

OUTDOOR INDIANA

JULY/AUGUST 2018 \$4

BUFFALO TRACE

MIAMI, 1812

UP CLOSE
PHOTOGRAPHY

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN INDIANA

TOGETHER WE WILL

- Grow our public lands for future generations.
- Protect and restore our native forests, prairies and wetlands.
- Encourage youth to embrace our natural and cultural heritage.
- Improve our health and quality of life.
- Support Outdoor Indiana magazine.



DONATE AT
IndianaNRF.org

Natural Resources Foundation
402 W. Washington St. W256
Indianapolis, IN 46204
317-234-5447

MAKE MEMORIES THIS SUMMER



“Places to see and things to do” is no exaggeration for summer in Indiana.

From the shores of Lake Michigan at Indiana Dunes State Park to Harrison-Crawford State Forest, adventure awaits in many forms and beautiful landscapes. Indiana is home to tons of trails that help tell the story of our history and heritage.

An example from the past is the Buffalo Trace Trail, which is featured on pages 20–29. It’s one of many Indiana attractions worth a drive, no matter where you live.

The Buffalo Trace is located along much of U.S. 150 and State Road 56, and across several counties. Driving those roads allows you to see where bison migrated between Illinois and Kentucky. Bison were not the trace’s only frequent travelers. Historically

significant figures such as George Rogers Clark led troops back from Fort Sackville via the Buffalo Trace. While there is little left of the actual trail, many roads wind through the hills of southern Indiana nearby, giving perspective of what once was.

No matter what your summer outdoor adventure in Indiana, I invite you to share your experiences. Send a few of your best photos to OI@dnr.IN.gov for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue of Outdoor Indiana’s Reader Photos (see next page for details). To improve chances of your photo being selected, find an uncommon and unique location that might catch other readers’ attention. If selected, maybe you can help us introduce them to a new place as well as create a lasting memory for you and yours. □

