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Journey to Kentucky in 1775

Diary of James Nourse, Describing His Trip from Virginia to Kentucky
One Hundred and Fifty Years Ago, When Harrodstown and
Boonesboro Were the Only Kentucky Settlements. Nourse
Rode from Piedmont, Virginia, to Pittsburgh, and Then
Went Down the Ohio and Up the Kentucky River in
a Flat-Boat, Walking Ten Miles Further to
Harrodstwon, Now Harrodsburg

(Continued from Volume XIX, Number II)

FRYDAY 26th OF MAY, 1775. Loaded our canoes; came to a bad
ripling—at which place are very large slabs of very fine stone. Sat.
May 27th passed two riplings—dined at a good spring—proceeded
to a place that is an Island when the river is high—getting around it, a
Considerable ripling, above a Creek on the upper side, supposed to be
Elkhorn creek—where we encamped, pitched my tent the others did not.
About midnight, violent thunder and lightening, E. Taylor and Johnston
creeped into my camp, the others lay'd out.—Sunday, May 28th. Fine
morning—breakfast, shave and dress all clean. Half past 2 before we sett
off—very hot—in two hours and a half, saw a great quantity of Buffaloes,

all sizes, went on to a small Island that the lowness of the water had made a bed of stones—cut down a kind of Pea Vine, blue Blossoms, no smell—I made a bed under my tent. Mr. Creswell thought it so bad he went and lay in the canoe. Slept well, got on board Monday, May 29th, by six o'clock—rowed till ten, Rice and Creswell quarreled, Rice Vulgar & ill behaved in the morning—this last I did not hear the beginning of, but from Tom's acct, Rice first to blame; when I came to them neither would have discredited a Billingsgate education. Rice on my declaring my opinion of his manner before, drew in and it became a Calm—we went a shore—breakfasted—proceeded and got to the buffalo Crossing, about 3 o'clock pitched our tents; purposing going tomorrow a day's journey by land back to see the Country, being come opposite where E. Taylor supposes he has a tract of land. Fine Stone all up the river, a kind of gray marble and Shell stone of all sizes—Slabs of any Breadth & thickness, even to tile stone and fine pavement. Tuesday 30th of May, 1775, set off on foot with E.T. & G.R. (having first breakfasted) with my great Coat tied to my Back; walked 3 miles and came to the River—Struck off again by the paged landing along a buffalo path, which soon led to good Buffaloes, all sizes (Tom here) ... except Johnston, self and George E. Taylor bring wood, they have killed three, a Cow, a Yearling and a Calf, Mr. Creswell killing Yearling to his great satisfaction—a ripling a head or we should follow them with the Canoes, they brot the heart, suet, marrow bones and some beef of the Cow. Went on to a small island ... land a good bottom and high land tolerable—came to the foot of a steep hill or mountain over which the path led—steep and rocky but not so bad but a horse might now go up and is capable of being made a waggon road—it is about 2 miles from the river on the top of the Hill, the land is level and well timbered with oak, afterwards it is light with timber—little oak—mostly sugar tree, Walnut, Ash, and Buckeye (horse chestnut) but the tops of the trees mostly scraggy, the surface of the ground covered with grass along the path which was as well trod as a Market-town path. About Twelve mile the farther we went the richer the land, better though of the same sort of timber, the ash very large and high, and large locusts of both sorts—some Cherry—the growth of grass under amazing—blue grass, white clover, buffalo grass, and seed knee & waist high: what would be called a fine swarth of Grass in cultivated Meadows, and such was its appearance without end—in little dells in this. We passed several dry branches but no running water our course S.E. At about twelve mile came to a Small run and soon after I discovered a pretty spring that joined its waters—here we resolved to dine, being both hungry and thirsty. We had seen in our walk about 5 hear of Buffaloes. At this place was the last, but they smelled us and away they ran (you may go close to them if you

