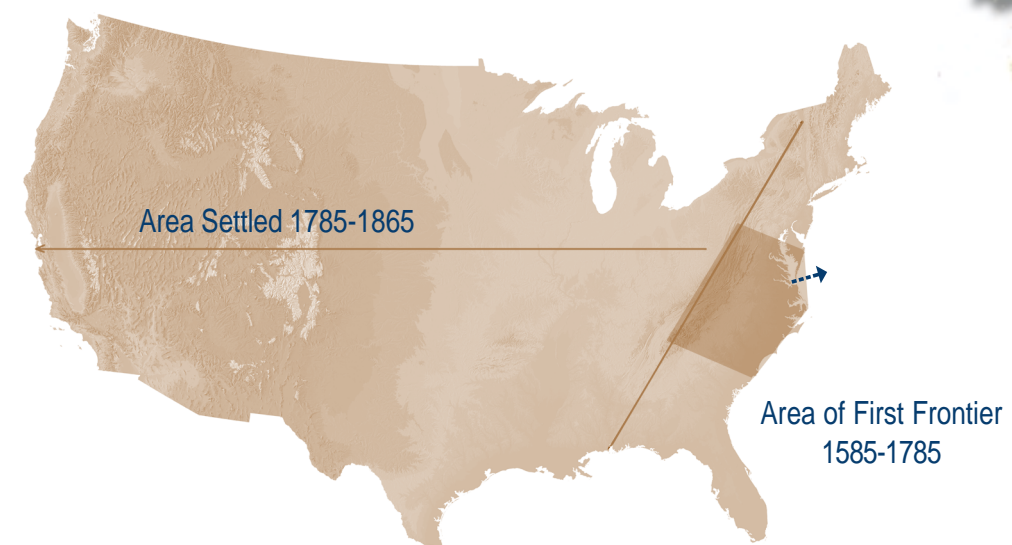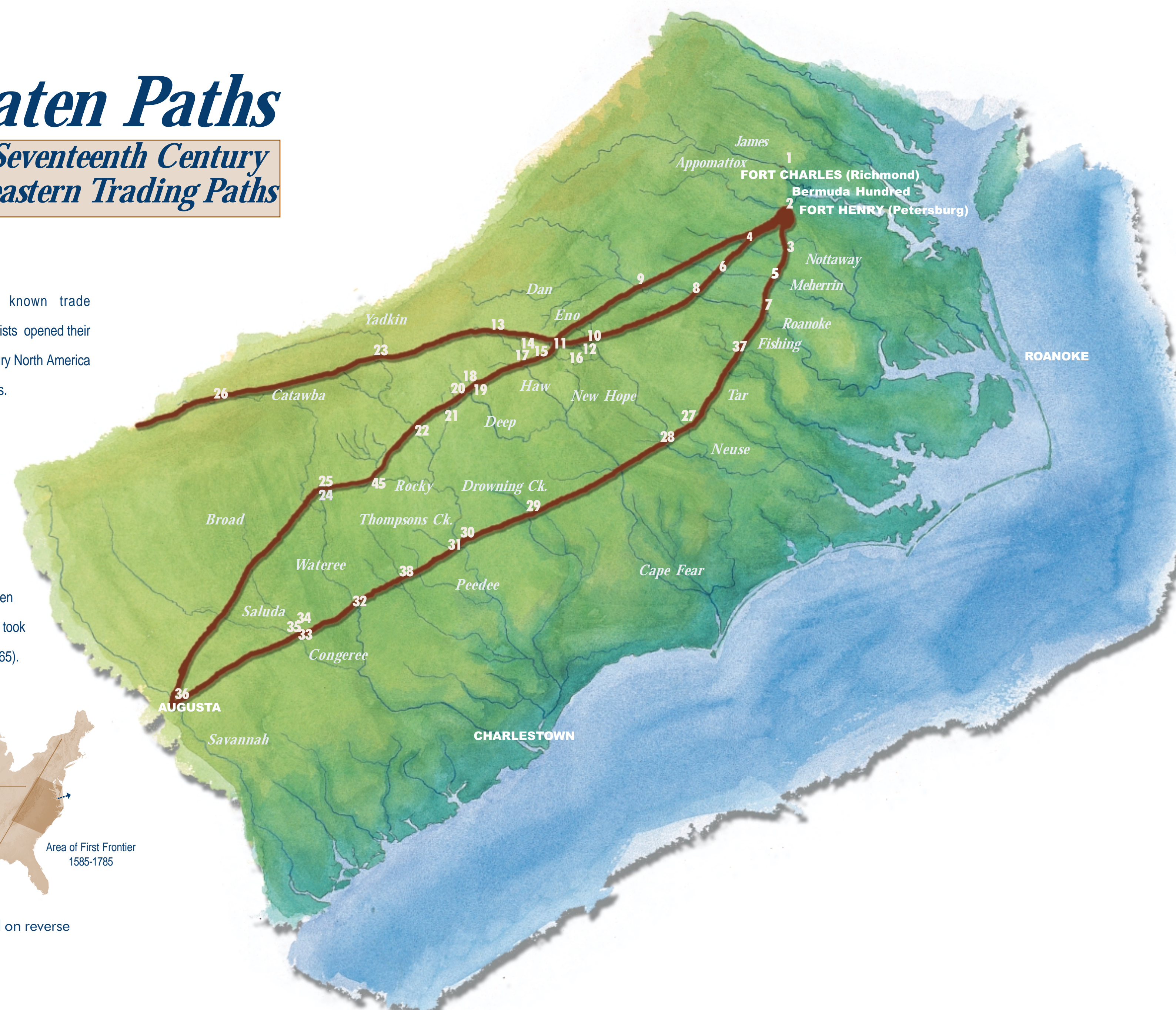# Beaten Paths

