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## An 1821 Trip Down Trammel's Trace

BY GARY L. PINKERTON

*There had never been a road prepared  
that a wheeled conveyance could pass  
from one section to the other.*

*R.L. Jones*

Trammel's Trace was the first road from the states and territories to the north of Spanish Texas in the early 1800s. Trammel's Trace from the north and the El Camino Real de los Tejas from the east were the earliest two routes into the Nacogdoches District of Spanish Texas from the United States.

The earliest evidence of the origins of Trammel's Trace appeared on maps from the early 1800s. A map drawn in 1807 by a Spanish priest named Puelles showed a road almost due south to Nacogdoches from a point on the Red River. Not long before the creation of this map, hundreds of Spanish soldiers marched to the Red River from Nacogdoches to intercept an American expedition exploring the boundary between Spain and the United States in 1803.

Following trails through the forests and prairies, the soldiers left behind a scarred landscape clearly visible to others. Men who captured mustangs in the prairies south of the Red River later used that soldiers' trail. Anglo immigrants also used parts of that route to migrate into Texas many years later.

Spanish Texas became Mexican Texas in 1821, and the liberalization of colonization laws resulted in Anglos migrating in growing numbers. People from Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri Territory, and the Carolinas came down Trammel's Trace from both of its origins at separate

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points on the Red River--one at Fulton, Arkansas at the Great Bend of the Red River, and a second point from settlements at Pecan Point and Jonesborough farther west up the Red River along what would become the border between Texas and Oklahoma.

Though the earliest maps did not name the trails across northeastern Texas, their track matches later maps which attached the name Trammel's Trace. The earliest mention of Trammel's Trace by name was in a letter dated June 1821 when an early Red River settler referred to the "old Trammel trace." Subsequently, Trammel's Trace was firmly entrenched in the cartographic history of the developing region. When the Texas Republic began making grants of land in 1838, surveyors noted the crossing of Trammel's Trace through many of the original Texas headright grants in seven counties. Commissioners forming the boundaries of Rusk County, Texas, in 1843 designated Trammel's Trace as two-thirds of the line between Rusk and Panola counties. Even into the mid-1860's, Civil War cartographers identified Trammel's Trace amidst a growing network of roads crisscrossing the region. In places where later roads followed on or near the original path of Trammel's Trace, evidence of the old road remains today in the form of overgrown ruts through forests or across cleared pasture land.

### **A Journey down Trammel's Trace**

Descriptions of Trammel's Trace and the terrain it crossed emerged from the letters and diaries of early settlers and travelers, official reports by envoys of Spain, Mexico, and the United States, and the daily logs of soldiers patrolling the edges of the frontier. To get to the northern border between the United States and Mexico in the early 1820's, immigrants first had to cross Arkansas Territory. The road across Arkansas cut diagonally from northeast to southwest, following a geologic boundary between the hills to the north and west and the plains to the southeast. Though the United States military had improved the trail, increasingly frequent use left it rutted and rough and forced wagons and horses around the remains of stumps eight inches or more above ground. In one section of the fearsome Mississippi Swamp in eastern Arkansas, only about five miles of high ground was found in ninety miles of river bottom.

No matter what difficulties they encountered crossing Arkansas, a traveler's journey from the Red River down Trammel's Trace was unlike any other leg of the trip. Stepping onto Trammel's Trace meant

stepping onto a path that crossed through unsettled lands in a foreign country. At the pace of a loaded wagon the trip from Fulton to Nacogdoches took roughly two and a half weeks. Two and a half weeks of forests, two and a half weeks of worry over attack by Indians, two and a half weeks when not a soul might be seen.

The day by day account that follows is based on both the geography of the route of Trammel's Trace and accounts from the period about their means of travel. With a loaded wagon, fifteen miles a day was making rapid headway. That measure, as well as the geography, is used to present an account that not only identifies the physical difficulties presented by the terrain but a sense of the feelings travelers of that time were likely to experience.

### **Day 1: Leaving the United States**

The trip down Trammel's Trace began with fear and anticipation--a fear of the unknown and anticipation of the opportunity for hundreds of acres of land and a fresh start. The transition to the uncertain eastern boundary of Mexican Texas began fourteen miles northeast of the Red River at the crossroads in Washington, Arkansas. There travelers learned there were two primary routes into Texas. Trammel's Trace crossed the Red River directly into what is now northeast Texas by way of Fulton, Arkansas. Earlier travelers continued farther west up the Red River to use the Trammel's Trace branch from Jonesboro and Pecan Point. That road had been only recently cleared for use by wagons. The second major route to Texas followed the east side of the Red River to Natchitoches, Louisiana. The advantage of that route was that it remained in the territory of the United States. By comparison, Trammel's Trace was reported to have better access to water and to be a faster journey.

Traders and immigrants used cowhide packsaddles to carry their belongings well before the Trace was cleared for wagons. As long as the space between a horse's legs, the pack was strapped across its girth. These Mexican-style packs, called *sillajes*, were large enough to carry one of the most prized possessions on the frontier--a valued feather bed.

