

SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF THE NAVIGABLE PORTION OF THE ROANOKE RIVER FROM JAMESVILLE TO PLYMOUTH, NC

Updated 10-17-10

INTRODUCTION

The Roanoke River is now a Network to Freedom partner as an Underground Railroad site through the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program. Along with its massive swamps, some friendly boat captains and safe houses in towns such as Halifax and Plymouth, the Roanoke is one of the first 4 rivers in the United States to be recognized for its contribution to the Underground Railroad.

MILE POST 112.2

CYPRESS GRILL ACCESS-JAMESVILLE

"Millions of people have read about this quaint little riverside grill over the past decade. Along with local and regional magazines and newspapers, it's been featured in Smithsonian, Southern Living and others. Dining on herring at the Cypress Grill was the title of a short article in the June 2004 issue of Metro Magazine. It quoted an article in April 7th, 2004 edition of The New York Times under the column 'At the Nation's Table.' The restaurant, which sits at the bottom of 'the hill' on the bank of the Roanoke in Jamesville is used to attention, though. Thousands of people from all over the country get off the main drags and trek over to Jamesville just for a taste of the local delicacies...and of authenticity, a vanishing trait in a world of slick, theme franchise eateries and packaged tourism. Traditionally open only during 'herring season', the restaurant serves thousands of plates of fried herring and row, fried rock and rock stew, perch and other fish from January to just after Easter. In recent years the menu has been expanded to include oysters and shrimp, too."

(Excerpt taken from http://www.roanokeriver.com/news_features/cypressgrill3.htm)

MILE POST 112 to 113

Many Union ships such as the Otsego and Bazely sunk in this vicinity attempting to pass through a vast mine field protecting the upstream Wilmington to Weldon railroad, *"Its (Otsego) service ended Dec. 9, 1864, when it sailed into a nest of 20 Confederate mines. One blast blew a hole in the bottom, and a second sank it to the upper deck. But troops remained aboard so it could serve as a guard boat. When the tugboat Bazely later approached the Otsego, the Bazely hit a mine that blew that 70- to 80-foot boat six feet out of the water."*

(Excerpt taken from

<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-admin/news/inthenews/archives/2005/06/06232005oswegoship.cfm>)

MILE POST 116

Directly across the river from mile post 116 is one of the few remaining US Army Corps of Engineers markers (15 mi) placed in the 1950's. These signs were hung every 5 miles from Hamilton to the Albemarle Sound. You may have noticed that some nostalgic sportsmen have filled in the gaps of these relics by placing homemade replicas every mile from Cut Cypress Creek to the sound. Note that the USACE markers count down to the sound, while the newer, Carsonite, mile markers count up to the dam located upstream in Roanoke Rapids.

MILE POST 118

Several canoe and kayak camping platforms (Cow Creek, Cypress Cathedral, Three Sisters) are located off Broad Creek which is just downstream on the west side of the river. Please visit www.roanokeriverpartners.org for more information.

MILE POST 120

THOROUGHFARE

A navigable gut (cut-through) between the Roanoke and Cashie Rivers is just downstream on the north side of the river. Please see <http://www.cardinalcanoe.com/CashieRiver-SelfGuidedTour.pdf> for an excellent self-guided tour of the Cashie River.

RYAN'S THOROUGHFARE

"Confederate supply ships evaded the Union boats by coming down the Cashie and slipping through Ryan's thoroughfare, turning up the Roanoke and going to Weldon to meet the train to Richmond." (Excerpt taken from "Roanoke River and the Great War," by Harry Thompson).

MILE POST 121

Bear Run, a canoe and kayak camping platform, is visible on the south side of the river from this mile marker. Please visit www.roanokeriverpartners.org for more information.

MILE POST 122 to 124 VICINITY

THE CHAIN FLEET

"The rumor came down to the Union at Plymouth that the Rebs were building an ironclad ship of war up the Roanoke River to the west of Fort Branch. As a form of protection, the Union brought in seven derelict ships and sank them in a line chained together across the river. They then added a row of pilings and explosives making an obstacle to any ship coming downriver. The Union referred to it as "The Chain Fleet." (Excerpt taken from "Roanoke River and the Great War," by Harry Thompson).

