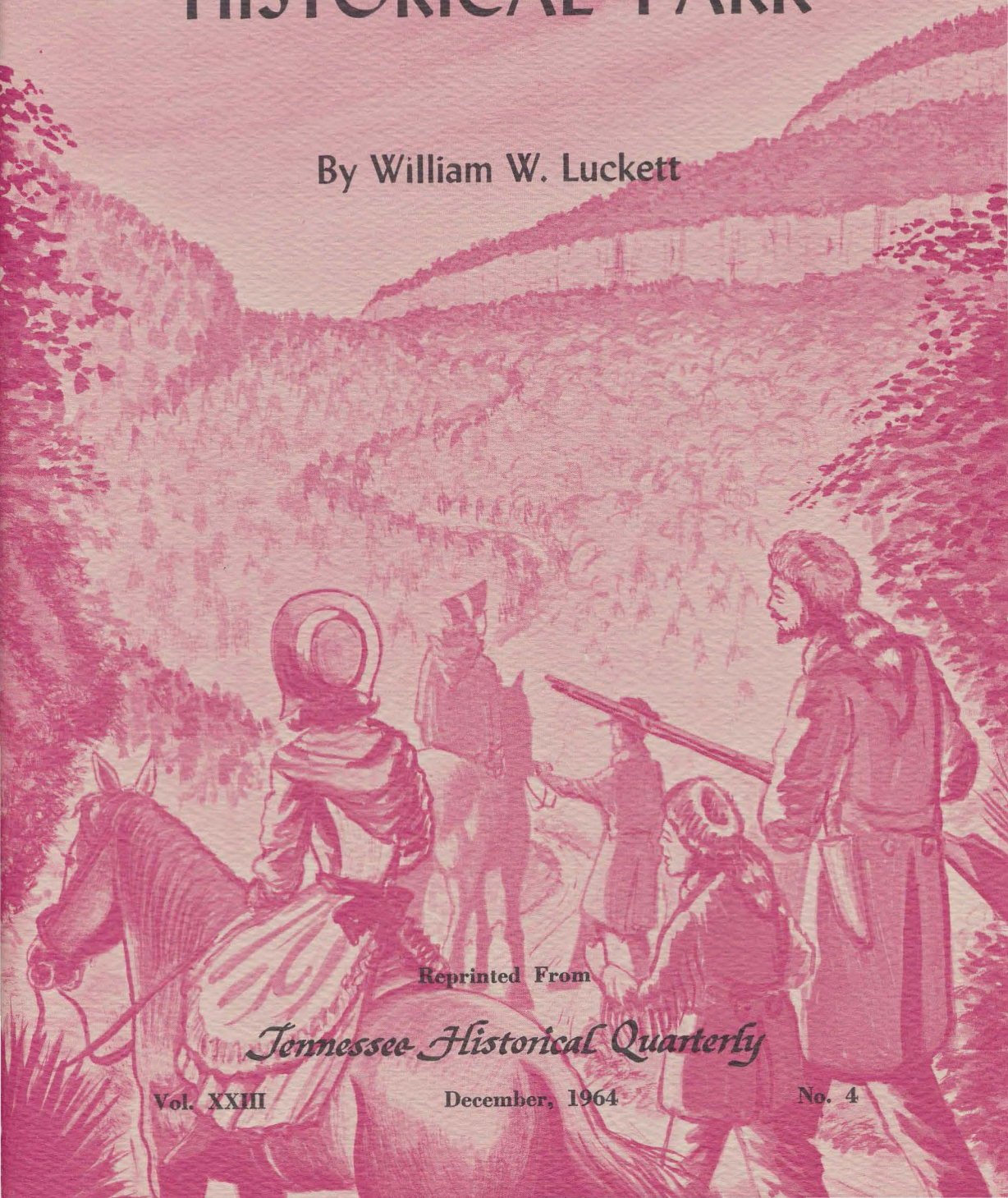


# CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

By William W. Lockett



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# Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

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Cumberland Gap is a prominent V-shaped indentation in the Cumberland Mountains. It is situated on the Kentucky-Virginia boundary approximately one-quarter mile north of the point where Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee meet. The base of the pass lies in a plane 300 feet above the valley floor and 900 feet below the pinnacle on its north side. On the south side, the mountain is only 600 feet above the saddle of the Gap. Viewed from a distance, this picturesque natural feature probably appears much the same as it did when seen by the first pioneers. However, a closer look will reveal that the north side of the pass has been sliced by a modern highway to a depth of approximately twenty feet.

