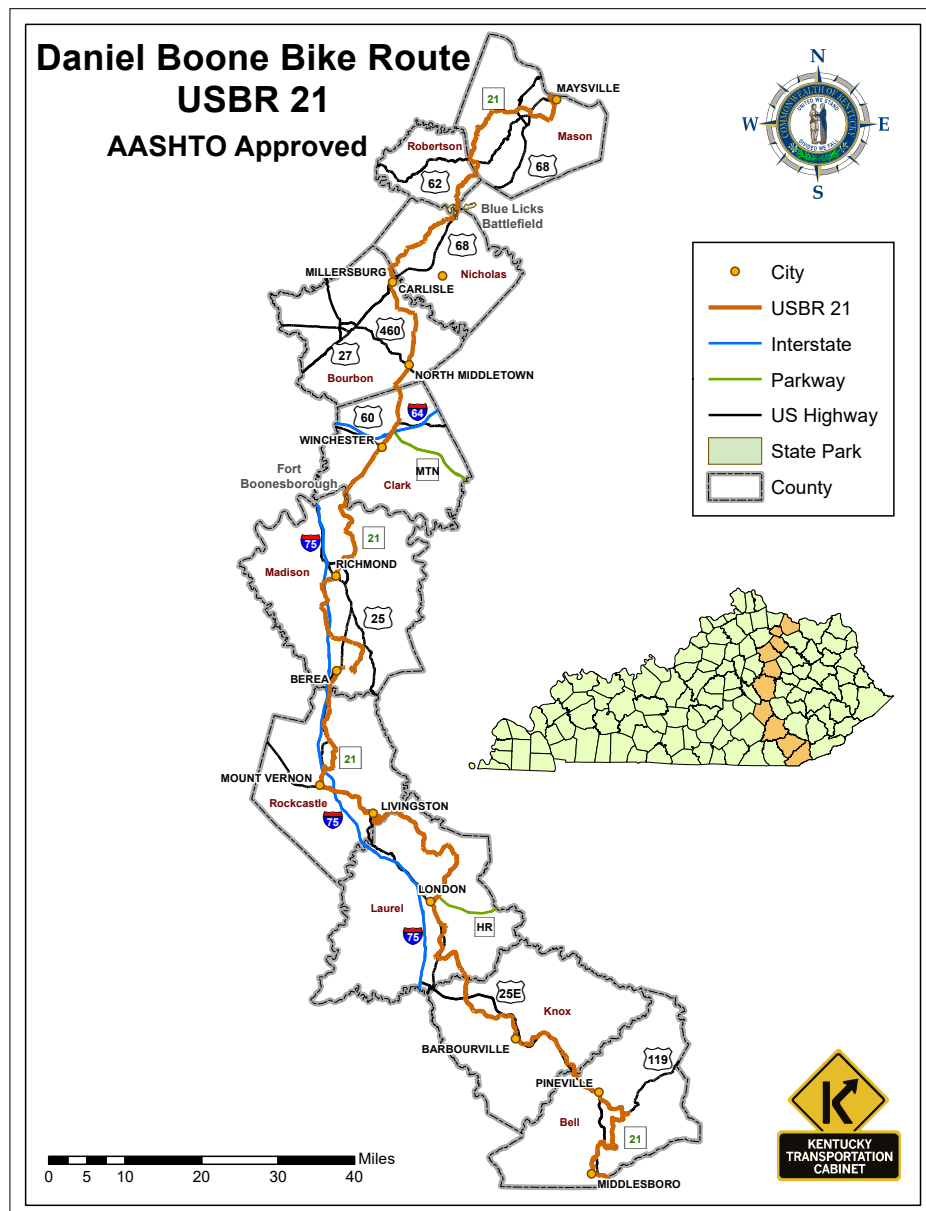


BOONE TRACE ALONG USBR 21

This is a somewhat comprehensive article written to assist cyclists on USBR 21 about Boone Trace (BT) traveling northbound, which is the direction Daniel Boone took in 1775 to “mark” the Trace. USBR 21 traverses 10 Kentucky counties from Middlesboro to Maysville, but BT only covers the lower five. The bicycle route has been altered at several locations, primarily for reasons of safety, missing some important features; but as they bike along the route, it will help to recognize many of the significant points of interest about Boone Trace.



On bicycling northbound on USBR 21, starting on US 25E at the tunnel in Middlesboro, the highway essentially passes under the Cumberland Gap just to the west and is the alternative way to get beyond the Gap, which used to be traversed over the Gap by vehicle. The Cumberland Gap National Historic Park is located here and is well worth a stop at the Visitor's Center on the Northside of the Gap.

In the old days, the Cumberland Gap itself was the only way to traverse the Appalachian Mountains for several hundred miles, and was used by long hunters, settlers and Native Americans, a trail known as the Warrior's Path (WP).