MILE POST 124

PLYMOUTH

"Several theories exist about how Plymouth got its name. Early in its history, Plymouth was a thriving port. The most popular theory supposes that sailors on ships from Plymouth, Massachusetts regularly stopped there for cargo—thus the name Plymouth Landing. Later, the name was shortened to Plymouth." (Excerpt taken from <http://www.visitplymouthnc.com/VisitorInfo/Default.asp>).

"The opening of the Dismal Swamp Canal in 1805 offered inside passage to the great northern cities where the raw materials were needed to manufacture consumer products such as cloth and building materials. Supply ships using the canal could easily navigate through inland waters without sailing on the treacherous seas along the coast. From the creation of this passageway, Washington County [Plymouth] boomed. An entire world opened at its doorstep with the accessibility afforded by watery passage. Life in the region became tied to the natural assets and the products afforded by working the land." (Excerpt taken from "Liquid Highways Nature's Roads Provide Prosperity," by Doward Jones Jr.)

MILE POST 124.5

PLYMOUTH TOWN DOCK ACCESS

The Picot-Armistead-Pettiford House just up the bank at 302 West Main Street in Plymouth was said to be an active underground railroad safe house, *"There is information of a mysterious escape tunnel in the Armistead house. Mrs. Staplefoot said that it ran diagonally across the street to the Ayers home and then on to the river."* (Excerpt taken from <http://www.visitplymouthnc.com/Walking%20Tour.pdf>). *"Also up and down the Roanoke, there were several ferries that slaves used to escape"* (Wanda E.H. McLean, 2008).

MILE POST 125

PLYMOUTH POLICE STATION ACCESS-SITE OF THE MOST DARING ACT OF THE CIVIL WAR

"...on the night of 27-28 October 1864, Lieutenant William B. Cushing, USN, took the torpedo boat Picket Boat Number One upriver to Plymouth and bravely attacked Albemarle at her berth, sinking her with a spar torpedo."

(Excerpt taken from

http://www.americancivilwar.com/tcwn/civil_war/Navy_Ships/CSS_Albemarle.html)

MILE POST 125.1

REPLICA OF ALBEMARLE IRONCLAD

"In April 1864 the completed Albemarle sailed down the Roanoke and helped Brig. Gen. Robert E. Hoke capture the Union garrison of almost three thousand men at Plymouth in what was the South's greatest victory in North Carolina."

(Excerpt taken from http://web.cortland.edu/woosterk/pot_raid.html)

"The Albemarle was one of the most successful of the ironclads, sinking 29 Federal vessels before being torpedoed and sunk near Plymouth on October 27, 1864."

(Excerpt taken from <http://www.roanokeriverpartners.org/RiverCamping.htm>)

FURTHER DOWNSTREAM FROM PLYMOUTH ALONG THE ROANOKE RIVER

MILE POST 126

Across the river from this mile post is another old US Army Corp of Engineers marker, the "5 mi" sign (5 miles downstream to the Albemarle Sound, and 126 miles upstream to the dam in Roanoke Rapids).

UPSTREAM FROM JAMESVILLE ALONG THE ROANOKE RIVER

MILE POST 111

DEVIL'S GUT

Several canoe and kayak camping platforms (Barred Owl Roost, Beaver Tail, Beaver Lodge) are located off Devil's Gut which is just upstream on the north side of the river. Please visit

www.roanokeriverpartners.org for more information.

MILE POST 107

CUT CYPRESS CREEK

A navigable gut (cut-through) between the Roanoke River and Broad Creek exists on the east side of the river, as well as, the close-by remains of a 2000-year old cypress tree. Several canoe and kayak camping

platforms (Cow Creek, Cypress Cathedral, Three Sisters) are located off Broad Creek. Please visit www.roanokeriverpartners.org for more information.