

Bridges to the Past:

The Historic Louisville and Nashville Turnpike



Self-Guided Historic Walking Trail 2 Miles – Gentle Slope, Hard Road Surface, Handicap Accessible

Fort Knox Military Reservation, Kentucky

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Army Garrison Fort Knox welcomes you to the BRIDGES TO THE PAST walking tour. The tour will take you along a preserved portion of the historic Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Turnpike. The tour is approximately 2 miles in length and is an easy route along a gently sloping paved road surface.

The tour passes through an area of Fort Knox that is used for military training. As a result, the turnpike is occasionally posted as Off Limits to the public. Visitors are required to remain on the paved road surface, except where walkways have been provided to allow visitors to view the bridges.

The L&N Turnpike tour features 10 points of interest. Each numbered location is described in this brochure.

The L&N Turnpike was constructed in the 1830s. It was the first improved road in this area to provide a route out of the Ohio River bottomlands. The turnpike was closed to public traffic shortly after Camp Knox was established in 1918 because the road was too near areas intended for artillery ranges.

The Louisville and Nashville Turnpike was constructed through the Muldraugh Hill region. Muldraugh Hill is a ring of continuous hills south of Louisville occurring west of the Knobs Region. It is a steep escarpment separating the geologically older Bluegrass Region on the north and east from the younger Pennyrile (Mississippian Plateau) Region on the south and west. This escarpment is comprised of erodible Mississippian-age shales which are capped by Mississippian-age limestones. This area has numerous underground springs and sinkholes due to the erosion of the bedrock. These rocks were formed approximately 350 million years ago during the Mississippian Period when a warm, shallow tropical sea covered the region. Near the end of the Mississippian Period, low coastal plains covered much of Kentucky. Mississippian age fossils found in the limestone include corals, trilobites, snails, clams, crinoids and blastoids, squid-like animals, and fish. Additionally, land plants such as ferns, scale trees, and calamite trees grew in the coastal plains and remnants

of these may be found among the fossils. Outcrops of exposed limestone bedrock are common in the Muldraugh Hill portion of Fort Knox.



After its completion, the L&N Turnpike became a popular stagecoach route. The new road now allowed travelers from Louisville to reach Nashville in three days. Famous travelers of the road include writer Bayard Taylor and Swedish singer Jenny Lind.



During the Civil War, 1861-65, the turnpike was an important route for the military. It was traveled extensively by the Union Army and at times by small detachments from the Confederate Army. In September 1862, General Don Carlos Buell used this road to march his Army of the Ohio toward Louisville in an effort to defend that city against a possible attack by the Confederate Army under General Braxton Bragg. Guerrillas, who terrorized the Army and civilians alike, also traveled the turnpike. No major battles occurred in this area during the war.



POINTS OF INTEREST

The L&N Turnpike tour and the Tioga Falls National Recreation Trail begin along a section of old Dixie Highway, the forerunner of modern US 31W. In the early 20th century, the L&N Turnpike would briefly be part of Dixie Highway. States began work on a “New” Dixie Highway in 1915. This section of the L&N Turnpike was bypassed by a new section of Dixie Highway. Now known as Railroad Trestle Road, the new highway turned west while the L&N Turnpike continued south. By the 1930s, 31W would replace that Old Dixie Highway as the new present day Dixie Highway.

As you begin the tour, you will pass under the steel trestle of the Paducah and Nashville Railroad. The railroad was originally part of the Elizabethtown and Paducah Railroad and later the Illinois Central Railroad. The railroad, including the trestle, was constructed in 1873.

On the right is the East Fork of Tioga Creek. The source of the creek is approximately 1.5 miles to the south near the extinct town of Pleasant View (Pleasant View Cemetery remains on Fort Knox) and empties into the Ohio River in Meade County.

#1. The Louisville and Nashville Turnpike was an overland transportation route widely used between the mid-1830s and 1860s. Use of the road for products and goods traveling between Louisville and Nashville diminished after 1859 when the Louisville and

Nashville Railroad (located east of Fort Knox) was constructed. The turnpike was meant as a thoroughfare for farmers and businessmen from Louisville to the Kentucky/Tennessee state line. Construction began in 1837 and by 1849 the road reached the Kentucky state line 108 miles to the south. This section of the turnpike was constructed with the revolutionary construction method using crushed stone, also known as macadamized construction. John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836), a Scottish Engineer, developed this method which used crushed stone to form a smooth water-resistant roadway in a time when roads were often muddy and uneven with wagon ruts. The Louisville and Nashville Turnpike was constructed with three layers of limestone. The first layer was made up of large limestone blocks, 10 to 12 inches in diameter. The second layer was constructed of limestone between 4 and 6 inches in diameter. The top layer consisted of 1 inch limestone compacted into the second layer. Drainage ditches excavated along the sides of the road carried water away from the roadbed. This construction method created a road that was passable any time of the year. Today an asphalt surface covers the underlying limestone macadamized road.