Daniel Boone came through the Gap to mark Boone Trace (BT) in 1775. It was the first road, EVER, into the land that was to become Kentucky. Later, in 1796, the Wilderness Road (WR) was constructed primarily as a wagon road to support more settlers coming through the Gap. Through this area, BT, WR & WP are essentially along the same course until the town of Flat Lick is reached.



Cyclists from the Tennessee side cannot enter and must be transported through the tunnel, and vice versa. Temporarily, until 21 becomes more popular, this is being done by the Tunnel Authority Hazmat vehicles, when a bike presents at the tunnel. It is planned for loading areas to be established at the southern and northern visitor's centers.



The Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is here and commemorates how the Gap became known as the “Gateway to the West” being the only access into the land that was to become Kentucky. Thousands of settlers then followed Boone Trace blazed by Daniel Boone and his axemen into the Bluegrass in 1775 which began the “westward movement.” Combining BT with the Declaration of Independence of 1776 was when people stopped being British citizens and became Americans!



While at the park, it is strongly advised to pedal up to the Dr. Thomas Walker parking area and then take a 1/2 hour hike up to the “Saddle of the Gap.” This is the hallowed gap in the mountain where all of those brave souls passed. Stop there and be silent for a brief moment, and you will have an almost spiritual experience of their presence. You can almost see their faces, hear their voices and hear the clink of metal as they labored through there.



This is also an opportunity to visit the town of Cumberland Gap, TN which is only about 1/2 mile from the southern visitor's center. It is a quaint little town with several places to dine, shop and visit museums.



As USBR 21 route traverses through the city of Middlesboro, it will be generally following BT and the WR through town, which in turn, was following Yellow Creek. Due to flooding, the route of the creek has been modified. As the route turns up 19th Street, a short run down Ashbury St would show some views of the creek and also some interpretive signs. The History Museum is also nearby on 20th St.



On the north end of 19th St, just before it cuts left on to Hurst Ave., is located the “Oldest House in Middlesboro,” built in 1800 and marked by a Kentucky Historical Society roadside marker. It undoubtedly was on BT and the WR. Nearby in this area is also the Ball Cemetery, containing Pioneer graves with a short segment of the Trace adjacent to it.



As you cross Hwy 441 and proceed north on Old Pineville Pike (Hwy 3486), you will now be essentially dead on BT/WR out to US 25E the entire way. It is quite winding and most likely following a trail tramped out by buffalo in need of water from the creek as they rummaged through the countryside searching for food.

You will again be following Yellow Creek, and you might also note that railroad tracks are nearby, creating what is known as “The Boone Trace Triad”: This finding represents the association of 1) a road (Boone Trace), 2) a stream (in this case, Yellow Creek) and 3) a railroad track.

This association is consistent along the entire course of BT to Boonesborough. It seems that when the railroad engineers came in about 1880, the best alignment would be following a low lying stream along which ran BT, and so they lay down the RR there. It's as if the buffalo knew where the railroads should go!



At the intersection of US25E and Old Pineville Pike, look up at the mountain ahead, so named “Rocky Face” by Daniel Boone. The reason for the name should be obvious.



From this point USBR 21 will soon depart from BT/WR and turn on to Hwy 188. The good news is that even though not exactly following the historical route, it will continue to follow Yellow Creek almost all the way to Pineville, and the experience is beautiful along the creek! Enjoy!

The route will cross the Cumberland River on to Hwy 119 and head into Pineville. At this point, the bike route is only about 3 miles from the entry on to the soon to be opened “Boone’s Ridge,” a major wildlife center under construction. The ascent from Hwy 119 to the center is fairly steep, but in time we are hoping to have a transport system available. This will become a major feature of bike route 21. Link to Boone’s Ridge: <https://boonesridge.com>



From the Bridge on Hwy 119 at the intersection with US 25E, looking north, you will be visualizing what is known as “The Narrows,” a water gap in Pine Mountain where the Cumberland River snakes through the mountain.



Back on to Hwy 25E, Pineville is entered turning left on to Pine St and then right on to E Virginia St going north and exiting on W Tennessee St, crossing US 25E into Wallsend. Only temporary signage now is being used in Pineville, while the city is renovating the downtown area.



Prior to turning left into Pineville, a right turn can be made on Hwy 66 where the Cumberland Ford can be viewed from either the bridge or the overlook next to the “Bunny Bread Building,” an old historical building, where bread was made and transported by train, which stopped next to it. The ford is where settlers and Native Americans had to cross the river west to east if going north, and vice versa going south. The shallow area is quite apparent just north of the bridge.



A famous large rock can also be viewed on the west bank of the river, known as the “Watch Rock.” If the rock could be seen by approaching settlers wanting to cross, that meant that the water was low enough for a safe crossing. If not seen, the water was too high, and they would have to wait for it to recede and/or build a boat, etc.