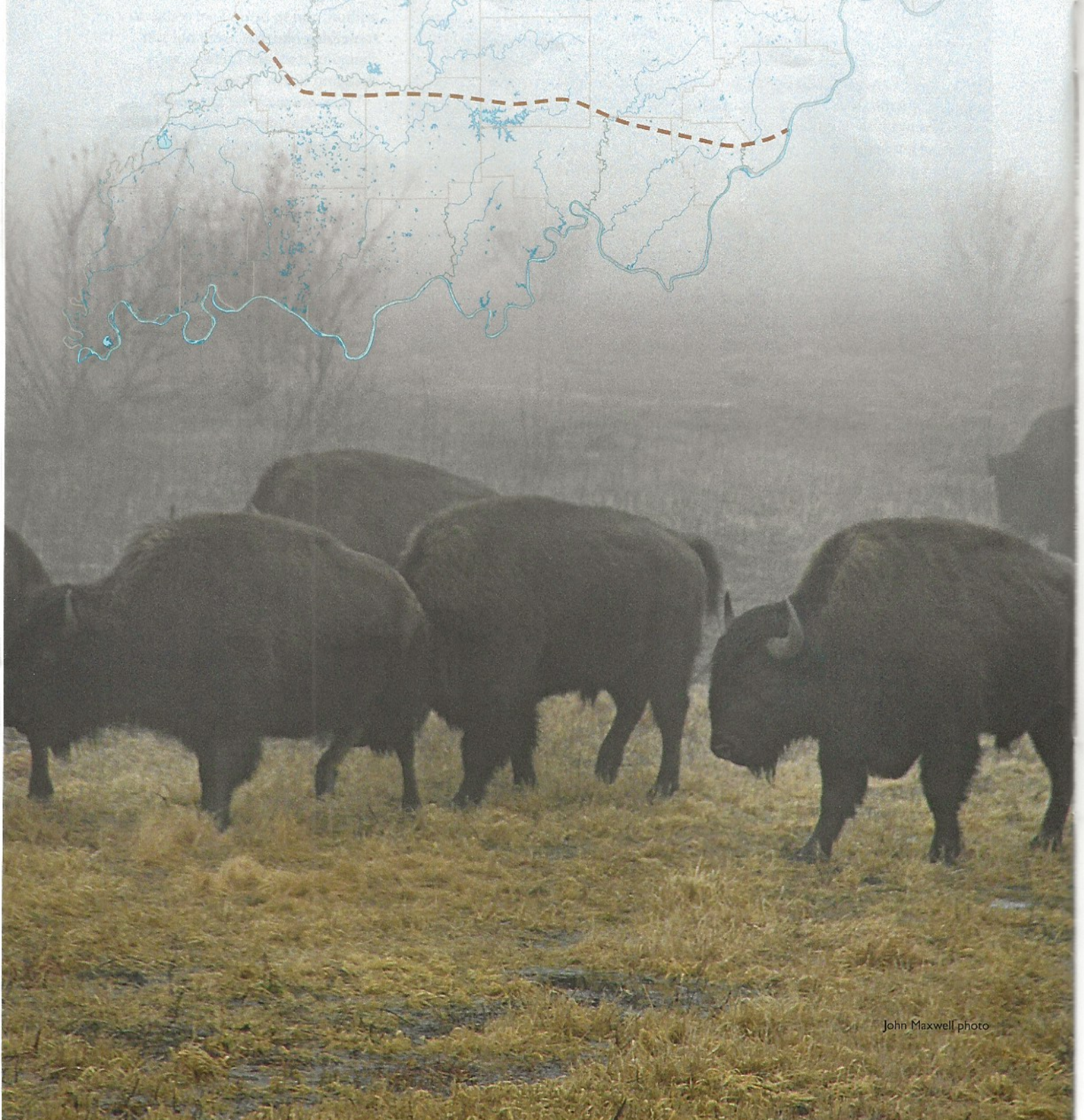
Tara M Wolf

Tara M. Wolf
tmwolf@dnr.IN.gov



Retracing the BUFFALO TRACE

Pathway leads back to time bison roamed the state



John Maxwell photo

You can see that an ancient highway cuts through southern Indiana.

If you know where to look.

It's called the Buffalo Trace. Long sections have vanished from the earth's surface, swallowed by nature or buried by man. This path survives in various, fragmented forms, like a winding Morse code message scrawled across a map.

David Ruckman knows where to look. The land surveyor from Floyd County understands the trace almost like an Indianapolis commuter knows Interstate 465. He pointed out remnants last summer during a drive through the countryside in the Floyds Knobs area. On winding county roads near his home office, his white Jeep Renegade rambled over steep, wooded hills, past sprawling, gated estates and alongside scenic cattle farms.

That blacktop driveway into the trees?

Buffalo Trace, he said.

That barely visible logging trail?

Buffalo Trace.

That tractor path where a farmer crosses Little Indian Creek?

Also Buffalo Trace.

"As a surveyor, whether you like it or not, you become a historian," Ruckman said with the subtle, Kentucky-like drawl of a Hoosier born on the Ohio River.

In recent years he tackled a project that required he become more—part Daniel Boone, part Sherlock Holmes. For the first time in modern history, he led a team of surveyors that uncovered and mapped the Buffalo Trace from Clarksville in the east to Vincennes in the west.

The undertaking was part of a larger, all-volunteer initiative sponsored by Hoosier National Forest to shed light on an element of Indiana history that has largely been overlooked, both literally and figuratively.

As its name suggests, the trace developed in part as a migratory path for American bison from their summer grazing lands in the tallgrass prairies of what is now Illinois to their winter home in what is now Kentucky. The weather was warmer in Kentucky, and rich pasturelands and abundant mineral licks sustained the herds. Bison forded the Wabash River at shallows in modern-day Vincennes and forded the Ohio at the Falls of the Ohio.

"It's just a cow path," Ruckman joked. "Why would we care about a cow path?"

