

THE FIRST TRIP TO BOONESBOROUGH

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Published in the Filson Club Quarterly, Vol 45, July 1971, pp 249-263;

Five maps and one illustration from Draper MSS.--

Felix Walker was a road cutter in 1775. Upon leaving the Rockcastle River he encountered and cut his way about twenty miles through a country entirely covered with dead brush, which he found to be a difficult and laborious task. At the end of the brush he and his companions traveled about thirty miles through thick cane and reeds, and as the cane ceased he discovered the pleasing and rapturous appearance of the plains of Kentucky.¹ But his pleasure was short lived.

On the evening of 24 March, the party of road cutters camped on the headwaters of Taylors Fork. ² Their leader, Daniel Boone, apparently satisfied at the progress of their work, failed to post a guard. About an hour before dawn they were attacked by Indians. Thomas Twitty and his negro slave, Sam, were comfortably sleeping in a tent when the attackers fired a volley into the camp. Sam was killed instantly and Twitty was shot through both knees. Felix Walker was also wounded, but managed to escape into the woods with the others in the party. Twitty's bulldog defended his master until tomahawked, which probably prevented Twitty's immediate death.

The attack ended as suddenly as it had begun. The Indians, after taking several horses, disappeared into the night. The road cutters cautiously returned, and with the first light built two or three cabins for protection and to shelter the two wounded men. Thomas Twitty, shot through both knees, soon died in the "Little Fort," as it was then called. Walker was carried in a litter between two horses to the Kentucky River, where the fort at Boonesboro was later built. ³

Richard Henderson, the leader of the Transylvania Company, who was guiding the settlers into Kentucky over Boone's newly blazed trail, was greatly

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¹. From Felix Walker's Narrative, reprinted in Boonesborough, Filson Club Publications No.16, by George W. Ranck.

². The headwaters of Taylors Fork, a branch of Silver Creek, are located about two miles south of Richmond, Ky., just west of Highway 25. In a deposition from the case of John Fowler vs. David Lynch (Madison County Complete Records, Vol. D, p.23), William Bush stated that Twitties Fort, the site of this camp, was "4 or 5 hundred yards up Taylors Fork to a boiling spring."

³. Felix Walker's Narrative, loc. cit.

alarmed by this attack. His party had just left Martin's Station in the Powell Valley, when they received the news of the [end page 249] ambush. Most of the group pressed on, in spite of their meeting dozens of settlers who were fleeing from Kentucky because of the recent trouble. By Saturday, the 15th of April, the party with Henderson had crossed the Rockcastle River, following Boone's path. William Calk, one of the settlers with this group, recorded their progress: ⁴

Sunday, 16 April: Start early - 2 mi down the river [Rockcastle] and then turn up a creek [Trace Branch] that we cross about 50 times. Some very Bad forrds with a great deal of very good land on it. In the evening we git over to the waters of Caintuck ⁵ & go a little down the creek and up there we camp.

Monday, 17 April: This is a very rainy morning hut breaks about 11 o'clock & we go on and camp this night in several campings on some of the creeks of Caintuck [Roundstone].

Tuesday, 18 April: We go on about 11 o'clock we meet some men from Boons camp that caim to Caintuck we camp this night just on the Beginning of the good land near the Blue Lick. They kill 2 hofelos this evening.

Wednesday, 19 April: about 11 o'clock we came to where the indians fired on Boons Company & killed 2 men and a dog and wounded one man in the thigh. We campt this night on oter creek.

Thursday, 20 April: We start early and git down to Caintuck to Boons fort about 12 o'clock.

The journal of William Calk, although brief, accurately gives the progress of Henderson's party. The exact route they followed, on the other hand, must come from other sources. Various writers in the past, including myself, ⁶ have erroneously speculated on the location of Boone's Trace through Madison County. The way is roughly shown on Filson's map, which indicated that the road led up Roundstone Creek, past the Blue Lick, and finally followed Otter Creek down to

⁴. Journal of William Calk, Kentucky Pioneer, transcription of the journal from the photostats at The Filson Club.

⁵. The incorrect reference to the waters of the Kentucky was also repeated by Richard Henderson in his Journal. Apparently the members of this party, being unfamiliar with the area, believed that when they had crossed over the divide between Trace Branch and Crooked Creek, that they had passed from the waters of the Rockcastle to the waters of Dick's River, a branch of the Kentucky. Actually, Crooked Creek is a branch of the Roundstone Creek, thus still a tributary of the Cumberland River. The mistake is not surprising considering that Copper Creek, which flows into Dick's River, also runs southward and is only a few miles farther west.