## Some Seventeenth Century Southeastern Trading Paths

This map represents the known trade channels by which English colonists opened their first frontier in seventeenth century North America in what is today Virginia and the Carolinas.

This frontier ranged from the Atlantic to the Appalachian Mountains and from Chesapeake Bay to the Savannah River. It took two hundred years for government to gain control of this terrain. For contrast, consider that settlement of the lands between the Appalachians and the Pacific Ocean took less than one hundred years (ca 1785-1865).

Area Settled 1785-1865

Area of First Frontier 1585-1785

—continued on reverse



### Map labels

James
Appomattox
FORT CHARLES (Richmond)
Bermuda Hundred
FORT HENRY (Petersburg)
Nottaway
Meherrin
Roanoke
Fishing
Dan
Eno
Yadkin
Haw
New Hope
Tar
Neuse
Catawba
Deep
Rocky
Drowning Ck.
Broad
Thompsons Ck.
Wateree
Peedee
Cape Fear
Saluda
Congeree
Savannah
AUGUSTA
CHARLESTOWN
ROANOKE

## fords

1. Fort Charles
2. Fort Henry
3. Nottoway 1
4. Nottoway 2
5. Meherrin 1
6. Meherrin 2
7. Roanoke 1/Roanoke Rapids
8. Roanoke 2/Moniseep
9. Roanoke 3/Occaneechi Island
10. Flat River 1/Harris Mill
11. Eno 1/Fawcette Mill
12. Eno 2/Salisbury Rd
13. Haw 4/Ossippi
14. Haw 1/Haw River
15. Haw 3/Swepsonville
16. New Hope 1/Adshusheer
17. Great Alamance Ck 1
18. Deep River 1
19. Deep River 2/Naomi
20. Carraway 1
21. Uhwarrie 1
22. Yadkin 1/Trading Ford
23. Yadkin 2/Shallow Ford
24. Catawba 1/Nations Ford
25. Sugar Ck 1/Pineville
26. Catawba 2/Quaker Meadows
27. Little River 1/Kenly
28. Neuse 1/Smithfield
29. Drowning Ck 1
30. Peedee 1/Cheraw
31. Thompson Ck 1
32. Wateree 1
33. Congeree 1
34. Broad River 1
35. Saluda 1
36. Savannah 1/Augusta
37. Fishing Ck 1
38. Lynches Ck 1