But, as Ruckman knows, the path didn't just connect wildlife habitats. Like a ribbon, it tied together elements of human history, too, starting with the pre-Colombian era and lasting through the 1800s. The trace was where European-American and indigenous cultures collided, sometimes violently. It was how early settlers developed inland Indiana, and, eventually, it served as a post road and major thoroughfare.

"They set out to make sure that history wasn't lost," said Laura Renwick, a community preservation specialist with Indiana Landmarks. "They've done a fantastic job."

BISON? IN INDIANA?

The State Seal of Indiana has dumbfounded some Hoosiers for generations.

The pioneer scene portrays a bison in the foreground jumping a log with its tail in the air. In the distance, an axe-wielding woodsman chops a tulip tree as the sun sets (or

rises—a subject of historical debate) on hills that look too much like mountains to be Indiana.

Ignoring the hill-mountains, some of us have asked ourselves, Why the heck is there a bison representing Indiana?

White-tailed deer? Absolutely. Wild turkey? Why not?

But, bison?

Save that for the Dakotas or Montana.

"I think we all have an iconic picture in our heads of bison on the Great Plains," said Cheryl Ann Munson, a research scientist with Indiana University's Anthropology Department and an expert on bison history in Indiana.



John Maxwell photo

(Opposite page) American bison roam Indiana's Kankakee Sands Preserve. Migrating bison once created a large path across Indiana called the Buffalo Trace. (Above) The trace crosses the Blue River at Clark's Ford in Harrison County.



In fairness to our Dances-with-Wolves imaginations, the American bison, *Bison bison*, has been a Western species for most of its natural history.

The animal's primitive ancestors crossed Beringia, sometimes called the Bering Land Bridge, from Asia into North America around 140,000 years ago, according to Steven Rinella, author of "American Buffalo," published in 2008. As climates changed and glacial corridors opened, bison predecessors spread south from current-day Alaska, and versions of the bison colonized the Great Plains.

These early bison shared the landscape with an array of fascinating mammals, including the saber-tooth cat, dire wolves, mastodons and ground sloths the size of elephants. The larger proto-bison varieties evolved into what we now recognize as the American bison.

Eventually, *Bison bison* expanded its range across the Mississippi River, driven east, perhaps, by wildfire or changing habitats. In Illinois, fossil records for modern bison date back 9,000 years. Bison parts begin appearing in archaeological contexts in Illinois—likely as tools—about 4,500 years ago, according to research by John White, an Illinois ecologist, and Chris Widga of the Illinois State Museum. But they aren't common, and it's not clear whether the bison parts came from animals that were hunted locally, hunted afar, or whether they ended up at these sites through trade with other cultures.

The presence of relatively dense human populations in the Midwest combined with hunting likely prevented Eastern bison populations from thriving.

Then, around 1500, humans mostly vanished from the Midwest, according to Munson.

"We think part of this is due to introduced European diseases and part of it was warfare," Munson said.

The era is known among anthropologists as "The Vacant Quarter." With people gone, bison spread.

The species expanded its range again, encompassing much of the modern-day United States, from New York in the East to Florida in the South.

While these bison have mostly been erased from our collective memory, their legacy lives on in place names. According to the National Parks Service, communities named "Buffalo" exist in eight Eastern states. There are "Buffalo Rivers" or "Buffalo Creeks" in at least seven states, and "Buffalo Mountains" in four.

