Cumberland Gap History / Info

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

Cumberland Gap is a pass through the Appalachian highlands near the border of Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. The gap was discovered by Thomas Walker in 1750, but it was Daniel Boone who in 1775 marked the trail the pioneers would follow as they headed west.

Historian Frederick Jackson Turner, whose Turner Thesis explained westward migration, said, “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 cattle-raiser, the pioneer farmer---and the frontier has passed by.”

Native Americans following paths marked by bison and deer created the Warrior’s Path that led south from the Potomac River through the gap and north to Ohio. When European settlers first discovered the trail it was said to be strewn with the bleached bones of the enemies of the raiding parties from the five tribes who fought for control of the area: Cherokee, Miami, Shawnee, Delaware and Wyandot. The first white man through the gap was Dr. Thomas Walker who, after discovering this passage through the Appalachians, named it in honor of the Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II. But it was Daniel Boone, with 30 men, who marked it and created the Wilderness Road in 1775. The narrow
winding 208-mile-footpath Boone created took pioneers six to eight months to travel. After crossing through the gap, there were three options: trails led to what would become Boonesboro, Kentucky; Nashville, Tennessee; and Louisville, Kentucky.

During the American Revolution, Great Britain enlisted help from the indigenous tribes to keep pioneers from moving west. But from 1775 through 1796, the gap was crossed by between 200,000 and 300,000 settlers. The westward groups often met farmers driving herds of livestock heading east.

In the 1820s and 1830s new routes to the west supplanted the route through Cumberland Gap. The National Road, a 1796 wagon road that extended north of the Ohio River was an easier route. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canals, the Pennsylvania Main Line and the Erie Canal. Steamboats also plied the Mississippi carrying settlers westward.

During the Civil War, Cumberland Gap was a strategic point dividing North and South---it was called the Gibraltar of America and the Keystone of the Confederacy. Union troops under Brigadier General Robert L. McCook built Fort McCook (earthworks of their fort can be seen from the park’s Pinnacle Overlook). It proved too difficult to provision the fort and McCook evacuated his men. The Confederates soon occupied the fort, renaming it Fort Rains. Over three years the fort changed hands four times, with occupying troops never managing to maintain a defensive position due to supplying difficulties. The invasion that both sides feared might come through the gap never materialized.
The 1860s were the military years, while the 1870s heralded the industrial years. In 1875 coal, iron and timber were reported to be abundantly available in the Cumberland Gap area. A railroad was built and the “Industrial Boom” of the early 1880s began. Local fires, bank failures and other unexpected setbacks heralded the end of the economic growth and it wasn’t until the early 1900s when roads began to open the gap to traffic that the area began recovering.

The visitor center for this 20,279 acre park, the nation’s largest National Historical Park, is on the Kentucky side of the park (just to the south of the park is Tennessee). Exhibits and displays at the center, open daily 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. (except Christmas, New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King’s Birthday and President’s Day), detail the history of Cumberland Gap. An audio-interpreted diorama reveals Daniel Boone and his crew blazing the Wilderness Road. On his exploration of the gap, Boone said, “I can’t say as ever I was lost, but I was bewildered once, for three days.” At the center you can view two short videos on the history of the park and on Hensley Settlement.

You can hike to the early 20th century Hensley Settlement by taking the 3.5 mile Chadwell Gap trail up the mountain from Caylor, Va., or during the summer months by park shuttle (reservations can be made up to a week in advance by calling (606) 248-2817). The Hensleys and their relatives, the Gibbons, moved to Brush Mountain, northeast of the gap, in 1903. They built log houses on their mountaintop and lived without modern conveniences. The last family member left this rural Appalachia community in 1951.
Cumberland Gap National Historical Park has restored three farmsteads at Hensely Settlement. You’ll see houses, barns, fences and farm and pasture land. Also restored is a one-room schoolhouse, where all the grades were taught by one teacher. Students had to haul water from the well and bring in coal and wood for the pot-bellied stove. There was no church in the settlement but services were held in the schoolhouse by preachers of various denominations. During the time the Hensleys and Gibbons lived here, there were no roads to the settlement. Access was by foot, horseback or mule-drawn sleds.

The best spot to gain an overview of the park is from the **Pinnacle Overlook**. Getting to this high ground reinforces the concept that pioneers desperately needed a route through the mountains, rather than a trail over them. After parking, you’ll see a bronze relief mural of the pioneers trekking through Cumberland Gap. A short walk along the paved Overlook Trail will bring you to the stone overlook platform. A map will indicate Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, the town of Cumberland Gap and the city of Middlesboro.

There are more than 50 miles of park trails. The 21-mile Ridge Trail is the longest; it is of medium difficulty and runs the length of the park. A spur off Ridge Trail leads to Sand Cave, located in the White Rocks on top Cumberland Mountain. This is not literally a cave, but rather an enormous opening 150 feet wide and 40 feet high. Sand is deposited in this opening which extends 160 feet into the mountain. The ceiling is of gold, red and green shades of rock. The easy Tri-state Peak Trail lets you stand in three states at the same time.
The park plans restoration work at **Cudjo's Caverns**, located beneath Pinnacle Overlook on the east side of Route 25E. These caverns boast the tallest stalagmite in the world and the many cavern chambers have fascinating formation. When this work is complete the caverns will reopen.

**Fort Robert L. McCook (G-54)**

Called Fort Rains by the Confederates, this structure is a Civil War cannon position built by the Confederates in 1861 and used alternately by both armies until the end of the War. It is located on the west slope of the Pinnacle at an elevation of 1860 feet. Originally the Fort was a semicircular platform measuring 49' x 45' with four 5' walls of earth, reinforced with gabions and a log retaining wall. Presently the site consists of the platform with portions of the berms existant but partially overgrown. This is a developed interpretive site with a cannon displayed and two wooden signs. Adjacent to the site are a paved path and a parking lot.

Hensley's Settlement is part of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, which lies in three states: Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. The preserved settlement is located atop Brush Mountain where the Hensley's first settled in 1903. In the early part of the century, the Hensley's settled on the mountain, forsaking settled areas for an entirely self-sufficient way of life. This truly rural Appalachian settlement continued, without electricity, indoor plumbing, roads or any modern conveniences until the last inhabitant left in 1951. Approximately 25 of the original buildings have been restored and the surrounding land has been returned to the original farming and pasture scene of its original appearance. Presently, transportation to the settlement is still somewhat limited in order to maintain the area's authenticity.

**Cumberland Mountain**

[Fig. 5](#), [Fig. 6] The name comes from England's duke of Cumberland. But this long and narrow mountain in Virginia's southwest corner has a history that goes back much further in time than any English duke. Cumberland Mountain is part of a huge, four-sided block of the earth's crust forced upward in ancient times. Today, it defines the eastern edge of the Appalachian Plateau in Virginia.
Its twin, Pine Mountain [Fig. 5(8), Fig. 8], is 25 miles west, on the other side of the block. The two are mirror images of each other for most of their length. Pine Mountain's steepest slope is on its northwest side, while Cumberland's is on its southeast side. Pine Mountain has exposed limestone on its northwest slope and sandstone on its southeast slope. Cumberland Mountain is just the opposite.