Exiting the ford north, a short segment of the actual Trace can be seen. Entering Wallsend and zig-zagging through town, you will be in close proximity to BT/WR going north, but once you get on Elys Hollow Rd in Knox County, you will be dead-on Boone Trace for quite a distance, following the Cumberland River.



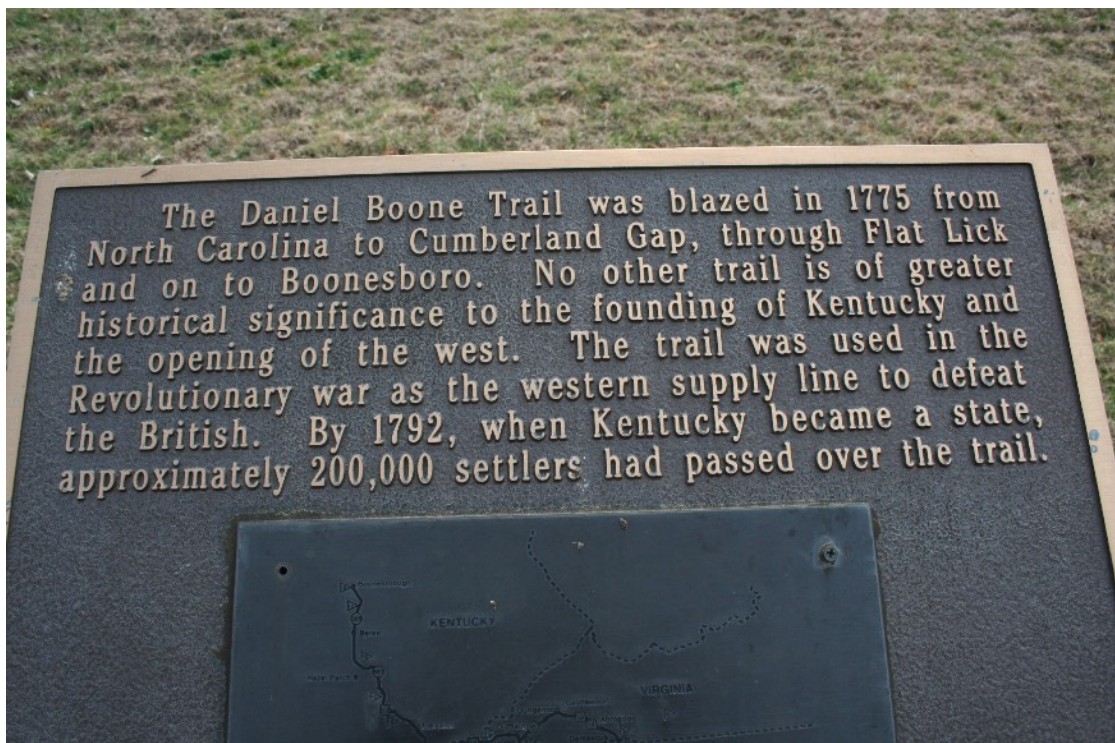
Along the way on Elys Hollow Rd, the actual Trace diverts off to the right overland up Pogue Hollow. It will eventually connect with Sandy Branch Rd in Flat Lick. Look for the street sign off to your right.



Elys Hollow Rd will emerge right onto US 25E, and shortly (0.1 mile) thereafter turn back right on to Evergreen Rd of Flat Lick. My advice would be to stay on the east side shoulder of US25E rather than making two dangerous crossings of US25E to accomplish the same thing.



Following the USBR 21 signage, you will come to the Daniel Boone Park in Flat Lick which is worth your stop. There are several very informative monuments, markers and maps worth stopping to study.



Also just opposite the park, a street sign commemorates the “Warrior’s Path,” (WP) the famous Native American trail along which the Indians waged their wars. Although the true historic WP continues south through the Cumberland Gap, Flat Lick has become almost symbolic of its lower extent, and the point at which all three historic trails (BT, WR & WP) begin to diverge going north, or converge going south.

