

BOONE'S TRACE THROUGH LAUREL COUNTY

By NEAL O. HAMMON

Louisville, Kentucky

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For several years I have been doing research on the subject of the original roads or, more correctly, trails that led into Kentucky from the southeast. In some places they are easy to locate; through Laurel County, however, there has been much confusion and conflicting information in past descriptions of these routes. This is due, in part, by the fact that part of Boone's Trace was abandoned in this area about 1796, when the then new Wilderness Road was built.¹ A few years later the "State Road" was constructed, which led from Laurel County to Lexington. The latter paralleled but ran east of the northern part of Boone's Trace.

In 1942 Mr. L. B. McHargue published a description of Boone's Trace through Laurel County, which was supplemented by a map prepared by McHargue, Mr. Russell Dyche, and Mr. J. H. Graham.² Although this work is the best description of the trace that is presently available, it is difficult to follow due to the use of farm locations to designate particular areas en route. With the passage of time most of these farms and farmhouses have burned, been sold, or the memory of them has been lost.

In December 1966, with the assistance of Mr. Logan Ewell of London, Kentucky, I was able to locate a number of the houses mentioned in the McHargue paper, and pinpoint them on the current U.S. Geological Survey Quadrangle maps. These sites were then translated into degrees of longitude and latitude, which are shown in the appendix. In some instances the original dwellings were no longer in existence, in which case the former site was given when known. Otherwise the location is denoted as "farm." On the basis of this information I will attempt to retrace Boone's road, as described by McHargue.

This trace appears to have left the Middle Fork of Richland Creek somewhere north of Gillam Hill in Knox County, and proceeded into Laurel County west of Kirby Mountain. It apparently crossed or proceeded down the Camp Ground Branch of Robinson Creek to the vicinity of the old Stansberry house. At this point it turned down the main branch of this creek, traveling along the south bank for

¹. The Wilderness Road And Other Early Trails and Roads Through The Wilderness of Kentucky, by Russell Dyche, Division of State Parks, Department of Conservation, Frankfort, Kentucky. 1946.

². "Boone's and Skaggs' Traces Through Laurel County," by L. B. McHargue, Laurel County, Kentucky, Information Series, No. 3. Issued by The Sentinel-Echo, London, Kentucky, June 4, 1942.

about one mile; from here it apparently went westward more or less with the existing dirt road that leads to the McHargue Church.

At this point the trace becomes more definite. It runs north north-west from the church for 2,000 feet, then crosses the main branch of Robinson Creek. It then continues northwest, crossing Queens Branch (which the old State Road followed) and climbs onto the ridge adjacent to Raccoon Springs. From this famous landmark the trace went up and along the ridge in a north northwest direction, "passing over the high point which affords them a view of the country." Such a point exists between the old Edward (Ned) Hopkins place and the old Slate Ridge School. From this high point the trace passed northwest down the ridge, arriving at the Laurel River in the vicinity of Happy Hollow. The total straight-line distance from Raccoon Springs to the river is 12,000 feet or 2.25 miles, which closely corresponds with Filson's and Brown's "two miles."

From the Laurel River crossing, Boone's Trace probably ran north for about one half mile, then veered in a northwesterly direction crossing the existing highway. It then turned north again, recrossing the highway which also swings northwest at this point. The trace definitely passes the hamlet of Fariston 500 feet to the east, and then continues due north for one mile to the northwest corner of the Levi Jackson State Park. I would imagine that the trace ran just west of the small hills just prior to reaching the reconstructed mill on Little Laurel River.

It is interesting to note that the McHargue route does not exactly agree with William Brown's Diary written in 1782, as the latter states that it is five miles from Laurel River to Little Laurel River. Thus if Brown's mileage is assumed to be correct, the trace would by necessity continue east of the Little Laurel River until it reached the vicinity of the fork northwest of Rocky Knob. It can also be seen that if the route paralleled the river in this fashion, it would have missed London (passed one mile east), and saved several miles on the way to Raccoon Creek.