Fulton, at the Red River, is fourteen miles southwest of Washington, Arkansas, near enough to make the trip in one day of travel. The trail from Washington to Fulton came down the southwest face of the foothills. Just above a bluff along the river, the single trail split into a

series of small traces. Each trace led to separate campsites and river crossings where various tribes and traders dispersed to avoid encroaching on each other. A sunset camp on the high banks of the Red River at Fulton was the reward for those who pulled out of Washington at first light. At the end of a long day, travelers could stand on a bluff overlooking their next obstacle, the crossing of the Red River. They were about to traverse 180 miles of uninhabited, foreign country before emerging in Nacogdoches. A good night's sleep in the relative safety of the United States was a comfort that would soon end.

### **Day 2: Crossing the Red**

Riverbanks are designated as right or left from the perspective of a boatman facing downstream. Fulton, the oldest settlement in southwestern Arkansas, was founded on the left bank of the Red River where the water slowly eroded the hillside in a grand turn from an easterly course to almost due south – the Great Bend. When the sun rose behind the last campsite in the United States at Fulton, it illuminated a sought-after destination on the other side of the river. Sounds of the morning coming to life eased minds otherwise occupied by the difficulties of the journey they were about to undertake. There were no inhabitants along the way who might offer safe respite for a night. The only grain their horses would have was what they could carry. The likelihood of danger and adversity was common knowledge.

Crossing the Red River could be simple or treacherous. Natural crossings built up in shoals where smaller streams entered the flow of a larger river. A mile or so upstream from Fulton, where the Little River merged its waters with the Red, sand bars and islands of debris created a ford that for much of the year was the easiest way across. Animals found the most favorable fords. Their historic paths were the best guides to suitable crossings. Just downstream of the bluff at Fulton, signs of horse's hooves angling down the bank to the water's edge indicated a manageable crossing. Even if the water level appeared passable, thorough reconnoiters were needed before making a choice about where to cross the ever-changing river. If the water was running swiftly from heavy rains, the boiling waters of the Red were tinted with the color of the clay soil through which they flowed. A darkened swirl two hundred yards across convinced the sensible to wait until water levels receded.

A passage without wagons made the crossing easier. Packs were piled atop the tallest horse to prevent them from getting wet, or towed

across on a small log raft built only for that purpose. A raft built by an earlier party could be reused, but only after it was retrieved from the other side of the river. If the water level was low, a wagon might still be pulled across by the horses. A passage with a wagon increased the danger and difficulty and put more belongings at risk. There was always a danger that the current might push against the side boards or sweep over the top, swamping the wagon and pulling the horses under the current. Carts and mules had been lost in similar circumstances, even when the flow did not seem that strong. Eddies and currents caused the sandy bottom to shift underneath the horses' feet, and the force of the flow could overcome a horse or topple a wagon. Only the inexperienced or foolhardy made a treacherous crossing with a wagon loaded with their only possessions. To get flour wet this early in the trip down the emptiness of Trammel's Trace would be unfortunate. To get gunpowder wet would be a disaster.

If the water was deeper, wagon boxes were raised by placing logs between the bottom and the running gear to gain a foot or so of height. If the water was too deep for the wagon to be pulled across at all, the wheels were removed and trees felled to build a log raft to carry it across. Traveling in a group made many things easier. With enough men, wagons that had been tarred and sealed, helping them to float, could be pulled across with a rope made from hide.

Safe arrival on the other side did not mean the dangers were over. What looked like a wide beach on the other side of the Red could in fact be a deep bog that shook with every step. After piercing the thin, drying crust, horses sank deeper into the muck, struggling to keep their footing. The soggy mud in the bottomland on the other side sucked the energy from the horse's legs and clung to wagon wheels like tar. The driver, muddy to his thighs, coaxed and pulled and hollered the horses across with the reins in one hand and a piece of switch cane in the other. Animals, property, and people were soaked and covered in dried dirt after several trips back to recover supplies from the other side of the river. A crossing like this could take hours for a large group to travel only two hundred yards, consuming the better part of a day and making little forward progress.

Not far from the riverbank on the other side was a well-used camp for weary travelers, a minor reward for the crossing. Signs of cook fires a few days prior left their mark under the branches of an old weathered oak. Past the campsite, the path of Trammel's Trace quickly left

the relative openness of the riverbank and entered a canebrake which covered miles of the route. The sky above the trail to Texas was about to disappear.

### **Day 3 - Breaking the Cane**

Cartographers who mapped the area around Fulton during the Civil War labeled Trammel's Trace on the Texas side of the Red River with a simple one-word testament describing conditions on the trail — "impracticable." After the challenges of the trail across Arkansas, it was hard to imagine the road getting worse, but that was likely. The road across Arkansas was rough, but still showed signs of a modest effort at improvement by the military and by settlers anxious to bring trade past their door. Trammel's Trace looked more like it had only just been beaten through the woods. The entire route showed signs it had not been long since it was simply a trail for smugglers. Those signs were found in the thick canebrakes on the Texas side of the Red River.

Cane twenty to thirty feet tall and an inch or more in diameter grew so thick that a man on foot had to weave his way like a tick crawling through the hairs on the back of an old hound. Seven miles of canebrake stood in the way, a canopy so thick the sun could not penetrate for four months of the year. When cane was flattened, or cut for a passage, the tall, leafy tops on the remaining sides curved inward toward the center and formed a darkened archway. This tunnel of cane was beaten down only by the regularity of travel.