Indians used Cumberland Gap as a gateway through the mountains long before the arrival of the white man. Those crossing the Ohio at the mouth of the Scioto River found a well-beaten trail known as the Warriors' Path, leading directly to the Gap. Often they ventured beyond and into the Carolinas on the Catawba Trail, or toward the south on the Clinch and Cumberland Gap Trail which connected with others leading to present-day Chattanooga and Middle Tennessee. Occasionally these hunters returned to the Scioto country by following the Great Indian Warpath which intersected the Catawba at a point about thirty miles southeast of the Gap.<sup>1</sup>

The Warriors' Path played a tragic role in the lives of the Indians and early white settlers of Kentucky. The region through which it passed was uninhabited and therefore a prized hunting ground for Indian tribes until the whites gained control. The bitterest rivals for this coveted territory were the Shawnees to the north and the Cherokees to the south. This was the state of affairs when the first white man entered the region.

For a century and a half the American colonists had been held in check by towering mountains, the warring French, and hostile Indians. Meantime, the pressure of a land-hungry population, especially in the middle colonies, caused these settlers to probe for the least hazardous routes westward. Although scanty reports had

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<sup>1</sup>William E. Myer, "Indian Trails of the Southeast," in *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1924-1925* (Washington, 1928), 772, 779-80, 845.



trickled in from traders and explorers such as Gabriel Arthur, who had roamed with Indian tribes from the Ohio to Florida, credit for discovering the pass which was to govern the course of the westward movement until the revolution, fell to Dr. Thomas Walker of Albemarle County, Virginia. Employed by the Loyal Land Company to search for a suitable site for settlement beyond the mountains, Walker started westward on March 6, 1750. After ascending a branch of the Roanoke River, he and his party of five crossed the Holston, the Clinch, and the Powell rivers, arriving at Cumberland Gap on April 13. He described the natural features here as follows:

On the North side of the Gap is a large Spring, which falls very fast, and just above the Spring is a small Entrance to a large Cave, which the Spring runs through, and there is a constant Stream of Cool air issuing out. The Spring is sufficient to turn a Mill. Just at the foot of the Hill is a Laurel Thicket, and the Spring Water runs through it. On the South side is a plain Indian Road, on the top of the Ridge are Laurel Trees marked with crosses, others Blazed and several Figures on them. As I went down on the Other Side, I soon came to some Laurel in the head of a Branch. A Beech stands on the left hand, on which I cut my name. This Gap may be seen at a considerable distance, . . . The Mountain on the North Side of the Gap is very Steep and Rocky, but on the South it is not So. We called it Steep Ridge.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving the Gap the same day, Walker's party followed the Warriors' Path for about four miles and camped that night on the banks of Yellow Creek. Continuing their journey the following day, they came to a river which Walker named in honor of the Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II of England. High water prevented Walker and his men from fording the river, and forced them to wander through difficult terrain for several miles, before they were able to cross in bark canoes near present-day Barbourville. Here they built a cabin and planted corn, thus bolstering their claim to the land. Proceeding northward again, they journeyed as far as the Rockcastle Hills country before deciding to abandon their search for more fertile lands. They now turned eastward, reaching their homes the following July. Although failing to find the blue grass region, Walker had returned with a written description of the great pass which was to become the main artery of migration into the trans-Appalachian wilderness. His journey through Cumberland Gap paved the way for settlement and acquisition of territory to the Mississippi River.

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<sup>2</sup>J. Stoddard Johnston, *First Explorations of Kentucky* (Filson Club Publication No. 13, Louisville, 1898), 48-49.