The route favored by McHargue, however, crosses the Little Laurel River at the mill near "Defeated Camp where the McNitt massacre occurred," then turns "more northwestward" crossing the present railroad tracks near the park entrance road. The trace then meets the present highway, US 25 near the Airport Road, then parallels it to the west for about one mile. From here the trace runs south and east of the two prominent knobs, entering London roughly with the present State Road 363.

Once in London proper, Boone's Trace traditionally crossed where the Court House now stands, then departed the town in a northeast direction down the hill. It

ran more or less in a straight line, climbing the next hill just north of or on Kentucky Route 638 near Dr. Foster's old home site. From here to Raccoon Creek, the Boone Trace approximately followed this paved road (Ky. 638) to Twin Branch.

From the farm of Cleveland Bales to the George Evan's Store is about 2,000 feet; the present road now goes up, then down, a slight grade between these two sites, but hardly over a "hill" as described by McHargue. From the Evan's place the trace did proceed northwest "up the hill," where an unpaved road exists today. This road, like the old trace, follows the ridge past the old Dalton and Scoville places, then descends to Little Raccoon Creek at the William Feltner farm.

From this point to the Wood's Blockhouse I am again in doubt as to the exact location of the trace. Across Kentucky Route 30 at the Feltner farm is an old road or trail leading up the hill to the northwest. As Chris Black has a farm on this hill perhaps McHargue referred to this route in his written version but this is vague. In this case the trace would follow the high ground in the vicinity of the Mt. Carmel Cemetery, then southwest down to the blockhouse. McHargue's map, on the other hand, indicates that the trace led west, more or less following Watkins' Branch to the head of Hazel Patch Creek.

From Wood's Blockhouse, Boone's Trace generally runs northward on or adjacent to Ky. 490 for about 2.8 miles. I had the opportunity to talk to Henry McWhorter who stated that the rock carved with Boone's name was found on the north edge of his farm. Upon nearing the old Baugh place, the trace swings to the west of Ky. 490, passing about 2,000 feet due south, then 2,000 feet due west of the Nelson Cemetery. It then proceeds down this hollow, or the adjacent ridge, finally reaching the main part of Parker Creek, which it descends to the Rockcastle River. Here the river was crossed, and the trace followed the north bank downstream to Trace Branch Creek.

In the McHargue report it states that the trace passed $\frac{3}{4}$ miles west of the Baugh place down into the "Denny" branch. In my opinion this is not the Denny Branch shown on modern maps but the now unnamed branch mentioned in the above paragraph. The Denny Branch on modern maps is much farther west than 0.75 miles, and practically speaking, does not run into Parker's Creek but joins the Rockcastle River at its mouth.

Research on the subject of Boone's Trace will immediately show the difference between the McHargue route outlined above and that given by William A. Pusey in

"Wilderness Road to Kentucky."³ The latter favors a short cut from London to the original Hazel Patch (Wood's Blockhouse) via Pittsburg, Kentucky. South of London he shows the old State Road, and labels it "the road of 1775." It is reasonably certain that Boone's Trace was used exclusively prior to 1796 when the new wagon road" or Wilderness Road was built by the new state of Kentucky. I, personally, am convinced that McHargue's version of the Boone Trace is the correct one, if for no other reason than it passes the sites of numerous Indian massacres. ⁴

The McHargue report also commented on Skaggs' Trace, the original route followed by early settlers to Stanford and Harrodsburg (then Logan's Station and Fort Harrod). This trail departed from Boone's Trace at Wood's Blockhouse at the original Hazel Patch, and proceeded west along this ridge to the junction of Altamont Creek (originally called Laurel Creek on old surveys) and Hazel Patch Creek.

From this junction the only possible route for the trace is westward through the Hazel Patch Creek bottom to Wood Creek. The trace may have followed this creek to the Rockcastle River, then down the river; however, another and better route would have been from Wood Creek to Rockcastle River via the high ridge north of Wollum Branch. This choice also seems to better fit Filson's and Governor Hamilton's narratives.