In other sections, hardwoods that survived the regular inundations in the broad flood plain of the Red River allowed tall shoots of cane to grow underneath. Clearing the canebrakes, passing Lake Comfort, and crossing McKinney Bayou, Trammel's Trace slowly angled southwesterly toward a long bluff overlooking the rich river bottom to the north. The slight elevation along the edge of the flood plain brought a refreshing breeze and a glimpse of the land spoken of so highly by others. The border between the United States and Mexico was still uncertain in this part of the country, but at this point travelers understood they were entering a foreign land as the sun set on their third day down Trammel's Trace.

### **Day 4: The Sulphur Prairies**

Meager supplies of coffee were carefully hoarded, but what better occasion to enjoy it than waking to the first dawn in a new country?

For the first time, the travelers beheld prairies bordering the Sulphur Fork of the Red River in a country that had been described as beautiful and undulating, equal parts of open grassland and wooded forests over low, rolling hills.

The westerly course of the Trace followed a ridge at the edge of the Red River bottom. Years later, the same land became part of the old Sugar Hill Plantation and is now a combination of farm houses and subdivisions northeast of Texarkana, Texas. The high ground gave relief from the flood plains below, and still provides an expansive hill-top view. A few more miles west, the path of the Trace crossed what is now the Arkansas-Texas state line about two miles north of Interstate 30 on State Line Avenue. When the survey of the eastern boundary between the Republic of Texas and the United States was completed in 1841, members of the crew built an eight-foot tall mound of dirt every mile along the line. Survey notes identified Trammel's Trace crossing between border mound markers 102 and 103, intersecting another road from the broad river bottoms to the east and the Red River south of Fulton.

Beyond the ridge along the flood plain, Trammel's Trace turned to the southwest where legend says smugglers kept a hidden stockade for stolen horses. What is now Bowie County, Texas, was a mix of intermittent grassland and hardwood forest. Wild horses often moved down from the northern plains into these prairies. The sounds of nearby mustangs attracted packhorses to escape their domestic confines. The gentlest wagon horse, once among a free-running herd, quickly acquired all the intractable wildness of his untamed companions. The result of such an encounter could be a bolting horse, nostrils flaring with the scent of freedom.

### **Day 5: Creek Crossings**

The ease of the trail through the prairies ended too quickly. Early in this day's journey it was evident that a bluff on Nettles Creek was a transition point to a different kind of terrain. The trail headed downhill toward another water crossing, several of them, in fact. The East Fork, Nettles Creek, and Conn Creek had to be crossed in a distance less than three miles. Hardwood forests of oak, ash, and cedar tangled with vines lined the edges of the creeks. Small streams this close together resulted in a continuous, thick undergrowth, making travel more difficult.

Detours that formed around low, rutted spots in the trail took on



the characteristics of side trails. Over time, some of those side trails replaced sections of the Trace and became the main path. Multiple and parallel tracks spread out across the terrain in places where wet or rutted trails made for rough going. Weaving its way from one high spot to the next, there were still sloughs in this bottomland the trail could not avoid. Horses constantly sinking into the mud in this kind of terrain required wagon passengers to climb down and coax them through. Pulling on the horses and pushing the wagon wheels through the muddy bottoms resulted in slow progress. Even if a spot of dry ground to catch one's breath could be found, enduring the nasty biting insects made every stop painful and miserable. At least the clouds of black flies did not follow from the woods to the more open ground. When black flies swarmed the horses, they left a drop of blood at every spot they touched.

The trail turned more to the south as it approached Caney Creek and Big Creek, separated by only about a mile and a half. It might take an entire day for travelers to slog through these creek bottoms. Relatively dry weather made travel easier than after an accumulation of rainfall. Wooded creek bottoms and bay galls (forested wetlands in a depression) did not dry out quickly, making for muddy going even without any recent rain. The land rose and leveled out again about a mile and a half past Big Creek. Back on the edge of a small prairie, the trail emerged from the deep woods where the clouds of mosquitoes relented for a change.

### **Day 6: Crossing the Sulphur River**

Travel the next morning was easier, but only for a few miles. The dark mud from the sloughs dried and began to fall from the bottom of the wagon. The woods opened into scattered prairies edged by mature hardwoods and pines. The ease did not continue, however, and the forest trail became thicker and more confined as the travelers entered yet another hardwood bottom. Traveling through similar country, one observer noted that when "the country began to descend a change soon took place in the aspect of nature, and of everything around us."

Tracks of horses and wagon wheels from earlier crossings were filled with a watery muck. The trail wound around haphazardly in the muddy sections, making way toward any higher patch of ground or spaces between trees wide enough to let pack horses or wagons through. Danger was camouflaged and hidden in the little oases of

land. One diarist chronicled the difficulties this way.

The unfortunate traveler has but little chance of escaping with life, if, from want of experience, he is foundered in the swampy cane-brakes. When the horse sinks and the rider leaves the saddle, the only thing he can do is to return back upon his track; but let him beware of these solitary small patches of briars, generally three or four yards in circumference, which are spread here and there on the edges of the cane-brakes, for there he will meet with deadly reptiles and snakes unknown in the prairies; such as the grey-ringed water moccasin, the brown viper, the black congo with red head and the copper head, all of whom congregate and it may be said make their nests in these little dry oases, and their bite is followed by instantaneous death.

