

THE SHALLOW FORD OF THE YADKIN RIVER

The Geology of the Shallow Ford

The Shallow Ford is a wonder of Creation. A solid rock base, with a gravel bar over it, a hundred feet wide and three hundred from bank to bank, and averaging less than three feet deep, it was one of only four Yadkin fords in North Carolina's northern Piedmont that heavily-loaded wagons, stagecoaches, or army cannon could cross safely. There were five foot or horse fords. This remarkable rock bottom is usually covered with water, but when the river's flow is low, the great marvel can still be seen.

Three of the four Piedmont wagon fords still exist, in the 93 miles from Elkin to Spencer: **Etkin Ford** at Elkin, **White Rock Ford** at Rockford, and **Shallow Ford** at Huntsville. The **Trading Ford** at Spencer, crossing for the **Great Trading Path** from Petersburg, Virginia, to the Cherokee in present Tennessee and the Catawba in northern South Carolina, was drowned by High Rock Lake in 1926.

The Indians' Settlements near Shallow Ford

Indians used the Shallow Ford hundreds of years before Europeans came to America. The remains of Indian settlements are scattered through the Yadkin valley, where they farmed the bottoms and fished in the river. One in particular was located about a mile north of the Ford in present Yadkin County. Five fish traps, or weirs, built by the Indians still remain in the river. State archaeologists have tried for years to get them listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Early European Settlement At and Near the Shallow Ford

Europeans came to the Yadkin and Catawba valleys in 1747, with the arrival of the Sherrills to the Catawba River's **Sherrill's Ford**, south of Statesville, cutting **Sherrill's Path** back to the Shallow Ford that year. In 1748, nine families organized the **Bryan's Settlement** around the Shallow Ford: the Bryan, Cresson, Davis, Ferree, Forbush, Hughes, Kimbrough, Linville, and Turner families. The Boones arrived in 1750, including 16-year-old Daniel. The Moravians settled the **Wachovia Tract** of present Forsyth County, their first town of Bethabara begun 17 November 1753, and cut the last section of the **Great Philadelphia Wagon Road** to the Shallow Ford on 18-20 February 1754.

Early Settlement Roads from the Shallow Ford

The Shallow Ford was a major hub of roads, all of them important in the settlement of the northern Piedmont, and all of them cut before the American Revolution. The **Great Wagon Road** began in Philadelphia, passed through the Great Valley of Virginia to Roanoke, crossed the Shallow Ford, and incorporated Sherrill's Path as its southern route, to Statesville, Sherrill's Ford (now covered by Lake Norman), Belmont, and through South Carolina to Augusta, Georgia, by 1754. It became the most important road for western settlement of this country. The **Mulberry Fields Road**, now called the **Daniel Boone Trail** because it was partially cut by the great frontiersman, probably began as Morgan Bryan's "driveway" to the Shallow Ford in 1748, continuing by stages to the Mulberry Fields (now Wilkesboro), becoming a Wagon Road or Highway on 15 February 1770, and continuing to the Cumberland Gap by 1773. The Daughters of the American Revolution marked the Boone Trail with heavy cast iron markers on both sides

of the river in 1913. The **Shallow Ford to Cape Fear Road** was cut in June 1755 from Cross Creek (now Fayetteville), and was a partial catalyst to the **Regulator War** of 1765-71. The **Irish Ford Road** to Salisbury, now partially Huntsville-Farmington Road, was authorized on 13 July 1763. The **White Rock Ford Road** to Rockford was authorized 9 January 1765, providing present Surry County with access to the Shallow Ford and points east and southeast. The **Etkin Ford Road** to the Etkin Ford at present Elkin was authorized 17 October 1766. The **Salem-Shallow Ford Road** to Salem, the chief town of the Moravians' **Wachovia Tract**, was opened 16 March 1772. Another road paralleling and partially merging with the Cape Fear Road was authorized by Surry, Rowan, Guilford, and Cumberland Counties 5 August 1774.

Battles At, Near, and Historically Connected with the Shallow Ford

The **Battle of the Shallow Ford**, 14 October 1780, was fought astride the Mulberry Fields Road. About 350 Whigs engaged about 400 Tories a mile west of the Ford. One Whig and fourteen Tories were killed in the short fire fight, which completed the rout of Tory forces of western North Carolina begun by the **Battle of King's Mountain** exactly one week before. The Buckeye Branch at the edge of the battleground was renamed Battle Branch in its honor. Lord Cornwallis' British Army pursued General Nathaniel Greene from the Catawba River to the Trading Ford near Salisbury by 4 February 1781. Greene escaped to safety across the flooded Yadkin by boats before Cornwallis could cross. Cornwallis turned north at Salisbury to the Shallow Ford, thirty miles by river but forty by road, crossing on 8 February, giving Greene time to cross the Dan River to safety in Virginia, again before Cornwallis could pursue. The two met at the **Battle of Guilford Courthouse** on 15 March, Cornwallis holding the field of battle at a loss of a fourth of his officers and a third of his men, eventually forcing his surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, on 19 October 1781. A skirmish between approximately 100 Yadkin County Home Guard and 3500 Union troops under General George Stoneman, referred to as **Stoneman's Raid**, was fought there in 1865. Stoneman destroyed the **Red Store** at Huntsville before marching to Salisbury.

Later History of the Shallow Ford

The Shallow Ford was a major crossing of the Yadkin River through the 18th and 19th centuries, funneling trade from western North Carolina to Salem, eventually making Winston-Salem one of North Carolina's largest cities, after the two cities merged in 1913. Many ferries also crossed the river until the construction of the Old 421 bridge in 1911, Donnaha and Clemmons bridges in c.1914, and the West Bend-Huntsville bridge in 1920. The last named bridge ended the use of the Shallow Ford as a crossing.

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