Two years after Walker's expedition, John Finley, a Pennsylvania trader, accidentally discovered the blue grass region. With trade goods, he had gone down the Ohio, established trade relations with the Shawnees, and accompanied them on a hunting expedition into the Kentucky lowlands. While on this expedition Finley learned that the Warriors' Path led directly to Cumberland Gap. On returning home, he had hardly finished telling friends of his discovery when the French and Indian War began, postponing any further explorations.

With the return of peace, hunters took to the trails in large numbers, mostly in the direction of Cumberland Gap. Chief among the earlier pioneers known to have passed through the Gap were: Elisha Walden and a small party in 1761; Captain James Smith, Uriah Stone, and three companions in 1766; Isaac Lindsay and five hunters during the same year; and an organized party of forty led by Joseph Drake and Henry Skaggs in 1770.

Proceeding as far as Stone's River, in Middle Tennessee, Lindsay met James Harrod and Michael Stoner who had come from Fort Pitt by way of the Ohio and Cumberland rivers. Another group led by Benjamin Cutbirth of North Carolina crossed the mountains above the Gap and hunted in southern Kentucky and northern Tennessee, carrying their furs down the Mississippi to New Orleans. The success of this bold venture as recounted by John Stuart aroused the interest of his brother-in-law, Daniel Boone, whose family lived in the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina. Unlike most hunters, Boone exhibited unusual interest in the geography of the country and the ways of the Indian. With these qualifications he was the most suitable candidate for Judge Richard Henderson, a North Carolina land speculator, who readily agreed to supply an exploration party in return for information concerning choice sites in the interior.

Remembering the story he had heard from Finley, a fellow companion during the French and Indian War, and having heard the tales of hunters who had passed through the Gap, Boone became anxious to venture into the blue grass region. His first attempt, made during the winter of 1767-68, resulted in a fine harvest of furs, but he missed the Gap.

Although keenly disappointed, Boone became encouraged following a chance meeting with Finley. They immediately began making plans to undertake an exploration the following spring. Accordingly, in May of 1769 the two, accompanied by Stuart and three



other woodsmen, began the trip. Each rode a wiry mount and led a pack horse.

With little difficulty Boone and his companions found the Gap and followed the Warriors' Path to Station Camp Creek, a tributary of the Kentucky River. Here a shelter was built for their furs. Luck stayed with the party until December when a band of Shawnees raided their camp and captured Boone and Finley. After escaping and rejoining the other members, all except Boone and Stuart were too frightened or discouraged to remain. At about the same time Daniel's brother, Squire, and a companion arrived with fresh supplies. Realizing that their camp was too near the frequently used Warriors' Path, the four hunters supposedly moved it to a point nearer the junction of the Red and Kentucky rivers.

During the following winter Stuart disappeared and Squire's comrade returned east, leaving the two brothers alone, and with a dwindling supply of ammunition. In the spring there was another reduction in force. Squire went east to deliver their furs and to obtain much needed supplies. Although left to live off the country, Daniel found plenty to do. He learned more about the geography of the region—especially the Kentucky and Licking Valleys. Upon Squire's return in July, they extended their hunts to the Kentucky, Cumberland, and Green rivers, and joined a party of forty hunters under the leadership of James Knox during the winter of 1770-71.

By then hunters were becoming wise to the ways of the Indian. They had learned that large numbers were required for protection against warring bands along the Path. Uriah Stone had demonstrated the wisdom of this policy the previous summer by leading a large party through the Gap and hunting profitably in eastern Kentucky.

With their pack horses loaded with furs, the Boone brothers started east in March, 1771. All went well until the pair reached Powell Valley. Just past Cumberland Gap, a band of Indians took their possessions, leaving them with nothing to show for two years of hunting except valuable information for Judge Henderson.

Stories brought back by Boone and other hunters encouraged the landless and adventurous and whetted the appetites of speculators. Without waiting for any settlement of Indian claims to lands in Kentucky, surveying parties began arriving in 1773. One of these groups, comprising five families including Boone's started out with immediate settlement in mind. Before reaching the Gap, however, their plans were upset by an Indian attack which resulted in the



death of Daniel's son, James.