## rivers & creeks

James River
Appomattox River
Nottoway River
Meherrin River
Staunton River
Dan River
Roanoke River

Fishing Creek
Tar River
Neuse River
Flat River
Little River
Eno River
South River

Cape Fear River
New Hope Creek
Haw River
Deep River
Lynches Ck
Thompsons Ck
Peedee River

Carraway CK
Uhwarrie River
Rocky River
Irish Broad Ck
Yadkin River
Wateree River
Sugar Creek

Catawba River
Congeree River
Broad River
Saluda River
Savannah River

## Trading Path Preservation Association mission

The Trading Path Preservation Association's goal is to find, protect and study the archaeological remnants of the Contact Era on England's first New World frontier.

# Trading Path Preservation Association

—Continued from front

**What little we know about this moment in history is intriguing.** We know that in the backcountry of the southeast Red, White, and Black folk survived together 'for generations without benefit of law or clergy.' They erected a society unique to that moment which continues to shape our sense of who we are to this day.

**Religious and political refugees**, escaped indentured servants and slaves, and assorted other folk fled or were taken into the backcountry from the moment English colonists arrived at Roanoke Island (1585) and, later, at Jamestown(1607). They blended with the Indian peoples and created a culture and society far different from anything imagined by enlightenment theorists and imperialists in the Old World. Government, tied to the seaports, lagged far behind the people in the southeastern backcountry, so the region evolved beyond the measure of record keepers and therefore outside the view of historians.

*Fayetteville Pike remnant*

**We are confident** that remnants of the Contact Era persist as artifacts in the ground. We are also certain that, if we do not find and protect those remnants in the next decade, urban sprawl will make this impossible. We must find and protect these remains. We shall do so by first finding the routes of travel.

**Southeastern geography** is unusual in that, above the tidewater areas, the rivers of the southeast are mostly unnavigable. Furthermore, flowing from northwest to southeast, they were major barriers to movement north and south, passable only at shallow water fording places. Travelers in the backcountry, therefore, moved on paths, trails, and roads from ford to ford. At the fords and in predictable concentrations along the trails between the fords we will find the archaeological remnants of the first frontier. In summary: find the fords, find the trails, find the remnants and they will tell the story.

*Footpath at "Moniseep" Ford*

**"Contact Era," "Frontier," and "Settlement"**
**Contact Era** is a concept dependent on the perspective of the observer. Native Americans might date the Contact Era from the arrival of European fishermen or Norse explorers who visted North America before 1000 CE. We won't do so. Nor will we pay attention to Spanish and French contact, even though it was earlier and possibly more intense than that of the English colonists in the southeast. For our purposes, the Contact Era begins in 1585 at Roanoke with the first English settlement.

**Frontiers** are stateless places described, if at all, by what they are not. They are lawless, but not ungoverned, boundless yet contained, indefinite space between seats of authority. If a frontier is bounded at al,l it is by conflicting authorities unable to control it. Frontiers, it may be said, occupy space vacant of authority, exist in the absence of authority, and fill voids between authorities. Absent authority, order, and an overarching, dominant government, the sheltered and privileged context required for a market economy to persist, frontier economies are subsistence economies. This one feature perhaps best sums up the difference between frontier and settlement and establishes a precondition for conflict between these two paragons of early American societies.

**Settlements**, be they European or Native American, were governed. In settlements authorities exerted an exclusive monopoly on the legitimate use of force. English settlements aspired to be marketplaces and centers of commerce. Native American villages, frequently seasonally occupied, were adjuncts to subsistence. Cashless barter processes, sufficient in a subsistence economy such as one finds in frontier zones, can not support European-style government. Government needs markets and production in excess of subsistence to provide taxes.

**Roads** were the first needs of settlement. Settlers carried their goods and chattels with them in wagons, a vehicle not likely to have been a part of frontier transportation. While footpaths and horse trails sufficed for frontier subsistence communities, a market economy needs roads. These pre-modern channels of transport, paths, trails, and roads are the evolutionary links between the contact era (the era of the first frontier) and settlement.

