

# The Fall Line Road

## ~ Traffic ~

A road system developed along the Fall Line where it was easy to cross rivers. The *Fall Line Road* wasn't subject to the ocean tides or marshes. Except for brief periods of flooding, the road could be used year round. It was the continent's first all-weather road.

Cities developed all along the Fall Line as transportation centers. The inland rivers there could be forded easily, and at those locations, people could place goods from the interior on to ocean vessels. Settlements sprung up and became trade centers, connecting the interior to the ocean. The *Fall Line Road* connected the towns.

Persons traveling from Pennsylvania or Maryland to the inland areas of the Carolinas before 1750 probably followed the *King's Highway*, then connected to the *Fall Line Road*. It was an easier road to travel than the piedmont road (the *Upper Road*.)

Richmond, like Alexandria and Philadelphia, was located at a considerable distance from the ocean, yet with harbors that could accommodate ocean vessels. But it was also close to the Fall Line and prospered as a result.

Cheraw's position at the head of navigation on the Pee Dee River made it an important trade center, which grew proportionally with increased river traffic.

Augusta, Georgia, was a major frontier trading post 130 miles west by northwest from the Cooper River crossing of the *King's Highway* as it neared Charleston, South Carolina. Augusta was perpetually jammed with Indians, pack trains, river men, and traders. Each spring the traders' path from Augusta was crowded with caravans of up to thirty horses each. They would be loaded mainly with deer skins obtained from Cherokees in the Tennessee mountains or from the Creeks in Alabama and mid-Georgia, or even from the Choctaws and Chickasaws in the Mississippi Valley. The pack trains plodded down the long peninsula leading to Charleston. These pack trains were accompanied by the cursing and shouting of the traders and their hirelings as well as a cloud of flies and gnats hovering about them.

During the American Revolution, more than a dozen battles were fought within a 30 mile radius of Camden. The colonists were defeated at the Battle of Camden, August 16, 1780, but the British suffered considerable losses.

## ~ Features ~

The "Fall Line" is a geographic feature, caused by erosion. It is a separation line stretching from Maryland all the way to Georgia, running between the river tidelands and inland elevations on the Atlantic coast. The Fall Line defines an east and west division between the upper and lower elevations. It is much closer to the Atlantic in the north than it is in the south because the mountains run northeast to southwest.

An ocean ship cannot move any farther up a river than the Fall Line, the first rapid a ship reaches from the ocean. Because of this geographical barrier, settlements developed at those locations to transport goods to and from inland areas and the ships. But these transportation centers were far apart without connection until the *Fall Line Road* filled that need.

In North Carolina, local laws called for building roads "to the nearest landing." This created a haphazard system of roadways leading to water routes. Although the major towns in North Carolina soon had roads, they didn't lead to each other! The *Fall Line Road* passed from north to south through North Carolina and South Carolina and connected them to their neighbors.

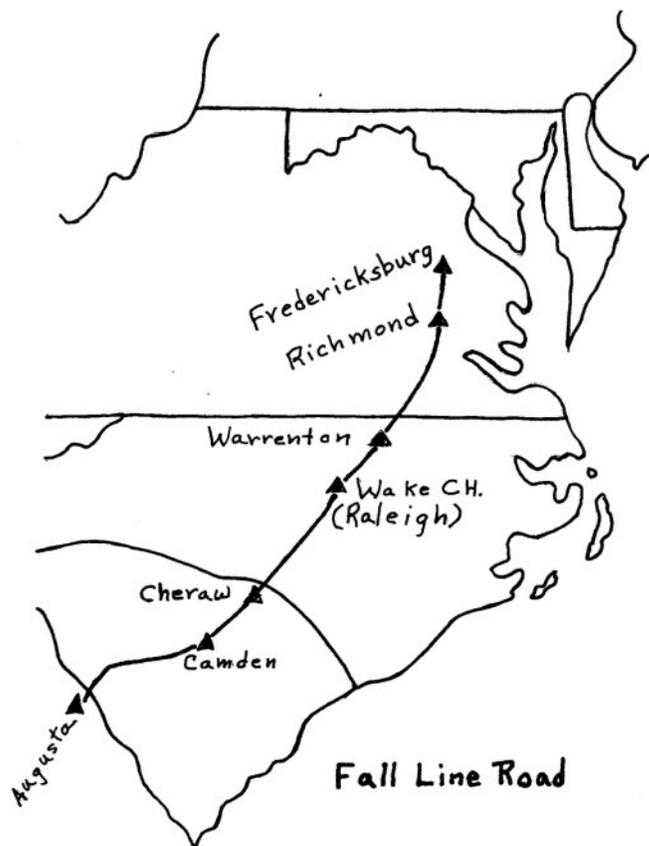
Eventually an adjoining road, the *Richmond Road*, ran from Richmond, Virginia, southwest to Ft. Chissel, providing travelers access to the *Wilderness Road* into Kentucky or north through the Shenandoah Valley.