Early the following year a group of Virginians was more successful. Under the leadership of James Harrod, a speculator from Pennsylvania, they entered Kentucky by way of the Ohio River and founded Harrodsburg. Widespread settlement could not succeed, however, in the face of continued raids. Few would risk exposing their families to the resultant brutalities. Virginia's Governor, Lord Dunmore, consequently declared war on June 10, 1774, against the Shawnees. Suffering defeat four months later in the Battle of Point Pleasant, the Shawnees agreed to renounce claims to all lands between the Ohio and Tennessee rivers and to stop molesting traffic on the Ohio. Learning of the treaty with the Shawnees, Judge Henderson acted quickly and dealt directly with the only other claimant, the Cherokees. Representing the Transylvania Company, on March 17, 1775, he bought the tribe's claim to the land south of the Kentucky River, including a right-of-way through Cumberland Gap. Even before meeting with the chiefs, however, Henderson had engaged Daniel Boone to blaze a trail to the Kentucky River.

Leaving Long Island on the Holston River, March 10, 1775, Boone with about thirty axmen hacked out a road which led through Martin's Station (Rose Hill, Virginia), Cumberland Gap, and Cumberland Ford (Pineville, Kentucky) to the mouth of Otter Creek on the Kentucky River. There, at the terminus of the famous Wilderness Road, they built cabins and founded a village which came to be known as Boonesboro.<sup>3</sup>

In April Henderson arrived with forty riflemen, several Negro slaves, and a number of pack horses with provisions. Almost simultaneously half a dozen other towns sprang into existence, none of which, however, would agree to recognize the claim of the Transylvania proprietors. Instead, delegates from these communities set up a temporary government of their own and dispatched George Rogers Clark with a petition to the colonial capital of Virginia, asking that Kentucky be annexed as a county. Although recognition did not come until early the following year, the Revolutionary War and Indian raids brought the entire population into closer union. Working jointly they built forts at Boonesboro, Harrodsburg, and St. Asaph's Station, and thus prevented annihilation during the early years of the war. Relief came only when Clark with a band of 175 trained Indian fighters took the offensive and captured the

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Kincaid, *The Wilderness Road* (Harrogate, Tenn., 1955), 100-105, 110.



British posts in the Illinois country.

Believing the war in the west was over, thousands of settlers poured through the Gap. Unfortunately, they soon found the condition to be otherwise. As a result of closer British and Indian ties, frontier provincialism, and poverty of the American Congress, most that had been gained was lost in 1781 and 1782. Of greater effect at the peace table was the well-known fact that the settlers continued to occupy the Kentucky region. This foothold west of the mountains paved the way toward British recognition of the Mississippi River as the western boundary for the new republic.

From the time of the founding of Boonesboro until peace was signed in 1783, the population in Kentucky increased from about 300 to 12,000. Seven years later, 73,677 persons were counted, and in another decade this number tripled and was greater than that of five of the original thirteen states.<sup>4</sup> Although many of these settlers had entered Kentucky by way of the Ohio River, Cumberland Gap was the favored gateway until General Anthony Wayne's final victory over the Shawnees at Fallen Timbers in 1794 made other western entrances safe. Of approximately 400,000 who had gone west by 1800, it was estimated that three-fourths had used the Cumberland Gap route, which had been widened into a wagon road four years earlier.

Following the floodtide of immigration, Cumberland Gap was soon to become a passageway for cattle-drives and stagecoaches. Yet as the North and South became engaged in a Civil War, the pass would once more become unusually important. Military authorities quickly recognized its strategic value as a gateway from the border state of Kentucky to East Tennessee and western Virginia. Furthermore, whoever occupied the pass would control the vital railroad from Virginia to Tennessee.

As early as July of 1861 the Federals began mustering troops into service in eastern Kentucky. To meet this threat, Brigadier General Felix K. Zollicoffer was ordered to assume command of Confederate forces in East Tennessee.

It was not until September, however, that both sides began operating openly in Kentucky. In the western part of the state the Confederates occupied Hickman and Columbus; the Federals, Paducah. In the east, Zollicoffer assumed the offensive from Cumberland Gap but was turned back in a sharp encounter with Brigadier

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<sup>4</sup>Mary Verhoeff, *The Kentucky Mountains* (Louisville, 1911), 74; Temple Bodley, *History of Kentucky* (4 vols.; Chicago, 1928), I, 561; Clifford L. Lord and Elizabeth H. Lord, *Historical Atlas of the United States* (New York, 1944), 210.