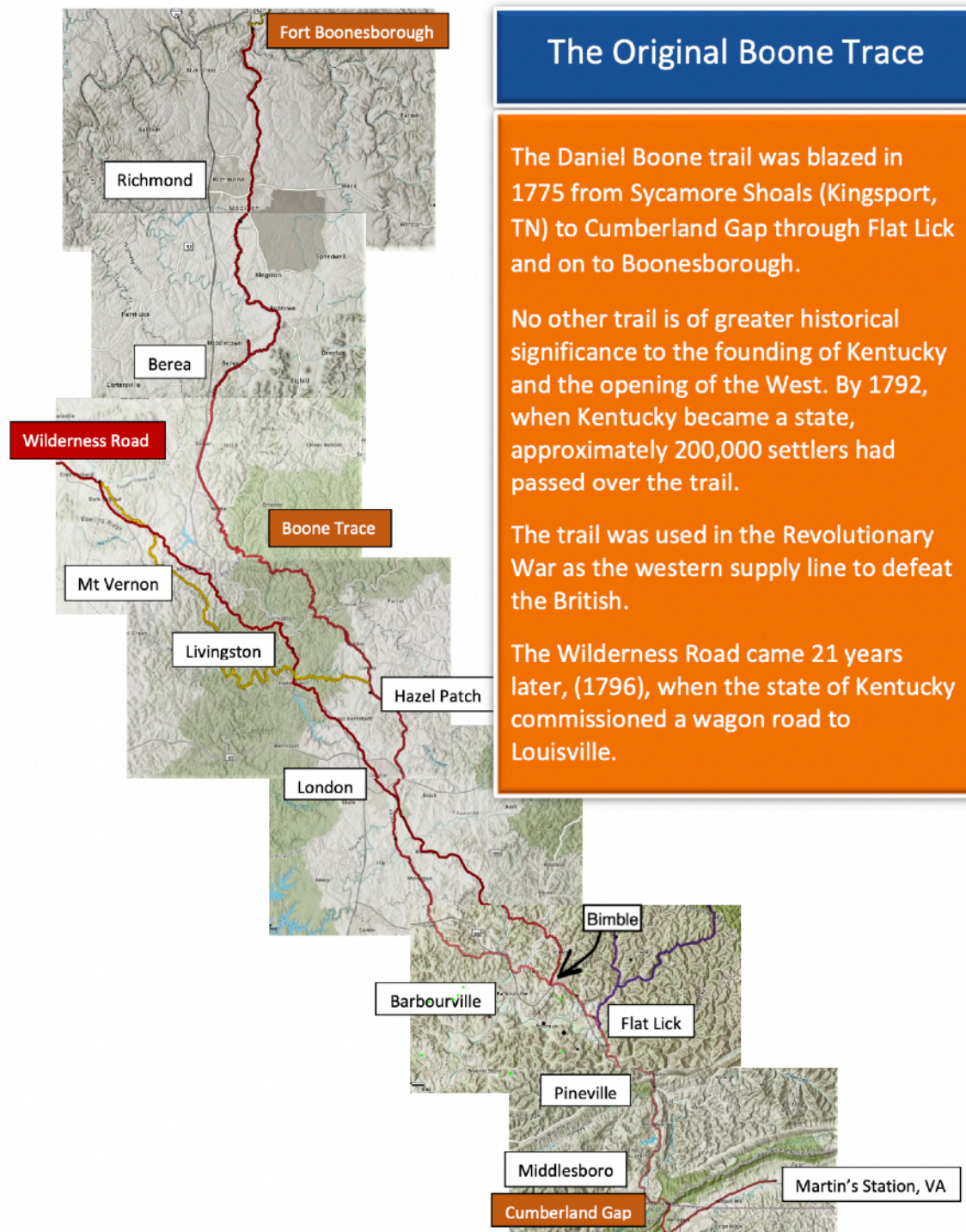
The WP will be departing from USBR 21 in this location to the east up through Manchester and McKee to the Old Indian Fields near Winchester, KY (Esskipakathikki), and ultimately into Ohio.



Leaving Flat Lick, USBR 21 will be in the vicinity of BT/WR which is largely covered by US 25E in this area, but then comes quite close to them again when it turns on to Hwy 3433 along Fighting Creek. Near the side road called Callahan Loop, it departs again overland and then proceeds up Shy Mug Rd, a good distance from the bike route. The actual Trace can be viewed at the top of the hill from Callahan Loop.



Note also, it is at the town of Bimble that Boone Trace and the Wilderness Road completely diverge, with the WR proceeding up Hwy 1304, passing through Sublimity Hollow and merging with the path of Hwy 229 into London. Keep in mind that BT and WR are totally separate from here on, but criss-crossing in downtown London by the courthouse.



Follow the road signs being quite a distance from the Trace, which loops around Barbourville to the east. The bike route goes through the interesting part of the town, including the courthouse square. Be sure and notice the statue of Daniel Boone in front of the courthouse. Also, visit the Knox County Museum on Daniel Boone Drive.



When on California Hollow Rd, BT has crossed the Richland Creek and is quite close if not on the road you are traveling. On Arkle-Emanuel Rd, you will get glimpses of the actual BT off to your left and down near the Poplar Branch of Richland Creek next to a row of houses.