Cumberland Mountain has an extensive limestone cave system on the Virginia side. But one of its most prominent features, Sand Cave [Fig. 6(2)] on the Kentucky side, is sculpted from sandstone. How these mountains were created affects everything from geological formations to the color of hepatica. The flower is a delicate pink in limestone soil on the Virginia side, but it is generally white in sandstone and shales on the Kentucky side.

In springtime, on rocky slopes at higher elevations, stands of Catawba rhododendron (Rhododendron) display stunning purple blossoms. Birds typical of eastern deciduous forests are abundant here: the wood thrush (Hylocichla mustelina), hermit thrush (Hylocichla guttata faxoni), veery (Hylocichla fuscescens), red-eyed vireo (Vireo olivaceus), scarlet tanager (Piranga olivacea), and many varieties of warblers, to name a few.

The southern end of the mountain begins at Cove Lake State Park at Caryville, Tennessee. With one exception—where Big Creek comes through at Ivydell, Tennessee—Cumberland Mountain remains unbroken until it arrives in Virginia. At the Virginia/Tennessee/Kentucky border is Cumberland Gap, carved out in the mountain's infancy by Yellow Creek. Originally, the creek flowed east into the Powell River. For awhile the creek continued to flow east, carving through the new mountain. But Cumberland Mountain rose too fast, and Yellow Creek was diverted westward to the Kentucky side, where it remains today.

Cumberland Mountain continues its journey to the northeast, defining the Virginia/Kentucky border with its ridgeline. On its northern end, the same mountain is called Stone Mountain. Once the Kentucky border veered off to the west, Virginians claimed the rest of the mountain for their own with a different name. The lines of Cumberland's northeast end are more blurred than those of its Pine Mountain twin. What started as Cumberland ends as Stone, gradually losing its identity where the Plateau bulges into Virginia.

**Cumberland Gap**

[Fig. 7] What a sight it must have been. Standing at the narrow, 2-mile-wide notch, or gap, on Cumberland Mountain, a visitor with lots of time—say, a couple of centuries—would have had the privilege of watching one of America's most unusual animal and human migrations. First it was woodland bison (Bison bison pennsylvania), elk (Cervus canadensis), and white-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus) that trampled a trail through this natural doorway to the salt licks and ample food of bluegrass Kentucky beyond the
mountain barrier. Bands of Shawnee and Cherokee Indians followed the animals to the rich hunting grounds, and sometimes raiding parties followed one another.

So many bleached bones of rival Indian tribes littered the trail from the Potomac River south through Cumberland Gap then north to the Ohio River that the route came to be called Warrior's Path. Then in 1750, white explorers led by Dr. Thomas Walker found this narrow pass through the Appalachian Mountains, of which the Cumberland range is a part. With only primitive transportation, restless colonists along the eastern seaboard had been stymied all along the mountain wall. Also, French settlers and allied tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy made the western frontier beyond the mountains dangerous to explore. Shawnees, distressed at encroachment on their rich Kentucky hunting grounds by white trappers and settlers, became increasingly belligerent.

In 1774, at Point Pleasant, Kentucky, the Shawnees and a confederacy of Delaware, Wyandot, Cayuga, and other Indian tribes led by Cornstalk lost a bloody battle with Virginia settlers and militia. To save their families, the Shawnees gave up rights to their hunting grounds by signing the Treaty of Camp Charlotte in 1774. The 1775 Treaty of Sycamore Shoals ended most troubles with the Iroquois Confederacy. Then Daniel Boone and 30 men marked and cleared the Wilderness Trail through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky.

Hunters began crossing the mountain through the gap, and they were followed by waves of land-hungry immigrants. By the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, an impressive stream of 12,000 people had crossed into the new territory. The stream became a river, then a torrent. By 1792, the population west of the gap was more than 100,000, and Kentucky was invited to join the Union. As the century came to a close, traffic on the Wilderness Road continued day and night. The curses of oxen drivers and the bawl of cattle mingled with the jingle of horse harnesses and the groans of loaded wagons struggling across Cumberland Gap. By 1800, just 50 years after it was discovered by Walker, the famous gap had funneled more than a third of a million people from the East to the new lands of the West.

Very soon, those headed west were met by thousands of head of cattle, pigs, sheep, and turkeys being driven east through the gap as the first settlers moved their cash crops to coastal markets. Cumberland Gap declined in importance only after easier routes were established in the 1820s and 1830s by dredging canals such as the Erie, Pennsylvania Main Line, and Chesapeake and Ohio.

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

The National Park Service provides the perfect way to become immersed in the rich human and natural history of Cumberland Mountain. Occupying 20,000 acres of Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park straddles the mountain for 20 miles along Virginia's
southwest border. No words on a page can demonstrate as well as the view along the historic Wilderness Road (US 58 from the Virginia side) what a formidable barrier this mountain wall presented to the early settlers.

At the visitor center [Fig. 7(15)] on US 25E at Middlesboro, Kentucky, a brochure and trail map are available. Most visitors to the park take the winding mountain road from the visitor center up to Pinnacle Overlook. There they are treated to spectacular views into Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee—a panoramic landscape where cascading ridgelines fade from deep blue up close to soft lavender in the distance. In autumn, local bird watchers gather at the Pinnacle. Migrant birds and butterflies use the Cumberland's updrafts to soar or flutter their way to the balmy Gulf states and beyond. Early on an October morning, as many as 50 to 100 hawks and other birds of prey lift off at the gap. The raptors catch a thermal, rising in ascending circles high above, then coasting out of sight on another day's journey to the southwest.

Frequent visitors have come to appreciate the interpretive programs on subjects as varied as meteor showers, autumn hawk migration, and geologic formations. For a summer program called Pioneer Camp, park rangers dress as early pioneers called long hunters. They fire black-powder long rifles, tan hides, and cook stew over an open fire. For children, the park has a program called Kids Explore Cumberland Gap. Children are taught how to use a compass and map, identify birds by sound, and survey a stream by wading in to search for aquatic insects, crayfish, and snails.

One way people appreciate Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is by hiking its 50 miles of trails. The park's best features take time to enjoy. These include the Skylight Cave [Fig. 7(13)], Hensley Settlement [Fig. 6(1)], Sand Cave [Fig. 6(2)], and White Rocks [Fig. 6(4), Fig. 7(4)], not to mention the wildflowers, wildlife, tumbling streams, talus slopes (boulderfields), and scenic views open only to the hiker or horseback rider. On the Virginia side of the mountain, 1.3 miles east of the Kentucky line, a road leads off US 58 to the park's Wilderness Road Campground [Fig. 6(14)], where 160 forested, spacious sites offer privacy. Around the campground are the Virginia pine (Pinus virginiana), dogwood (Cornus florida), yellow poplar (Liriodendron tulipifera), and red maple (Acer rubrum) characteristic of intermediate succession. Severe windstorms around the vulnerable border of this cleared area have blown down the oaks, hickories, and beech typical of the northern hardwood forest that covers most of the mountain.