The approach to woodland rivers like the Sulphur was across boggy, miry, nasty ground. Horses tired quickly in this kind of terrain and required time to recover and rest. The left bank of the Sulphur River finally appeared, and was the first river crossing encountered since the trip down Trammel's Trace started at the Red River. The trail led to a low bluff with a steep incline down to the river. The river was no more than fifty feet across, but the banks dropped off quickly, making the crossing more difficult. For two miles on the west side of the Sulphur River crossing, the flood plain was as flat as the bottom of an iron skillet, with virtually no change in elevation or the unrelenting density of the forest.

The Trammel's Trace crossing of the Sulphur was one of the most significant natural landmarks in the area. Anderson's Creek entered the Sulphur Fork a quarter-mile above the crossing and deposited a shoal of silt and debris that created a convenient ford. Moscoso crossed here twice in 1542, and La Salle's surviving crew in 1687. In 1821 when immigrant traffic increased, there was no ferry to take travelers across the Sulphur. If they were lucky, there were the remains of some earlier crafted log rafts or pirogues lashed to a tree on the bank of the *river*, or pushed to higher ground by the last flood.

It was not until 1837 that Mark Epperson operated Epperson's Ferry at this crossing and it became a mail stop on one of the Texas Re-

public's early postal routes.

The trail emerged on the other side of the Sulphur River bottom on high ground between where Thomas Creek and Whatley Creek emptied into the river. The sharp rise of the trail to a bluff signaled an end to their present difficulties. Another long day of hard work through muddy ground and an arduous river crossing was complete. The next few days of travel beyond the Sulphur River offered a more relaxing journey with easier creek crossings. Thoughts of less arduous travels to come could now supersede the difficulties of the present journey. There was time for looking ahead, but not for a good night's sleep. The insects did not allow it.

### **Day 7: A Historic Fork in the Road**

When rain clouds covered the sun in the early part of the day, weary travelers got a few more minutes of sleep before the sounds of thunder off to the northwest jolted them to attention. The scent of rain and a stillness in the air alerted them to prepare for a day of wet travel. If rain continued until their next river crossing, they could only persevere or wait for the water to subside.

Anyone traveling on Highway 77 near Dalton Cemetery and who knows where to look for the historical marker can still see ruts across what is now only a pasture. Another mile to the southwest and travelers came to a historic fork in Trammel's Trace. A trail from the north joined the main track from Fulton and continued southward. This northern branch of Trammel's Trace connected the early Red River settlements of Jonesborough and Pecan Point to the main trail to Nacogdoches. The route between this fork and the Red River was later called the Spanish Trace. Northwest of this fork, the trail to Pecan Point crossed the Sulphur River at what became known as Stephenson's Ferry, about one and a half miles upstream from where the Sulphur River crosses Highway 67 in the northwestern corner of what is now Cass County. The section of Trammel's Trace from Pecan Point and Jonesboro was the entryway for many immigrants from Tennessee and Kentucky, some of whom became part of Stephen F. Austin's "Old Three Hundred" original settlers.

### **Days 8-10: Turning South and East**

Inevitably, the rains came. Not in torrents, but in a steady, light rainfall that sent the wagon underneath a canopy of trees until prepa-

rations to get back on the trail for a rain-soaked ride were completed. The next few days' travel was much simpler than the last. The creek crossings to come were more easily managed, and the sandy soil in the forests allowed the rain to soak into the ground beneath. Though the terrain was easier, the environs were not.

Indians in the area assessed the settlers' interests in remaining in their territory by trading with them. Despite the general good will, immigrants new to the country could not help but wonder if the friendliness was merely a ruse before some horse thievery to be carried out during the night. The likelihood of a safe encounter and a little trade was not enough reassurance to dissuade the wary from paying closer attention to noises out of sight in these forests.

More certain than encounters with Indians, and perhaps more fearsome, was the frequency and predictably of stirring hornets and yellow jackets from their hiding places. The edges of creeks, the bottom side of fallen logs, and tree stumps held swarms of the menacing insects. If a horse was stung it would paw and kick the ground, then roll in the dirt to rid itself of the sting.

From the fork in the road that was the Trammel's Trace branch to Pecan Point, the trail ran almost due south for about fifteen miles. There it passed near the site of an old Choctaw Village, on the east side of present Hughes Springs. Near these settlements, a chalybeate spring filtered by iron ore reportedly had a healing effect on those who drank from the waters. Leaving the old Choctaw Village, the path of Trammel's Trace turned southeasterly in a long sweeping curve, after which it followed a relatively straight course for about twenty-five miles to the crossing of Big Cypress Bayou, near present day Jefferson.

In one account of a trip back up Trammel's Trace from Nacogdoches to Pecan Point in 1821, the traveler said the only people he saw on the entire journey of almost 200 miles were one small group of Delaware Indians. Caddo people built burial mounds in the area and would have left footpaths crossing the main trail. With signs of Indians about, even the sweet sound of a bird call brought a certain uneasiness about whether it was a bird, or the signal of warriors waiting to attack.