About one mile of this mostly paved road is gravel which should be acceptable going uphill (north) but could be problematic going downhill (south). As it criss-crosses the RR track, look for a small cemetery about 100 feet to the right



Eventually, Arkle Rd will intersect with Hwy 233 and pass through the town of Gray. An extremely dangerous intersection will then have to be crossed to continue on to Hwy 233 north. Recent research suggests that the actual Trace at this point possibly crossed into Laurel County somewhat to the east of this point, but the bike route for efficiency will continue up Hwy 233 and intersect on to Robinson Creek Rd which becomes Hopkins Cemetery Rd.

Turn left on Slate Ridge Rd and begin to look for a Boone Trace 1942 Stone marker about six feet up on the hillside on the right. It is just beyond the intersection of Boggs Rd coming up from the left on a rise and curve to the right (a bit dangerous to stop here). Seven of these stone markers were placed in 1942, only in Laurel County, to mark the route of Boone Trace, but also to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of Kentucky in 1792.



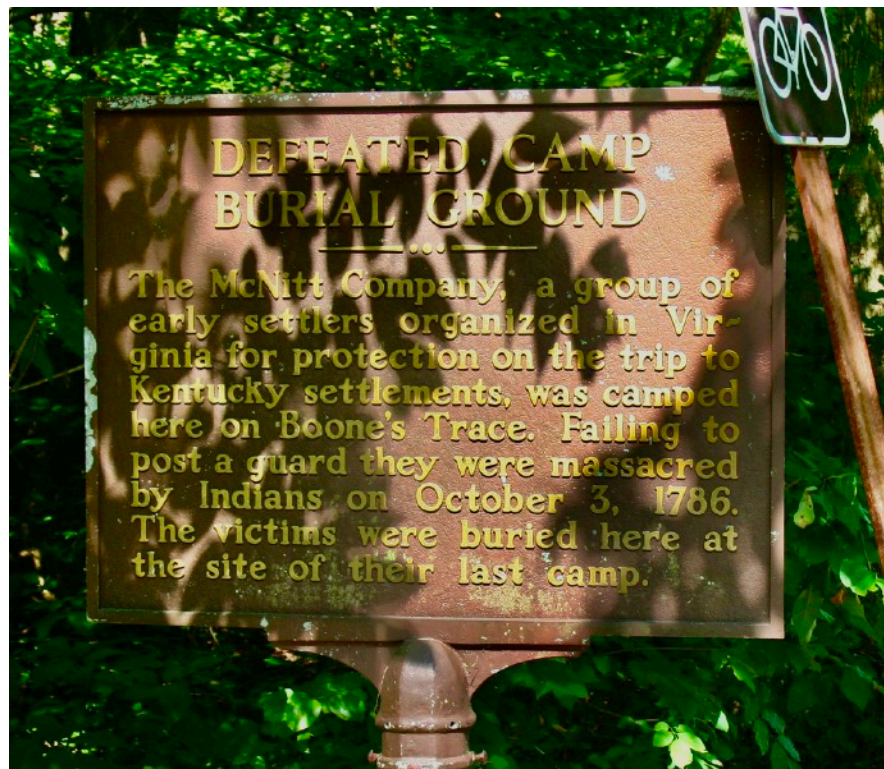
Crossing US 25 south of London on to Fariston Rd will depart somewhat from BT, but re-engages on crossing back over US 25 as it enters Levi Jackson Park. You will pass by the back of the park, and a short diversion into the Boone Trace area, will reveal an actual short segment of BT marked by a 1942 stone marker on one end and another Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) 1915 Boone Trace marker on the other end. It could be walked in about 15 minutes



Also, in this location is the site of a hollow tree where a young mother escaped from an Indian attack taking place down the hill, crawled into the tree, delivered her baby and survived the attack. The tree no longer exists but the site is located by a circular rock wall and sign.



Leaving this location and down the hill on the bike route is the location of the “McNitt Defeat” where a family of 27 were attacked by Indians, as mentioned above, and all killed except for three. The cemetery is near the location of the attack and where members of the family are buried.



Exiting the park on to US 25 into downtown London, Boone Trace and the Wilderness Rd (HWY 229) merge and criss-cross in front of the Courthouse, where there is another BT 1942 stone marker. BT will turn eastward on to 4th Street which is quite close to the actual Trace and then turns northward on Hwy 638 (McWhorter Rd).



At the corner of Hwy 638 and Sam Black Rd sits another BT 1942 stone marker in the front yard of a private dwelling. Continuing on up HWY 638, near the Macedonia Church, you will be in the vicinity of two other Indian massacres, known as the Drake and McFarland defeats.



Traveling north on McWhorter Rd (Hwy 638) on the way to Twin Branch Rd, a BT 1942 stone marker will be sitting on the side of the road. It's in excellent shape with the nearest mailbox address is 3270. Also, the creeks being followed by Boone off to the right are Slate Lick and Raccoon Creeks.



