



## Negro Head Point Road



### Introduction

Ferryboats, like the one in the illustration above, crossed the Cape Fear River from the Wilmington docks to Negro Head Point for centuries. The peninsula, known as Negro Head Point, is created by the confluence of the Northeast and Northwest Cape Fear Rivers. In colonial times this "point" was the site of wharves and a tavern. Negro Head Point was known for its holding pens for slaves marketed in Wilmington. Plantation slaves were kept at the point before and after auctions to reduce contact with free blacks and urban slaves. These factors, along with the periodic "head" counts used to ensure no slave had escaped, earned the site its name.

Negro Head Point Road took its name from this terminus as it wound its way to colonial Campbelltown and Cross Creek (present day Fayetteville). The road appears on maps as early as 1743. Moore's Creek National Battlefield protects a remnant of this historic trace used by Patriot and Loyalist forces during the Moore's Creek Bridge Campaign in 1776.

### Slavery

By the 1700s West Africans had developed advanced technological societies. Possessing refined farming techniques and being accustomed to a tropical climate, West Africans became an attractive source of labor for the New World's agricultural and economic demands. Tragically, they arrived as slaves.

By the time of the American Revolution, 350,000 people lived in North Carolina. About one-third were of African descent, and most were held as slaves. Sadly many of our nation's founders felt slavery and indentured servitude were as much a part of the natural order as liberty and equality.



Although only a small percentage of slaves lived on large plantations, their accommodations were spartan at best. Surviving slave quarters are generally found in towns where conditions were often better and public opinion demanded more gentle treatment of "servants."



## Transportation in Colonial America

Early European settlers in North America found a wilderness without roads or bridges. Native Americans, having no wheeled vehicles or draft animals, traveled by foot along primitive trails or canoed the many waterways.

Europeans established the first colonial towns along waterways. As the population grew, the need for access to interior land increased. A "labor tax" paid for the construction and repair of roads and bridges. An Act of the North Carolina Assembly in 1732 required all able-bodied men to work six days each year on these projects. That same year broad guidelines were established for road and bridge construction.



Negro Head Point Road as it looks today

## Colonial Road Construction

In 1764 the North Carolina Assembly enacted additional specifications for road and bridge construction. For example, "highways" were to be 20 feet wide and built with ditches along the edge. Earth placed on the roadbed made it higher than the landscape and less likely to flood. Causeways had to be built in swampy areas that are common in much of eastern North Carolina.

These causeways were built by laying logs on the ground, covering them with earth, laying down another layer of logs and covering them with earth. The process was repeated until an adequate road level was obtained. Bridges were to be 10-13 feet wide with rails. Decking consisted of sawed planks covered with earth. Even well maintained bridges lasted a maximum of 15 years before needing to be replaced.



## Walking a Historic Road



Negro Head Point Road was used for many different purposes: transportation of goods, military use, and perhaps the beginning of a road to freedom for a runaway slave.

You can get a sense of colonial travel by walking a remnant of the Negro Head Point Road as it crosses the park.

To walk this trace follow the Tar Heel Trail to the tar kiln and the rail fence. At this point the historic "highway" is easy to see to your right. Leave the Tar Heel Trail and walk across the entrance road where you will see signs designating the historic road. Walk down this shady lane and along the tree line. Make a sharp left towards the battlefield and earthworks. Here the historic trace becomes a sandy road and continues to the bridge spanning Moores Creek.

By crossing the bridge you can see the trace as it cut through Colonel Richard Caswell's abandoned camp-site. It was this approach the loyalists used on their march to the sea to rendezvous with British forces at Port Brunswick.

As you walk, imagine marching this road as a Minuteman under Colonel Alexander Lillington. No noise from automobiles or aircraft intrudes and the woods thrive with wildlife. Finally, imagine the freedom and challenges of life in the 1770s and ponder the opportunity you would have had to participate in the creation of our nation.