⁶. Hammon, Neal O., "Early Roads into Kentucky," The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Vol.68, No.2 (April 1970), p.116.

the Kentucky River. But certain obscure records in Madison County ⁷ throw more light on this subject. Taken geographically, they more accurately locate certain sections of the old trace, and at the same time offer some interesting facts on our early history.

One of the first things a reader will come across in reviewing these documents is a land case entitled, "William May vs. Joshua Yeager." ⁸ These parties, with overlapping land claims, brought in a number of witnesses who were familiar with the area prior to 1780. One was Joseph Kennedy, who said he was on the creek in 1776 and had heard it called the "Round Stone Creek" and the "Rouny Stone Lick Creek or fork."⁹ He further stated that he had lived in Kennedy's Station, which was only 8 or 10 miles from Roundstone Lick, from the fall of 1779 until the fall of 1786, and that he had frequently hunted there during this time. [end page 250]

Michael Stoner and his friend, William Bush, both lived at Boonesborough until 1780, and were also familiar with the area. These men, and others, stated that although Daniel Boone's Trace led down the Roundstone Creek, there was another route marked in 1775 by a man named Crabtree, which split off from Boone's original trace on the head-waters of the creek. This route later assumed the name of Boone's Trace also. The existence of this second trace is explained by the deposition of William Bush, taken at a spring on Roundstone Creek. ¹⁰

Question: 'Did not Crabtree first find the trace that leads up the creek by this spring and mark it?'

Answer: "He was requested by Boone and Calloway to straighten the road in 1775 and I believe he did it, for in 1776 I came along and found it to be so ever since."

Crabtree was a long hunter and acquainted with the area long before 1775 and had followed Boone's Trace out and said that "they had come very crooked and that he could straighten the road very much at which time Boone and Calloway requested him to do it." ¹¹

Michael Stoner said that Boone's route passed through the Roundstone Lick, and Bush stated that there were six or seven licks along this creek. Bush also

⁷. Land suits between June 1807 and February 1825 were recorded in "Complete Records," Madison County Circuit Court. Five volumes, A through E, are still available for inspection, and contain surveys and depositions. Hereafter these documents are referred to as MCR.

⁸. MCR, Vol. A, pp. 118 to 136, circa 1806. All depositions in this case were taken at a spring on Roundstone Creek or at the residence of Thomas Fish, who lived nearby.

⁹. Ibid., p.121.

¹⁰. Ibid., pp.127-128.

¹¹. Ibid., p.128, part of William Bush's deposition.

deposed that "the first time I traveled it [Boone's Trace] in '75, it was a great big Buffalo Road." ¹² David Coak [name difficult to read] added that there was a buffalo road leading along between the larger licks "and to the small licks there was deer traces." ¹³ He went on to say that there were also two large springs located on Boone's route along this creek.

Thus these depositions make it clear that Boone and his road cutters used the game trails that were found along Roundstone Creek to avoid the extra work of clearing a way through the brush and cane. Later in the year the hunter named Crabtree marked a shorter course, which was generally used thereafter.

Farther north, another survey shows a mile and a half section of Boone's Trace near Berea.¹⁴ This plat places the route just southeast and parallel to the Bushy Fork of Silver Creek, heading in the direction of the Blue Lick.¹⁵

John Snoddy, in a deposition, said, "I came to Kentucky with Daniel Boone in the year 1775 and came by the blue lick crost Silver Creek and went up Harts fork and so on to what is now called Boonesborough." ¹⁶ As the buffalo roads generally led to and between the main licks, we can a gain surmise that the trace followed one of these paths from the Roundstone Lick toward the Blue Lick.

The next case which locates Boone's Trace shows over four miles of the route between Hays Fork of Silver Creek and the Little Fort.¹⁷ [end page 256] The crossing of Silver Creek was about a mile east of the junction of Hays Fork and Harts Fork, and the trace led northward from this point to Harts Fork and along this branch before cutting over to the "Little Fort." Thus the old trace in this area was west of the modern highway, U.S. 25, and ran roughly parallel to it. The "Little Fort" is the place where the aforementioned Indian attack occurred on the morning of 25 March, 1775.

A study of a map will quickly reveal that to connect the sections of the trace now established will form a crooked "S". From the head of Roundstone Creek the trace led northeast toward Blue Lick, but then it must have curved back toward the northwest to make the crossing of Silver Creek shown on the above survey. To have led directly into the center of the Blue Lick would have necessitated a lengthy detour, so I am of the opinion that it only passed near, not through, this famous

¹². Ibid., pp. 131-132, Michael Stoner's deposition. This particular quote from Bush's deposition found in MCR, Vol. D, p.51, of the case of John Fowler vs David Lynch, taken on 31 Aug. 1808 at the home of Jonathan Estill.

