

The Great Valley Road

~ Traffic ~

German settlers in the Shenandoah Valley kept to themselves so much that other settlers seldom saw them. They clustered in farms close to their church and school. They ventured into the towns of New Market, Luray, Woodstock, or Harrisonburg only to trade. About 57 percent of the population of Shenandoah and Rockingham Counties and about 33 percent in Page and Frederick counties were of German stock. The Scots-Irish, driven from their Ulster homeland by drought in 1717, found opportunity in America. By 1729 they came in large numbers. Entire families "bumped over the Philadelphia road in big-wheeled Conestoga wagons, trailing cattle and dogs. Nearly all were Presbyterians, once employed in the Irish linen and wool trades. Half were so poor that they indentured themselves to obtain passage. By-passing the Germans, the Scots-Irish settled in numbers in Augusta, Rockbridge, Highland, Bath, and southward. Unversed in farming, they frequently chose rocky, hardscrabble land and later moved." By 1730 they established Winchester, and six years later Staunton. Then came Lexington, Fincastle, Big Lick (Roanoke), Draper's Meadows (Blacksburg), Augusta and Rockbridge.

--Parke Rouse, *Planters and Pioneers*

Stage wagons and stagecoaches operated on major roads. In about 1750, a northern newspaper began advertising John Butler's Philadelphia stage wagon. A more comfortable coach with places for five passengers and a "boot" for mail replaced the canvas-covered wagon by 1780. The name "stage" came from the fact that the horses were changed at "stages" along the way, usually taverns. By 1800, the stage traffic between Philadelphia and Lancaster averaged one tavern per mile.

In addition to the human traffic on the *Great Valley Road*, the driving of cattle and hogs continued. About 120 cattle formed a drove, with a manager directing the movement from horseback and two footmen assisting. Pigs moved in droves numbering as many as 5000, driven by a swineherd.

By 1765, most parts of the Road were open to wagon traffic. The Pennsylvania-designed Conestoga Wagon got larger as the road got wider and longer. They were usually drawn by five or six stout draft horses. It was common to see six immigrant wagons a day passing through the Shenandoah Valley at any one point. Packhorse trains continue to serve the upcountry.

~ Features ~

The road began as a buffalo trail, and was followed by Indians as the *Great Warrior Path* from New York to the Carolinas. At Salisbury, NC, it was joined by their *Great Trading Path*.

As a road for pioneer settlers, it bore many names. Since the road progressed through the Shenandoah Valley, it came to be called both the *Great Valley Road* and the *Shenandoah Valley Road*. The link by the early 1740s from the Pennsylvania communities of Lancaster, York, and Gettysburg became known as the *Philadelphia Wagon Road*. This portion was also referred to as the *Lancaster Pike*, and its 63 miles was the most heavily traveled portion of the entire road. Another link, by 1746, was the *Pioneer's Road* from Alexandria to Winchester. The section of the *Great Valley Road* near Fincastle and present-day Roanoke, VA, was known locally as the *Harshbarger Road*.

By the early 1750s, the southwestern end of the road at Big Lick (Roanoke) was extended. Travelers could continue South into North Carolina, or head Southwest into eastern Tennessee. Some historical maps will show the road breaking off at Big Lick to go south to Salisbury and Charlotte, NC, and on to Augusta, GA. Still another route went to Savannah, GA.

Some historians choose to include the *Wilderness Road* within the route of the *Great Valley Road* since early pioneers often used the entire set of trails to move from into Kentucky and the Ohio Valley. The *Wilderness Road* widened for wagon traffic, but it dates back to the discovery of the Cumberland Gap in 1750 and Daniel Boone's blazing of the trail in 1775.

