



## The Natchez Trace and the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area

[The Natchez Trace Parkway](#) is a 444-mile scenic recreational road that spans three states: Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The trace has a 10,000-year-old history. It has served as a pathway for travel for Native Americans, settlers in the region, and modern drivers.

Prehistoric animals set the path of the trace, which closely follows a geological ridge line, as they traveled between salt licks. Prehistoric Native American people followed the animal herds on hunts. The trace also connected the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers, which facilitated the



*Pharr Mounds*

development of a trade network between indigenous people. During the historic period, the trace served to connect the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez tribes. These Native Americans left behind the remnants of their settlements on many points along the Trace. Along the Natchez Trace today, visitors can see mounds constructed in the prehistoric era -- including the [Pharr Mounds](#), near Tupelo, MS, which are over 2,000 years old.

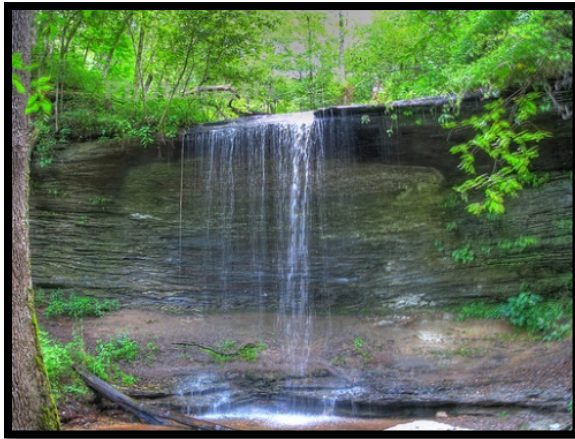
When settlers from the eastern United States entered the southeastern United States, they too utilized the well-worn track. The purpose of the trace shifted as it became a major trade route. Some of these traders were boatmen from Kentucky, known as "[Kaintucks](#)," who would travel the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to sell their livestock, coal, and other goods in New Orleans or Natchez, Mississippi. Since returning upriver without engines was practically impossible, the Kaintucks would use the Natchez Trace to return north back to their homes. Research shows that in 1810 alone, more than 10,000 Kaintucks traveled along the Trace.



Because many of these men were carrying large sums of money with them, the trace became a haven for outlaws, hoping to catch weary travelers unsuspecting. The notorious [Harpe Brothers](#), who were perhaps America's first serial killers, put many of their plots into motion along the trace.

The trace has witnessed many significant historical events. General Andrew Jackson led his *The Natchez Trace crosses the Tennessee River* troops down the trace on their way to fight at the battle of New Orleans. Later as president, Jackson would order the removal of thousands Native Americans called the Trail of Tears— the trace would again serve as one of the major routes used.

The Tennessee River and the Natchez Trace meet in the Muscle Shoals region, near Waterloo. It was there that Chickasaw Chief George Colbert operated an inn and ferry. During the War of 1812, Colbert charged Andrew Jackson \$75,000 to ferry his soldiers across the river. The modern-day parkway has marked the site of the original inn, a respite for businessmen, boatmen, and outlaws alike with a stand.



*Fall Hallow Falls*

With the introduction of the steam engine and the growth of railroads, farmers or traders no longer used the Natchez Trace as their primary trade route. However, the trace remained a busy roadway for people living nearby.

In the 1930s, under President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s [New Deal](#), construction of the modern national parkway began. The Natchez Trace Parkway was one of the many projects completed by the [Civilian](#)

[Conservation Corps](#) during the Great Depression.

Today, the Natchez Trace Parkway is a scenic recreational road. Many people enjoy biking, hiking, and camping along the route. Along with sites of historical significance the Natchez Trace offers beautiful views of the landscape, including spectacular waterfalls. The Natchez Trace Parkway serves as the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area’s partner park.