A mile-long trail from the picnic area adjacent to the campground leads to Skylight Cave [Fig. 7(13)]. The 200-foot-long limestone cavern is safe to explore. One-quarter mile past the cave, this trail intersects the Ridge Trail [Fig. 7(10) Fig. 6(13)].

- **Directions:** The visitor center and road to the Pinnacle Overlook are on US 25E, just east of Middlesboro, KY. The Wilderness Road campground and picnic area are on US 58 in Virginia's southwest tip. From the visitor center, go 3 miles east on US 25E, through the Cumberland Gap Tunnel [Fig. 6(13)] to US 58, and continue 1.3 miles to the campground and picnic area on the left. Continue east on US 58 in Virginia to access trailheads on the park's southeast slope.
• **Activities:** Hiking, including self-guided nature trails and overnight trails. Camping, picnicking, interpretive programs, fishing for children only in Little Yellow Creek (no license required), bicycling, horseback riding, horse camping. Caving in Cudjo’s Cave will resume when Cumberland Gap is restored in several years.

• **Facilities:** Visitor center at Middlesboro, KY. Campground with 160 sites on US 58 in Virginia with picnic tables, grills, and paved pull-ins, including some that will accommodate large trailers and RVs (no hookups). Restrooms have hot showers. Four primitive campgrounds on Ridge Trail are accessible by foot only (permit required at visitor center). Amphitheater for seasonal music and craft demonstrations and interpretive programs. Bicycling (.75-mile trail). Horseback riding on many trails (brochure available) and horse camping by permit near Hensley Settlement.

• **Dates:** Open year-round; hours for visitor center and shuttle are seasonal.

• **Fees:** There is no charge for admission or backcountry camping; a fee is charged for camping at the main campground.

• **Closest town:** Middlesboro, KY, is just west of visitor center. Cumberland Gap, TN, is on east side of tunnel.

• **For more information:** Superintendent, Cumberland Gap NHP, Box 1848, Middlesboro, KY 40965. Phone (606) 248-2817.

**Hensley Settlement**

[Fig. 6](1)] Still standing on a plateau in a remote clearing, high atop Cumberland Mountain, are houses, barns, and fences of several restored farmsteads from the early 1900s. Established by Sherman Hensley in approximately 1904, the little community of about 12 families constructed buildings from hand-hewn chestnut logs and topped them with shake roofs. Isolated from civilization, community members survived through their own cunning and skill.

Hundreds of people assemble at the Hensley Settlement on a Saturday night around August 12 each year for a program called Shooting Star Spectacular. The evening is set to coincide with the literally stellar performance of the Perseid Meteor Shower, an annual heavenly phenomenon. On this occasion, private vehicles are allowed on the road to the Hensley Settlement. The clearing is located along the Ridge Trail 12 miles from the Pinnacle and just west of Chadwell Gap [Fig. 7(7)] at 3,358 feet. Shuttles, when they are running, offer an easy journey along the Shillalah Creek Trail [Fig. 7(5)] from the Kentucky side of Cumberland Mountain to the settlement.

• **Dates:** If funded, open June—mid-Aug.

• **Fees:** A fee is charged for the shuttle.
Cudjo's Cave

Temporarily closed to tourism, this cave is located on the Virginia side of the gap on a portion of US 25E no longer in use since the completion of the tunnel through the mountain in 1996. Rising from the cave's limestone floor is the largest known stalagmite—a giant that brings to mind California's sequoias.

Left to a consistently cool silence punctuated only by slow limestone drips are several species of bats. Unimpressed by Cudjo's monstrous stalagmite, these nocturnal mammals spend much of their lives suspended upside-down among the stalactites of the cave ceiling. Included is the endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis)*.

When the gap is restored to resemble the Wilderness Road as it was in the late 1700s, wild cave expeditions will begin. The path will be lighted from lanterns attached to cavers' heads rather than from the colored lights that wash the walls of commercial caves.

Sand Cave

This giant overhang of sandstone (40 to 80 feet high and approximately 150 feet wide) is easily the most outstanding geological feature in the park. Sand Cave, carved by the weathering effects of wind and rain, is an example of "headward erosion." In another few million years the park superintendent predicts there will be "a jim-dandy arch." Headward erosion may take its time, but the result will be an impressive natural tunnel.

The cave, located on the Kentucky side of Cumberland Mountain ridge, is a carrot on a stick to hikers along the Ridge Trail. The trail to the cave leads off the Ridge Trail 16 miles northeast of the Pinnacle Overlook. Sand Cave is also accessible by a strenuous climb up the Ewing Trail at the park's east end. This route is 8 miles round-trip. But timing a trek to coincide with spring wildflowers will double the reward for a hiker's effort.

Hiking Trails at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

Fifty miles of well-maintained hiking trails provide the best opportunity to become familiar with Cumberland Mountain. These trails range from short, paved paths accessing overlooks to rugged climbs over sandstone boulders as big as houses. Skylight Cave [*Fig. 7*(13)], Sand Cave [*Fig. 6*(2)], and White Rocks [*Fig. 6*(4), *Fig. 7*(4)] are accessible by trail spurs off the main Ridge Trail [*Fig. 7*(10)].

At present, biking is allowed only on the .75-mile trail at the visitor center [*Fig. 7*(15)] and on the old highway through the gap, until restoration begins. Construction of a multiuse trail will add variety for mountain bikers in the
near future. Around the campground, the park service has added wood chips to the natural forest floor of the hiking trails. Trails are not blazed, but are easy to follow, with handrails and bridges along the way.

Though mountainous and strenuous at times, the park trails are not difficult, except for the Chadwell Gap Trail [Fig. 7(8)]. Allow yourself extra time to rest along this 1.5-mile steep ascent up the south slope of Cumberland Mountain. From the trailhead at VA 688 north of Caylor, you'll climb to 3,385 feet at the summit. Also, the last 2 miles of the 5-mile Gibson Gap Trail [Fig. 7(14)] are moderately strenuous, as it winds its way from the main campground up to the backcountry campground at Gibson Gap [Fig. 7(11)].

Spring wildflowers are especially picturesque on the Virginia side of the mountain along the short Skylight Cave Trail [Fig. 7(13)], the 5-mile Gibson Gap Trail [Fig. 7(14)], and the 4-mile Ewing Trail [Fig. 6(5)]. On the Kentucky side, the Sugar Run Trail [Fig. 7(12)] supports a hemlock and rhododendron forest, growing in soil left from the Pennsylvanian deposits. Look for tiny fossils embedded in rocks in the higher elevations, especially at the top of the Ewing Trail.

Park officials advise not to hike this wild area alone. **Watch your footing near cliffs and rock outcroppings.** Plan for the possibility that fires may be prohibited in the backcountry during dry spells. Carry an alternative fuel source. Backcountry camping is allowed (by permit from the visitor center) at four areas along the Ridge Trail [Fig. 6(3)]—Gibson Gap [Fig. 7(11)], Chadwell Gap [Fig. 7(7)], Martin's Fork [Fig. 7(3)], and White Rocks [Fig. 6(4), Fig. 7(4)]. Pit toilets are the only improvements. Camping outside these areas is not allowed. A one-room primitive cabin with fireplace and six bunks at Martin's Fork (near the Hensley Settlement) also requires a permit.