After crossing the river, Skaggs' Trace apparently followed Big Trace Branch, then crossed the ridge to the west into the East Fork of Skaggs' Creek, near Pitman Branch; it then continued up Skaggs' Creek to its headwaters, and proceeded to Crab Orchard.

I am of the opinion that the southeastern part of Skaggs' Trace was part of an older trail frequently used by the Indians. This trail no doubt followed up Trace Branch to Sand Hill, one of their favorite camping places in this area. The path very likely ran northwest along Chestnut Ridge to the present site of Mount Vernon, where it dropped into the valley. In 1796, when the "new wagon road" or Wilderness Road was laid out, it was placed on this same ridge, running from the existing towns of Mount Vernon to Livingston, by way of Sand Hill. Possibly this ridge route was not favored over the creek route by the first travelers because it lacked abundant watering and grazing spots for their horses and stock.

APPENDIX

³. The Wilderness Road to Kentucky, by Wm. Allen Pusey. George H. Doran Company, New York. 1921.

⁴. At a later date I decided that the McHargue was not correct in all respects. N.H.

Geographical Co-ordinates of longitude and latitude related in description of Boone's Trace by L. B. McHargue.

Old Stansberry House	37	00	18"N	83	58'	15"W
Westerfield Farm	37	00	35	83	58	30
McHargue Church	37	00	08	84	00	53
Hugh Elliott House	37	00	35	84	01	20
Raccoon Springs	37	00	52	84	01	37
Edward (Ned) Hopkins House	37	01	53	84	01	45
"High Point	37	01	55	84	02	10
Felix Wells House	37	03	17	84	02	40
Ky. Exp. Sta. Farm	37	03	17	84	03	20
Jesse McFadden	37	04	04	84	03	13
J.R. Harden	37	04	08	84	03	21
Old Caleb Catching Farm	37	04	45	84	03	15
Restored Mill	37	05	10	84	03	15
James W. Jackson Home	37	06	23	84	04	20
Old Harden Farm	37	06	50	84	05	05
London Court house						
Dr. J. D. Foster House	37	08	17	84	04	10
Jesse Lovelace House	37	08	33	84	03	45
John Moore House	37	09	42	84	02	47
Macedonia Church	37	09	58	84	02	53
Leonard Oakley	37	10	09	84	03	00
W. R. Maples	37	10	36	84	02	37
Matt Pigg House	37	11	58	84	01	20
George Evans Store	37	13	02	84	01	35
Tom Dalton House	37	13	38	84	01	52
Wm. Feltner House	37	14	10	84	02	15

Block House Marker	37	13	50	84	06	20
Mt. Carmel Church	37	14	25	84	05	48
Henry McWhorter House	37	14	58	84	05	42
J. F. Baugh House	37	16	29	84	06	52

Approximate locations of Indian massacres and other points of interest from the McHargue - Dyche - Graham map of 1942. Wording from map:

Five persons killed here, 1779 or 80	37	01	00 N	84	01	40 W
First postman, Thomas Ross killed here, March 1793	37	01	15	84	01	48
John English defeat Aug 1779	37	02	10	84	02	20
Fowlers defeat	37	02	25	84	02	48
Hendersons defeat Apr or May 1780	37	02	35	84	02	58
Modrell Blockhouse	37	03	30	84	03	13
McNitt defeat Oct 1786	37	05	05	84	03	13
London Court House	37	07	45	84	03	03
Moote's defeat Oct 3, 1784	37	09	07	84	03	35
Drake's defeat March 1793	37	09	43	84	02	56
McFarland's defeat April, 1793	37	10	35	84	02	45
Julians' defeat	37	13	55	84	02	05
Wood's Blockhouse 1792	37	13	50	84	05	40
Jenkins' defeat (on Skaggs Trace)	37	14	05	84	10	18
McClure's defeat Sept 1784	37	18	05	84	19	30
from the McHargue map						
According to L. R. McClure	37	20	15	84	20	40