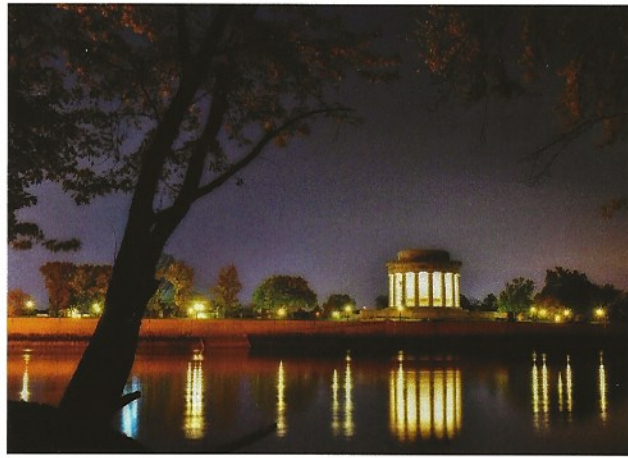
In Indiana, French Lick owes its quirky patchwork name to springs where bison and deer lapped mineral water and—according to legend, at least—because the spot served as a French trading post.

Even during this eastward expansion, bison populations on this side of the Mississippi remained comparatively sparse. Scientists estimate that bison in western North America numbered around 30 million before European-American settlement. Those east of the river numbered 2 million to 4 million.

This "Vacant Quarter" is when bison developed the Illinois-to-Kentucky migration reflected in the Buffalo Trace.

According to Ruckman, bison followed existing paths first developed by humans and dating back to the end of the last ice age.

"Humans had already been on this land for 10,000 to 12,000 years," Ruckman said. "Buffalo didn't show up east of the Mississippi in large numbers until about the time Columbus discovered America."



Frank Oliver photo

(Opposite page) Surveyor David Ruckman and the author follow remnants of the trace near Floyds Knobs. (Above) From Illinois, the George Rogers Clark National Historic Park in Vincennes is reflected in the slow-moving Wabash River.

Nonetheless, they found plenty to eat in southern Indiana.

"We had lots of savannas and pocket prairies in that part of the state," Munson said.

The path bison took through southern Indiana was not a single road. There may have been a main branch, but the animals also spread across the land. Much like a braid, the network of branches converged at springs, mineral licks, stream crossings and hill climbs, according to Teena Ligman, retired public affairs specialist for Hoosier National Forest.

Ligman served as coordinator for the Buffalo Trace project's education outreach committee.

"It's like cow paths through a field," Ligman said. "There was probably a dominant path and a lot of other side paths. But they tended to kind of funnel into certain areas."

The paths were always evolving, too, Ruckman said. During floods, bison would move upstream, carving new paths to find a more suitable place to ford. If a windstorm blew down a large section of a forest, they would go around.

"Mother Nature creates roadblocks," Ruckman said. "And there would have been multiple traces."

Regional human populations were diminished during this period but not destroyed. A culture known as the Caborn-Welborn people emerged in far southwestern Indiana. Like the modern-day plains American Indians, the Caborn-Welborn people hunted bison for food and converted body parts into tools, jewelry and more.

Munson has excavated many Caborn-Welborn sites in Indiana, where she has found bison shoulders used as hoes, bison teeth used as necklace pendants, and other bison bones used as gaming pieces. The existence of thousands of hide scrapers at Caborn-Welborn sites makes Munson believe the Caborn-Welborn were hunting bison and trading their hides.

The Caborn-Welborn people seem to have disappeared by around 1700, around the same time the French established a trading post on the Wabash River, believed to have existed near modern-day Vincennes.

Bison hides were a major component of the fur trade at Vincennes and Fort Ouiatenon in what is now Lafayette, Munson



said. Bison were not only present along southern migratory routes, but also in northwest Indiana, where a peninsula of prairie punctured the woodlands and wetlands between Lake Michigan and the Wabash River.

"But the bison didn't last long," Munson said.

In 1790, devastating winter weather reportedly buried Indiana in 5 feet of snow, killing much of the bison population. John Heckewelder, a Moravian missionary, described the scene in his memoir "A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians," published in 1820.

"Next spring, a few buffalo, poor and haggard in appearance, were seen going westward, and as they approached the carcasses of the dead ones, which were lying here and there on the prairie, they would stop, commence pawing and lowing, then start off again in a lope for the west," he wrote.

Indiana adopted an early version of the state seal, complete with bison, around 1801, while still a territory. Though certainly a coincidence, the seal seems to imply that the bison is fleeing the state, a fitting image for the period.

