

## **PRICE'S TURNPIKE**

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Big Stone Gap, Va.

The Federal Government and the individual states have been designating driving tours of many of the old trails in the country. Perhaps the most outstanding example is the Lewis and Clark Trail. Perhaps the next most important effort being made by both the Federal Government and Commonwealth of Virginia is the Wilderness Trail running from Philadelphia to Boonesboro, Kentucky.

The only segment of the Wilderness Trail that is a single trace without alternative routes is the portion that runs from Middlesboro to Pineville, Kentucky. Virginia contains the longest parts of the trail, and it presents itself in numerous variations. The main variant runs the length of the Valley of Virginia to Reedy Creek at Bristol in Tennessee before it reenters Virginia via Moccasin Gap and on to Cumberland Gap. The main alternative to this route runs to the north of the Valley of Virginia along the Virginia – West Virginia border. Its most modern incarnation was the Fincastle to Cumberland Gap Turnpike completed in 1841.

The legislation of 1832 that enabled the surveying of the Fincastle to Cumberland Gap Turnpike is enigmatic, in that it specifies that this survey start at New Castle at "Price's Turnpike". References on-line document that there is legislation on record in Virginia authorizing Price's Turnpike, and that it ended up in the Kanawha Valley of what is now West Virginia. Nothing else seems to be documented in modern literature. This essay's goal is to do just that.

New Castle is an ancient road hub on Craig's Creek on State 615 in Botetourt County, Virginia. 615 continues west and is the route of the Fincastle to Cumberland Gap Turnpike as far as US 460 near Pearisburg. In 1833 the Commonwealth of Virginia passed legislation for improvements on this route, which it called 'The Cumberland Road'. That year it published a map of that route as it ran from Cumberland Gap to the Town of Fincastle, the county seat of Botetourt County, which is just south of the mouth of Craig's Creek into the James River. This map shows Price's Turnpike leaving the Cumberland Road in the middle of New Castle, and proceeding north up State 617 following Barber's Creek. It also documents that this intersection is mile post #6 of Price's Turnpike. It is six miles to the mouth of Craig's Creek.

The New River starts near Boone, North Carolina, and flows north through Virginia by Radford and passes into West Virginia at Narrows. Its first major tributary in West Virginia is the Greenbrier River, which comes in from the East. Its major city is Lewisburg. This town is situated on an ancient Indian Trail intersection of the Seneca Trail that ran from Buffalo, New York to the Narrows. The



A PORTION OF THE 1833 MAP OF THE 'CUMBERLAND ROAD'  
SHOWING THE ROADS AROUND NEW CASTLE

other trail is the Midland Trail that ran from Charlestown, West Virginia to Hampton Roads, Virginia. It is important to note that the New River changes names in its course through West Virginia, and becomes the Great Kanawha River.

It is said that the Midland Trail more or less follows US 60. It is doubtlessly true, but it seems that its route across the Alleghenies from the Valley of Virginia to the Greenbrier Valley went to the south of present US 60 and its modern version – I-64. Price's Turnpike was most likely the route of the Midland Trail across the Allegheny Mountain.

Oral tradition, widely held, in Botetourt County is that the 'old road from Lexington' came in a direct line following State 612, which is named 'the Blue Grass Trail' today. This same name is applied to State Highways of various numbers to a route that lies all the way to the Valley of the North Fork of the Holston River in Washington County. This route represents yet another variant of the Wilderness Trail, and which lay between the Fincastle to Cumberland Gap Turnpike and the main trail down I-81 in the Valley of Virginia.

