

BOONE TRACE MOTORCYCLE RUN DESCRIPTION LOWER HALF/ NORTH TO SOUTH

This article was written to give riders an idea of the general route of Boone Trace from Levi Jackson State Park south through the Cumberland Gap over into Virginia about eight miles, ending up at Martin Station. Points of interest along the way will also be described. This description will only describe the “lower half” of Boone Trace heading north to south, the opposite direction that Daniel Boone took. To remind you, Boone Trace, specifically, was the path Daniel Boone and his 30 “axemen” blazed in a northerly direction up through the Gap starting at Kingsport, TN and ending at Boonesborough during March and April of 1775. It was the first road, ever, into Kentucky for the purpose of bringing in settlers and had an enormous historical impact on the founding of Kentucky and opening of the west. Proof of this fact is that 200,000 settlers followed him along this route over the next 20 years, and Kentucky was established in 1792.

We have to use existing roads to experience the route since the original trail was just a dirt bridle path, large enough only for horses and not even wagons. Roads evolved out of that path, even I-75, and we have back-tracked them to the oldest, most primitive roads that come as close to the original trail as possible to recreate the experience. You are going to love it!

The following is a description of some of what you will be seeing and doing along the way:

- 1) In the back of Levi Jackson State Park is a short segment of the actual dirt path of Boone Trace marked by a 1942 stone marker at one end and a 1915 DAR marker at the other. It could be walked in about 15 minutes before taking off on the bike run. At this location is also the McNitt Cemetery which is the burial site of 24 members of a single family camped along Boone Trace who were massacred by Indians in 1786. One young pregnant girl escaped by hiding in the hollow of a tree, delivering her baby and survived. The tree site is also marked.
- 2) Leaving the park along the Jackson-Fariston Rd, turning right at Hwy 1189 and then left on to US 25 south, the site of Modrel's Station, a safe house in the Wilderness, will be at the southwest corner of that intersection. No building remains.
- 3) Traveling down US 25 a short distance, there is a 1942 Boone Trace stone marker on the left next to a telephone pole at the edge of a large field. From this point The Trace cuts off southeast across Happy Hollow without a road close to it to follow. Another marker connects with this marker and is located on Slate Ridge Rd planted in a hillside on the left near the intersection with Boggs Rd.

4) A third marker connects Boone Trace to these two at one of the real treasures of the entire trail, Raccoon Springs. It is on Cherry Hill Rd and takes a little zig-zagging to get to it. The legend is that Daniel Boone was getting a drink of water from the spring when a raccoon came out of the bushes and scared him. Hence, the name. Also, several people were killed by Indians in this area. The site is on the backside of private property and takes about a 200 ft walk to get to from the road. The owner is a nice guy, Bill Deweiss, who has been cordial enough to let folks stop and see the site, but we don't want to aggravate him in any way by blocking his drive or causing too much commotion. I think it also would be good to reward him a little, too. A buck or two would be good, and he might let us come back again.

5) From there, we will head down Hwy 830 to 233 and will be on The Trace. We have to cross US 25E at Gray, which is a dangerous intersection where there have been some bad accidents. Looping around to the right and u-turning back is a safer way of making the crossing. Stay alert there!

6) On motorcycles, it is best to divert off The Trace again near Gray; because the actual trail follows the Poplar Branch of Richland Creek, and the road closest to the creek has about 0.9 miles of gravel, down hill (really tricky and not good for motorcycles). The good news is that the road we are going to follow, Hwy 1223, has one of the most spectacular views you will see anywhere.

7) Then get back on Hwy 25E down to Barbourville, looping around the town along roads 2418, 11, 3440 and 3439 back on to 25E.

8) The next stop is Old Flat Lick after crossing Turkey Creek and Stinking Creek (I love that name), so named because Indians and hunters would skin and clean their game and dump the carcasses into the creek. At Old Flat Lick, there is a beautiful little park, well-kept, and a good model for future parks along The Trace. Also, Old Flat Lick is where the three major historical roads at that time diverged, namely, the Warrior's Path, Boone Trace and the Wilderness Road. Traveling north, the Warrior's Path, the old Indian trail on which they waged their wars, splits off to the east, and there is actually a street sign opposite the park which reads, "Warrior's Path."

At the park, there is a monument which makes the most profound and relevant statement about Boone Trace found anywhere:

"No other road is of greater historical significance to the founding of Kentucky and the opening of the west (than Boone Trace)---"

At least the author of this monument thought than Boone Trace was incredibly important historically.

