

THE MID NEW RIVER TRAFFIC CIRCLE OF THE WILDERNESS TRAIL

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Introduction

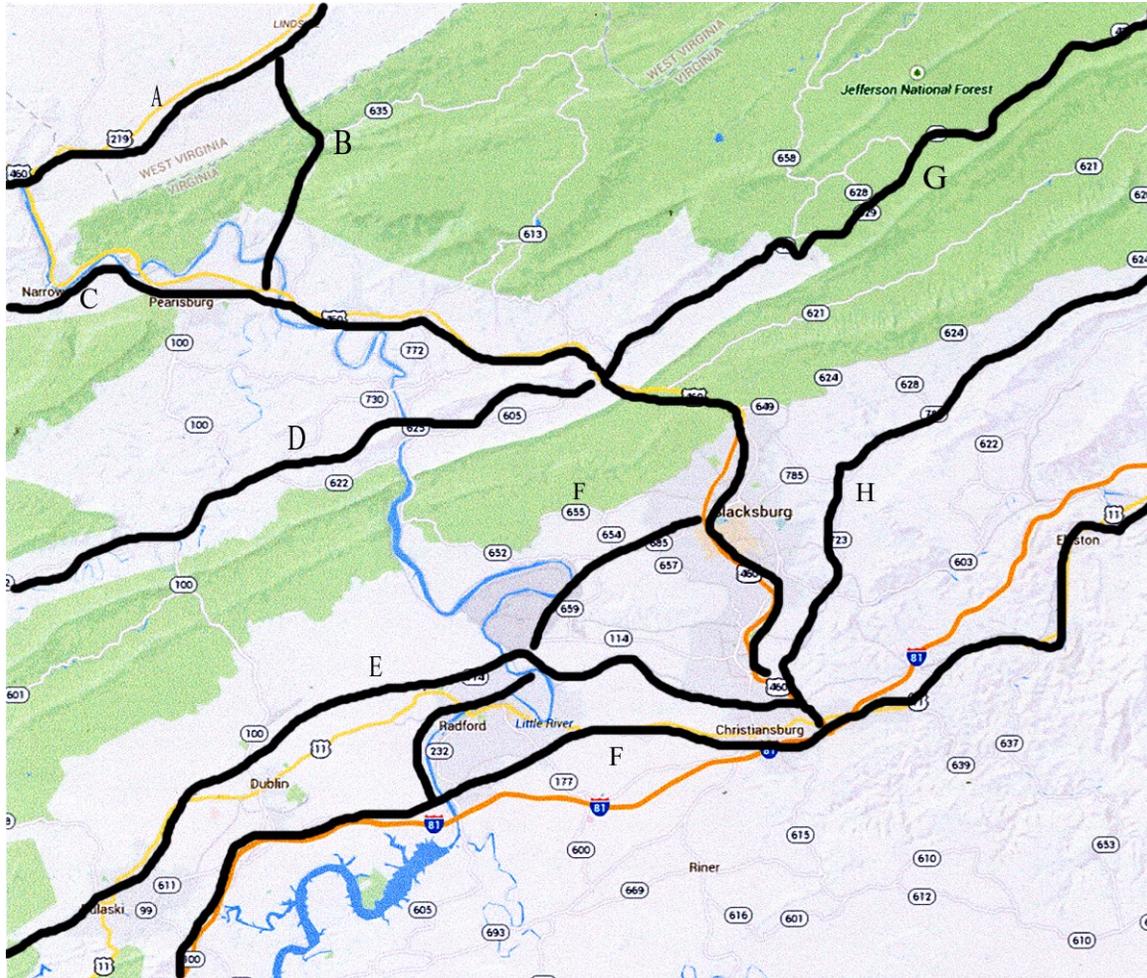
The main Indian trail in the eastern United States was called by the Delaware Athawominee, or the Great Warrior's Path. In pioneer days it became called by various names, including the Wilderness Trail, the Great Road to Kentucky, and the western portion – the Daniel Boone Trail. The only section of this trail that did not offer itself in a series of alternative routes was the section from Middlesboro, Kentucky to Pineville, Kentucky. The portion of the trail that was in Virginia offered alternatives all the way westward from Harrisonburg to Cumberland Gap.

If the Great Warrior's Path is considered to have been the route of the Iroquois Indians of the Mohawk Valley of New York to Kentucky, then one must deal with the fact that it existed in an eastern version, and in a western version. Think of the Five Tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy as being laid out in a line running east to west in the Mohawk Valley from Albany to Buffalo. The Mohawk tribe lived easternmost, and the Senecas lived at the western end at Buffalo. Indeed, the Seneca were called the 'Western Door' of the Iroquois 'longhouse'.