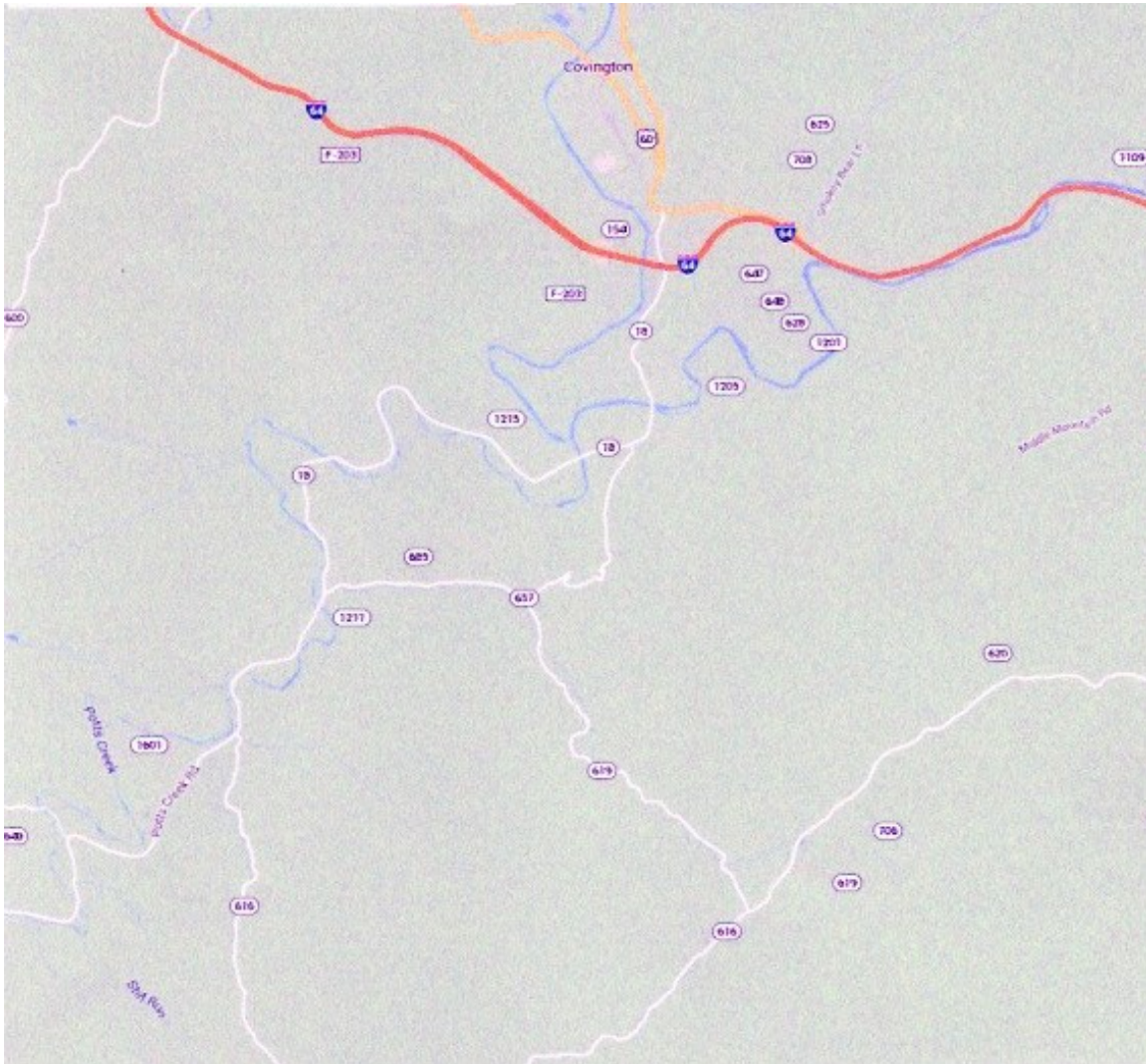
The route turns to the west to the right off of 612 onto State 622, the Mill Creek Road. Both these routes are today obscure gravel roads, but 300 years ago they passed significant iron works, such as Jane and Rebecca Furnaces, which still stand today. Rebecca Furnace still has its iron master's house standing. Mill Creek overlays a deep crack, or fissure, in the earth's crust. Warm mineral water flows up this fissure for the entire length of Mill Creek. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century there were spas at Dagger's Spring and at Gala at the intersection of 622 and US 220. The ancient route follows the combined State 622 and US 220 for about a mile, and turns off on Price's Bluff Road, which carries the number of State 622 beside the James River to Price's Bluff. The old trail fords the river near this point.

A MODERN MAP COVERING THE ROUTE OF THE MIDLAND TRAIL  
AND OF PRICE'S TURNPIKE AS THEY BYPASS I-64

At any event, Price's Turnpike started at the mouth of Craig's Creek, and followed current State 615 to New Castle. There it turned northwest up Barber's Creek on State 617. It went around the western end of Rich Patch Mountain to State 616, and then down the north side of the Allegheny on State 18 to rejoin US 60 and I- 64 at Covington. We do not know its western terminus, but it likely was modern



White Sulfur Springs (the old name was Blue Sulfur Springs), where it joined the Lewisburg to Blue Sulfur Springs Turnpike.



MODERN ROAD MAP OF THE ROUTE OF PRICE'S TURNPIKE  
BETWEEN NEW CASTLE AND COVINGTON

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