#2. This hollow-out section of the rock face was a small quarry where limestone was removed for construction of the turnpike. Limestone is a rock made up of calcium carbonate. It was formed from shells, corals, and other sea creatures encased in clay and sand and compressed for thousands of years. Limestone is very useful for construction of buildings, roads, bridges, and to produce lime. In the mid-1800s, rock was quarried using gunpowder to blast the rock loose. Often, holes would be drilled into the stone; gunpowder would be placed down the hole and ignited. This was a dangerous job and many accidents occurred.

#3. This location contains ruins from a mill that was operated around the first quarter of the 19th century by Ezekiel Field (1773-1858). His brothers, Joseph and Reuben, were members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition that explored the Louisiana Purchase and Pacific Northwest between 1803-1806.

#4. The turnpike crosses the East Fork of Tioga Creek on the first of three limestone arch bridges that are over 150 years old. These limestone bridges are among the

oldest standing in Kentucky. Irish laborers earning fifty cents per day constructed the road and the bridges. In the 1940s, just over 100 years after the bridges were constructed, German Prisoners of War interned at Fort Knox in the 1940s helped repair the bridges.

#5. This road led up to the Shady Grove School, which was operated from 1891-1919. Like many rural schools of the area, it was a one room, wood frame schoolhouse. No remnants of the school remain.

#6. On the left is an area that was known as Cedar Point. The metal, asphalt and rock were placed here in recent years to curb erosion caused by the strong current of the creek. As you pass Cedar Point, look back and note the remnant of a stone retaining wall the original builders designed to control erosion and support the roadbed.

#7. This is the second of the old stone bridges used to cross the East Fork of Tioga Creek. The road crosses the creek and then doubles back to cross on the third of the old stone bridges.

#8. This is the third and final bridge on the tour. After you cross this bridge, look back at the splendid use of the keystone on the arch. These keystones are at the uppermost point of the arch and hold the whole structure in place.

#9. On the left is Siebolt Cave. The cave is named after August Siebolt, an immigrant German farmer on whose land the cave was located. Farmers in this area would cool their milk, cream and butter in the cave before taking it to market in West Point.

#10. On the right is Dripping Springs, a well known local landmark. In fact, the natives of this area often referred to this old road as Dripping Springs Road. In the 1800s, drovers would camp here with their livestock on the way to the stockyards in Louisville. Approximately one mile beyond the gate, this road merges with Wilson Road and passes through Fort Knox.

SAFETY REGULATIONS

The BRIDGES TO THE PAST tour of the historic L&N Turnpike enters an area of Fort Knox Military Reservation that is used for military training. There is a risk of unexploded ordnance (artillery shells, grenades, rockets, bombs, etc.) due to the types of training conducted over the years. For this reason, visitors must remain in designated hiking areas.

Motorized vehicles, bicycles, skateboards, horses, etc., are not permitted beyond the parking lot.

Except where walkways have been provided for viewing bridge construction, visitors are required to remain on the hard road surface.

Vegetation is not to be disturbed. The area has an abundance of poison ivy.

Children under 16 years of age must be under the supervision of a person 21 years of age or older.

No alcohol, drugs, firearms, metal detectors, fireworks, glass bottles or containers are permitted.

Anyone violating these safety regulations, or otherwise committing an unsafe act, will be required to depart the Fort Knox Military Reservation.

NOTE

Training missions may require the site to be closed to the public. Warning signs will be posted to inform visitors. Contact the Fort Knox Environmental Management Division, Cultural Resource Office at 502-624-6581 for additional information about potential closures or other information regarding the Bridges to the Past/Historic L&N Turnpike.

Trail located approximately 1 mile south of West Point, KY on 31W or 8 miles north of Fort Knox Main Gate on 31W.

Map Showing Location of Trail