9) Soon after leaving Old Flat Lick by way of Hwy 3085 on to US 25E, the route dives back down on Ely Hollow Rd which is dead on Boone Trace picking up the Cumberland River on the right into Pineville where The Trace crosses the river at Cumberland Ford. This is an area called "The Narrows" which is a water gap in Pine Mountain where the river snakes through the mountain. It allowed passage of travelers similar to the

Cumberland Gap at Middlesboro, which is a “land gap.” Taking the time to actually see the ford requires an extra stop, but there is a marker at the corner of US 25E and Hwy 66 and is worth stopping there.

10) Also, at the stoplight on this corner, by looking southwest to the top of the Pine Mountain ridge line, a notable gigantic rock perched precariously over the town of Pineville can be seen held in place by a huge chain. There is some doubt if the chain would be strong enough to hold if the boulder were actually to let go, but it is an interesting feature of Pineville.

11) Another attraction in Pineville is the Narrows Overlook near Hwy 119. Look for the sign on US 25E. It gives an impressive view of The Narrows from an overlook built on the mountainside. It’s about a 1/2 mile climb up the mountain, practically straight up, and is fairly strenuous. The mountains down in this area are quite spectacular, and I hope you enjoy and appreciate the scenery. Look for “Rocky Face” mountain on your left north of Middlesboro which is a large mountain, the face of which has a rock wall exposed and was supposedly named by Daniel Boone.

12) Then cruise on down US 25E to Middlesboro turning off at Hwy 3486 which follows Yellow Creek into town to the Gap. The creek has been re-routed over the years because of flooding, so the actual route of the Trace is a little difficult to follow in town. However, there are a couple of “fixes”: One is the “Oldest House” in Middlesboro which lies right on Boone Trace from the late 1700’s and therefore represents a marker of The Trace. It’s on Hurst Rd with a marker out front. Look for it on the left. Also, the junction of Bennet Fork and the Little Yellow Creek located on Ashbury Avenue in the field opposite the elementary school represents another fixation of The Trace.

13) A good place to stop in Middlesboro for lunch is the Ryan’s Steakhouse, and a good time to gas up with a filling station right across the street. About 3 hours should have passed.

14) After returning again on to US 25E, the Cumberland Gap National Park Visitor’s Center will be on the right, well worth checking out. They have good displays and park officials who are very knowledgeable and helpful in experiencing the park.

15) An absolute “must” at the park is to find the walking trail up to the “Saddle of the Gap.” This is the hallowed ground where ALL of those hundreds of thousands of settlers had to pass. It is also the point where history “turned,” and Kentucky and the entire west were opened up. It takes about one hour walk, up and back. We will take the time to do it.

16) Another important attraction at the park is to drive up to “The Pinnacle” which is risky with a large group of motorcycles. It is a very tricky switch-back road leading up the mountain to an overlook where the Gap can be seen from above. It is really one of

the highlights of the Gap but probably should only be done by small group of experienced riders.

17) Leaving the Gap, the bike route proceeds through the tunnel on to Hwy 58 over to Martin Station, about 8 miles into Virginia. Just after leaving the tunnel, on your left, will be the best single view of Cumberland Gap, seen from the SOUTH side. Be sure to catch this sight. On the way, there will also be a spectacular view of the Cumberland Mountains on the left, and it is easy to understand why the Gap became so important, as the towering mountains must have been foreboding and impregnable to settlers were it not for the Gap.

18) Before stopping at Martin Station, an interesting additional point of interest is to proceed past the park about 3 miles to the burial site where James Boone, Daniel's son, was killed by Indians on a prior attempt to enter Kentucky made by Boone and a group in 1773. After the incident, they turned back only to come again and blaze the famous trail in 1775.

19) Martin Station was the final staging point for settlers before embarking off into the Wilderness. You can imagine the sense of excitement and apprehension they must have felt, leaving civilization for the last time, likely forever. At the park, there is an accurate replica of the fort with people dressed up in period clothes who are all very knowledgeable and helpful.

20) After leaving the park on Hwy 58 back towards the Gap, the final stop will be the Daniel Boone Trail on the back side (south side) of the Gap. This is another one of the few places where you can get off your bike and walk along the actual dirt of Boone Trace. It has been identified by the park as authentic, and the landscape returned to its natural state of 1775 as much as possible.

21) The ride essentially ends here with about a two-hour ride to Lexington, if that is where you are going, either by US 25E and US 25 at Corbin, or the Interstate.

Thanks for participating the effort to save "that little road" (Boone Trace). Please spread the word about this fascinating trail and story. If you want more information on Boone Trace, check the web-site www.boonetrace1775.com

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