A bluff at the edge of the Big Cypress bottomlands offered a vantage point high above the trail ahead. It was clear there were few hills and little high ground for the next five miles. Halfway across the bottom, a single hill in the midst of the bottom was visible over the trees, another hundred feet higher than the bluff on which they stood. The

trail headed in that general direction and it was easy to see why. This change signaled their entrance into an unhealthy country of river bottoms and thick hardwood forests different than anything they had encountered to this point. The woods were darker and more ominous, the high ground less certain, and the still air filled with more of the biting insects that tormented both people and horses. Mosquito bites left faces swollen, and buffalo gnats could kill a horse. The curdling cry of a panther, the howl of wolves in the distance, or the low moan of bears huddled in the canebrakes sent chills down the spine of the hardest traveler. The prairies were behind them now, and terrain of a different sort lay ahead.

### **Day 11-13: Cypress Bayous**

The forests changed as the wagon headed down a slight incline into the expansive, wooded floodplain of the Big Cypress and Little Cypress Bayous. The air was still with little breeze, damp with the smell of rotting wood and wet earth. Magnificent cypress trees gave the forests a more ominous feel. The trail slogged across muddy sloughs from one dry stretch of ground to another for the next two miles. Fatigue wore down even the hardest of animals and their wariness became more heightened as they grew tired. Broken tree limbs and brush offered telltale signs of the prior passage of a wagon or a horse carrying pack bags. Travelers occasionally rediscovered the ruts of a trail used by others, but their advance for now was based less on markers of those gone before than on their sense of direction. They headed toward a solitary piece of high ground in the middle of the creek bottom and hoped for a short respite there. Even with all its attendant obstacles, a crossing of the Big Cypress Bayou seemed routine at this point in the journey. They learned to look for logjams backfilling a sandy island that bisected a faster flowing channel. Travelers gathered up fallen logs and built upon the debris that was already there to construct an easier way to drive a wagon across a shallow ford.

The ground rose quickly out of the bottom not far beyond the Big Cypress Bayou. The change in elevation was so sudden that the trail curved around the rise to avoid the steepness of the grade. The top of the hill was almost two hundred feet above the swampy bayou behind them. From that vantage point they could see their bottomland excursion had only reached its mid-point. The same type of terrain was ahead of them at the crossing of Little Cypress Bayou. The trail fol-

lowed a slightly more elevated route through the bottom, and only the bayou crossing itself led to any difficulty. After another mile of travel, the trail finally emerged to higher ground out of the thick river bottom.

If providence and the trail builders were kind, a small clearing in the woods beyond the bottomland was available at about the same time weariness overcame tired bodies. Nightfall led to thoughts about how to respond if they spotted the last flames of a camp of Choctaw or Caddo sleeping near these same banks, or suspicious characters taking cover in a canebrake. Enduring nightfall without the benefit of a fire for cooking or for light may have been advisable to avoid detection, but the risk of attack by humans was less than the sure assault of bugs. Biting insects were so numerous that the sound of their swarming drowned out everything but the shriek of a bobcat. The smoke of a campfire stoked with sweet gum roots, called copal, was more valuable than any sense of security since it kept the bugs at bay. The insects were far more likely to draw blood than panthers or Indians.

As the trail left the Little Cypress bottom it wound up and down, from one small hill to the next, across narrow creeks for another full day of travel. The woods varied little and the clearings were fewer. There were clear tracks around the largest trees and through the most open ground available. Two days past the mud and mosquitoes of the Cypress, the trail descended into another flood plain. Past Caddo burial mounds and across creeks and hills, the trail finally came to the edge of the last river crossing before completing the journey to Nacogdoches. The muddy, brown waters of the Sabine River lay ahead.

### **Day 14 & 15: Boundaries in the Piney Woods**

The banks of any river became gathering places when flood waters prevented a crossing. Men of many nations camped together in a tenuous traveler's truce, their horses tethered nearby to feed and rest. When the water level allowed, the low water crossing of Trammel's Trace over the Sabine was atop an outcropping of dark brown lignite. The coal shelf was about forty feet wide and about three feet above the flow on its downstream side, creating a small waterfall. The shallow depth of the water and the hard surface made wagon crossings much easier any time the water level allowed.

The path of Trammel's Trace angled steeply down the sandy bank of the Sabine River through the ruts left by previous crossings. At low water, the crossing of the Sabine River at this rocky ford offered few

challenges. The water was often only knee high at the edge of the coal shelf that formed the hard surface. The trail down to the river was steep and narrow, but once at the water's edge the crossing proceeded uneventfully if the Sabine was kind.

Upon emerging on the south side of the river there was more of the predictable slog through bottomland filled with hardwood and brush. Though it was low and muddy, compared to the Cypress Bayou lowlands it was not nearly as difficult or as foreboding. Oxbow lakes, cut off from the former flow of the river, appeared on both sides of the trail. On the south side of the river, pines were more predominant and the character of the forests began to change. There was even more evidence of one of the demons of the Trace, poison ivy, in places where the canopy opened to the sunlight. This poisonous plant grew widely as ground cover, plaguing travelers on foot who took to the trail in the wrong places. An itchy nuisance could become a serious infection without medicines or herbal remedies in harsh conditions unsuitable for cleanliness. Keen-eyed travelers with more experience also noticed specimens of a tree that was one of the primary commodities of the Indians. Wood from the Osage orange, or Bois-d'arc tree, was easily polished, hard, and durable, making it a prime source of wood to make hunting bows.