*Cumberland Gap from the Southeast*

Photo by William W. Lockett





*Visitor Center, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park*

Photo by William W. Luckett





*Pinnacle Overlook at Cumberland Gap*

Photo by William W. Lockett





*Iron Furnace on Gap Creek*

Photo by William W. Lockett



General Albin Schoeff near Livingston. Recognizing the significance of these initial incidents, the South sent its ranking field general, Albert Sidney Johnston, into this region to guard against northern invasion. With Bowling Green, Kentucky, as his headquarters, Johnston established a line of defense which extended eastward to Cumberland Gap, and westward to Columbus, Kentucky, on the Mississippi River. Facing him on the right was Major General Don Carlos Buell with headquarters in Louisville, and on his left was Major General Henry W. Halleck at St. Louis.

On Johnston's right the first move to culminate in a sizeable battle was made by Zollicoffer. Leaving Colonel William M. Churchwell in charge at the Gap, he moved with the main force toward Jamestown, Tennessee, and finally established headquarters at Mill Springs, Kentucky, on the south bank of the Cumberland River. A few days later, on December 9, 1861, he transferred most of his troops across the river to Beech Grove and began harassing a Federal post at Somerset, about ten miles to the northeast.

Buell countered by ordering Brigadier General George H. Thomas at Lebanon to concentrate his forces near Somerset for an attack on Zollicoffer. Accordingly, Thomas moved on New Year's Day and by the 17th had reached Logan's Cross Roads where he halted, awaiting the arrival of his entire force. Major General George B. Crittenden, who had superseded Zollicoffer, decided to attack before the Federals could be fully concentrated. During the ensuing battle which occurred near the Cross Roads, Zollicoffer was killed, and the Confederates were defeated. With remnants of his command, Crittenden retired toward Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Now that the Confederate line had been seriously weakened, President Lincoln felt that the time was ripe for striking at the Gap and East Tennessee. To him, a movement against Middle Tennessee, as advocated by Buell, was secondary in importance. However, because of bad roads and reported shortages of supplies, Buell's plan was accepted provided there would be a minimum of delay in returning to the East Tennessee theater of operations.

While the movement into Middle Tennessee had met with success, that against the Gap bogged down. Brigadier General Samuel P. Carter, commanding a brigade, attacked in force on March 22-23. On the first day he moved with 2,300 men against the Confederates on his right, driving in their pickets. Finding the position too strong for infantry alone he brought up two field Parrotts the following morning. However they were no match for the well-placed defend-



ing batteries. Under direction of the Gap Commander, Colonel James E. Rains, the Confederate guns poured a concentrated fire into the ranks of the attackers, forcing them to retire.

The President alone appeared to have remembered the Gap and East Tennessee. The occupation of Nashville had hardly been completed when his General-in-Chief, George B. McClellan, telegraphed Buell, "What have you from the Knoxville campaign? I hope soon to hear that it has reached the railroad."<sup>5</sup> After two weeks had passed and there was no stepped-up offensive, Lincoln reduced Buell's power by making him subordinate to Halleck. Although Carter's brigade was soon increased to division strength, and Brigadier General George W. Morgan placed in command, Halleck did little if anything further to improve the situation.

Meanwhile Crittenden's successor in East Tennessee, Major General E. Kirby Smith, learned of the buildup in Federal strength and called for a movement against Nashville to divert attention from the Gap. At the same time Morgan was suggesting that Chattanooga be threatened. This, he said, would cause the Confederates to shift their strength from the Gap. Only the latter's wishes were granted. Smith, unable to defend both ends of the East Tennessee line, ordered Brigadier General Carter L. Stevenson to evacuate the Gap and fall back to the railroad northeast of Knoxville. At the same time he rushed to the aid of Chattanooga with two brigades. Morgan who had already pushed through Rogers' and Big Creek gaps occupied Cumberland Gap June 18, 1862, reporting that, "After two weeks of maneuvering we have taken the American Gibraltar without the loss of a single man."<sup>6</sup>

Meantime, the tide had begun to change. Confederate successes in Middle Tennessee and against Morgan's supply lines, along with the knowledge that General Braxton Bragg was moving an entire army from Chattanooga toward Kentucky, caused Buell to abandon his movement toward Chattanooga and race northward.