**Pre-modern transportation** means transportation powered by muscle. For all of human history prior to the use of modern motive force, land travel proceeded at a very predictable pace. Except under emergency circumstances, transportation moved at two and one-half miles per hour or, depending on natural obstacles, from ten to twenty miles per day and travel was all by daylight. On long trips, every five or six days travelers rested for a day or two to repair footwear, hooves, and harness and for the recuperation of livestock and humans alike. As in our own times, economics dictated that, no matter the mode of transportation, travel be accomplished in the least time over the shortest possible distance consistent with the purpose of the trip and the capabilities of the different modes of carriage.

**Humans can regularly carry** tens of pounds, animals hundreds of pounds, and wagons thousands of pounds. Different limitations applied to each mode of carriage, thus, which path, trail, or road one used depended almost entirely on one's mode of transportation. There were routes compatible with all three modes of transportation. Many horse trails followed footpaths, and many wagon roads lie on top of horse-trails that overlay footpaths, but not all. As a rule, foot paths were the most direct route between points and wagon roads were the least direct, with horse trails falling somewhere between the two extremes. Variation in capability between humans, horses, and wagons is particularly evident at river fords.

**Fords in the backcountry** of the southeast governed travels. In the southeast, particularly when moving along a north-south axis, it is nearly impossible to find a twenty-mile stretch of passable terrain that contains no stream crossings. Until the advent of bridges, stream crossings confronted travelers with their most arduous and hazardous obstacles. Fording was therefore a daily necessity and a terror. There's little wonder that one of the most famous hymns to come out of the southeast is "One More River to Cross."

*Fork in a 19th century wagon road*

**Foot fords, horse fords, and wagon fords** share common basic elements. Fords all consist of approaches, exits, and water crossings. Humans can handle the steepest approach or exit at a good crossing, and they can cross on stream bottoms that would defeat horses or wagons. On the other hand, owing to greater weight and to greater inherent stability, horses and wagons can resist water pressure that would sweep away even the strongest human. Horses can traverse cobbled stream bottoms that would destroy a wagon and weave through a boulder field that would block a wagon. Therefore, we find more foot fords than horse fords and more horse fords than wagon fords.

**In almost all cases of pre-modern paths**, trails, and roads, there was more than one route from every point "A" to every point "B" – the high road and the low road. "High" and "low" described both the relative position of fords on streams intersecting a route and the place of a given track on the terrain. Low roads were lower down the stream course, usually along valley bottoms, where in dry weather movement was most energy efficient. High roads ran along or near ridgelines and cut streams higher up the channel, where there was less water flow to obstruct crossing. The need for high and low roads leads us to conclude that what came to be called trading paths, trails, or roads were

*Horse Path at "Moniseep" Ford*

*Hikers on 18th century roadbed*

not singularities comparable to interstate highways. They were, rather, corridors of braided trails leading to alternative stream crossings. The thread one followed through the braid was a function of weather conditions, transportation mode, and social factors. We want to know more about the "social" factors.

**Our search**, therefore, is for the remaining evidence of Contact Era society. We'll start with the simple, the geophysical, the fords. They will point us to the paths, trails, and roads; complex, interwoven and interrelated, visible reminders of human needs and ingenuity. Along these ancient arteries of commerce we will dig up the even more complex remnants of our first frontier.

## Trading Path Preservation Association

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**The Trading Path Preservation Association gratefully acknowledges the support of these Sponsors:**

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*Wagon ford on upper New Hope Creek*

## About this map

Beaten Paths was created in five stages. The first stage entailed defining the southeast and its current hydrology with ESRI's ArcView GIS system. This map was turned over to the graphic artist who transferred it to a sheet of translucent tracing paper. At this stage all but the primary rivers were removed as were all reservoirs and other artificial lakes. Using historic maps, we manually reconstituted the river channels to what was their likely seventeenth century forms. Bryan Dobyns then painted in the terrain using water colors. This product was photographed and the photo digitized. Trails, numbers and names were added to the digitized image.

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