¹³. MCR Vol. A, p.133.

¹⁴. MCR Vol. C, Stephen Walker vs. John Montgomery, starting on p.187, surveys on pp.218-219, circa 1813.

¹⁵. Blue Lick is located on the headwaters of Blue Lick Creek, directly between Joe Lick Knob and Robe Mountain.

¹⁶. MCR Vol. C, p.389, from Merewether Heirs vs. Wolfscale, taken in Richmond, Ky., on 7 Aug. 1809.

¹⁷. MCR Vol. B, p. 503, William Blythe's Heirs vs. John Kincaid, March term, 1810.

landmark.¹⁸

Again, a number of depositions were taken from the early pioneers regarding the area. Page Portwood, John Snoddy, Sam Estill, James Estill, William Bush and others, generally agreed on the location of the original trace as was shown on the surveys. The "Little Fort" or Twitty's Fort was discussed in some detail as the trace passed by this landmark. Samuel Estill stated that "it was notoriously known by the Little Fort but after [it was] called Twitties fort as Twitty was killed at or near the fort and as I understood was buried at the fort and I saw T.T. on a tree which was the first two letters of his name."¹⁹

The depositions also reveal other interesting facts about this section of Madison County. The land drained by Silver Creek and extending up to the headwaters of Otter Creek was described as being a large body of cane land, in which there were plentiful growths of locust trees. The cane predominated south of Estill's Station, which accounted for the name "Stock Field" in Squire Boone's old settlement entry.²⁰ Hays Fork was called Boone's Fork by some, perhaps because Daniel Boone acquired the settlement claim of his son-in-law, William Hays, who made the original entry.²¹ The depositions also locate a tree on the old trace carved by Daniel Boone, which was just north of Hays Fork, on the entry of Anthony Bledsoe.

Many historians have speculated on the condition of this early trace. Was it a road which was easy to follow or just a path identified by some blazed trees? Sam Estill was asked this question about the route along Silver Creek and answered as follows:²²

Question: "Was Boons trace so plain that any person could travel it without a pilot?"

Answer: "Boons trace was a marked trace but it was pretty difficult to follow

¹⁸. This opinion is also supported by data contained in the Diary of James Nourse, which reads as follows: "Wednesday June 28 (1775) ... arrived at the old fort Trysts (Twitty's). Stopped not - left the road and fell into a buffalo path, passed through very fine land and some water to a lick called the Blue Lick Transcript, University of Chicago Library, p. 18.

¹⁹. MCR Vol. B, p.528. Blythes vs. Kincaid.

²⁰. There was apparently some confusion as to this name as it was occasionally recorded as "Stalk Fields" in the records. Squire Boone, in his deposition, stated that the name was derived from "the quantity of cane and my intending to keep stock there for Col. Thomas Hart." His land adjacent the above claim was called " 'Bitifalow Shades." MCR Vol. C, p.378.

²¹. This survey is shown in the Lincoln County Survey Book, Vol. A, p. 167, Daniel Boone, assignee of Williams Hayes. The land was located on Harts Branch of Hays Fork, as shown on the illustration. The deposition of Joshua Barton, (MCR Vol. C, p. 391, 7 Dec. 1811) and various surveys show that Hays Fork was often called Boone's Fork.

²². MCR, Vol. B, p.529.

through the thick cane, though I have followed it." [end page 257]

The Madison County records contain other cases on land disputes in the Silver Creek area. One shows that additional roads were established by 1780, called "Adams Trace" and the "Road from Estill's Station to the Blue Lick."²³ According to the surveys, neither of these routes were the same as Boone's Trace, although Adams Trace may have used a short section of the old trail.

The relationship between Boone's Trace and two other famous sites, Twitty's Fort and Estill's Station, is discussed in various depositions connected with these land suits. When Thomas Warren was asked if Boone's old trace passed Twitty's Fort, he answered, "There was a trace that went near to it called Boons Trace, I suppose about the distance of thirty or forty yards from it."²⁴ Others confirmed this fact. Samuel Estill's deposition on this subject is informative.²⁵

Question: Did said Boons trace pass on or near the plantation at Estill's old station in 1780?

Answer: Yes, it went through the track of land near the improvement.

Question: Was there a plain road from Estill's Station in [the] Spring and Summer of 1780 into said Boons trace going toward Boonsborough and passing on by this place [Bond Estill's Spring]?

Answer: Yes.