"By the 1820s, the last wild bison is seen in Indiana," Munson said.

BLOOD ON THE TRACE

In the 1700s, Indiana's trails were like lonely backroads with little human traffic until after the Revolutionary War. The reason, in large part, was due to a man with a wicked nickname, Henry "Hairbuyer" Hamilton.

Some French people and American Indians lived in the region, but few from the British colonies dared set foot there.

It was too dangerous.

England acquired much of the eastern United States, including what is now Indiana, from France in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years War. The war's North American theater was called the French and Indian War. The Midwest became part of a new British jurisdiction called the Province of Quebec, which stretched from Canada's east coast to the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

But instead of colonizing the province, King George III put the area on a proverbial shelf.

The king's Ordinance of 1763 forbade colonists from settling west of the Appalachian Mountains. Weary from war and fearful of another conflict, the king hoped the edict would help keep peace between the British and the French and American Indians who still lived in the region.

Initially, the ordinance did little to discourage settlement, according to Frank Doughman, superintendent of the George Rogers Clark National Historic Park in Vincennes. Land-hungry settlers poured through the Cumberland Gap and into Kentucky.

"The hallmark of American pioneers is that drive for land," Doughman said.

With only a few hundred soldiers to maintain order west of the mountains, England eventually enlisted tribal allies to enforce the ordinance, arming them and encouraging them to kill white travelers and attack settlements. The man behind this grisly plan was Hamilton, the lieutenant-governor of the Province of Quebec, who was posted at Detroit from 1775 to 1779.

In July 1777 alone, Hamilton sent 15 bands of Indians from Detroit to raid settlements in Kentucky. The year became known as "The Bloody Sevens."



John Maxwell photo

(Opposite page) The Buffalo Trace Loop in Vincennes honors the route taken by bison. (Above) Big bluestem grass at Falls of the Ohio may have originated from seeds from Illinois carried in on bison hides.

The atrocities got worse, Doughman said. "And they were driven by the British," he said. "Supposedly they were paying for scalps."

Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark of the Virginia Militia had enough.

In summer 1778, he launched a daring campaign to end Hamilton's reign of terror and conquer the West for the United States by capturing British outposts at Cahokia and Kaskaskia, in Illinois, and at Vincennes in Indiana. Vincennes changed hands several times as Hamilton and Clark continued to battle, but by 1779, Hamilton was a prisoner of war, shipped to Virginia in chains.

With Hamilton gone, existing bison paths provided the near-perfect route for settlers to explore and develop interior Indiana. Settlers from the East would float by flatboat down the Ohio to the falls between modern-day Clarksville and Louisville. From there, they would go overland.

One section of the trace was said to be 12- to 20-foot wide and worn into the earth at a depth of 12 feet in many places.

Over time and human activity, the meandering buffalo paths converged into a single wagon road called the Buffalo Trace or the Vincennes Trace.



While significant for its history, the Buffalo Trace was only one of dozens of wilderness trails that crisscrossed Indiana, from the Sauk Trail near Lake Michigan to the Yellow Banks Trail between Vincennes and Evansville.

One aspect that set the Buffalo Trace apart was its distance. The Buffalo Trace is the name for Indiana's section of an ancient footpath that stretched from the Carolinas to the Pacific, including other cities such as St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri, along the way.

"This is really a cross-country migratory route, and we just have a little piece of it," Ruckman said.

By 1800, the Buffalo Trace became a government post road. It passed through what is now Clark, Floyd, Harrison, Crawford, Orange, Dubois, Pike and Knox counties.

Clark had made the Western frontier and many of its trails safer for European-Americans, but the peace didn't last long.

By around 1800, England was back to its old tricks, encouraging tribal allies to attack settlers. This time, the bloodshed wasn't limited to Kentucky.