From Augusta, four major trails radiated. One went northward along the fall line, crossing the Congaree at Columbia which was another roaring frontier post, and then moving into Catawba territory around Charlotte, North Carolina. A second trail bumped beside the rocky Savannah River until it reached the valleys of the Cherokees, an Iroquois-speaking tribe ranging from the Great Smoky Mountains to the hilly country below Chattanooga. Then the Upper Path went due west from Augusta to a segment of the Creek tribe below Atlanta. From there, Georgia traders moved into the Alabama division of the Creeks along the Tallapoosa and Coosa Rivers, and a few went on over the Old Chicasaw Path, to the villages of the small but warlike tribe around Tupelo, Mississippi. The Lower Path led southwest from Augusta to seek out another Creek division just below the falls of the Chattahoochee around modern Columbus, Georgia. Other Creeks were located near Montgomery, and in central Mississippi were the powerful Choctaws.

The road ran parallel to and between the *King's Highway* and the *Upper Road*. The route today is close to that of U.S. Highway 1 and I-95, passing through almost every major East Coast city.

~ *Timeline* ~  
**The Fall Line Road**

- 1700 By 1700, towns were being established at the Fall Line wherever there was a navigable stream.
- 1735 By this date, the *Fall Line Road*, breaking off from the *King's Highway* at Fredericksburg, is carrying traffic into the interior of Virginia and the Carolinas and across into Augusta, Georgia. *The Fall Line Road* provided both transportation and communication for the widely separated English colonies.
- 1736 Augusta, Georgia, is founded. At the head of navigation on the Savannah River and strategically located on several of the most important Indian trails, it becomes a prosperous city.
- 1750 The town which becomes known as Cheraw in South Carolina is settled before 1750 and formally laid out in 1768.
- 1751 The first settlement of what is to become Camden, South Carolina, is made in 1751 by Irish Quakers, who name it Pine Tree Hill.
- 1768 The town Pine Tree Hill has a change in name to Camden to honor Lord Camden, a friend of the Colonies.
- 1792 The city of Raleigh, North Carolina, is founded and named after Sir Walter Raleigh.
- 1821 The town of Cheraw, South Carolina, officially acquires that name from a local Indian tribe.
- 1828 The *Federal Road* is laid out, starting at Columbus, GA, and many settlers desiring to go into Alabama and Mississippi join that road by coming down the *Fall Line Road*. It is an easier path than the piedmont *Upper Road* which joins the *Federal Road* at Athens, GA.
- 1860s The *Fall Line Road* sees heavy use during the Civil War and afterwards.



**Route of the Fall Line Road**

The *Fall Line Road* cut off from the *King's Highway* at Fredericksburg, and continued south following the geographical fall line. It was the first interior route into Virginia and the Carolinas, and it went as far South as the Georgia line.

Fredericksburg, VA  
 Richmond, VA  
 Petersburg, VA  
 Warrenton, NC  
 Raleigh, NC (Wake C.H.)  
 Cheraw, SC  
 Camden, SC  
 Augusta, GA