### **Day 16 & 17: One Ending is the Next Beginning**

The last week of travel down Trammel's Trace to Nacogdoches was through a virtually unbroken forest. Pine trees formed a dense crown overhead in the woods of eastern Texas. Short-leaved pine with a diameter of two to three feet dominated the landscape with a majestic evergreen shade growing upwards of 130 feet. Loblolly pines were even larger, if less abundant. It would not have been unusual to see a loblolly with a diameter of four feet or more chest-high from the ground. Trees like these were saplings over 200 years before Anglos used the trails which became Trammel's Trace. Oaks like the chinquapin, red oak, white oak, and the basket oak with acorn caps bigger than a musket ball were prevalent in the creek bottoms. Elm, black walnut, hickory, cypress, sycamore, dogwood, and birch provided a more varied forest in the lowlands. Other than tree limbs which naturally fell from the lowest parts of the pines, some sections of the forest floor were as clear as if cared for by unseen inhabitants. The only undergrowth was grass or lacy green ferns that thrived in the filtered sunlight. The size

of the towering trees was a formidable deterrent for anyone who considered staking a land claim and building a cabin. Finding trees suitable for a cabin--small enough for a man to handle with only an axe--was difficult in some stretches.

From a point just twenty-six miles north of Nacogdoches the route of the old trail varied over time. Williams Settlement was a well-populated community of over twenty families on high ground above the East Fork of the Angelina River west of present day Mt. Enterprise. A road from there to Nacogdoches would have been established in the early days of the settlement for trade and business activity. Most likely, the road through Williams Settlement was Trammel's Trace. Farther south and west of there on Dill Creek, just north of present day Cushing, Texas, the site of the Spanish Mission San Jose de los Nazonis was served by trails to nearby Indian settlements. The mission was established in 1716, one hundred years before the beginnings of Trammel's Trace. Spanish and French trade goods recovered during archeological studies of the mission site attest to early activity pre-dating the use of Trammel's Trace. Any remaining segments of pathways from the mission to Nacogdoches may have provided a part of the trail that became Trammel's Trace.

Indications of the likely route of Trammel's Trace between Williams Settlement and Nacogdoches also appear on a map for a land survey just south of the current boundary of Rusk and Nacogdoches counties. In the survey for Mariano Sanchez, a road from Pecan Point to Nacogdoches--Trammel's Trace--tracked diagonally across the survey to the south-southeast, toward Nacogdoches from the direction of Williams Settlement. The plat map for the Luis Sanchez survey, angling off to the west of Trammel's Trace, names a "road from the Saline to Pecan Point." The "saline" was a salt deposit northwest of Nacogdoches that was a critical resource for the region. That road connected to the El Camino Real near the Trinity River, a key crossing.

The last stretch of Trammel's Trace into Nacogdoches followed the eastern edge of La Banita Creek -- a sandy trail along a beautiful creek. Signs of an approaching arrival in the only settlement in this part of Texas could be recognized in a slight widening of the road or by the presence of small cabins. Finally, Trammel's Trace became El Calle del Norte (North Street) in Nacogdoches, and intersected the El Camino Real near the old stone building at the plaza. Nacogdoches was virtually empty after 1812, its inhabitants driven off by conflicts with the Span-



iards. After 1820, some of the early residents returned to their homes, bringing the population of the settlement back to over one hundred inhabitants. Nacogdoches and its trading partner, Natchitoches to the east in the United States, were both important to the history and commerce of the borderlands. Natchitoches was a river port and the outer reaches of United States influence. Nacogdoches was a way station on the El Camino Real which led westward to the new colonies in Texas.

The rigors of travel and the strain of uncertainty never diminished the dreams that kept immigrants moving forward into Texas following promises of land, riches, and opportunity. The trip from north to south on Trammel's Trace, from Fulton, Arkansas, all the way to Nacogdoches, Texas, took up almost three weeks of travel over 180 miles of raw, wagon-busting trail. Those who managed to keep their supplies and belongings dry past dozens of stream crossings and three rivers, and who avoided mortal injury, disease, or attack, at last reached their next waypoint in Nacogdoches.

As travelers emerged from the forest at the place where Trammel's Trace widened into something closer to a road, the need to be on guard did not disappear; it simply changed to an awareness of new dangers. Any traveler coming down the way of the smugglers might be suspected to be another one of the "bad men" from Pecan Point or smugglers the trail tended to bring south. Seeing someone emerge from the road's shadows on the way south gave the citizens of Nacogdoches cause to wonder what act of illegality was underway. That assessment was probably correct in the earliest days of the trail's use, before the wave of colonization and migration that started so fervently after Mexico took possession of the territory in 1821.

There were two jumping off points on the northern ends of Trammel's Trace heading to the new country to the south--Fulton and the route from Jonesborough and Pecan Point. On the southern end was Nacogdoches, the town that signaled it was time to turn west to a better life toward colonization in central Texas. In between were smugglers, thieves, Indians, and those men and women brave enough to endure those risks in order to start a new life in Texas. Those inhospitable wilds and unsettling times were the province of Trammel's Trace.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Source: Trammel's Trace: First Road to Texas from the North, Gary L. Pinkerton, Texas A&M University Press. (order information: [www.tamupress.com](http://www.tamupress.com) or [www.trammelstrace.com](http://www.trammelstrace.com))

<sup>2</sup> R. L. Jones, "Folk Life in Early Texas: The Autobiography of Andrew Davis," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 43 (July 1939 – April 1940): 161.