**Ridge Trail.** [Fig. 6(3)] This moderate trail on the Virginia/Kentucky line along Cumberland Mountain ridge starts at Pinnacle Overlook and runs 16.6 miles east to White Rocks. It connects to all major park trails and to four primitive backcountry campgrounds (permit required). It leads 11.7 miles from the Pinnacle to the Hensley Settlement [Fig. 6(1)]. Other side trips from the Ridge Trail include Skylight Cave, Sand Cave, and White Rocks.

- **Trail:** 16.6-mile linear path along Cumberland Mountain ridge, accessible from the Pinnacle Overlook and by other trails at both ends.
- **Elevation:** 2,440 feet at Pinnacle Overlook to 3,513 feet just west of White Rocks.
- **Degree of difficulty:** Moderate, with many ups and downs.
- **Surface:** Natural forest floor and rock.

**Ewing Trail.** [Fig. 6(5)] On the shortest but steepest path to Sand Cave and White Rocks the payoffs are many, especially in the spring. Hikers who take time and smell the flowers along the switchbacks will not be disappointed. Explorers should also look for painted trillium (**Trillium undulatum**), bloodroot (**Sanguinaria canadensis**), hepatica of varying hues, spring beauty (**Claytonia virginica**), and large patches of nodding trillium
(Trillium cernuum). Rocks at the top of Ewing Trail provide the best opportunity in the park for discovering embedded fossils of ancient marine shellfish. To get to the trailhead at Civic Park [Fig. 7(9)], go east on US 58 from Wilderness Road campground and picnic area 12 miles. At Ewing, go left (north) on VA 724 1 mile to Civic Park.

- **Trail:** 3.8-mile ascent to Ridge Trail.
- **Elevation:** From 1,550 feet at Civic Parking Lot on VA 724 to 3,500 feet at junction with Ridge Trail.
- **Degree of difficulty:** Moderate, with steep areas and several switchbacks.
- **Surface:** Natural forest floor and rock.

**White Rocks Trail and White Rocks.** [Fig. 6(4), Fig. 7(4)] For pure scenic enjoyment, take this 1-mile cutoff from the Ewing Trail, across the Ridge Trail, to White Rocks and White Rocks backcountry campground. The path is not difficult once it intersects with the Ridge Trail. Cross it to get to the campground, or go east .5 mile on the Ridge Trail to see the 600-foot-high sheer cliffs that are the White Rocks.

From the lookout at 3,500 feet, the views of Harlan County, Kentucky, on one side and Lee County, Virginia, on the other are spectacular. But visitors who spend a bit of time examining the rocks up close will find quartz pebbles embedded in limestone which tell a strange story. There are deeper areas of limestone and shales, below younger, more shallow layers of Pennsylvanian sandstone. At these high elevations, it is overwhelming to think of the lap of oceans that deposited these layers more than 290 million years ago and ponder the upheaval that brought the deposits to these heights.

White Rocks, prominent from the Wilderness Road in Virginia, served as a marker for early travelers in the valley below as they labored west toward Cumberland Gap. When the cliffs came into view atop Cumberland Mountain, shining in the afternoon sunlight, travelers knew they had one more day to Gibson Station. There they would assemble in large groups for protection against Indians during the treacherous journey through the gap.

- **Trail:** 1-mile trail from Ewing Trail to White Rocks, intersecting Ridge Trail.
- **Elevation:** 3,500 feet at highest point.
- **Difficulty:** Difficult from Ewing Trail up to Ridge Trail, moderate from Ridge Trail to White Rocks.
- **Surface:** Natural forest floor and rock.
The Cumberland Gap Tunnel

Imagine the relief of pioneers, had they discovered such a wonder. A modern, four-lane highway through the mountain. Completed in 1996, this pair of two-lane tunnels opened to carry travelers under instead of over the gap that has seen so much history. The massive engineering project of carving twin tunnels through nearly 1 mile of solid rock was a joint effort by the National Park Service and the Federal Highway Administration. Layers of sandstone, shale, limestone, and chert laid down through millennia were drilled, analyzed, exposed with pilot tunnels, excavated, blasted, supported, and waterproofed in preparation for the new highway. Begun in 1985, the project took 10 years before autos could use it.

The old portion of US 25E above the tunnel is abandoned today. The Park Service intends eventually to restore the Wilderness Road through the gap to give visitors an appreciation of the path early pioneers used in the late 1700s. Meanwhile, the road that felt the march of history is quiet—left again to birdsong, the tinkle of tiny mountain rills, and the pale wash of moonlight on Cumberland Mountain.

Cumberland Gap Tours

A tour bus operating twice daily picks up visitors at motels, bed and breakfasts, or restaurants for two- or three-hour tours of the Cumberland Gap area. Guide Tom Shattuck is a Daniel Boone fan, and has written a Cumberland Gap guidebook.

Other half-day or full-day offerings include a Wilderness Road Adventure Tour, Great Smoky Mountains Tour (Dollywood, Pigeon Forge, and Gatlinburg), and Big Stone Gap Tour (Trail of the Lonesome Pine outdoor drama, coal museum, and Southwest Virginia Museum). Tours are flexible and can be adjusted to suit individual desires. Service area includes Middlesboro, Kentucky, Pineville, Kentucky, and Cumberland Gap, Tennessee. The service is approved by the Department of Transportation and Interstate Commerce Commission.

- **Dates**: Open year-round.
- **Fees**: A fee is charged for the gap tour.
- **For more information**: Wilderness Road Tours, 224 Greenwood Road, Middlesboro, KY 40965. Phone (606) 248-2626.

Tennessee Valley Divide

Rain falling on the Virginia side of Cumberland Mountain will eventually end up in the Tennessee River. Rain that falls on the Kentucky side winds its way to the Cumberland River. Both rivers are heavily controlled with dams, but the Tennessee River, under the management of the Tennessee Valley Authority, has achieved fame as one of the most managed river valleys in the world. The imaginary line marking the separation of the Tennessee River watershed from others is called the Tennessee Valley Divide. The beginnings of river watersheds don't always follow boundaries between states as the
Tennessee Valley Divide does here along Cumberland Mountain. For watershed management, however, it's convenient when they do.

Virginia's Dickenson County, for instance, also borders Kentucky, a bit farther to the north. But the divide runs along the east side of Dickenson instead of the west. Water in Dickenson County flows west into Kentucky and north into the Ohio River instead of south into Tennessee. A mother in Cincinnati, Ohio, gives her child a glass of water at bedtime. The mother has a vested interest in what happens to that water on Fryingpan Creek in Dickenson County, hundreds of miles away in Virginia.

