

Big Bone Lick in Kentucky



Big Bone Lick State Park.

Since the days of Lewis and Clarke, Kentuckians have been in awe of the large animal bones discovered in Big bone Lick State Park in Union, Kentucky. The belief is that during the last great Ice Age that enormous herds of herbivorous animals existed in the vicinity. According to park experts, the mammoth and the mastodon were among the animals to visit the Lick. Later, ancestors of the sloth, bison, and horse came to the salty soil and vegetation around springs. From the excavations there, animals became mired in the bogs and died in the wet, marshy land. The Delaware and Shawnee Indians were quite familiar with the bones of the animals in the Ohio Valley and collected the salt. Later, the Europeans learned of Big Bone Lick from the Indians.

The first remembered European to visit this site was a French Canadian, de Longueil, in 1739. In fact, a Louisiana map dated 1744; marks the lick as the place where they found the elephant bones in 1739. In 1744, an American Indian trader by the name of Robert Smith removed some of the fossil bones. And, The first map of Kentucky, prepared by John Filson in 1784, bore on the legend: "Big Bone Lick; Salt and Medical Spring. Large bones are found there." Later on in 1803, when Meriwether Lewis traveled to Big Bone Lick en route west to join William Clark and the men assembling in Louisville for the Corps of Discovery, he sent a box of specimens to President Jefferson, along with an extremely detailed letter describing the finds of Goforth. President Jefferson devoted much time to the study of Big Bone Lick and believed that some of the large animals might still be living in the western regions of the country. In 1807, the president sent Clark to Big Bone Lick for the first organized vertebra paleontology expedition in the United States. During the three weeks that Clark was there, he hired laborers to collect bones and shipped three huge boxes to the President. Jefferson maintained a room in the White House for the display of the Big Bone collection.

The Battle of Blue Licks was one of the last Revolutionary War battles in Kentucky. The battle occurred on August 19, 1782, ten months after the famous surrender of Lord Cornwallis in Yorktown, which had effectively ended the war in the East. About fifty American and Canadian Loyalists along with three American Indians ambushed and routed 182 Kentucky militiamen on a hill next to the Licking River (then Kentucky County, now Robertson County Virginia).



The rebels had reached a spot on the lower river near a spring and salt lick in the morning. They were spotted by some Indian Scouts watching from across the river. Behind the scouts was a hill around which the river looped. Todd called a council and asked Daniel Boone, the most experienced woodsman, what he thought. Boone said he had been growing increasingly suspicious because of the conspicuous trail left by the Indians; he suspected that the Indians were trying to lead them into an ambush. But a fierce Indian fighter by the name of Hugh McGary, urged an immediate attack. When no one listened, he mounted his horse and rode across the ford, calling out, "Them that ain't cowards, follow me." The men and officers followed McGary into the trap while Boone remarked, "We are all

slaughtered men," and crossed the river. When the rebels reached the summit, the Indians opened fire at close range with devastating accuracy. After only five minutes, the center and right of the rebel line fell back. Only the force of Boone managed to push forward, while Todd and Trigg, easy targets on horseback, were shot dead. The rebels ran down the hill, fighting hand-to-hand. Boone ordered his men to retreat and grabbing a riderless horse ordered his 23-year-old son, Israel Boone, to mount it. Then, while he searched for a horse for himself, Israel suddenly fell to the ground. He was shot through the neck. Boone realized his son was dead, mounted the horse, and joined in the retreat. Revolutionary War Pensions on this website The Freedoms Won by our Ancestors, the Mighty and the Brave.

"After four days of moderate and pleasant traveling, we arrived in the evening at the Buffalo Lick. This extraordinary place occupies several acres of ground, at the foot of the S. E. promontory of the Great Ridge, which, as before observed, divides the rivers Savannah and Altamaha. A large cane swamp and meadows, forming an immense plain, lies S. E. from it; in this swamp, I believe the head branches of the great Ogeechee river take their rise. The place called the Lick contains three or four acres, is nearly level, and lies between the head of the cane swamp and the ascent of the Ridge. The earth, from the superficies to an unknown depth, is an almost white or cinereous colored tenacious fattish clay, which all kinds of cattle lick into great caves, pursuing the delicious vein. It is the common opinion of the inhabitants, that this clay is impregnated with saline vapors, arising from fossil salts deep in the earth; but I could discover nothing saline in its taste, but I imagined an insipid sweetness. Horned cattle, horses, and deer are immoderately fond of it, insomuch, that their excrement, which almost totally covers the earth to some distance round this place, appears to be perfect clay; which, when dried by the sun and air, is almost as hard as a brick."

Sources:

Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida
by Author: William Bartram (1794)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bone_Lick_State_Park