<sup>3</sup> Fray Jose Maria de Jesus Puelles' *Mapa Geographica de la Provincias Septentrionales de esta Nueva Espana of 1807* can be found in the Dolph Briscoe Center of the University of Texas in Austin. For more discussion of this trace to the Spanish Bluff see Dan Flores, *Southern Counterpart to Lewis and Clark: The Freeman and Custis Expedition of 1806*. (Norman OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 191-192.

<sup>4</sup> Though Jonesborough and Pecan Point are two distinct points on early maps, it was Pecan Point which was the earlier settlement and most often referenced by traders and Indian agents. When mentioning the access points from there to Trammel's Trace, I use them both together to indicate a focal terminus to what came to be called Trammel's Trace. When referencing activity in each locale, they will be noted separately where the documents indicate.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, *Autobiography*, 323.

<sup>6</sup> Library of Congress, *Maps, American Memory*. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>. The American Memory Project of the Library of Congress provides online access to several different maps of Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana that show trails which became part of Trammel's Trace. By the 1830's, more direct routes between settlements replaced the Trace as the primary route for routine.

<sup>7</sup> William C. Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness: the Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier*. (New York, Harper Collins, 1995), 14. Davis provides a description of conditions on the early Natchez Trace using a journal written by an Englishman named Francis Baily who left Natchez, Mississippi, in 1797 bound for Nashville. His journal provides some insight into the perils of travel during that time.

See also Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies, Or, The Journal of a Santa Fe Trader: During Eight Expeditions across the Great Western Prairies, and a Residence of Nearly Nine Years in Northern Mexico*. (New York, H.G. Langley, 1844). This is an excellent resource on travel conditions in Texas during this time period.

See also Jack Jackson, ed., and John Wheat (translator). *Texas by Teran: The Diary Kept By General Manuel de Mier y Terán On His 1828 Inspection of Texas*. (Austin TX, University of Texas Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Southwest Trail. <http://www.southwesttrail.com>. This route from the northeastern corner of Arkansas to the southwestern corner at Fulton and the Great Bend of the Red River was often referred to as the Old Military Road or the National Road. In

this book, it will be called the Southwest Trail which is more presently used to name the collective group of trails and roads that roughly followed the edge of the Gulf Coastal Plain across Arkansas.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Priest (ed) and Kathryn Priest. *The Diary of Clinton Harrison Moore*, <http://www.pcf.org/genealogy/ClintonHarrisonMoore.html>. The citation is for Moore's diary entry for March 18, 1839.

<sup>10</sup> AUTHOR'S NOTE: A map of Trammel's Trace can be viewed or downloaded at [www.trammelstrace.com](http://www.trammelstrace.com). Where applicable, sources to support the following depictions of the terrain and difficulties of travel are cited. Del Weniger's landmark work, *The Explorers Texas: The Land and Waters*, provides many details for depictions of the route to follow. Since the route of Trammel's Trace has been generally established, information about the landscape can be described with relative accuracy. A mud hole is still a mud hole and a rattlesnake still fearsome. The author's wish is to convey some sense of the emotion of such a difficult journey and he requests of the reader the liberty to explore that without direct documentation.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Davis says Trammell was the first one to clear this route in about 1821.

<sup>12</sup> This route to the El Camino Real afforded the relative safety of remaining inside the United States until reaching the Sabine River crossing at Gaines' Ferry. Trammel's Trace reportedly had better water resources.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, *Folk Life*, 161. Andrew Davis called these packs "ciaxes."

<sup>14</sup> James Dawson and Mary Eakin Dawson. *Trammel's Trace*. The Dawson's researched and mapped Trammel's Trace during the 1940's. A manuscript of their work, along with the definitive map of Trammel's Trace produced using survey information is found in the collection at the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives (SARA) in Washington, Arkansas. This reference is from their manuscript note 14, citing the Arkansas Gazette, Hempstead term of court, 1820.

<sup>15</sup> "Vicinity of Fulton, Ark's", in Jeremy Francis Gilmer Papers, Gilmer Map Number 180, May 20, 1864. [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/g/Gilmer,Jeremy\\_Francis.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/g/Gilmer,Jeremy_Francis.html).

<sup>16</sup> Accounts of the difficulty of water crossings can be found in various sources. A diary entry by P.V. Crawford on crossing the Snake River is dated August 10-11, 1851, accessed December 30, 2013 at <http://tomlaidlaw.com/otkiosks/snake.html>. See also George W. Riddle, *History of Early Days in Oregon* (Riddle, OR; Riddle Enterprise, 1920), 14. Accounts of crossings from diaries by Mrs. Marcus Whitman, August 13, 1836; and Elizabeth Wood, August 21, 1851; Accessed December 30, 2013, [http://www.traveltipsandtricks.com/rv\\_adventures.shtml](http://www.traveltipsandtricks.com/rv_adventures.shtml).

<sup>17</sup> George William Featherstonehaugh, *Excursion through the slave states, from Washington on the Potomac, to the frontier of Mexico; with sketches of popular manners and geological notices*. (New York, Harper, 1844), 124. Featherstonehaugh gave this 1834 account of a

crossing near the location of Dooley's Ferry, south of Fulton. Even with the benefit of a ferry, his crossing into what the ferryman called "Spain" (it was Mexico at the time) was treacherous.