The main trail was the eastern version which followed US 11 from the eastern end of Lake Ontario south through the middle of the Iroquois Confederacy all the way through Virginia into Tennessee, before it returned to Virginia on US 23, and then on US 58 to Cumberland Gap. However, if one were a Seneca, one would find this route out of the way. The Seneca Trail followed US 219 to the northern end of the Narrows on the New River in Virginia. At that point, one had a choice of either following US 460 south to the "traffic circle" that existed within the section of the central New River Valley, or of continuing west on US 460 to the Clinch Valley version of the Wilderness Trail at Tazewell.

The New River Valley from Radford to Narrows was like a functional traffic circle, into which all the versions of the Great Warrior's Path entered from the east, and all the versions going west exited. A description of this traffic circle is the object

of this essay. A map is presented with all the routes depicted. There is an accompanying text that describes each of the routes coming in, and all those leaving.



THE WARRIOR'S PATH or THE WILDERNESS ROAD
IN THE CENTRAL NEW RIVER VALLEY

MAP KEY

SENECA TRAIL	A
SYMM'S GAP TRAIL	B
CUMBERLAND ROAD TRAIL	C
BLUE GRASS TRAIL	D
PEPPER'S FERRY ROAD	E
MAIN WILDERNESS ROAD	F
CRAIG'S CREEK TRAIL	G
CATAWBA CREEK TRAIL	H

The version of the Wilderness Trail that is most vividly fixed in people's minds is, as one would expect, the most recent one. This version went right down the middle of the Great Valley of Virginia, crossing all the creeks and rivers, and wadding through all the wetlands, and served all the great plantations that had developed in the Valley. Indeed, it had developed into a wagon road, and not a foot or a horse trail. It is easily documented by verbiage in the surveys of the land patents and grants, and by the construction of turnpikes along its course. County road commissioners often recorded its courses in the court records of their jurisdiction.

The trail requirements of the Indian and Long Hunter were quite different. The long intermountain narrow creek valleys north of the Great Valley were the more favored habitats of the large game sought by these early trail users than the vast wide open Valley of Virginia. The steams that required fording were much smaller, and indeed, could be avoided altogether if one could find a nice level ridge top that was headed in the right direction to follow.

These more primitive versions of the Trail are harder to document, and are supported more by oral tradition. However, these old traditions are often reinforced by more modern designations. The State highway routes were originally all county roads, but frequently were given continuous numbers that crossed county lines. This circumstance was intended to show an existing ancient trail. An excellent example is State 42. We have seen how the national highway system designates US 219 and US 11 as modern versions of old trails.

Individual Trail Descriptions

- A) Seneca Trail – Overlain by US 219 this is the trail used by the Fincastle Militia in its march to the Battle of Point Pleasant in 1774. The records of this venture well document its existence.
- B) Symm's Gap Trail – US 460 was the connecting link between the eastern and western versions of the Great Warrior's Path. There was no other cross link until the two versions of the Trail merged in Scott County within the bounds of Natural Tunnel State Park. The portion of the Seneca Trail that lies within Clinch Valley is referred to as the Clinch Valley Branch of the Wilderness Trail. The Symm's Gap Trail is a short cut to the Seneca Trail for people travelling north on US 460. It was used by the Militia in 1774, and shows that saving distance was more important than grade to the foot traveller.
- C) Cumberland Road Trail – This route provided access to the head of the Clinch Valley, and from there to the head of the Big Sandy route to the Ohio River via Abs' Valley. The route down the Clinch River rejoined the main Wilderness Trail at the Rainbow Bridge within the limits of Natural

Tunnel State Park. It gave the advantage of totally bypassing the climb into and out of the Holston Valley. The section between Narrows and Tazewell at the head of the Clinch Valley provided a choice in two routes. The shortest and most direct route cut west up Wolf Creek from the Town of Narrows. It was favored by the early foot travellers. However, it was prone to washouts, and wagon travel was difficult. Later on the second version of the route was opened up, and it went through the Narrows to the mouth of the East River. It followed the roadbed of the current Norfolk-Southern Railroad and US 460 to Bluefield West Virginia / Virginia, where it turned south to Tazewell on US 19. Though it was longer, wheeled vehicles preferred this route. In 1833 the Commonwealth of Virginia improved this route via Craig's Creek from the Town of New Castle at Price's Turnpike all the way to Cumberland Gap. The 1833 Official Map of this project shows that both the Wolf Creek and East River routes were provided as options. The official name of the road was the 'Cumberland Road'. In 1844 the road was further improved as the Fincastle to Cumberland Gap Turnpike, and the map of this project drawn by Claudius Crozet showed the Wolf Creek Route as having been closed.