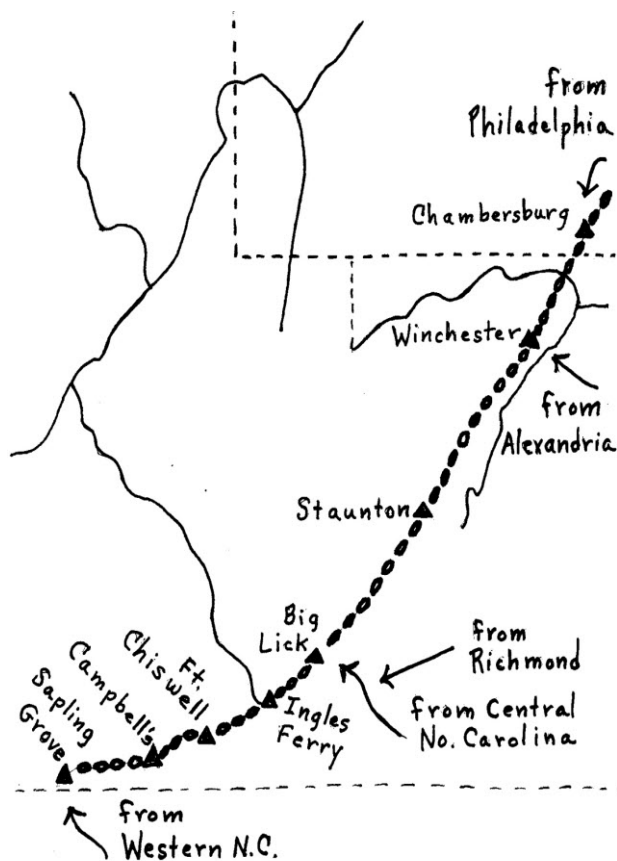
Since the Shenandoah River formed the geography of the Valley, directions are reckoned by the river's flow. Therefore, in the Valley, people say "up" meaning "south" and "down" meaning "north" because the flow of the river is from south to north. One goes up to Staunton and down to Martinsburg!

The mountain ranges to the West of the Valley are the Alleghenies, and the ones to the east constitute the Blue Ridge chain.

The general route of the *Great Valley Road* today is Interstate 81 or U.S. Highway 11.

~ Timeline ~ The Great Valley Road

- 1722 The Second Treaty of Albany guarantees to the Indians the use of the great Indian Road, which ran north and south through the Shenandoah Valley.
- 1726 Germans begin to settle the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley. Jacob Stover leads a group to the Shenandoah River, Spotswood's Euphrates.
- 1730 Another German colony is settled near Luray, led by Adam Muller.
- 1730 The Scots-Irish establish Winchester, VA.
- 1732 Sixteen families come with Joist Hite and settle in the Lower Shenandoah Valley. They start a village named Mecklenberg which is later changed to Shepherdstown.
- 1743 Two Moravians begin a missionary journey down the *Great Warriors' Path* which brings them to South Carolina and Georgia. They return to Pennsylvania on a sloop from Savannah, Georgia.
- 1744 By the treaty of Lancaster, the Indians agree to move westward and relinquish the Valley route.
- 1748 George Washington comes to Old Frederick County to survey land for Lord Thomas Fairfax.
- 1749 Over 4000 settlers have taken up land in the western counties of Virginia.
- 1751 Quaker records begin in the Piedmont region of North Carolina and Georgia.
- 1754-65 Colonial governor of North Carolina publicizes the benefits of North Carolina.
- 1769-72 Jacob Strickler and Jacob Gochenour petition the Virginia House of Burgesses to permit them and their Mennonite brethren to have certain permissions relating to their religious doctrines. The Mennonites are located in what becomes Page and Shenandoah counties and northern Rockingham county.
- 1770-75 Quakers come into the area from Nantucket.



Route of the Great Valley Road

The early *Philadelphia Wagon Road* (also called the *Lancaster Pike*) linked to the road going through the Shenandoah Valley, shown above.

On their 1775 "Map of the Most settled Parts of Virginia," Peter Jefferson and Joshua Fry labeled this route "The Great Wagon Road from the Yadkin River through Virginia to Philadelphia distant 435 miles." --Parke Rouse, *Planters and Pioneers*

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| Philadelphia, PA | New Market, VA |
| Downing Mill, PA | Harrisonburg, VA |
| Lancaster, PA | Staunton, VA |
| York, PA | Lexington, VA |
| Gettysburg, PA | Fincastle, VA |
| Chambersburg, PA | Big Lick, VA |
| Greencastle, PA | (now Roanoke) |
| Hagerstown, MD | Ingles Ferry, VA |
| Martinsburg, WV | Ft. Chiswell, VA |
| Winchester, VA | |