

# Braddock's Road

## ~ Traffic ~

*Braddock's Road* was the first road to cross overland through the Appalachian Mountains. He insisted that the road be 12 feet wide so that horse-drawn wagons could travel on it to haul the necessary supplies for his advancing army.

The crossing of Laurel Hill was an arduous task for Braddock's army, with each of the four eight-inch howitzers requiring a nine-horse team.

With Braddock gone and the French firmly in control of the Forks, the road began to revert back to the Indian path it had originally been. Dense weeds soon covered the wagon ruts. Thick underbrush developed. Soon saplings began to appear in the roadbed.

Without repair and hard surface, *Braddock's Road* became impassable. The pioneers who subsequently trekked into western Pennsylvania usually preferred to depend on pack-horse trails. They would organize a caravan with a master driver to carry their local products to market. They loaded their packhorses with hides, gingseng, snakeroot, bear's grease, and rye. They wound slowly around spongy swamps, crossed rocky slopes and steep mountains to reach merchants at Hagerstown and Cumberland. On their return trip, they hauled salt, nails, iron, and gunpowder.

George Washington returned to *Braddock's Road* in 1784, traveling on horseback with his nephew, his friend Dr. James Craik, Craik's son, and several servants. Washington saw the need for a road West to "make a smooth way for the Produce of that Country to pass to our Markets." His return visit to the Alleghenies was in part for the purpose of inspecting property he owned there, but it also allowed him to evaluate the old road's suitability for future East-West travel. The road had been used very little during the Revolutionary War and in the years thereafter. But even though the wilderness was creeping back, Washington found it less primitive than on his first trip. He saw taverns here and there and landmarks which were becoming familiar to travelers. He recorded his impressions in a journal. ". . . Dined at Mr. Thomas Gists at the Foot of Laurel [Hill], distant from the Meadows 12 Miles, and arrived at Gilbert Simpsons' [on *Braddock's Road*, north of Uniontown] about 5 o'clock 12 Miles further. Crossing the Mountains, I found tedious and fatiguing, . . . in all parts of the *Road* that would admit it I endeavoured to ride my usual traveling gate of 5 Miles an hour."

## ~ Features ~

*Nemacolin's Wilderness Path*, over which George Washington and Christopher Gist traveled in 1753 was an important early route to the West, even in its primitive state. It was barely two feet wide in most places.

Fort Duquesne occupied a strategic location "where the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers poured their waters from the south and north into the great westward-curving stream that the Mohawk Indians called O-he-yo, and the French, La Belle Riviere." Washington referred to this in his journal as "the Forks." --P. D. Jordan, *The National Road*

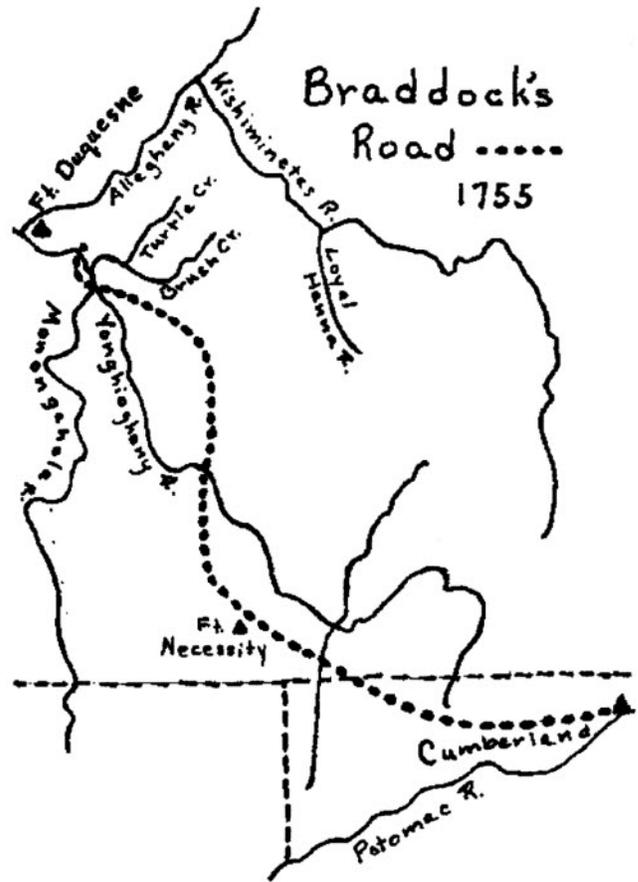
On loan to Braddock in 1755 were thirty seamen from the British navy's North American Station at Hampton Roads. Their role with the expedition was to use their knowledge of ropes and rigging to get the heavily loaded military wagons, and especially the gun carriages, down the steep Allegheny slopes. The horses had sufficient power to go uphill; but the wagon brakes were inadequate for going down. The seamen used block and tackle to control the rate of descent.