Although General Morgan's supply line was completely severed, his messages to his Union commander were filled with optimism. One sent to Halleck on August 19 read as follows: "He [the enemy] imagines that I will evacuate the Gap and waits to enter it. I shall

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<sup>5</sup>George B. McClellan to D. C. Buell, February 25, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (69 vols. and index; Washington, 1880-1901, Ser. 1, VII, 664, (Hereinafter cited as *OR*).

<sup>6</sup>George W. Morgan to E. M. Stanton and D. C. Buell, June 18, 1862, in *OR*, Ser. 1, XVI, Pt. II, 38.



never do so. . . . If the enemy attacks he will be crushed." Also on the 25th in a message to Major General Lew Wallace he said: ". . . we have sufficient beans and rice for at least two months, and we can get cattle, despite the enemy." However, after September 11 nothing was known of him until he and his entire command appeared on the banks of the Ohio on October 3. Without permission he had evacuated his post. Although Morgan had conducted a masterful retreat, his action gave the Confederates a safe route of withdrawal following the failure of their Kentucky campaign. Bragg was now able to enter the field again and at Stone's River, further delay the Federal offensive toward Chattanooga.

For almost a year following the Confederate reoccupation of the Gap, comparative inactivity prevailed in Tennessee and Kentucky. Impatient, the War Department in Washington continually urged Major General William S. Rosecrans to move against Bragg's army, in the direction of Chattanooga. At the same time Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, who had gathered a Union force in Central Kentucky, was being prodded to move against the Gap and East Tennessee.

Although aware of Burnside's objective but not knowing where he would strike first, the Confederates in East Tennessee found it necessary to scatter their forces. Rarely were there more than 1,000 defenders at Cumberland Gap. Brigadier General Archibald Gracie, in command until August, 1863, stationed most of his men in supporting distance at other gaps and along the railroad leading northeast from Knoxville.

At last in late August, in cooperation with Rosecrans' movement against Bragg, an entire corps under Burnside began arriving at Cumberland Ford and spilling into Tennessee at Jamestown and Huntsville. With little opposition he occupied Knoxville September 2, forcing the East Tennessee commanding officer, Major General Simon B. Buckner, to retire to Loudon.

Two days later Buckner arranged with Major General Samuel Jones to add the Gap to his Department of Western Virginia. Then, on the 6th he sent a message to Jones asking him to order Brigadier General John W. Frazer to evacuate the Gap. Instead of complying, however, Jones referred the matter to the Secretary of War, adding that he was daily expecting reinforcements which, if received, would be sent to Frazer. Furthermore, he minimized the danger of an immediate attack, pointing out that Burnside veered away from the Gap. Supported by the Secretary of War and the President,



Jones took no action. Had the order been delivered immediately, Frazer's command would have been saved.

Burnside's lack of attention to the Gap was short-lived. On the 7th one of his cavalry brigades appeared on the south side of the mountain and demanded unconditional surrender. Following Frazer's refusal, there was an exchange of ineffectual artillery shots but that night the Federals captured Gap Spring, the Confederate water supply. Finding himself invested on both sides the following morning, Frazer temporized by treating separately with the two brigade commanders. But with the arrival of Burnside and an additional brigade the next morning, negotiations began anew. It was while treating with him that a courier arrived with a message from Jones, urging Frazer "not to give up . . . without a stubborn resistance."<sup>7</sup> However, upon being informed that no fresh troops were on hand at Abingdon, the Gap commander lost no time in capitulating to Burnside. The Confederate losses were approximately 2,200 men and twelve pieces of field artillery.

The Gap, once again in Federal hands, was now occupied by a brigade under command of Colonel Wilson C. Lemert. It was not again seriously threatened during the remainder of the war.

