

SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF THE NAVIGABLE PORTION OF THE TAR RIVER FROM TARBORO TO OLD SPARTA

INTRODUCTION

“The Tar River was called the Pamptico (Pamlico) River in colonial times. The upper portion of this river became the Tar River about the time settlement reached Tarboro. Perhaps that name came from the extensive ‘naval stores’ of tar and turpentine shipped down to the Port of Bath. Tarboro later became a river port for up-country farmers to send pork and corn downstream to Atlantic Seaboard markets. Many plantations along the Tar River maintained their own wharf and landing. Landing names persist on modern maps and include such names Penny Hill, Pillsboro, Blue Banks, Red Banks, and Yankee Hall. Commercial boat traffic continued on the Tar River until well into the 20th century” (Excerpt taken from “Pitt County Canoe/Kayak Paddle Trails” guide provided by Mid-East RC&D, Pitt County, PTRF and Sierra Club).

MILE POST 137.2

BELL’S BRIDGE ACCESS

“Paddling from Bell’s Bridge at NC 33, the Tar River twists for approximately five miles” (Excerpt taken from “Canoe/Kayak Paddle Trails and Civil War Trail Sites,” produced by the Town of Tarboro) .

MILE POST 140.8

“Just before reaching marker 141, the entrance to Fishing Creek will be on the left [downstream on the east side of the river]” (Excerpt taken from “Canoe/Kayak Paddle Trails and Civil War Trail Sites,” produced by the Town of Tarboro).

MILE POST 143

“Downstream just past marker 143 will be historic Red Iron Bridge, a railroad trestle that will become a part of the new Tarboro Bike Trail. From this point, the river straightens out and continues to the Riverfront Park take-out in downtown Tarboro” (Excerpt taken from “Canoe/Kayak Paddle Trails and Civil War Trail Sites,” produced by the Town of Tarboro).

MILE POST 146.5

PRINCEVILLE

“Princeville was the first all-black town and independently governed African-American community incorporated in the United States...Princeville’s location [southside of the river] has subjected it to frequent flooding. A levee completed in 1965 protected the town until 1999, when Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd overtopped it in the worst flood on record here. Princeville’s residents soon began rebuilding their historic community, repairing houses and constructing new homes, a town hall, a park, and an African-American history museum” (Excerpt taken from “Canoe/Kayak Paddle Trails and Civil War Trail Sites,” produced by the Town of Tarboro).

MILE POST 146.8

RIVERFRONT LANDING ACCESS

“In an earlier time, Tarboro was a thriving port town, where ships and boats frequently came and went, carrying bales of cotton and sheaves of tobacco.”

(Excerpt taken from http://www.dailysoutherner.com/local/local_story_283110234.html).

“The ‘Amidas’, built in Hartford, Conn., specifically to run on the shallow Tar River, reached as far as Tarboro, NC on Oct. 27, 1849, towing four flats of merchandise. The ‘Amidas’ continued to have trouble getting up the river and the merchants were left waiting for freshets [high water] to make the river navigable” (Excerpt taken from “The Locks and Dams on the Tar River,” by Roger Kammerer).

“Future Congressman James E. O’Hara... successfully integrated a steamer from Greenville to Tarboro” (Excerpt taken from [The Strange Career of Jim Crow](#) by Comer Vann Woodward).

MILE POST 154.2

OLD SPARTA ACCESS

October 11, 2007, “Low river levels caused by a statewide drought have exposed a rare, sunken boat in the Tar River. Historians believe it was a pole vessel used on the Tar River before steam boats, when Tarboro and Old Sparta were booming port cities...Historians said the 80-foot-long boat was likely built in the 1820s...Crowds gather daily to catch a glimpse of the large wooden object from the river banks and the Old Sparta [NC HWY 42] bridge... Some historians worry look-seekers will compromise artifacts. State officials have asked folks not to disturb the vessel... Edgecombe County sheriff's deputies...patrol the area. State archaeologists, currently working on what is thought to be Blackbeard's flagship, plan to study the Tar River boat soon...” (Excerpt taken from <http://www.wral.com/news/local/story/1918588/>).

FURTHER DOWNSTREAM ALONG THE TAR RIVER

TAR RIVER MILE POST 158.5

PENNY HILL ACCESS

The Tar River enters Pitt County at Penny Hill...[N35 45.6, W77 30.9]. At this point the river is about 100 feet wide at normal water level. Its steep banks are formed of muddy clay and stand about 10 feet above the water. Between here and Greenville a sandy beach may occur on the outside edge of curves in the river channel. Most of the land beyond the stream bank is in agricultural production. This is the highest part of Pitt County with elevations rising over 80 feet above sea level. The river gradient is slight because it is normally only a few feet above sea level (base level). The tree canopy along the bank consists of river birch, ash, tupelo gum, bald cypress, and several oaks...If you pull into the landing at Penny Hill [N35 45.7 W77 31.0] (north side) and walk 300 feet to NC-33 you will see the remains of a pre-Civil War brick doctor’s office” (Excerpt taken from “Pitt County Canoe/Kayak Paddle Trails” guide provided by Mid-East RC&D, Pitt County, PTRF and Sierra Club).

“An interesting side note... is the origin of the name Penny Hill for the community. The account was retold by John D. Duncan in a January 27, 1962, [Daily Reflector](#) newspaper article. In the account, Bruce Cotten of Cottendale described a trip he took down the Tar River on the steamer Greenville in 1888. As the steamer approached Penny Hill, Mr. Cotten stated the reason for Penny Hill's name thusly: ‘...Penny Hill [was] named for a 'free woman...' [an African-American] who used to sell 'tabacco and eatables' for the flatboat men of earlier days” (Excerpt taken from <http://media.lib.ecu.edu/spclcoll/staffpick.cfm?id=1620>).

UPSTREAM FROM RIVERFRONT PARK ALONG THE TAR RIVER

ROCKY MOUNT

July 19-23, 1863, *"Potter's Raid had been successful--the Union cavalry had inflicted great damage on important Confederate targets in the Tar River region. Traffic on the vital Wilmington and Weldon Railroad was badly snarled by the burning of the bridge at Rocky Mount. The Southern war effort was deprived of badly needed rolling stock and equipment by the destruction of the engine, cars, and railroad buildings at the Rocky Mount depot. The burning of the Governor Morehead and the Colonel Hill ended Confederate steamboat traffic on the Tar River for the remainder of the war. The unfinished gunboat [a sister ship for the "Albemarle"] in the Tarboro shipyard was destroyed and was to be the last attempt to build a Confederate ironclad on the Tar River. The Rocky Mount Mills, North Carolina's largest cotton mill, was a smoking ruin, as was a great variety of important stockpiles of Confederate war materials and provisions. A large number of horses and mules, scarce in the war-ravaged South, were either taken to New Bern or killed along the way. And lastly 'over 100' prisoners were brought back to New Bern, along with three hundred newly freed slaves."*

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