

Cumberland Gap

Official Map and Guide



Warrior's Path, Wilderness Road

Stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization, marching single file—the buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur-trader and hunter, the cattleraiser, the pioneer farmer—and the frontier has passed by.

Frederick Jackson Turner, 1893

From Maine to Georgia the Appalachian Mountains rose like a giant wall, protecting the American colonies from their enemies: the French in Canada and American Indians to the west. Land transportation was primitive, and the nearly trackless mountains that offered security to the colonists also kept the growing population confined along the eastern seaboard. In the South, though,

Cumberland Gap had long been used to cross the Appalachians. The American Indians learned of it by following the buffalo, and it had become a major route to the hunting grounds of Kentucky. The gap was also an important feature on the Warrior's Path that led south from the Potomac River, across the gap, and north to the Ohio River.

In 1750 the first white explorers came upon the gap. Thomas Walker had been hired to stake out an 800,000-acre grant beyond the mountains of the Blue Ridge. After two months of searching, Walker and his companions returned home. They had not found the Kentucky bluegrass, but they did find the gap that would lead settlers to the

region. Colonists could not immediately take advantage of the trail through the mountains because wars with the French and the Indians kept the western frontier closed.

When peace returned hunters began crossing the mountains. Daniel Boone spent two years exploring alone, then returned to North Carolina. In 1775, after the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, in which a large portion of the Kentucky country was obtained from the Cherokee Indians, Boone and 30 men marked out the Wilderness Trail from Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. Immigration began immediately, and by the end of the Revolutionary War some 12,000 persons had crossed into the new territory. By 1792 the population

Early History

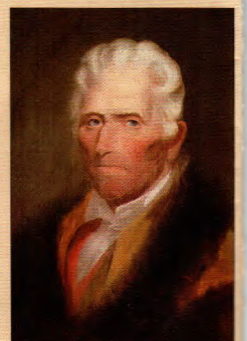


Long before people came here, bison and deer in search of food trampled a path through the gap. For Indians the gap was a vital pass to hunting grounds in what would later be Kentucky. It was also the key pass on the Athawominee (path of the armed ones), or the Warrior's Path, the trail of trade and war. The trail today (left) is nothing like the original trail, which was four feet wide and densely forested.