**Karlan State Park**

[Fig. 6(12)] Visitors will enjoy a stroll beneath century-old ash and maple trees on the grounds of one of Virginia's newest state parks. In 1993, the state purchased 200 acres that were part of an old farm originally owned by Robert M. Ely. Several of Ely's descendants lived in a mansion that still stands on the property. The mansion was constructed in the late 1870s and renovated several times in the 1900s. It stands empty now and closed to the public, awaiting restoration work. (The mansion may be rented for weddings or other functions.) The grounds, however, are open for picnicking and exploration. The rolling countryside and woodlands at Karlan offer tempting subjects for photography in any season.

Along a wooded path in spring, hikers may find columbine (*Aquilegia*) with its nodding red and yellow blossoms, and hear the plaintive, gentle call of bluebirds from an adjacent field. Bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) call their own names from the hedgerows.

Another delicate, nodding plant—spotted wintergreen (*Chimaphila maculata*)—emerges in dry woods here and displays its white blooms in summer. White-tailed deer quietly appear at the edge of woods at dusk to browse the open fields. In autumn, the great variety of plants and trees of Karlan turn yellow, red, gold, and rust. The sheer cliffs of White Rocks gleam at their 3,500-foot perch atop Cumberland Mountain in the background. Blue jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*), quiet and secretive in the early summer nesting season, now gather in raucous gangs. A great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), attempting to sleep out the day high in one of the old maples, finds itself the target of the blue jays' restless excitement. A snowy winter day is also a lovely time to visit this old farm, when the bright red of a cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) huddled against the cold in a dark evergreen has its own wild appeal.

A self-guided loop trail leading to Cave Hill on park property is under construction. The trail will explain the history of the park, which was on the Wilderness Road explored by Daniel Boone. Vegetation and geology of the area will also be featured. (Karlan sits at the eastern edge of the Appalachian Plateau in a transition karst zone, full of limestone caves and sink holes.) The trailhead is located on the east side of 690, about .75 mile north of US 58. The old L&N (Louisville and Nashville) Railroad splits Karlan in half. Visitors can hike, bike, or ride horses on the easy Wilderness Road Trail that has replaced the railroad.
• **Directions:** From Cumberland Gap at the junction of US 25E and US 58, go 7 miles east on US 58. Park is on left. Or, from Ewing in Lee County, go west 4 miles on US 58, and turn right into park just past second junction with VA 690 (both junctions on right side, as VA 690 makes a loop).

• **Activities:** Hiking, biking, horseback riding, picnicking.

• **Facilities:** Hiking/biking/equestrian trail, picnic tables, self-guided loop trail. Plans include a village, refurbished mansion, and visitor center.

• **Dates:** Open year-round.

• **Fees:** None.

• **Closest town:** Ewing, 4 miles east.

• **For more information:** Karlan State Park, Route 2, Box 78, Ewing, VA 24248. Phone (540) 445-3065.

**Wilderness Road Trail**

[Fig. 6(14)] The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) purchased the old L&N (Louisville and Nashville) railroad bed in the southwest tip of Lee County for possible use when US 58 was widened to four lanes. Now, in cooperation with local jurisdictions, VDOT is turning the railroad bed into a trail for those who would like to hike, bike, or ride horseback on the same path the early settlers took on their way to Cumberland Gap. Ten miles have been completed so far.

The trailhead on the eastern end is at a parking lot on the north side of US 58, 3 miles west of Ewing. The wide, easy path heads westward, through Karlan State Park [Fig. 6(12)]. Then it passes Gibson Station, once the assembly point for pioneers preparing to cross through Cumberland Gap on their way west to the bluegrass of Kentucky. On the west end, the trail leaves the railroad bed and the grade becomes steeper as it ascends to its temporary end at the Wilderness Road Campground of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. West of the packed gravel trail toward the gap, the trail passes through open farmland and woodlands and crosses small tributaries of Indian Creek. VDOT built sturdy bridges across streams and developed access to streams for watering horses. Instead of rumbling trains of the past, the bubbly voice of the wood thrush, the cooing of the mourning dove, and the sharp bark of a gray fox fill the air.

Black-eyed susan (*Rudbekia hirta*) and Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) sway among the trail-side grasses on a summer afternoon. Other sites along the trail could include a groundhog (*Marmota monax*) munching clover near his burrow or a red-eft, the subadult stage of the red-spotted newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens*). This is prime territory for the rusty-yellow eastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*), a rather large squirrel found in the woodlands. To the north is the steep, south-facing slope of Cumberland Mountain that dictated the path this railroad and the Wilderness Road took.

Plans are to involve Tennessee and Virginia localities in extending the trail along the old railroad bed at both ends. On the southwest end, the Wilderness Road Trail will follow the old train route south into Claiborne County, Tennessee. The present path that leads away from the railroad bed, ending in the National Historical Park campground, will
become a spur of the extended trail. Also, VDOT has plans for wildflower plantings and plans for an asphalt surface for hikers and bikers on one side of the path, leaving the other side for horses.

- **Trail:** 10-mile linear path with plans to extend both ends along old railroad bed.
- **Elevation:** 1,200 to 1,300 feet with no more than 10 percent grade except at temporary west end where trail rises to about 1,400 feet.
- **Degree of difficulty:** Easy, with some steep sections on temporary west end.
- **Surface:** Packed fine gravel.
- **Directions:** East-end trailhead at parking lot in Caylor on north side of Route 58 near the middle intersection (there are 3 intersections of Route 684 and Route 58), next to Wheeler's store, 3 miles west of Ewing in Lee County. West-end trailhead in Gibson Station on north side of Route 58, .25 mile west of the intersection of Route 693 and Route 58. There is also a trailhead at Wilderness Road Campground at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. Campground is on US 25E in southwestern tip of Lee County, 1.3 miles east of junction with US 58. Access also available where railroad bed comes through Karlan State Park, about 4 miles west of Ewing.

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**Cumberland Gap**

[Fig. 12] The wall of mountains stretching diagonally from Maine to Georgia known as the Allegheny, or Appalachian, Mountains impeded western expansion during early American colonization. Buffalo and deer established a trail through an unusual gap to the fertile valleys to the west. To understand the unique significance of the gap in American history, it's important to understand the geographic features that combined here to make it the main avenue of migration beyond the Allegheny Mountains.

At one time Yellow Creek flowed south into the Powell River, cutting a gap in Cumberland Mountain as it did so. Cumberland Mountain rose faster than the creek could wear it down and eventually the creek was diverted northward into the Cumberland River. As Yellow Creek flowed out of a large, flat area known as the Middlesboro Basin, it created a valley that led to a second gap at Pine Mountain and beyond to the rolling hills of the bluegrass region of Kentucky.

Indians followed the game to major hunting grounds in what is now Kentucky. This trail became part of a travel route known as the Warrior's Path that led from the Potomac River to the Ohio River.

The gap was first seen by a white man, Dr. Thomas Walker, on Good Friday in 1750, but it remained part of Cherokee lands until the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals was signed 25 years later.
Frontiersman Daniel Boone heard about Cumberland Gap and set out to explore the area in 1769. Suitably impressed with the natural resources, four years later Boone returned with a party of settlers, but his oldest son was killed in a fierce Indian attack before they reached the gap and the party turned back.