John Snoddy first stated that he "had seen Twitties fort but am not certain whether the Trace passed it or not." In the next question he was asked if there was any other trace that led from "the old settlement to Boonsborough besides this trace called Boons trace." His answer was, "I do know the next fall after I came out [referring to 1776] there was another trace that some called it Boons trace and some called it Calloways Trace."²⁶ In another deposition, when asked if Boone's Trace passed along by Twitty's or the Little Fort, he replied, "Yes it did and one end went to Boonsborough and the other to Powells valley." Question: "Did you know of any other trace at that time that was called Boones trace that went to Blue lick and by Twitts fort."

Answer: "I did not." He also said that he knew "this [Boone's] trace leading from Boonsborough to the Blue Lick which was the same with Estills trace in the

²³. MCR, Vol. C, William Rush vs. Samuel Jamison, starting on p.146, and surveys on pp. 174, 185, dated 6 Sept. 1813.

²⁴. MCR, Vol. D, p.28, 3 March 1814.

²⁵. MCR, Vol. D, p. 24, dated 25 Feb. 1813.

²⁶. MCR, Vol. B, p.526, circa Aug. 1794.

year 1780." ²⁷

North of Twitty's Fort, Boone's Trace passed over into the head-waters of Otter Creek. A survey from "Green Clay vs. William Brisco and others" ²⁸ shows the entire area from Estill's Station to the Kentucky River. Six miles of the trace from Boonesborough along Otter Creek is set down on this plat, as well as another short section further south. The depositions in this case establish that the old trace passed Bond Estill's spring which was on Punkin Run, named for the wild pumpkins found growing there by the first settlers. This run was often used as a camping place by the early pioneers. [end page 258]

Unfortunately, the survey does not show all of the trace, but it apparently followed a course almost due north from Bond Estill's spring, and fell into the main branch of Otter Creek near its junction with Dreaming Fork. Thus, from Twitty's Fort this old trail would have crossed to the east side of the present highway U.S. 25 near the site of the historical marker, and passed along about 6500 feet east of the Richmond Court House to the creek, where it continued down to the Kentucky River. Sam Estill thought the distance along the creek bottom was 8 or 10 miles. ²⁹

One deposition explained why Boone's Trace followed the meanders of the creek, rather than cutting straight across the curved sections. It reads as follows:

Question: In passing from Boonsborough up Otter Creek along Boons old trace for 5 or 6 miles did the hills and Cliffs make down to near the bank as to compel travellers to keep pretty close to the bank on account of their not being able to pass said Hills and Cliffs, so as to mark a trace up creek straighter or farther off the said creek than the one made by Boone.

Answer: I believe the buffaloes made the road and that Boon Marked and traveled the same road. The hills were Caney and Steep and the bottoms of the creek was the most convenient place for a road. ³⁰

An interesting fact about the site of Richmond is told in a deposition given in this case by Archibald Wood. ³¹ He stated that "the fork that goes up through Richmond was called the Town Fork owing to an old Indian town near where the courthouse now stands."

When Boone and his road cutters evacuated the "Little Fort" on the 1st of

²⁷. MCR, Vol. C, pp. 175, 176, dated 11 March 1808.

²⁸. MCR, Vol. D, p. 15. This survey is incorporated into the case which is also titled Green Clay vs. Reed and others. Survey dated 1 Dec. 1812.

²⁹. MCR, Vol. D, p.25, from above case.

³⁰. MCR, Vol. D, p.20, deposition of David Lynch, dated 27 May 1814.

³¹. MCR, Vol. D, pp.17, 18, dated 27 Aug. 1814.

April, 1775, they carried Felix Walker along in a litter tied between two horses. Their route, as previously mentioned, led down Otter Creek to the bottoms on the south side of the Kentucky River. Here they encountered "a lick with two sulphur spring" where "a number of buffaloes, of all sizes, supposed to be between two and three hundred, made off from the lick in every direction, some running, some walking, others loping slowly and carelessly, with young calves playing, skipping and bounding through the plain."³² The men soon set to work and constructed some cabins which were known as Fort Boone until its destruction by the Indians three years later. This first station was located about 60 yards south of the river bank near the old ferry crossing.