Turning left on to Twin Branch Rd and then a quick right on to Feltner-Steer Rd, begins a very steep hill for about 1/2 mile. The good news is that once to the top, there will be a long gentle downhill run to Hwy 30. This road was also known as "Old Hog Rd," because in the past, hogs were herded down this road from London to Richmond.

At the intersection of Feltner-Steer Rd and Hwy 30 is another DB 1942 stone marker indicating with great certainty that BT went this way. Just across the intersection on the north side of Hwy 30 is an actual segment of BT extending up to the Feltner Family Cemetery. It is on private property; so permission from the family must be obtained to visit the trail, although the cemetery is open to the public.



The next significant stop is an important one. Turning right on to Murray Cemetery Rd, you will be entering the “Hazel Patch” area. It was known by long hunters for its abundance of hazel nut trees where small game would feed on the nuts, which when ripe, were a handy source of food.



Skaggs Trace came through this area and turned westward towards Crab Orchard. In 1775, the year Daniel Boone marked BT, John Floyd and Benjamin Logan were about one month behind Boone, and at Hazel Patch, rather than following Boone, they continued on Skaggs's Trace westward towards Crab Orchard and later settled over near Louisville.

Thus, at Hazel Patch was the original “fork in the road” which began the direction the Wilderness Road (WR) took in 1796. It was a designed and constructed wagon road by James Knox and Joseph Crockett built to specks of 30 feet wide and capable of handling a 2000 lb wagon load. Also when constructed, it actually split from BT to the east at the town of Bimble in Knox County.

It's important to distinguish between BT and the WR. They are distinctly different paths, and Daniel Boone had little to do with the WR. It is in error to say that DB “blazed” the WR, as many even noted historians will do. PLEASE do not conflate DB with the WR.



From Murray Cemetery Rd, across Hazel Patch Creek, can be viewed another BT 1942 stone marker noting the site of the Wood's Blockhouse, one of the oldest permanent buildings in the wilderness at the time, dating to at least 1793. A blockhouse was a relatively safe haven temporarily from the elements of the wilderness to a traveler along the Trace. Bishop Frances Asbury, a noted traveling clergy, was reported to have stayed there.



Also in this area was the Farris Tavern visited by the infamous and murderous Harpe Brothers, Big Harpe and Little Harpe, who once showed up with three young pregnant women. They befriended another traveler, John Langford , who made the fatal mistake of exposing the fact that he had money in his saddle bags. They departed traveling together, only find the body of Langford nearby a couple of days later, robbed of his money.



At the intersection of Murray Cemetery RD and Hwy 490, looking south on Hwy 490, a Hazel Patch Kentucky Historical Society roadside marker can be seen about 0.1 mile to the south.



Turning right (north) on Hwy 490 for about 1/2 mile in front of Mount Carmel church is a 1915 DAR marker commemorating Boone Trace. A total of 15 of these markers were placed along Boone Trace in Kentucky in 1915 by the DAR. Park your bike and climb up on the monument and notice carved in the rock on top of the monument are the words "D Boon." We believe it is highly likely that DB himself carved these words.



Further down Hwy 490 is another 1942 stone marker at the intersection with Winding Blade Rd. The actual Trace is probably a bit west of here, and the area is known as Mershon's Cross Roads



The bike route then follows the Parker Branch of the Rockcastle River into Rockcastle County. Notice that the Sheltowee Trace merges with BT for about 1.3 miles before crossing the bridge at the Rockcastle County line and then splitting off again to the east along Hwy 89 into Jackson County. On the west side of the bridge is where Boone and company forded the Rockcastle River and camped. The shallows can be viewed from the bridge.

This is the area also where some say the remains of John Stewart, friend of DB, were found in the hollow of a tree after being wounded by Indians on a hunting trip with Boone in 1769. The other area suspected is up near Fort Boonesborough. Proceeding north be sure to stay on Hwy 490 into Livingston and not turn on to Hwy 89 into Jackson County. On the way into Livingston, you'll be following the Rockcastle River, so enjoy the view.