In 1758, when British General John Forbes planned a new advance on Fort Duquesne, he ignored the pleas of Colonel Washington to use *Braddock's Road* again. By now it was heavily defended by the Indian forces of the French. Forbes' plan was to send Colonel Washington with a small force up *Braddock's Road* to keep the French occupied, then build a new road further north and sweep down on the French by surprise. Forbes slowly built his road and finally arrived at Ft. Duquesne, only to discover that the French had abandoned it. The all-important forks of the Ohio has remained in British-American control to the present day.

An enabling act for admission of Ohio to the Union contained provisions for construction of a road linking East and West. It was then decided that the first portion of the road would follow close to *Braddock's Road*. Construction contracts on the *National Road* (first called the *Cumberland Road*) were let in 1811. Each contractor used his own crews, sometimes sub-letting contracts. A strip 66 feet wide had to be cleared of all trees and underbrush, grubbing out the roots, then leveling the roadbed to 30 feet in width, which was a pick-and-shovel job. Hills had to be cut down and earth, rock and stones hauled away. It was necessary to fill culverts and bridge abutments, hollows, and valleys. Side slopes could not exceed 30 degrees. Twenty feet of the road surface was to be covered with stones ranging in depth from 12 inches to 18 inches. Over that would be stone broken small enough to pass through a three-inch ring.

~ *Timeline* ~  
**Braddock's Road**

- 1752 The Ohio Company of Virginia engages Colonel Thomas Cresap to supervise the blazing of a path from Cumberland, Maryland, to its trading post on the Monongahela River (present-day Brownsville, PA). Cresap employs the Delaware Indian Nema-colin to mark the trail, and it becomes known as *Nemacolin's Path*.
- 1753 Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie sends young Major George Washington to Fort LeBoeuf (Waterford, PA) to tell the French to withdraw from British territory. At Cumberland, MD, Washington is joined by Christopher Gist, an experienced woodsman.
- 1754 Dinwiddie sends Washington with a small army to expel the French. To accommodate his supply wagons, it is necessary to widen the trail. For a time it bears the name *Washington's Road*. He reaches Great Meadows where he stands his ground against the French at a hastily built fortification which he names Ft. Necessity. He is forced to surrender it to the French on July 4.
- 1755 Major General Edward Braddock is given orders from the British government to subdue Ft. Duquesne and perhaps move against Ft. Niagara. A company of 600 soldiers set out from Ft. Cumberland to widen Washington's old road through Maryland, past the ruins of Fort Necessity into western Pennsylvania, moving toward the French stronghold at the Forks of the Ohio.
- 1755 On July 9, after safely fording the Monongahela, Braddock's troops are suddenly in an exposed position before the enemy. The French and Indians nestle in the weeds and thickets and behind trees while Braddock's men are ordered to maintain perfect formation to fight in the continental style. Then amongst the dead and wounded, Braddock himself falls, a slug tearing through his arm and lodging in his lung; he dies a few days later and is buried at Ft. Necessity, in the center of his road.
- 1813 Travelers are using the new *Cumberland Road*, which roughly follows the old *Braddock's Road*. By year's end, the first 10 miles is completed and a second stretch of 11 miles is nearly finished.



**Route of Braddock's Road**

Braddock's axe men cut a 12-foot road through the tree-covered slopes of Maryland and Pennsylvania, connecting the Potomac River at Cumberland, Maryland, with the Monongahela River at Turtle Creek just south of what today is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The route went from Fort Cumberland over Savage Mountain, on to Little Meadows and the future site of Grantsville, then over Negro Mountain to Great Crossings and on past Fort Necessity, near the present town of Farmington, PA.

Braddock's military route followed that which Washington had used by widening the old *Nemacolin Trail*. It subsequently carried the *National Road* through the Allegheny Mountains.

Today's U.S. Highway 40 follows nearly the same route from Cumberland, MD, to Pittsburgh, PA.