In 1807, a family named Larkins was attacked as they were traveling on the Buffalo Trace in Indiana. The husband was killed, and his wife and their five children were captured.

"There is absolutely no information about what happened to them," Doughman said.

The incident put pressure on the territorial government to provide better protection. Gov. William Henry Harrison organized the Indiana Rangers to safeguard travelers between Clarksville and Vincennes.

The Rangers were a militia of rifleman that patrolled sections of the trace from blockhouse posts along the route, including a central fort in French Lick that served as an armory.

"By just being present on the trace, the Rangers were very effective," Doughman said.

By 1809, the Buffalo Trace was safe enough that Harrison disbanded the Rangers, although he reactivated them as an army auxiliary during the War of 1812. The rangers were disbanded for good in 1815.

"As the frontier calmed down there was no longer a need," Doughman said. "They were too expensive."

The Indiana Rangers inspired the creation of the Texas Rangers in 1823, according to Ligman. The more-famous Texas counterparts played a similar role, protecting settlers in the new Texas territory.

The 151st Infantry Regiment of the Indiana National Guard also traces its heritage to the Indiana Rangers. The Regiment has served in many conflicts, from the Battle of Tippecanoe to the modern-day Operation Enduring Freedom.

On horseback, a traveler could ride the 114 miles from Clarksville to Vincennes in about three days. As early as 1812, taverns were sprouting trailside to serve travelers. By 1820, the trail was a stagecoach route.

THE SURVEY

The Indiana Territory was born in 1800, but it didn't look like it does today.

(Opposite page) Seeping springs form mud holes at Buffalo Flats, a swamp forest east of Jasper. Migrating bison congregated and rolled in the mud at such places.

MORE ONLINE

Learn more about the project at buffalotrace.indianahistoricpathways.org.

The website includes:

- A link to Hoosier National Forest's interactive map.
- Suggested routes for a driving tour.
- Historic information on American Indians, Indiana Rangers and early surveyors.
- A Buffalo Trace timeline.
- Bison facts.
- Contact information for educators who want to incorporate the project into their classrooms.
- And more.

It consisted of a large area around Clarksville known as Clark's Grant and a large area of land around Vincennes known as the Vincennes Grant. The land in between and to the north was frontier, still belonging to various tribes.

Harrison, then territorial governor, launched a campaign to connect the two areas and secure all of southern Indiana for the U.S. He did so by paying tribal "chiefs" to cede territory through treaty, according to Ruckman.

"Those who said they were chiefs often weren't really chiefs," Ruckman said.

By 1805, Harrison had used treaties to connect Vincennes Grant and Clark's Grant. The treaties called for the northern boundary to be a straight line drawn parallel to the general course of the Buffalo Trace. The treaty said the boundary should not travel more than a half-mile north of the trace's most northerly bend.

The treaties represented a boon for the federal government and misfortune for native culture.

Upon taking office in 1801, President Thomas Jefferson inherited a government that was in the midst of a financial crisis. The national debt had ballooned to \$83 million. Treaties such as these allowed the federal government to earn money through land sales.

"Our coffers were in dire need of revenue, and the only thing Jefferson really had to capitalize on was land," Ruckman said.

To determine that northern boundary between the Vincennes Grant and Clark's Grant, the federal government sent surveyor William Rector to Indiana.

Rector surveyed the Buffalo Trace to know where to set the treaty boundary line. According to Ruckman, his survey gives us a good understanding of where the trace was. But it didn't document every curve or meander. It didn't need to.

"Central Barrens, for example, is nothing but karst topography—caves and sinkholes," Ruckman said. "On Rector's survey, he has it straight for 15,000 feet. There's no



way the trace was straight. It would have gone around all those holes. But he only needed to tell the general course. He did not measure every twist and turn. That would have driven him crazy."

Rector and his men surveyed and measured the 46-mile section of the trace over 30 days by literally dragging a 66-foot chain through the woods, according to Ruckman.

Over time, treaty lines advanced northward, travel methods and technologies changed, and the Buffalo Trace disappeared.

