

~~Points of Interest~~  
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BIG BONE LICK

Boone Co., Ky.

(WPA)

In Boone County, about five miles from highway #42, is "Big Bone Lick" one of the most noted salt springs in Kentucky. Here salt is freely deposited on the surrounding ground. In earlier days, deer, buffalo and other wild beasts frequented these licks, to lick the salt deposits, thus giving rise to the term "lick". Today the lick is still frequented by cattle and other animals in quest of the saline deposit. Often they lick the salty mud, thereby removing enough to make the surrounding surface full of holes. The barren and much trodden quagmire from which the water bubbles forth is situated in a fertile valley of about one hundred acres, through which flows Big Sandy Creek.

Big Bone Lick was discovered in 1739 by Captain Charles Lemoyne de Languell, a French-Canadian soldier and explorer who descended the Ohio River from the eastern Great Lakes region. Capt. de Languell probably was conducted by Indian guides to this lick for it was widely known among the Indian tribes of the Ohio Valley. The Indians obtained salt from these springs and by lying in wait beside the buffalo traces leading to the bog, had unbounded success in stalking and slaying the wild animals which gathered there in large numbers.

Varied descriptions of "Big Bone Lick" have been left by geologists and other scientific explorers. These scientists agree that no other place in North America has produced bones from mammoth remains in such large quantities, and in such a wide variety. Most of the bones were removed from the surface before 1810. The first collection of these skeletons and fossils was made in 1803 by a Dr. Goforth. This collection was sold in England, a part going to the Royal College of Surgeons in London. The next collection was made in 1805 by order of Thomas Jefferson while he was president of the American Philosophical Society. A part of this collection was sent to France. It has been estimated that bones of a hundred mastodons and a score of arctic elephants, in addition to those of other animals, have been obtained here.

The journals of early explorers vividly describe the transition of the lick after discovery. Colonel George Croghan, following a visit in 1765, referred to the vast quantities of bones scattered about. Also, he mentioned the wide, plainly marked buffalo trails leading to the springs. Present day highways in the vicinity follow generally routes originating from these trails. Other explorers, including Charles le Yell, English geologist, tell of the splendid pasturate nearby, the extent of the muddy part of the bog, and relate their impressions of the sulphur smell, so readily discernible. Mention is made, too, of the Indian paintings on some of the trees surrounding the swamp.

At the present time two principal springs bubble through the surface of the marsh. One is at the northern edge of the creek, the other emerges south of the stream at the base of a hill nearby which <sup>in part</sup> bounds the valley. In the early days the forest was free of undergrowth. The surface of the ground within the area covered by the lick is several feet lower than the level of the valley. A third spring is located some distance north of the creek. Water from it flows from a well sunk in pioneer times when salt was being manufactured at the lick. The Indians are known to have made salt there as early as 1756 and the process was carried on by white men as late as 1812. About five hundred gallons of the water will, when evaporated, produce a bushel of salt.

Because of the valuable medicinal qualities of the water and the historical significance of the celebrated bog, which is sometimes called "The Graveyard of the Mammoths," visitors are numerous.

Big Bone Lick is owned by Boone County, and there is an organized local effort to create a State Park in the County which is to embrace the Lick.

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