Boone's next trip to the gap was in 1775, when he was hired by the Transylvania Land Company to blaze a trail through Cumberland Gap to 20 million acres it had recently acquired from the Cherokee for settlement. He and his crew of 30 backwoodsmen marked and roughly hacked a 208-mile trail from Long Island at Kingsport to Cumberland Gap in less than three weeks during the spring of 1775.

In 1796, the road was widened to support wagons. The migration through the gap was responsible for pushing the westward boundary of the United States to the Mississippi River. Generally, settlers traveled the trail in winter when the water at Cumberland Ford was lower so they could plant spring crops and bring in a harvest the first year. The rugged trail evolved into the Wilderness Road, the safest passage for settlement of the Territory South of the Ohio River.

As westward expansion continued on railroads and steamboats in the 1820s and 1830s, Cumberland Gap lost its importance. That was to change when it was viewed as the Gibraltar of America by General U.S. Grant during the Civil War.

It was a logical point for the Union effort to want to control in predominantly pro-Union east Tennessee, and both the Union and the Confederacy felt it held strategic importance. Though no major battles were fought here, the gap changed hands four times.

Confederate General Felix K. Zollicoffer was dispatched to fortify the gap in May 1861. Two months later, Union General George Morgan was sent to capture the gap. Morgan drew a portion of the Confederate forces defending the gap toward Chattanooga with one brigade while sending the remaining brigade to outflank the remaining defenders at Cumberland Gap. The Confederates evacuated Cumberland Gap on June 17, 1861 and Morgan occupied the important gateway the next morning.

Morgan proceeded to fortify the gap and store supplies in area caves, including Cudjo's Cave, which has been acquired by the National Park Service (see below). In September, Confederate General Stephenson engaged Morgan's troops in Tennessee and drove them back to the gap. When the Union general realized the Confederates were maneuvering to turn his flank, he ordered the soldiers to gather what supplies they could take with them and pile everything else in the narrow gap. They set fire to the pile, including exploding munitions, which stopped the Confederate advance and covered their retreat, but once again the gap was in Confederate hands.
In 1863, the tables were turned when Stephenson was met by Union General Burnside in Tennessee and forced to retreat to the gap. The Union forces surrounded the Confederates and forced a surrender. Cumberland Gap remained under Union control for the rest of the war.

The small town of Cumberland Gap is tucked in a hollow on the Tennessee side of the southwestern edge of Cumberland Mountain. Built to house laborers working on a railroad tunnel through the mountains funded by British entrepreneur Col. A. A. Arthur's American Association, Ltd., it has a population of about 220. In the fall of 1996, a new four-lane tunnel rerouted US 25E away from the town of Cumberland Gap, bypassing the town in order to allow the Wilderness Road to be restored to its appearance in Boone's day. It's well worth the short detour into the historic Tennessee town on your way to the 20,271-acre Cumberland Gap National Historical Park (CGNHP) just across the Kentucky line in Middlesboro. The Wilderness Road hiking trail begins at the remains of the iron furnace off Pennlyn Avenue in Cumberland Gap and climbs gradually through a hardwood forest to the historic gap.

- **Directions:** On US 25E near the junction of Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky.
- **For more information:** The Cumberland Gap Towne Hall, North Cumberland Drive at Colwyn Avenue, Cumberland Gap, TN 37724. Phone (423) 869-3860 or (800) 332-8164.

**Cudjo's Cave**

[Fig. 12(1)] Also called Cudjo's Cavern, this cave is noted by Thomas Walker, the first white man to see Cumberland Gap, in his diary. The cave was so well known that the gap we know as Cumberland Gap was known earlier as Cave Gap. Not commonly used as a camping spot by early travelers for fear of being detected by Indians, Gap Cave was often a landmark to be passed by as quickly as possible. The entrance to the cave lay just above a large spring.

The name Cumberland became established after Walker noted a river that was as "crooked as the Duke of Cumberland" flowing through the region. The use of the name Cumberland to describe the region soon followed, and Gap Cave became Cumberland Gap Cave. It was renamed in the 1930s after a novel by J. T. Trowbridge romanticized it as the hiding place for an escaped slave named Cudjo.

Once a popular tourist destination, the cave was closed to tourism until old US 25E was torn up, recycled, and restored to the appearance of the Wilderness Road in the 1700s. The cave has been reopened as Gap Cave as of spring 1999. A hiking trail accesses the cave and the Cumberland Gap National Historic Park has plans to conduct wild cave expeditions to view geologic formations. There are several miles of charted trails to explore.

- **For more information:** Superintendent, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, PO Box 1848, Middlesboro, KY 40965. Phone (606) 248-2817.
Cumberland Trail

The Cumberland Trail is a state scenic trail that remains unfinished due to lack of funding and landowner opposition. Most of the trail is privately owned. The project was initiated by the Tennessee Trails Association and was designed to follow a route from Cumberland Gap to a terminus on the Tennessee River south of Chattanooga for a distance of more than 200 miles. From Cumberland Gap the trail ascends Tri-State Mountain, generally follows the plateau's eastern escarpment to Prentice Cooper State Forest, then travels along the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Tennessee River to a point near the Alabama line. Parts of the trail have white blazes.

In the beginning, money for construction of the northern part of the trail was provided by the state and administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation. Since budget cutbacks in 1990 resulted in the funding being withdrawn, this part of the trail has not been maintained. Continuing work on the southern half is being done by members of the Cumberland Trail Conference, Tennessee Trails Association, and several sections are open to hikers.

- **Trail:** 235 miles.
- **Elevation:** Change, 1,800 feet.
- **Degree of Difficulty:** Strenuous.
- **Surface and blaze:** Rock and forest floor with white blaze on a brown background.
- **For more information:**
  Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, 7th Floor, 410 Church Street, L&C Tower, Nashville, TN 37243. Phone (615) 532-0109

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park contains over 20,000 acres in Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee, with the majority on the ridgeway north of Cumberland Gap that forms the boundary between Kentucky and Virginia. The park is a memorial to the Wilderness Road, the Civil War, and the Hensley Settlement, a farming community that existed on an isolated plateau from 1904 until 1951. Sherman Hensley arrived in 1904 and, with his family, constructed a home and outbuildings of hewn chestnut logs. At its peak, the settlement included about 100 inhabitants. The National Park Service has restored three of the original 12 farmsteads, and two farmer-demonstrators maintain the properties.

The Pinnacle Overlook, which affords a splendid view of the town of Cumberland Gap and far beyond, is one of the most popular features in the park. A paved road leads to within about 200 yards of the overlook. There is no road access to many of
the other features, such as Sand Cave and White Rocks, but there are about 50 miles of hiking trails. One of these, the Ridge Trail, extends almost the entire length of the park and has four primitive campgrounds that require a permit. Biking and horses are permitted on designated routes.

EWING, Va. - Who knew sand had this much personality?

We were standing at the mouth of Sand Cave, in Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, marveling at the sheer volume of sand beneath our feet. We walked up the slope toward the back of the rockshelter, in sand so deep it spilled over the top of our hiking boots.

It was like walking uphill on the beach.

