in this part of Mississippi. There were just a few white people scattered here and there. These white people and Indians were on friendly terms. One of the Indian men was in love with an Indian girl, and they were supposed to get married. He left his horse in front of her tent one night, and she was to carry it to him that same night. That was their way of getting married. The Indian girl did not carry the horse to him, and he found out that she was being friendly with a white man. The Indian was very disappointed and heartbroken because he thought the Indian girl was in love with the white man. On Mackey's Creek near Bay Springs, there is a big rock that stands out over the water. It is about 50 or 75 feet high. The Indian man went to this rock and jumped off and killed himself. The Indian girl heard about it and, of course, she was hurt too. She found out that the white man did not care anything for her and did not intend to marry her, so she went to the same rock and jumped off as well. From that day until today, that rock has been called "Lovers Leap."

The Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway and Jamie L. Whitten Bridge (293.2) cross the 459 mile navigable waters between the Gulf of Mexico and the Tennessee River. Travelers of the Natchez Trace Parkway discover an unhurried scenic route of unsurpassed natural beauty. Each season of the year offers a rich panoply of color as the golden and crimson leaves of fall give way to the flowering pink and white dogwoods of spring and the brilliant wild flowers of summer. Wildlife is plentiful and seems relaxed as travelers slow to get a quick photograph or memorable glance as they meander onward toward their destination.



Chief Tishomingo was a legend in his own time because he lived for more than a century (from about 1737 until about 1838). He, as a prominent member of this civilized tribe, helped to form the destiny of the United States. This statue of Chief Tishomingo is located inside Tishomingo State Park.

Where foot touches earth a path is formed. My grandmother, Eula Mae Crouch, was raised in Winona, Mississippi. In fact, it was there that she met and married my grandfather Lester Whirley, who worked a short time there in her brother's sawmill. Once they were married they moved back to my grandfather's hometown of Glen and later, Burnsville. I fondly remember the memories on riding with Grandma (Mamow) down the Natchez Trace to Winona in the 1970s and 80s to visit her family. I still use that same route on most of my trips to Jackson.

I last journeyed the Natchez Trace on January 20, 2007. As my friends and I made our way home to Tishomingo County, we reminisced on the pioneer methods of our ancestors and awed each time we saw a group of deer and turkey feeding on the beautiful green grass on the historic Natchez Trace.

“We must not allow our past to slip away from us, but talk our history, teach our history and live surrounded by its memorials.” Mrs. Charles Oliver Norton, State Regent, Nebraska DAR, 1911-1913, *American Monthly Magazine*, March 1909.

Reference:

- i. A Century of Service – The Story of the DAR by Ann Arnold Hunter. National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, Washington, D.C.
- ii. Natchez Trace Parkway, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee brochure.
- iii. UPA Records, Assignment #22, Tishomingo County (from MDAH).

- iv. Excavations at the Pharr Mounds, Prentiss and Itawamba Counties, Mississippi, and Excavations at the Bear Creek Site, *Tishomingo County*, Mississippi, by Charles F. Bohannon. Published/Created: Washington, U.S. Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Division of Archeology and Anthropology, 1972.