When Col. Henderson finally arrived on the 20th of April, he was not completely satisfied with what he found. His diary illustrates this point: "On Viewing the Fort, and finding the plan not sufficient to admit of building for the reception of our company and a scarcity of ground suitable for clearing at such an advanced season, was at some [end page 259] loss how to proceed. Mr. Boone's company having laid off most of the adjacent good lands into lots of two acres each and taking as it fell to each individual by lot was in actual possession and occupying them. After some perplexity resolved to erect a fort on the opposite side of a large lick near the river bank which would place us at the distance of 300 yards from the other fort, the only commodious place near or where we could be of any service to Boone's men or vice-versa. Henderson continues to describe how he and two others who remained with him first built a "magazine" on the fort site, the others in the party having gone off to build their cabins elsewhere. Henderson's temporary camp on the later fort site was about 50 yards from the river and 50 yards from the "devine elm" where the first Kentucky convention was held a month or so later."³³

Several plans have survived which show the main fort at Boonesborough. One was copied from Henderson's papers³⁴ and another was made by Moses Boone.³⁵ The two drawings are in general agreement in most respects. Hall estimated that the fort was 260 feet long and 180 feet wide, with the long side fronting the river. Moses Boone [end page 260; plan of fort from Draper Mss here.] stated that the

³². Felix Walker's Narrative, loc. cit.

³³. Richard Henderson's Journal, reprinted in Boonesborough, pp. 169-180, loc. cit.

³⁴. Ranck, Boonesborough, p. 34, loc. cit. This plan was copied by James Hall in 1835, and shows Henderson's and Luttrell's cabins and kitchens along with the cabins of Hart and Williams, in the plan of the fort.

³⁵. Draper Papers, 19C12. A copy of this drawing made by the author is illustrated p.260. Cardinal directions in article are as given by Moses Boone; actually the North gate on the river faces Northeast, etc.

fort contained about an acre, and was one-third longer than wide. Calculations would thus show his version to be 180 feet wide by 240 feet long. Both drawings establish that there were blockhouses or "bastions" on all four corners, and cabins along all of the walls. The plat attributed to Henderson places the gates in the center of both the north and south walls, while Moses Boone's drawing shows only the main gate in the south wall. Both agree that Henderson lived at the northwest corner, and had a second cabin for his kitchen. Moses Boone indicated that three additional buildings were inside, but separated from the fort walls. One of these cabins was the house of his father, Squire Boone, and another his gunsmith shop. The third building inside the walls was the home of Col. Callaway. Moses Boone also stated that after his uncle Daniel returned from captivity in 1778 the fort was put in repair with new stocking added where necessary and the walls extended to the east. At the same time, he said that a second story was added to the southeast and southwest corners, but that they were not roofed over, as there was insufficient time before the attack. This sketch also shows the "treaty spot" which was "60 yards" directly in front of the south gate, and on "trail from the spring to the Indian camp." This spring itself was south of the southwest corner of the fort, according to the drawing.

A third plat of Boonesboro survives which is of some interest.³⁶ This drawing, originally published in Collins' His'ory of Kentucky, shows the entire village which was incorporated in 1787, including the location of the fort, the lick, town lots, and streets. "Main Street," as shown on this old document, would correspond to Boone's Old Trace, whereas a separate "Boones Road" leaves the township near the modern highway 227. The first station was located on the north side of the lick near the ferry.

History relates that the small unoccupied "Fort Boone" on the north side of the lick was burned by the Shawnees during their attack in July 1777.³⁷ How long the main fort at Boonesborough lasted is still a mystery. Certainly it did not survive long after the Indian menace disappeared. Possibly the logs in the fort were used by the inhabitants of the town to build new cabins on the town lots. In any event, only a few chimney stones were still present in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³⁸ The roads to the fort survived, however, although improved and relocated.

³⁶. The town plan is recorded in the Madison County Order Book C, p. 639, dated "July Court 1810." This plat is essentially the same as the copy of the original published in Collin's History of Kentucky, Vol.2, p. 514.

³⁷. Daniel Boone, by John Bakeless, William Morrow & Co., 1939.

³⁸. Collins, loc. cit., Vol 2, p.516.

The road cutters, it would appear, received the sum of 10 pounds, 10 shillings, for "work making roads to Cantucke." Although this amount would seem only a pittance by modern standards, at the time it would purchase about 420 acres of Bluegrass land, today worth nearly half a million dollars. The road cutters, however, were not furnished equip-[end page 261] ment by the company once they reached Kentucky, as can be seen by Michael Stoner's purchase of "powder, lead, and osnaburgs" from the company store for 7 pounds, 3 shillings and 6 cents.³⁹

Although the cutters were undoubtedly motivated by the prospect of cheap land, they must also have had a lust for adventure. These men who volunteered to lead the way to the Kentucky River certainly obtained that goal, if they remained at Boonesborough.

³⁹. Ranck, Boonesborough, loc. cit., p. 25 (footnote). My appraisal is calculated by assuming that the land was purchased in the Bluegrass area at the Transylvania Company price of a half shilling per acre, and sold at today's prices of over \$1,000.00 per acre.