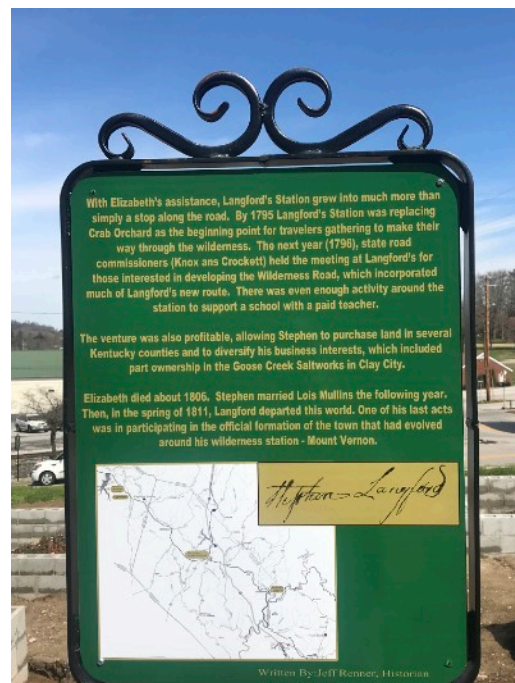
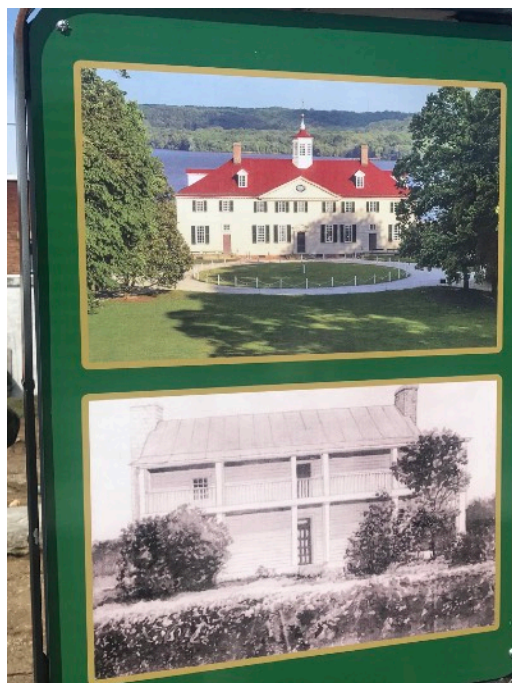
Also on Hwy 490, the famous Castle Rock can be visualized looking south from the highway with the nearest address on a mailbox being 4406. It can only be seen during winter due trees blocking the view.



Livingston is a “Trail Town” and has a nice Visitor’s Center to enjoy. Kayaking on the Rockcastle River is also available.



The ride into Mount Vernon does involve a fair distance riding on US 25 which is two lanes and 55 mph speed limit. Before reaching I-75, it will turn off on to McHargue Branch Rd which is a back road; and then, after I-75, on to the Old Dixie Hwy into Mt Vernon. Be sure and visit the History Garden at the corner of Main St (Hwy 1326) and Richmond St (US 25).



Also, leaving Mt Vernon, you will pass by Renfro Valley, one of the homes of country music, as well as the Kentucky Music Hall of Fame near Hummel Rd



From Hummel Rd on to Maret Cemetery Rd, you will rejoin Boone Trace, which was beginning to pick up the Roundstone Creek into the town of Wildie. You will pass the Maret Cemetery which is a pioneer cemetery giving indirect evidence of the road being Boone Trace.

From Wildie, follow the road signs carefully over the RR tracks and turn onto the Old State Rd, which very definitely is the actual BT paved over, at least until it empties onto Hwy 25 towards Berea.



At the Rockcastle/Madison County line on Hwy 25 is Boone Gap, one of five “gaps” Boone’s party had to traverse (Moccasin, Kane and Cumberland Gaps, the Narrows and Boone Gap.) This was the final gap into the Bluegrass region, much to their relief.

Boone Gap has been converted into an historical site with a DAR marker placed there in 1915. When the state road was built a rock wall was constructed creating an overlook onto the gap which must have been spectacular in its day.



Behind the rock wall is a segment of the actual trail. Stand there quietly looking south and down and experience that spiritual feeling mentioned previously.



Proceeding into Berea along Slate Ridge Rd, the paved road is quite close to the actual Trace following the creek. When you come to Brushy Fork Creek at the bridge, Boone Trace veers off to the east along the creek and the bike route proceeds up about 1/4 mile to, Chestnut St where it passes by a 1915 DAR marker in front of Boone Tavern.



Following the signs you will then be led to the shared-use path out of Berea which again follows Brushy Fork Creek to a bridge that crosses BFC where it empties into Silver Creek. At this point, Boone crossed Silver Creek and later turned north following Silver Creek. Initially, however, it is believed that he and his party continued eastward to Blue Lick.



The bike path will lead you to Blue Lick Rd, which is essentially BT. Only later was the route shortened by turning north along Silver Creek.



At the end of Blue Lick Rd, you will pass by Joe Lick Knob, a prominent mountain probably used as a navigation aid by and other explorers.



The next object of the bike route is to get bikers through the city of Richmond safely. Unfortunately, it will depart from BT at Bobtown until it rejoins it again north of Richmond along Otter Creek at Redhouse. Prior to that following the signs will lead you west of I-75, along the southern bypass, back across the Interstate on the overpass and up Barnes Mill Rd to downtown Richmond.