chance to be to the leeward, but their smell is quick off to the windward). By the blessing of that God that feedeth the ravens, they left one calf asleep, and whilst we were kindling a fire he started up and Rice soon fetched him down and in a trice his heart, liver, kidneys, Sweetbread and about 10 lbs of the best part of the meat was soon broiled upon forks and a most excellent dinner we made, left the meat we eat not at the fire and proceeded about 3 mile farther; the path decreased but the growth of the land bespoke its being still richer. We returned to our spring—a thunder gust threatened us, but we had no great quantity of rain—put on my great coat—lay down under a tree, but got no sleep till after 12 o'clock, lay too slanting and missed my ... for a pillow. Wednesday, May 31—Returned to our Camp, eat heartily of a large Cat they had caught—about twenty pounds weight. Lay down and slept most soundly—by the time eating and baking was over they thought it too late to proceed—gave my Gun thro cleaning, supped upon rice Broth and went to bed. Slept well. Thursday, June 1st—Called them all up by daybreak and got in the canoe before 5 o'clock. Passed two Riplings in the course of two hours and one more at the end of the 2^d two hours—went on shore to a spring—examined the Virginia (?) Spider Wort—3 foot high—beautiful stem and leaf and fragrant smell. Still the banks every now and then walled with regular stone in beds Horizontal with the river, which in some places appear to be paved all across. Saw several Buffaloes—went on shore—shot at one, but when after other shots, he having stood at bay the dogs, found him Old and poor—so took none of him—rowed till one—dined upon jerk beef and soup made of [?] All quiet—no disputes. N.B.—Last night very cool—cold though wrapped up in blanket—took my great coat from under me to keep me warm and the air all day fresh and cool—except in the sun. Rowed till one—eat cold jerk and a cup of broth for diner—rowed again—Stopped soon on acct. of getting some meat. The hunters went out on both sides but no success—went to bed—cool again before morning. Fryday, June 2nd—Morning cloudy—set off about 6 oclock met 5 Canoes—one gave us the best half of a Buck, rowed to where they Camped, found good part of a doe and a fire still burning—cutt some of it, put it on the coals, dressed our venison and went a hunting—high acct. of the lands on Elkhorn creek, but fear it is most of it surveyed—other canoes passed—in all the day eight—no success, one deer saw on on side and on buffalo on the other, but neither killed, fitted my camp with a bark floor and matt at the door, walk with Creswell thro' the woods about 3 miles, saw nothing, returned and eat venison steaks. Saturday, June 3^d. Set off at 6 o'clock—rowed till twelve. Hard rain before we got on shore—the others out about an hour in worst rain making a bark tent, whilst mine was up in five minutes—Supposed

ourselves within about fifteen miles of Harwood's landing—afternoon cleared, but being hazardous, resolved to stay here all night—for had they moved another tent would have been to have made which consideration more than once lost us half a day. Sunday, June 4th, Cloudy set off about 6 o'clock, rowed about 3 hours, rained again, went under a cave in the rocks stayed about 2 hours (having passed 6 bad ripples this day) about 2 o'clock arrived at Harwood's landing—Monday, June 5th, breakfasted upon thickened broth. E.T., G.R, B.J. and I. (J.) N. set off with a Cane and my Great Coat slung to my back, walked along 15 Miles to Harwoodstown which Consist of about 8 or 10 log cabins without doors nor stopped ... about 70 Acres in Corn—the land most part of the way rich—weeds as high as your head—the path but badly trod and continual logs and sticks across that I fell twice—very tired I was—B.J. though he walked much better there than I no sooner we arrived but he was taken with a violent pain in his thighs, which never left him till he had borrowed a horse to carry him back and fetch his goods.—When we got there an acquaintance of Johnston's treated us with bear fat and hot bread for dinner (their meat being just out) and hominy for supper, hominy also for breakfast. Tuesday, June 6th. B.J. on horse back and the rest on foot, returned to our landing.—Wednesday, June 7th, B.J. drew out his 2 shares which left us only about 20 pounds of flour a hand and about 1 gallon of Corn, and no prospect yet when I can attend my business the Surveyor being out a Surveying and not knowing where to meet with him or when he will return. Thursday 8th Mr. Creswell resolved to return with some Men going by water to Wheeling; divided flour and corn—in the night, George Noland, servant to E. Taylor, and a servant of G. Jones ran off, had taken Mr. Creswell's share of flour, but being alarmed, they fled to the woods and left it in the canoe. Friday June 9th Creswell left me the others being out seeking the run-aways, they return without success, engage Welch to go after them—a Man Johnston sent down for his things and a horse that brot Creswell's company's things, when loaded with mine &c. Tom and I set off once more for Harrodstown, very hott, mett about half way 3 young Men, who told us of the Boston engagement and of 39 Negroes being hanged near Williamsburg, said to be 900 of the English troops killed. About 6 arrived in town, eat some beef and hominy at Mr. Slaughter's, pitch my tent about 10 yds from them and slept well. Saturday, June 10, 1775—Breakfasted with Billy Slaughter and Johnston. Johnston set off for the landing. Tom beat and boiled hominy—dined upon it and a bitt of Bacon. Mr. Slaughter baked bread in a dutch oven, the best I had eat in a great while. Just at dark when I was gone here came Taylor Rice and Johnston and for supper finished my Hominy and bread—Sunday, June 11th. Dressed. Johnston & Taylor went to Capt. Harwood's [?] Rice with