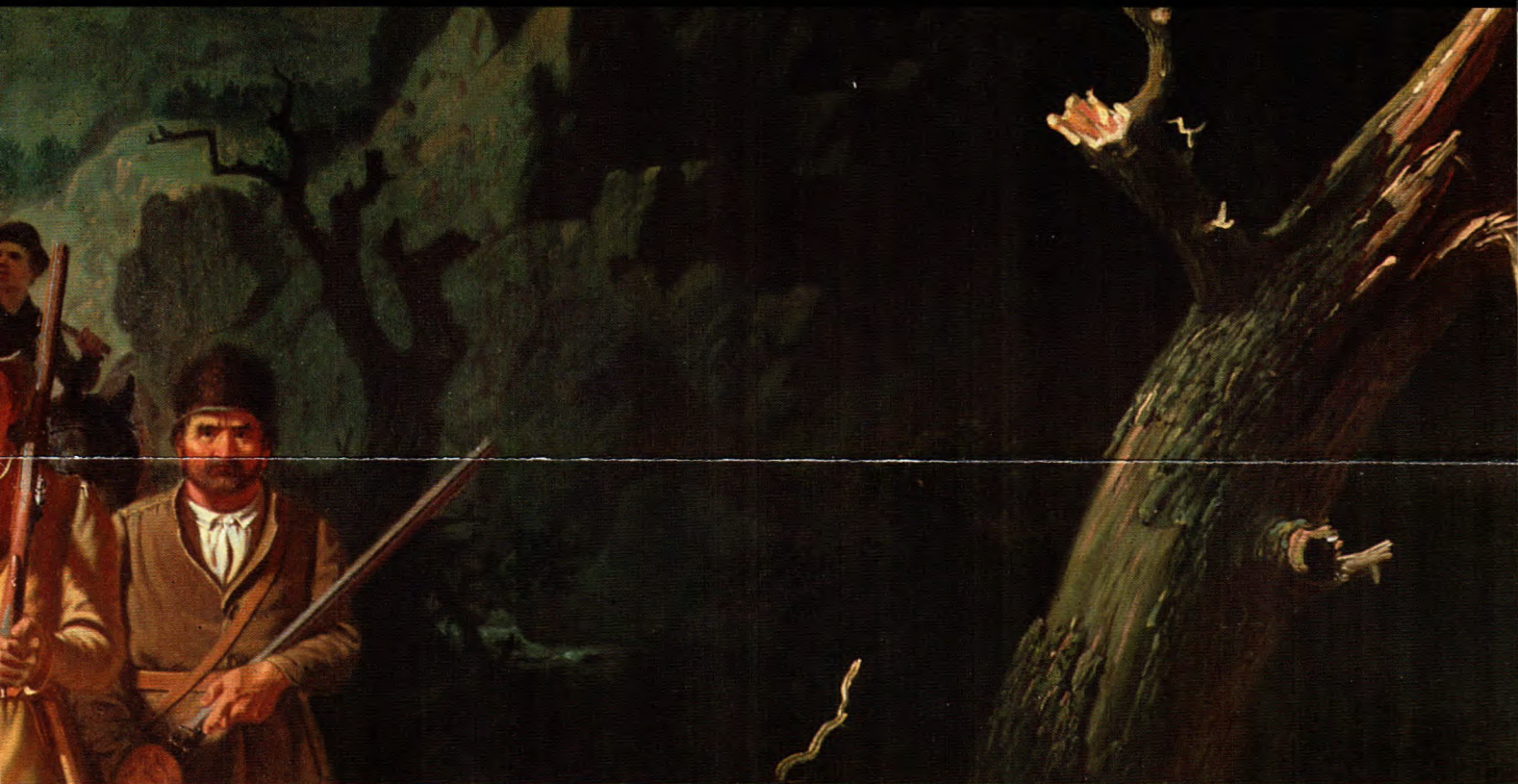


Cherokee chief Cunne Shote (left) at around the time of the American Revolution.

Daniel Boone (right) sat for this portrait in a Missouri cabin when he was 86. The artist made a pencil sketch and a small oil painting, noting in his diary that Boone reminisced about his early adventures.



Shote: Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Okla.
Boone: Chester Harding, The J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Ky.



Detail from George Caleb Bingham's "Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap," painted 1851-52

The Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Mo.

was more than 100,000, and Kentucky was then admitted to the Union.

In the 1790s traffic on the Wilderness Road increased. Between 1780 and 1810 from 200,000 to 300,000 people had crossed the gap heading west. Each year large herds of livestock were driven east. As it had been for the Indians, the gap was an important route of commerce and transportation.

In the 1820s and 1830s engineering overcame the mountain wall. The west could be reached via the Erie and Pennsylvania Main Line canals, or on steamboats up the Mississippi River. Cumberland

Gap declined in importance, but it had overseen the opening of the first American West.

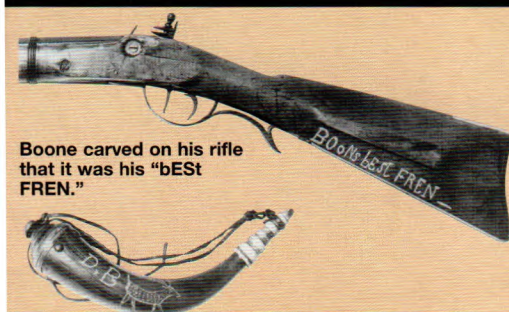
Daniel Boone No name is more associated with Cumberland Gap and the opening of the West than Daniel Boone's. He was not the first person to see the gap, to explore Kentucky, or even to settle there, but this does not reduce his impact upon the land and the people. He embodied qualities admired by frontier people: courage, agility, and strength.

Daniel Boone was born near Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1734. He had little schooling but his innate intelligence complemented his physical abilities. When he was 12 his father gave him a

rifle, and Daniel soon became renowned as a hunter. A few years later he participated in the disastrous Braddock campaign that led to the French and Indian Wars. On this campaign Boone first heard of the fabulous Kentucky country. In 1767 he set out to explore the West. Eight years later he founded Boonesborough. He eventually served in several positions in local government.

Boone had continual problems with land claims, and by 1788 all his lands in Kentucky had been lost in legal battles. He moved to what is now West Virginia in 1788 and 10 years later moved again to Missouri, where he died in 1820.

1792



Boone carved on his rifle that it was his "bEST FREN."

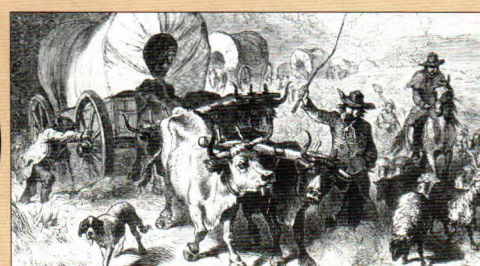
Boone's powder horn.

Kentucky Military History Museum, Frankfort, Ky.

Kentucky's population soon topped 100,000, and, in 1792, it was admitted to the Union as the 15th state, the first west of the Allegheny Mountains. That year its state legislature adopted a seal—with two men shaking hands and the motto "United We Stand, Divided We Fall."



1800



The Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap became a two-way thoroughfare. As the

west, thousands of cattle, sheep, pigs, and turkeys from western farms traveled east to