For much of the trace's distance, Rector's 1805 survey is the best record of where it existed.

But for more than 200 years, the survey sat collecting dust, most recently in the Indiana State Archives, and our understanding of the trace's true course faded.

RETRACING THE TRACE

In 2014, Hoosier National Forest archaeologist Angie Doyle wrote an article for the Bedford Times-Mail newspaper about general Buffalo Trace history, and it piqued an interest in dozens of readers.

She fielded at least 30 phone calls from readers interested in doing more to promote trace history. So Doyle planned an open house at the forest's Bedford office.

"Just to see who was interested enough to come to a meeting," she said.

The number matched the phone calls. Attendees included artists, genealogists, Ruckman and other surveyors, historians and educators from throughout southern Indiana.

From these volunteers, Hoosier National Forest formed the Buffalo Trace Working Group with the goal of increasing public awareness and appreciation for Buffalo Trace history. They wanted to map the trace across Indiana and produce educational resources for the public and for classrooms.

And they wanted to finish the project in time for the 2016 state Bicentennial.

Ruckman, whose interest in the Buffalo Trace is life-long, volunteered to lead the mapping efforts. The Indiana Society of Professional Land Surveyors' Initial Point Chapter in southern Indiana agreed to make the project a group priority. Ruckman and about three other Initial Point surveyors completed the task.

Ruckman started by travelling to Indianapolis to study Rector's notes.

"If it weren't for those notes, we would have never been able to find the Buffalo Trace today," he said.

In areas not surveyed by Rector, the men relied on other historic surveys, some of them pre-dating Rector, Ruckman said.

Ruckman said those early surveys were surprisingly accurate. The group believes it has identified the trace's surveyed path across Indiana within a margin of error of 100 feet. To find an exact location across the entire state would require studying the soil for compaction, a huge undertaking.

But, in some spots, the surveyors know exactly where the trace went, because it has survived. It crosses the Blue River on private land between Harrison and Crawford counties, and a path still crawls up each bank. A section of the Springs Valley Trail in Orange County in Hoosier National Forest follows the trace. In Vincennes the trace became Hart Street and approaches the Wabash near the historic "French House," built in 1809 by Michael Brouillet.



Frank Oliver photo

(Opposite page) David Ruckman carves a bison for a new Buffalo Art Park in New Albany. (Above) A re-enactor awaits school children for a tour of a state historic site in Vincennes.

In Petersburg, "It went right through downtown," Ruckman said.

To the east, the trace roughly parallels U.S. 150, which is one of two designated Indiana Historic Pathways.

Emily Engstrom, a GIS specialist for the HNF, took the surveyors' work and produced an interactive online map available to anyone with computer access.

Ligman worked with educators to create about a dozen lesson plans for fourth grade, the year in which Hoosier kids learn about Indiana history.

The group also sent 72 boxes with Buffalo Trace materials to schools in the eight counties that comprise the trace. The boxes included pieces of bison hide and sinew, a bison horn, books, a DVD of Ruckman and others re-enacting Rector's survey, a compass and length of rope to represent a surveyor's chain, and more.

"We were product-oriented" Doyle said.

The group met its Bicentennial deadline.

In October 2017, the Indiana Historical Society recognized the Buffalo Trace Working Group with its annual Indiana History Outstanding Event or Project Award.

In May of this year, the city of New Albany unveiled a life-size limestone bison, carved by Ruckman, at the new Buffalo Art Park to commemorate that city's role in the trail's history.

No longer is the path's route a mystery.

Take time to see the reports and resources produced by Ruckman and the other Buffalo Trace volunteers. Maybe they'll lead you on a journey to southern Indiana. At minimum, they'll guide you through the course of thousands of years to a better understanding of state history.

"As a land surveyor, all we do is discover truth," Ruckman said. "Discover truth and show it in land boundaries. The trace project was the same way." □

Email nwerner@dnr.IN.gov.