Sand Cave is famous for - well, for its sand. Legend has it that at one time, visitors to the site could see at least 21 different colors of sand. Prior to 1959, before Cumberland Gap was established as a national park, souvenir collectors would collect sand from Sand Cave and pour it into glass vials in separate layers of brick-red, salmon-pink and yellow-brown.

Carol Borneman, a ranger for Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, said she has heard rumors that some of these old vials are still floating around.

"People say you can still go to local flea markets and find sand from Sand Cave," she said. "I'm still looking for some."

Located on the north slope of Cumberland Mountain, Sand Cave actually is a large rockshelter carved by the erosional forces of water, wind and ice. The overhanging rock covers about 1.5 acres of sand, much of it as fine and dry as talcum powder. Visitors to the site over the past decades have tramped down the sand and blurred some of the color distinction, but even today, the sand in Sand Cave is said to come in six different shades.

Getting to Sand Cave isn't easy, but it's well worth the effort. The Cave is at the east end of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park - a 20,000-acre unit of the National Park Service that straddles Cumberland Mountain for 20 miles. Most visitors access Sand Cave by hiking the Ewing Trail - a three-mile trip up Cumberland Mountain that gains 2,000 feet in elevation in the first two miles.

Just one mile east of Sand Cave is White Rocks, a wall of 300-foot cliffs that overlook the Virginia valley and served as a beacon to 18th century settlers traveling to Cumberland Gap. A classic excursion is to knock off Sand Cave and White Rocks in the same day.
Sand Cave is a sensory delight. Eons of weathering have sculpted the rock and left multicolored swirls along the cave ceiling. On hot summer days the inner recesses of the rockshelter remain deliciously cool, and voices echo off the sandstone walls. In the pre-park days, when Sand Cave was accessible by road from the Kentucky side, churches used to hold singings at the site to take advantage of the acoustics.

Sand Cave is located in a remote section of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park that has been proposed to be designated as wilderness. The cave is carved out of a band of Pennsylvanian sandstone that runs a half-mile below the ridge.

Scott Teodorski, park ranger, said much of the physical weathering that carved Sand Cave occurred during the last ice age.

"Even though the ice sheets didn't advance this far south, the freezing and thawing fractured the rock and set the stage for what you see at Sand Cave," he said.

At the downhill end of the rockshelter is a small waterfall that pours over a ledge into a moist, cool alcove. It's a prime example of a microhabitat, a place where hemlock, fern and rhododendron grow in stark contrast to the surrounding rock and sand.

"Sometimes, there's water dripping over the entire face," Teodorski said. "It's an area exposed to the elements, and as it gets bigger, the erosion just gets more pronounced."

**Ewing Trail**

Ewing trail starts at the Civic Park parking lot and climbs a steep 2.5 miles to White Rocks trail. White Rocks trail short very steep .5 mile trail that leads to the junction of Ridge Trail. Go straight to White Rocks campsite, go right to White Rocks overlook or go left to Sand Cave. The total ascent from the parking lot to the top to White Rocks overlook is 1,655 ' and takes about 2 hrs.
Ridge Trail

The 21 mile Ridge Trail follows along the ridge top of the Cumberland Mountains and leads from the west Pinnacle overlook to White Rocks overlook in the east end of the park. The trail has no visible blazes but does have some mile marker posts along the way. We found that the mile markers and the official map of the area did not match. The trail surface changes from dirt to rock to sand to pebbles and all combinations in between. It is a shared horse trail that is in good condition and is wide. There are many changes in elevation that make this a challenging trail.

There are several features to see while hiking the trail, White Rocks is a large sandstone escarpment that overlooks Poor Valley Ridge. Sand Cave is a large 250 feet across rock house who's sand filled floor is like a east coast beach. A water fall flows over the rock house during wet periods. Martins Fork Cabin has a large stone fireplace, three wooden bunk beds, and a picnic table, and can be rented for $10.00 per night. Be prepared for mice! Hensley Settlement is a restored pioneer settlement (1903-1951) with cabins, farm buildings, schoolhouse, church, spring houses, wooden fences, and family graveyard. Skylight Cave is .4 off the trail and has an opening that lets light in from the top of the cave. We found Indiana brown bats and a small rodent which we could not identify. Pinnacle overlook has a lot of history and was the site of a civil war fort. The overlook sports vistas of Powell Valley, Fern Lake and the city of Middlesboro.
Towering 3,500 feet above the valley, White Rocks was a welcome sight to the settlers traveling along the Wilderness Road in the 1700s. Upon seeing this massive sandstone outcropping, settlers knew they were but a day's journey from the Cumberland Gap. Today, visitors can hike three miles up to the top of White Rocks for a breathtaking view into Virginia.
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 Cap. 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 Cap 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.¹


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 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.²


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.
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.3

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

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 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.4 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 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 Beoch 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 defending 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." 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.

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."\(^6\)

\(^6\)George W. Morgan to E. M. Stanton and D. C. Buell, June 18, 1862, in OR, Ser. 1, XVI, Pt. II, 38.

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 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."7 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.

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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 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. 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 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.9

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

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, 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 he 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.\(^\text{10}\)

Did You Know?
Between 1775 and 1810 some 300,000 settlers crossed Cumberland Gap and began settling the land west of the Appalachians. These brave pioneers were following dreams of prosperity in the wilderness of Kentucky.

Geologic Formations

Along the south face of Cumberland Mountain, in Virginia, are 24 caves varying from 20 feet to over six miles in length. These caves occur in the Greenbrier Limestone formation. Some of the caves contain dome pits up to 125 feet deep as well as small, tight, crawl-ways large enough for a small person or child to enter. Indiana bat (endangered), other bats, rats, beetles and several invertebrates have been found in many of the park's caves.

The Sand Cave, a natural scenic area in Kentucky, is a half-domed chamber, 250 feet across in front (open). The floor slopes from back to front and is 1.25 acres of fine, colorful sand.

At the east end of the park are 500-foot cliffs known as White Rocks. These cliffs rise above the surrounding wooded slopes and offer the visitor a 360-degree view of the surrounding area.

Did You Know?
Gap Cave has also been called: King Solomon's Cave, Soldier's Cave, and Cudjo's Cave! The cave was originally referred to as "Gap Cave" because of its proximity to the Gap. When early pioneers saw the cave they knew they were about to cross the mountains into the wilderness of Kentucky.
Carved by wind and water, Cumberland Gap forms a major break in the Appalachian Mountain chain.

Stretching for 26 miles along Cumberland Mountain and ranging from 1 to 4 miles in width, the park contains 24,000 acres of which 14,000 acres is proposed wilderness. The natural beauty of Appalachian mountain country, lush with vegetation, supports diverse animal life including: white-tailed deer, black bear, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, gray squirrel, fox, and wild turkey.

Park resources provide habitat for the endangered Indiana bat Myotis sodalis, and the threatened blackside dace, Phoxinus cumberlandensis. There are 59 state-listed rare plant species.

The majority of the forest is second and third growth Eastern hardwood and conifer mix, the result of timbering and farming over a 175 year period.