Following the Civil War, the Cumberland Gap area lay a desolate waste. Scarred by deeply rutted military roads and entrenchments, and studded with tree stumps, it appeared doomed to oblivion. Interest would return only after geologists had thoroughly investigated the region in the mid-1880's and reported it to contain rich deposits of coal and iron. Then followed a giant industrial plan by an English syndicate designed to exploit these natural resources. The millions of dollars which were invested in coal mines, railroads, iron furnaces, and factories gave birth to the city of Middlesboro, Kentucky, and encouraged northern capitalists to invest heavily in a health resort at Harrogate, Tennessee, on the opposite side of the Gap. However, in 1893 financial reverses and a general panic caused the industrial boom to collapse. Although the economy of the region suffered a serious setback, it managed to survive and to grow at a normal rate following the establishment of a sounder economic foundation.

Cumberland Gap's richness in history along with the scenic beauty of the mountain gave this region a double advantage enjoyed by

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<sup>7</sup>Report of Brigadier General John W. Frazer, November 27, 1864, in *OR*, Ser. 1, XXX, Pt. II, 613.



few others. Apparently the first public recognition of these qualities occurred at the Appalachian Logging Conference, which was held in Cincinnati on May 30, 1922. At that meeting it was suggested that a mountain park be established with Fern Lake as its center.<sup>8</sup> Within two weeks the Kiwanis Club of Middlesboro had secured the promised cooperation of congressmen of Tennessee and Kentucky for the establishment of a park with the historic Pinnacle as its focal point. Acting in conjunction with leaders of the Chamber of Commerce, they prevailed on Congressman John M. Robsion of Kentucky to sponsor legislation which would authorize the establishment of such a park. His first two bills, introduced February 12 and December 10, 1923, were virtually the same. Both called for establishment of Lincoln National Park at the tri-section of the states of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Failing to get either of these bills reported out of committee, the matter lay dormant for six years when a different approach was made. This time the congressman's bill called for the acquisition of lands on which suitable monuments and markers would be erected in honor of those who had participated in battles at the Gap. Again, no vote was taken and the subject was dropped for almost a decade.

Meanwhile, local leaders discussed the Park idea in numerous meetings, the most important of which was held August 27, 1938, at Lincoln Memorial University, in Harrogate, Tennessee. It was here that representatives of the National Park Service gave assurance of support for the creation of a national historical park, provided that the lands would be donated to the United States. At the same time the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park Association was created for the purpose of keeping the subject alive in the three states.

During the following February Congressman Robsion and Senator Marvel M. Logan of Kentucky introduced bills calling for the establishment of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park and Cumberland National Recreational Area. Both proposals died in committees. One year later, however, Congressman John W. Flannagan of Virginia was more successful. His bill, introduced July 12, 1939, was like its predecessor except that it omitted reference to a recreational area. Passed by both Houses the following spring, it was approved by the President on June 11, 1940. Following the adoption of amendments on May 26, 1943, the chief provisions were: (1) The establishment of Cumberland Gap National

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<sup>8</sup>Middlesboro *Daily News*, May 31, 1922.



Historical Park in Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee; (2) The Park to contain at least six thousand but not more than fifty thousand acres; (3) The Secretary of the Interior would be empowered to decide which lands would be acceptable to the United States; and (4) Permission for the states of Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky to enter into a compact providing for the acquisition of lands and their transfer to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the three states began purchasing lands which at the time of acceptance by the Federal Government, September 14, 1955, amounted to 20,184 acres. Of this acreage, Kentucky had contributed 10,679; Virginia, 7,478; and Tennessee, 2,027. Since then a minor boundary adjustment and the purchase of lands with state and federal funds have resulted in increasing Kentucky's portion to 10,682 acres.

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, dedicated on July 4, 1959, is the largest unit of its kind in the National Park System. From a point on the Kentucky-Virginia boundary just north of Ewing, Virginia, it follows the mountain southwestwardly to the Kentucky-Tennessee corner, a distance of 17.5 miles. It then extends due south two miles to Poor Valley Ridge. The average width of the Park is one and two-third miles.

