



Foundation Document Overview

Natchez Trace Parkway

Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee



Associated Sites:
Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail
Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site
Tupelo National Battlefield

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Contact Information

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Purpose



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The Natchez Trace Parkway commemorates 10,000 years of travel along the Old Natchez Trace corridor and provides a 444-mile journey linking culture, nature, and history along one of the oldest transportation routes on the North American continent.

Significance

Significance statements express why Natchez Trace Parkway resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- As one of the oldest transportation routes, the Old Natchez Trace travel corridor has been an avenue of travel, trade, change, conflict, and communication for more than 10,000 years. It is now honored as a designed landscape, making the Natchez Trace the only parkway to commemorate an ancient travel route.
- Many native peoples, including the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez, created vibrant cultures that thrived for thousands of years along what is now the Natchez Trace Parkway. Today, the Parkway links more than 350 archeological sites and 22 burial and ceremonial mounds, including Emerald Mound, the second-largest ceremonial mound in the United States.
- The Parkway's uninterrupted corridor traverses approximately five degrees of latitude, includes seven major ecoregions, protects more than 2,600 species (some rare, threatened, and endangered), and preserves and restores historic landscape vegetation.
- The Old Natchez Trace played an important role in the development of the nation by providing a route to facilitate trade, settlement, and transportation throughout the Old Southwest. Notably, parts of the route were widened by the military in the early 1800s and then used by General Andrew Jackson to move volunteer militia and regular army troops to and from the Battle of New Orleans.

The following significance statement has been identified for Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site and Tupelo National Battlefield.

- Brices Cross Roads and Tupelo were two battles late in the American Civil War critical to the protection of the single-track railroad that provided supplies to the Union Army during Sherman's Atlanta Campaign.

Fundamental Resources and Values



Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Old Natchez Trace.**
- **American Indian History and Culture.**
- **Early American History and Culture.**
- **Designed Landscape and Scenic Integrity.**
- **Diversity of Natural Resources.**

Natchez Trace Parkway contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Opportunities for Recreation.**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Homelands in Transition.** Generations of American Indian occupation of these lands came to an end as Americans migrated westward. Many remnants of these American Indian cultures remain on the Parkway landscape and help convey to visitors the story of tribal displacement and American expansion in the Old Southwest.
- **Travel and Trade.** The Old Natchez Trace served as a prominent route of travel, trade, and communication; it became an avenue of change for a new nation.
- **Pathway to Parkway.** The Parkway demonstrates the evolution of transportation methods and technology, the social changes that occurred throughout the decades as the Old Southwest became the American South, and changes in the nation's recreational values over time.
- **Inspiration and Preservation.** The Parkway is a vulnerable greenbelt that provides habitat for wildlife and promotes emotional connections to Parkway resources. The Parkway also fosters a sense of discovery that allows modern visitors to appreciate the park's natural and cultural history.



Description

Natchez Trace Parkway

The Natchez Trace Parkway was created by Congress as a unit of the national park system in 1938 to commemorate the historic travel corridor known as the Natchez Trace (referred to in this document as the “Old Natchez Trace”). The Old Natchez Trace is one of the oldest transportation routes in North America; its human use dates back as far as 8000 BCE (before the Common Era). The modern parkway stretches 444 miles and takes more than 10 hours to drive from end to end through three states, 25 counties, and 20 communities. The combined residential population of the counties it traverses is nearly two million.

The Old Natchez Trace has long been a transportation corridor, with centuries of American Indian use traversing the heart of the Natchez, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Nations. By 1785, the Old Natchez Trace was used as a transportation route for boatmen who floated down the Mississippi River to sell their goods in Natchez and New Orleans. Future presidents, traveling preachers, settlers, and soldiers also traveled along the Old Natchez Trace. In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson designated it as a US postal route on the western frontier. General Andrew Jackson used the Old Natchez Trace as a major route for moving volunteer militia and regular army troops during the War of 1812. The Trail of Tears crosses the parkway in four different locations. Furthermore, Civil War battles occurred in and around the Old Natchez Trace corridor in 1864.

The modern Parkway was completed in 2005 and now covers one of the largest geographic ranges of any unit in the national park system. The parkway corridor, which spans five degrees of latitude, includes 52,000 acres of impressive scenic, natural, cultural, and historic resources representing a variety of traditional southern landscapes—forests, wetlands, prairies, rivers, pastures, and croplands. In 1996, the Natchez Trace Parkway was designated a National Scenic Byway and All-American Road for its significant historic, cultural, natural, and scenic qualities.

Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail

In 1983, Congress designated the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail as a separate unit of the National Park Service. The Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail consists of several components of the parkway corridor, including the 444-mile paved roadway and 66 miles of foot and horse trails, some of which follow segments of the Old Natchez Trace. These segments of the trail parallel Natchez Trace Parkway in five different areas, ranging from middle Tennessee to southern Mississippi.

Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site and Tupelo National Battlefield

Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site and Tupelo National Battlefield are legislated NPS units that commemorate two Civil War battles that occurred in northern Mississippi. These two battles were important in the eventual success of Union Major General William T. Sherman’s Atlanta Campaign. The two units were created by Congress in 1929 and are now managed by Natchez Trace Parkway staff.

