

Zane's Trace

~ Traffic ~

"A colorful cavalcade traveled over the *Trace*. Pack horses plodded through mud and snow with mail or freight. The covered wagons of the westward-moving emigrants lurched down the hills and jolted over ruts. Stagecoaches carried mail and passengers between Wheeling and Maysville in five days by changing horses frequently. Lumbering freight wagons crept westward with merchandise from Baltimore and Philadelphia. Herds of horses and cattle raised clouds of dust on the way to eastern markets. Business men, artists, actors, adventurers, statesmen, robbers, and circuit riders used the *Trace*."

--Norris F. Schneider and Clair C. Stebbins, *Zane's Trace*.

At first, *Zane's Trace* was only a narrow dark path through the forest, between a wall of ancient trees. Only horsemen could travel over it. For many years, it was not wide enough for wagons.

The road immediately became the mail route from Wheeling to Maysville, and eventually it went on to Lexington and Nashville. As Zane had predicted, the schedules became more regular, and the service was faster, more regular, and cheaper.

"The first mail carriers over the new *Trace* rode on horseback beneath the spreading branches of great oak, beech, elm, maple, and sycamore trees that shaded the path. In some places their horses clattered along the wind-swept ridges of the divides, and in other places they swished through the tall grass of creek bottoms. For dozens of miles the mail carriers saw no living creatures except startled deer, slinking foxes, and other wild animals."

--Norris F. Schneider and Clair C. Stebbins, *Zane's Trace*.

In 1804, a wagon road was built over the entire route of *Zane's Trace*. Wagon drivers had to proceed cautiously, however, due to the stumps left in the roads. It is recorded that in 1806, it took five days for the Thomas Sarchett party to drive three wagons from St. Clairsville to Cambridge, a distance of forty miles. Taverns were spaced along the Trace at an average of four miles apart for those who could afford them. Many travelers camped out at night.

Travelers crossed streams by ferry, bridge, and ford. Ebenezer Zane ran a ferry across the Ohio River at Wheeling. Ezra Graham had a ferry at Wills Creek, but was ousted by George and Henry Beymer, who in turn were driven away by John Beatty. Benjamin Urmston had a ferry across the Scioto River at Chillicothe. Another ferry was located at Maysville.

~ Features ~

By 1796 the Ohio Country region was at last open for legal settlement. The region had been kept closed to emigrants after the French and Indian War in order to avoid conflict between Indians and the colonists; however eager pioneers began to enter the area prior to the Revolution. Then in the Revolutionary War, the colonists took the Northwest Territory from the British. And with the Ordinance of 1787, Indian claims to the region were quieted by treaty. The final Indian resistance was put down in 1794 when "Mad" Anthony Wayne defeated the tribes at Fallen Timbers.

One appeal of a road out of Wheeling was that many families going west would rather trust the dangers of the forest than the hazards of the Ohio river's snags and currents. In the winter ice locked the river, and in the summer sand bars blocked the channel.

The city of Wheeling got its name because it was the spot called by the Mingo, "Weeling," meaning "the place of the skulls." The area had always been troubled by Indian warfare.

In proposing the building of the road to the government, Zane claimed it would save 300 miles on a trip between Philadelphia, PA, and Frankfort, KY. He also said it would save 100 miles between Wheeling and Maysville. Maysville was already a busy settlement because river cargoes unloaded there to be shipped farther into the interior.

The most convincing argument for the road was the fact that the mail could be carried over the proposed road by horseback on regular and definite schedules, more cheaply and more quickly.

Colonel Zane began work on the road even before his petition was authorized. He hired axe men to fell the trees, grub out underbrush and stumps, and widen the narrow trail he had followed on his earlier exploratory trip. Zane himself went along to oversee the work.

At the Muskingum, where Licking Creek entered the river, was where Zane laid out his first town, giving the site to his brother and son-in-law. They named it Zanesville.

Zane's Trace was used by hundreds of flatboatmen returning on foot or horseback to Pittsburgh and upriver towns from downriver ports as far away as New Orleans.

~ *Timeline* ~
Zane's Trace

- 1769 Ebenezer Zane and two of his brothers (Silas and Jonathan) arrive at the mouth of Wheeling Creek on the Ohio River and found the town of Wheeling the following year.
- 1796 Colonel Ebenezer Zane petitions Congress to authorize him to build a road from Wheeling to Limestone (Maysville).
- 1796 Congress awards Colonel Zane a contract to complete the path between Wheeling and Limestone by January 1, 1797, and requires him to operate ferries across the Muskingum, Hocking, and Scioto rivers as soon as the path is open. His only compensation: three 640-acre tracts, one at each river crossing; Zane is to survey them at his own expense and send plats to the United States Treasurer.
- 1796 Zane selects his crew of workmen, including several relatives, takes food and camping equipment for a round trip crossing 230 miles of primeval forest. With axes, they cut trees and blaze a trail.
- 1797 Zane opens his *Trace* and has his three tracts surveyed, but the deeds are not signed by President Adams until 1800.
- 1802 No attempt has been made until this year to improve *Zane's Trace*. Now Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin decides to have a road laid out which will follow Zane's route between Wills Creek and Chillicothe.
- 1803 The Enabling Act by which Ohio becomes a state provides that three percent of the income from the sale of public land should be used for "laying out, opening, and making roads."
- 1804 The Legislature has appropriated about fifteen dollars a mile for making a new twenty-foot road over *Zane's route*. By modern standards it is not a good road because stumps of trees are left when under one foot high.
- 1825-1830 The section from Wheeling to Zanesville, with some changes in routing, becomes part of the *National Road* at a cost of \$3,400 a mile.



Route of Zane's Trace

Zane's proposal was to follow along the northern bank of Wheeling Creek, up the mountain ridge and down its western slope, then along the *Great Warrior's Road*—the old Mingo Trail—o the Muskingum Rvier and then go southwest to the Hocking River, then from there south to the Scioto River, and across to Maysville in Kentucky. Chillicothe was the only settlement on the route.

Josiah Espy called Zane's route "the new state road" in 1805. In 1811, John Melish referred to it as "the great state road from Pittsburgh." On old maps, it is sometimes called the *Wheeling Road*.

- Wheeling, WV
- Zanesville, OH
- Chillicothe, OH
- Maysville, KY (Limestone)