Then out of town along 2nd St becoming Hwy 388 (Redhouse Rd). USBR 21 will then turn on to Union City Rd which is along Dreaming Creek turning on to Hackett Pike which is not on Boone Trace but in the vicinity.



It then will rejoin Red House Rd and the Trace into the Fort Boonesborough State Park. Be sure to note the “Red House “ on Red House Rd. It is privately owned, but served as a stage coach stop between Richmond and Fort Boonesborough. Built in 1810, it is on the National Register of Historic Places. From there, the bike route will follow Hwy 388 into Fort Boonesborough along the Otter Creek bed, which at times was used as part of the trail.



Just past a zig-zag railroad crossing, look to the right for a pioneer cemetery near a big tree about 200 feet up into a yard. It is on private property but good evidence that you are on, or near, Boone Trace.



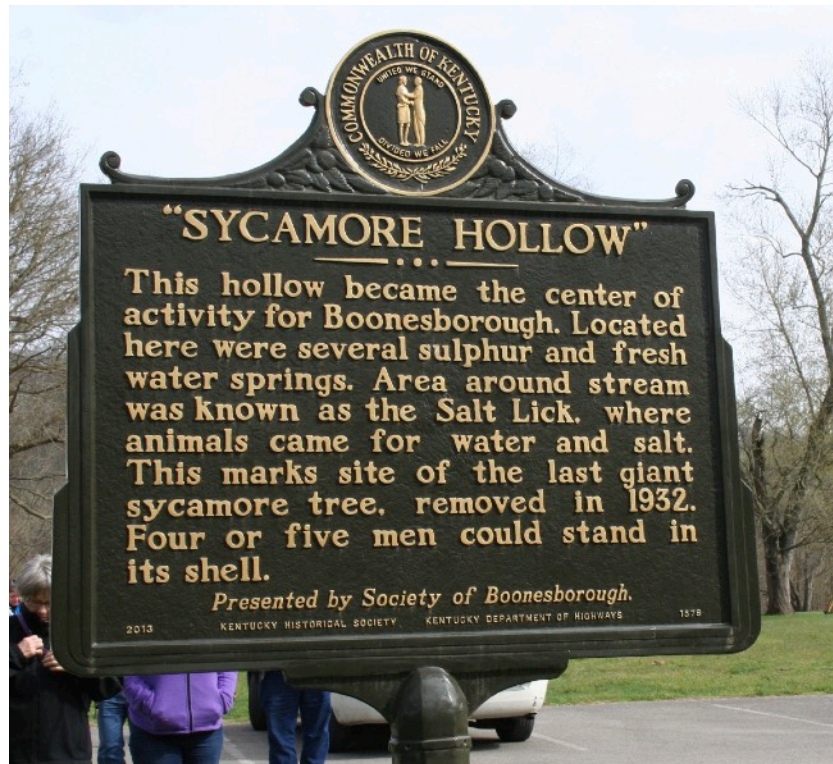
This latter northern segment is nearly dead on BT, and just before the park, it will pass by the Lisle House on the left built about 1825, the Lisle cemetery a bit north on the left, and the Hart House remains opposite the cemetery on the right.



The Hart house was the first house built outside the fort in about 1778 when it was presumed that the threat of Native American attack had subsided. Ironically, Hart was killed by Indians in 1782 and is buried in the cemetery across the road



At the state park, USBR 21 will lead past the original fort site, which is definitely worth a stop to visit and Sycamore Hollow, where Boone and his party first began construction of the fort . When Richard Henderson, who had hired Boone to mark the trail, arrived about three weeks later and realized that this initial site might flood. He then moved the construction site to a higher level. Multiple interpretive signs are in this location.



About 1/2 mile south of this site is a replica of the original fort on Hwy 627. It can be reached either from Hwy 627 or from a back walking trail off of a parking lot on Hwy 388.



Fort Boonesborough is the final terminus of Boone Trace, and USBR 21 will exit the park and the Trace on to Hwy 627 north toward Winchester. Bear in mind that Hwy 627 did not exist in 1775, and during the siege on the Fort in 1778 by Blackfish and about 400 Native Americans plus some British, they were attacked from the west through the area now occupied by the rock quarry.

Link: <https://parks.ky.gov/richmond/parks/historic/fort-boonesborough-state-park>

This ends Boone Trace along USBR 21, but the story goes on. As you cross the river heading north, the first turn-off to the right on to Athens-Boonesboro Rd for about one mile will lead you to the Lower Howards Creek Nature Preserve which is where the settlers first began to move west in the late 1700's. It's worth a visit just in itself.

Link: <https://www.lowerhowardscreek.org>

Otherwise, you will be departing Boone Trace here to continue your USBR 21 journey north through five more counties, exiting Kentucky at Maysville. Good luck and stay off the pavement!

For more information, visit the Friends of Boone Trace web site

Link: www.boonetrace1775.com