The highest point in the Park is on the Kentucky-Virginia boundary near White Rocks. The elevation here is 3,513 feet above sea level and 2,113 feet above the valley at the southern base of the mountain. Following the crest of the mountain toward the other end of the Park, the elevations diminish to 2,505 feet at the Pinnacle just northeast of the Gap. From this point a broad panoramic view presents varied landmarks of interest: Powell Valley as it sweeps out of Virginia into Tennessee; the town of Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, which lies almost vertically below; the Great Smoky Mountains, eighty miles away; the Gap itself, 900 feet below; and the Middlesboro basin, highlighted by the city of Middlesboro, Fern Lake, and the Park Visitor Center—all of which are surrounded by mountains.

Although Cumberland Gap is primarily significant because of its historical importance, its geology is also noteworthy. The beautiful landscape is the result of tremendous earth stresses and erosion through countless ages. Presumably this area was once inundated by a shallow sea. Various types of sediments including shells,

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<sup>9</sup>Edmund B. Rogers (comp.), *History of Legislation Relating to the National Park System through the 82nd Congress* (Washington, 1958).



gravel, sand, mud, and calcium carbonate, accumulated and compacted into rock to form shale, sandstone, limestone, and conglomerate. Great earth disturbances then occurred and huge areas were uplifted, only to be eroded later to a plain near sea level. The extensive peat bogs formed on the lowlands were the forerunners of the coal beds of today. Once again uplifting occurred on a large scale, followed by erosion, which continues to wear away the less resistant rocks, leaving the conglomerate-sheltered mountains.

Bisecting the Park at the Gap, U. S. Highway 25-E winds down the northwest side of the mountain in Kentucky past the Visitor Center, which houses Park offices, a museum, and an audio-visual facility. From here, four-mile Skyland Road wends its way up the steep mountain to the Pinnacle, site of an information shelter and a developed overlook. A short distance east of the Gap, U. S. Highway 58 leads through Virginia, paralleling the base of the mountain. Just off of this road and two miles from the Gap are located the Wilderness Road Campground, an amphitheater, and an adjoining picnic area.

Other places of interest at the southwestern end of the Park are Cudjo's Cave (on U. S. Highway 25-E just east of the Gap) controlled by Lincoln Memorial University; the Tri-State Peak (south shoulder of the Gap) that can be reached via a three-quarter-mile hiking trail; the ruins of an iron furnace near the town of Cumberland Gap; traces of the Wilderness Road; and Civil War fortifications.

Numerous trails and jeep roads lead to remote areas within the Park. Although maintained chiefly as fire trails, hikers often use them as convenient avenues to the innermost secrets of the mountains. South of the Gap, trails lead to Civil War fortifications, the Tri-State Peak, the Tennessee-Kentucky corner, Little Pinnacle, and into a mammoth rhododendron grove. From the Pinnacle the Ridge Trail follows the crest of the mountains all the way to White Rocks at the northeast corner of the Park. Spurs leading from this trail connect with Sugar Run Overlook; the campground, an amphitheater, and a picnic area; Chadwell Gap Overlook and Rocky Face; Hensley Flats, which was once an isolated settlement but only a ghost village today; a virgin tract of timber on Martin's Fork; and Sand Cave, a spectacular example of erosion.

At last the trail arrives at White Rocks, an outstanding natural feature within the Park. From atop these giant, vertical cliffs, the view encompasses beautiful, broad Powell Valley, with its well-



groomed farms lying more than 2,000 feet below. Fittingly, the Park's backbone trail terminates here. For it was the towering White Rocks that first attracted the attention of the pioneers who hacked out the Wilderness Road. Daniel Boone, leader of the axmen, described the Gap as it appeared to him and the five other families he led to Kentucky in the fall of 1773:

These mountains are in the wilderness, as we pass from the old settlements in Virginia to Kentucke, are ranged in a S. west and N. east direction, are of a great length and breadth, and not far distant from each other. Over these nature hath formed passes, that are less difficult than might be expected from a view of such huge piles. The aspect of these cliffs is so wild and horrid, that it is impossible to behold them without terror.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Willard Rouse Jillson, *Filson's Kentucke* (Filson Club Publication No. 35, Louisville, 1930), 57-58.