There are 24 known entries to limestone caves, the best known of which is Gap Cave. Other significant natural features include: the Pinnacle, Sand Cave, Devils Garden, and White Rocks.
Did You Know?
Civil War buffs will appreciate the fact that the famous Confederate Brigadier General Felix Zollicoffer personally supervised the construction of the earthen fortifications at Cumberland Gap.

Felix Kirk Zollicoffer (May 19, 1812 – January 19, 1862) was a newspaperman, three-term United States Congressman from Tennessee, officer in the United States Army, and a Confederate brigadier general during the American Civil War. He led the first Confederate invasion of neutral Kentucky and was killed in action at the Battle of Mill Springs, the first Confederate general to perish in the Western Theater.

Although Zollicoffer's main responsibility was to guard the Cumberland Gap, in November 1861 he advanced westward back into southeastern Kentucky to strengthen control in the area around Somerset. He found a strong defensive position at Mill Springs and decided to make it his winter quarters. He fortified the area, especially both sides of the Cumberland River. On December 8, he was superseded by the arrival of Maj. Gen. George B. Crittenden, who assumed command of the department, but retained Zollicoffer as commander of the 1st Brigade in his army.

Union Brig. Gen. George H. Thomas received orders to drive the Confederates across the Cumberland River and break up Crittenden's army. He left Lebanon and slowly marched through rain-soaked country, arriving at Logan's Crossroads on January 17, where he waited for Brig. Gen. Albin F. Schoepf's troops from Somerset to join him. Two days later, they attacked Crittenden and Zollicoffer at the Battle of Mill Springs.

The southern bank of the Cumberland River at Mill Springs was a bluff and a strong defensive position, whereas the northern bank was low and flat. Zollicoffer, a colorful politician with no prior military experience, chose to move most of his men to the north bank where they would be closer to nearby Union troops, incorrectly assuming that it was more defensible. Both Crittenden and Albert Sidney Johnston ordered Zollicoffer to relocate south of the river, but he could not comply—he had insufficient boats to cross the unfordable river quickly and was afraid his brigade would be caught by the enemy halfway across.

Zollicoffer's men were routed from the field. Some accounts claim that Union Colonel Speed S. Fry shot Zollicoffer as the battle waned. He had inadvertently wandered into the Union position, thinking they were Confederate soldiers with his nearsightedness and the gathering darkness. He was struck several times by enemy bullets and soon died from his wounds.
While Daniel Boone is the name most associated with Cumberland Gap, it was Dr. Thomas Walker who first recorded the existence of the Gap. Although a man of great achievements, the details of Walker's life are relatively unknown.

Walker was born on January 25, 1715 in King and Queen County, Virginia, to Thomas and Susan Preachy Walker. Walker's ancestors came to America in 1650 from Staffordshire, England, and settled in Tidewater, Virginia, where the family prospered as respectable plantation owners.

Thomas was educated at the College of William and Mary and then studied medicine under his brother-in-law, Dr. George Gilmer of Williamsburg, a medical graduate of Edinburgh University. In 1741, he married Mildred Thornton Meriwether, widow of Nicholas Meriwether. Mildred was also a second cousin to George Washington. Walker erected their home, Castle Hill, on Mildred's 15,000-acre estate in Albemarle County, east of Charlottesville. The couple had 12 children.

Walker was physician to Thomas Jefferson's father, Peter. After Peter's death, Walker became Thomas Jefferson's guardian. Peter Jefferson, like many of the wealthy Virginia gentlemen of the time, had spent much of his life exploring and surveying. It was perhaps through this long association with the elder Jefferson that Thomas Walker acquired his love for exploration, a fondness that he shared with the young Thomas Jefferson.

Walker developed great skill and reputation as an explorer and surveyor and in 1743 led an expedition as far west as present-day Kingsport, Tennessee. In March 1750, he led another expedition through present-day Kentucky that lasted four months. Click here to see the path of the
expedition. It was during this expedition that Walker discovered Cumberland Gap and recorded its existence in his April 13th diary entry:

"We went four miles to large Creek, which we called Cedar (Indian) Creek, being a branch of Bear Grass (Powell's), and from thence six miles to Cave Gap (Cumberland Gap), the land being levil [sic]. 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 (Cudjo Cavern), which the Spring runs through, and there is a constant Stream of cool air issuing out. The Spring is sufficient to turn 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... This Gap may be seen at a considerable distance, and there is no other, that I know of, except one about two miles to the North of it, which does not appear to be so low as the other."

Throughout his life, Walker continued to act as surveyor and land agent and was active in civil affairs as treaty commissioner, member of the House of Burgesses and General Assembly, delegate to the Revolutionary Convention and a member of the Committee of Public Safety. In 1791, Walker's son Francis wrote a letter to a friend, describing his father's attributes:

"(He) possesses all that life and good humor which we were all kept alive by in the woods."

Thomas Anbury, author of "Travels Through the Interior Parts of America," also commented on Walker's character when he wrote:

"One day, in a chat, while each was delivering his sentiments of what would be the state of America a century hence, the old man [Walker], with great fire and spirit, declared his opinion that, The Americans would then reverence the resolution of their forefathers, and would eagerly impress an adequate idea of the sacred value of freedom in the minds of their children, that if, in any future ages they should be again called forth to revenge public injuries, to secure that freedom, they should adopt the same measures that secured it to their brave ancestors."

"Life and good humor" and "fire and spirit" were certainly Walker's mottoes throughout his life. He died at his home November 9, 1794.
The construction of the Cumberland Gap Tunnel was a crucial step in the broader goal of restoring the Cumberland Gap to the way it appeared to the earliest pioneers. On June 21, 1991, the first rock of what is now the north-bound tunnel was blasted, beginning this herculean effort.

A pilot tunnel, 10 feet high, 10 feet wide, and 4,100 feet long, revealed several characteristics of the mountain that would pose challenges to the project. It was discovered that the mountain would produce 450 gallons of water every minute, regardless of outside weather conditions. The tunnels would course through occasional rock voids with thick clay infillings. Within limestone formations, caves as high as 85 feet and a “lake” of water 30 feet deep were encountered.

Excavation took place simultaneously from both sides of the mountain, and met in precise alignment in July 9, 1992. The project was successfully open to traffic 1,947 days after the initial blast.

The Cumberland Gap tunnel is actually a set of twin tunnels 4,600 feet in length. Each has two dividing lanes and at the tallest point the tunnels are 30 feet in height. Cross passages located every 300 feet connect the two tunnels and are equipped with fire extinguishers and phones for emergency use.

Each tunnel is lined with a thick PVC liner to ensure the tunnels remain dry. High-pressure sodium lights illuminate the tunnels, and 32 large, jet-powered fans keep the air circulating. Sensors collect data on traffic.
movement and volume, and this data, along with visual information supplied by in-tunnel cameras, is monitored in the portal building on the Kentucky side of the tunnel. The ground floor of the portal building houses a fully-equipped ambulance, fire truck, and two wreckers. The control room is on the ground floor.

The Tennessee side portal building has the same equipment, but no control room.

The Cumberland Gap Tunnel is an engineering marvel. It stands as an example of what can be accomplished through cooperation between federal and state agencies.