<sup>18</sup> "Vicinity of Fulton, Ark's".

<sup>19</sup> Unknown Author, *A Visit to Texas in 1831, being the journal of a traveller through those parts most interesting to American settlers, with descriptions of scenery, habits, etc.* (Houston TX, Houston Post Dispatch, 1929), 192.

<sup>20</sup> Unknown Author, *Encarnacion prisoners: comprising an account of the march of the Kentucky Cavalry from Louisville to the Rio Grande, together with an authentic history of the captivity of the American prisoners, including incidents and sketches of men and things on the route and in Mexico.* (Louisville KY, Prentice and Weissinger, 1848), 8-13. See also William McClintock, "Journal of a Trip Through Texas and Northern Mexico in 1846-1847" *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 34 (July 1930-April 1931), 20-37.

<sup>21</sup> Unknown Author, *Encarnacion Prisoners*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> A Texas state historical marker is at this location.

<sup>23</sup> Gregg, *Commerce*, 366.

<sup>24</sup> This describes the route of Trammel's Trace just northeast of present day Redwater, Texas.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, GIS *Aided*, 169. The Lobanillo Cuts on the El Camino Real west of Nacogdoches retain the effects of heavy trail use and has seven parallel ruts.

<sup>26</sup> Unknown, *A Visit to Texas*, 205-207.

<sup>27</sup> Featherstonehaugh, *Excursion*, 8-132.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick Marryat, *The Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet in California, Sonora, and Western Texas.* (New York, George Routledge and Sons, 1843), 358. Marryat visited the United States in 1839.

<sup>29</sup> Rex W. Strickland, "Moscoso's Journey Through Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 45, (1942), 109-137.

<sup>30</sup> "An Act To Authorize the Post Master General to establish a Post Route." *Laws of the Republic of Texas*, Approved Dec 18, 1837, signed into law by Sam Houston.

<sup>31</sup> As a result of investigations by the author and colleagues, this crossing was identified. The efforts of Bob Vernon of Bivins, Texas led to a Texas state historical marker at this location on Highway 77 near Dalton Baptist Church.

<sup>32</sup> This intersection became part of the Daniel Barecroft headright survey near the location of Old Unionville and present day Naples in northwestern Cass County.

<sup>33</sup> This section of the road had many iterations. It was first referenced in surveys as the "Mexican Trace," but part of it was the road the Spanish used to intercept the Freeman & Custis expedition in 1806. It also became part of the Jonesborough to Nacogdoches Road and was also referred to in one land survey as Dayton's Road.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, *Folk Life*, 327

<sup>35</sup> The old Indian village was about a mile east of what is present day Hughes Springs, near where Highways 11 and 49 intersect. Some years later, a dispute over the ownership of this land, which became the Joseph Burleson headright survey, was a landmark case in the Texas Supreme Court. See *Urquhart v. Burleson*. Supreme Court of Texas. 6 Tex. 502. 1851. *Reports of cases argued and decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Texas during a part of Galveston term, 1851, and the whole of Tyler term, 1851. Volume 6.* 251-257.

<sup>36</sup> William B. Dewees, *Letters from an Early Settler of Texas*. (Louisville KY, Morton & Griswold, 1852), 22. Dewees states he saw the Indians on Boggy Creek, but it is unclear which of the many streams named Boggy Creek that might have been.

<sup>37</sup> Near the present town of Jefferson, Texas.

<sup>38</sup> Klier, *Pavie*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Betje Black Klier, *Tales of the Sabine Borderlands: Early Louisiana and Texas Fiction by Théodore Pavie*. (College Station TX, Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 99. In those days, copal was an item of commerce, used for its sweet aroma.

<sup>40</sup> This crossing would later be the site of Ramsdale's Ferry, where Harrison, Rusk, and Panola counties intersect at the Sabine River.

<sup>41</sup> Gregg, *Commerce*, 360.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Botsford Buckley, *Geological and Agricultural Survey of Texas*. (Houston TX, A.C. Gray State Printer, 1874), 92.

<sup>43</sup> The path of Trammel's Trace no longer appears on the old maps from the Texas General Land Office (GLO) at a point just north of present-day Mount Enterprise. The reason for the sudden ending of its demarcation is not known. The location of the old trail from that point to its end at Nacogdoches about twenty-six miles farther south was unmapped on Texas headright surveys. However, roads across early Spanish land grants are the likely route and a comparison with land features and historical sites provides a likely route.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, *GIS Aided*, 37. See also Perttula, et al, "Caddo Ceramics from an Early 18th Century Spanish Mission in East Texas: Mission San Jose de los Nasonis (41RK200)." *Journal of Northeast Texas Archaeology*. 2009, Vol 29, pp 81-89. Spellings vary and include Nazones, Nasonis, and Nazonis, which is the name cited in the Handbook of Texas.

<sup>45</sup> Texas General Land Office. *Spanish Land Grants*. Survey notes for the Mariano Sanchez grant in Nacogdoches County (Sanchez, Mariano; Abstract 51; File Number SC 000044:5) and Luis Sanchez (Sanchez, Luis; Abstract 51; File Number SC 000044:5) surveys are found online at the Texas General Land Office.