some townsmen a hunting. Read the service (communion excepted) to a Sick man. Dressed a bitt of bacon with Billy Slaughter's buffalo beef—and dined with—eat hominy and cord bread made of corn only beat—the only way they have making it—at Boonsburg they say they have no bread at all. Monday, ye 12th June—Taylor and B.J. came back from Harwood, say like him much—he will be here tomorrow or Wednesday—undetermined what to do—Sometimes talk of going to Boonsburg to enquire further after the surveyor Capt Floyd, tother of getting Capt. Harwood to show us eagle creek upon Kentuke where they say are no surveys made. Tues 13th built an Arbor—no Capt. Harwood; Reuben and the men came that was after the Run-aways, no tidings of them, but bring an account that Willis Lee, Mr. Taylor's friend, that was to show him his land and who I was in hopes would put me in the way to get a good place clear of Surveys, was at last at Elkhorn. Mr. Taylor inclined to return to Elkhorn. I quite ready but he wants to see Capt. Harwood [?] and the return of G.R., who is gone Hunting—Wednesday, June 14th, cleaned my Gun. Capt. Harwood and Mr. Moore of Dunmore arrived—dine under my Arbor—boiled beef and buffalo, bacon and young cabbage plants, Fritters and hominy and wheat bread—endeavored to engage Capt. H. to go with us over Kentuke, is to send us word toMorrow if he can go—he has come twice up the Mississippi, says it may be done and is twice a year by the French up to the Illinois, upon an average in between 2 and 3 Months. Thursday, June 15th, a Cool Night and Morn. Taylor, Johnston and self all resolved to attend Capt. Harwood to Boonsburg, if we can possibly get horses—about 1 oClock two men arrived from the landing—had left Willis Lee at the mouth of Elkhorn Creek—Lee desires to see Mr. Taylor—upon this he resolves to go down to him—but having weighed the great probability for all counts that I shall be able to get no good surveys there—hold myself to the form intention of going up, tho' it goes against the grain to leave Taylor to go with B.J. At night Grayson arrived with the acct. that Capt. Harwood [?] would expect us tomorrow, but no horses being to be got for love or money. Fryday 16th June. Sent off Tom to Capt Harwood letting him know we were horse bound. Johnston is to have Mr. Slaughter's when Rice comes back—but I have but a small prospect of getting one without parting with the money that is to pay the surveyor—and walk I cannot at present—as yesterday I found a small inflammation in on my legs—that is rather worse today. Got a little British oil of Johnston—Saturday, June 17. Yesterday two Men bro't in Geo. And Thom, the 2 runaways; they were both whipped moderately—Tom hired himself out today for his victuals and Mocasins; my leg something better but no way fit to walk a day upon. Rice and the odd Irishman Thos. Cowan not come in yet nor Ingram a man who has an old White horse to

sell—about noon they all dropt in. Johnston told me if he could not have Mr. Slaughter's horse, he believed he could by a young horse of Mr. Grayson for 15£, Johnston being to have Mr. Slaughter's. I desired him to inquire of Grayson for me—the horse is gone to the landing, if I like him, I am to have him at 16£ and send him the money in the fall—but just 3 years old. Sunday, June 18th bot the above horse at 16£, N.B., he has exacted 20£. Capt. Harwood told me in the afternoon that he had offered him a few days before at 15£. When I came to load him, found that I should be offered to buy if he would take my horse, but not liking that march on foot to Capt. Harrod, leading my horse (Kentukee) however, I please myself with my bargain, because I think he will make a good match for Jenny. Stopt about half an hour to eat Mulberries—by which means got wet before we got to Harrod's between 5 and 6 o'clock, got an excellent stew of buffalo and as much Lettue and young Endive as I could eat but no bread, made as good a Meal as ever I would with—a tolerable good house having a floor and a Chimney but not stopt—a pleasant situation & good water. Monday 19th Having breakfasted upon Stewed pork without Bread or Salad, proceeded for Boonsburg, rode about 15 south to the NobLick, fine level land all the way the lick an extraordinary place, 100 acres without a Stick or Grass, large knoll licked by the cattle to Caves, appears to be trod as much as any Public road—eat some fish and then proceeded thro' fine lands, lay at Run. Tuesday 20. Set off early having eat a little first, and got some mulberries and arrived at the old fort a cabbin—where 3 men were killed in March—having walked about 10 mile to ease my horse. Wednesday 21st—a cold night last night—mine and another man's horse that had no bells not to be found—baked a little bread upon sticks for supper—Set off pretty early—rode about 3 miles, killed a Buffalo bull, eat a hearty breakfast without bread came to Col. Henderson's at Boonsburg—dined upon stewed venison and buffalo no bread. Col. Henderson came home about 11 o'clock. Thursday 22nd, last night cold—gave flour out for breakfast—set off over Kentuke—rode thro' a fine Country, but little water—saw a Buffalo—camped—the day cool but warmer towards evening, shower of rain. Fryday 23rd. Set off—last night warm enough tho' I left my great coat behind. Wind blew off the rain rode through a fine land and fine timber and with running creek, considerable in wett seasons—several near dry. Col. Harrod missed a little tract he wanted but soon recovered—saw some buffaloes, the Col. Soon shot one down. I made the fire and to cooking we went—a finer country can not be conceived. Springs are the only thing that it can be said to be deficient in.

(To be Continued)