- D) Blue Grass Trail – State 42 crosses US 460 at Newport and continues west to the Town of Bland, and on to Saltville on the North Fork of the Holston River, usually (but not always) being labeled as The Blue Grass Trail. Here, this version of the Wilderness Trail rejoins the main route at a choice of either Glade Spring or at Abingdon.
- E) Pepper's Ferry Road – Coming from the east, if one were entering the 'traffic circle' within the New River Valley from one of the routes north of the main route, and intended to follow the main route on west, one was automatically positioned to cross the New River by either the ford or the ferry at Pepper's Ferry on a road known to this day as the Pepper's Ferry Road. This route followed US 11 to the Town of Pulaski, where US 11 crosses Draper's Mountain south to the main route following I-81. The Pepper's Ferry Road continues west from Pulaski along the top of Case Knife Ridge to Max Meadows and on to Wytheville, where the Pepper's Ferry Road rejoins the main Wilderness Trail going west.
- F) Main Wilderness Road – As an Indian Trail, it begins in the eastern Iroquois tribes in the lower Mohawk Valley. As a settler's trail, its head is the port of Philadelphia. It runs along US 11 through the Great Valley of Virginia and takes a short cut to US 23. It picks up the Clinch Valley Branch of the Wilderness Road in Natural Tunnel State Park, and then at Duffield turns onto US 58. At Jonesville it dips south just north of the Powell River, and then turns north to US 58 at Rose Hill, which it follows to Cumberland Gap and on to the Blue Grass of Kentucky. The Hunter's Trace parallels it as it cuts more through the mountains and salt licks. In

the 'traffic circle' system in the New River Valley, this route crossed the New River at Ingle's ford / ferry / bridge and proceeded west on I-81.

- G) Craig's Creek Trail – This is older than the main trail, from which it splits in Lexington. From Lexington the trail follows State 251 (Collier's Town Road) to State 612 (Blue Grass Trail) to State 622 (which on some maps continues the name 'Blue Grass Trail', and on some as Dagger Spring Road, and on others as Mill Creek Road). These are all the same road, and it comes to US 220 at Gala, where it turns north to where State 220 turns to the west. The old trail crossed the James at Price's Ford just downstream from Price's Bluff, and cuts across to the Craig's Creek Road on State 615 to New Castle. The section of the road from Price's Ford through New Castle is the old Price's Turnpike, which was the old way to US 60 & I-64 to Covington and White Sulfur Springs. State 42 joins the 'traffic circle' in the New River Valley on US 460 at Newport. The Blue Grass Trail road continues west on State 42. It crosses the New River at Godwin's Ferry. However, much of the traffic from Craig's Creek turned north on US 460 and went to Narrows, where it turned west either up Wolf Creek in the earlier days, or in later days along the East River. Under this incarnation it was known as the Cumberland Road, and later as the Cumberland Gap to Fincastle Turnpike.
- H) Catawba Creek Trail – This is the route taken by Col. John Buchanan, chief surveyor for the Loyal Company, on his trip west in 1745, when he came to Charles Mack's cabin at Max Meadows. It starts in the Town of Fincastle, which was the old road junction on the plateau between the James River Valley and the Roanoke Valley. It went west up Catawba Creek on State 600, which passes imperceptibly into the head of the North Fork of the Roanoke River, and as State 785 to US 460 in the heart of old Draper's Meadows (current Blacksburg). This route was often chosen over the main route of the Wilderness Trail because it delivered the traveller to the top of the Draper's Meadow Plateau without any awareness of having gained 1,000 feet. This is in marked contrast to the main trail up US 11, which struggles up Christiansburg Mountain. Much the same thing can be said about the Craig's Creek route as about the Catawba Creek Trail in this regard.

Summary

Only the road complex in the Upper James Valley running from Buchanan to Gala offers anything of comparable complexity. As intricate as that complex was, it was of lesser magnitude than the New River complex. The Indians understood this, and the existence within this complex of the settlements of Draper's Meadows and Dunkard's Bottom was the root cause of Lord Dunmore's War.

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