

By GEORGE ROBERTSON, M.D.

The ancient trail of the American Indian days going from north to south across Tennessee and into Mississippi has been converted by the National Park Service to a scenic limited access highway which is perfect for bicycling.

The history of the trail dates back 8,000 years when it was used by wild animals and Native Americans and later by Spanish explorers, British troops and finally Frontières settlers as a path across Tennessee, Alabama and well down into Mississippi. The route is now a gently curving road which has a 50-mile-an-hour speed limit making it easy to stay out of the traffic as you bike along and admire the scenery.

The last cool and breezy day was just right for an outdoor activity and we got off of Highway #7 near Hilltop, Tenn., to turn onto the Natchez Trace at mile number 415. Starting South on the route gave us a downhill ride much the way over the next 7 miles.

Linda was surprised that so many birds were singing since it was windy and cold. She identified the song of the Louisiana Water Thrush vocalizing near a small stream shortly after we turned onto the roadway.

I noticed trail markers alongside the trace and thought how much easier it would be to hike this country rather than the Appalachian Trail in East Tennessee. But after finding out that the route encompasses a 444-mile journey, I decided to leave his activity off to a later date.

The trail came to a turnoff where there was an overlook above the Water Valley community. The picnic table looked inviting, but we hadn't brought any food along so we would have to save this for the next outing. The thin clear notes of the Prairie Warbler serenaded us at this point in the trip. We also heard a Red Eyed Vireo that seemed to be trying to make conversation with us as we biked along.

Birding by ear on the Natchez Trace

Monday, April 16, 2012

Before going on to the trail it's a good idea to have an exit strategy because the connecting roads are spread some distance apart. Our next opportunity to get off the trace came at mile marker 409, but we could have lifted the bikes over picket fence barriers if we wanted off sooner.

The 2-mile uphill pull to the east on Highway 50 was loud and dangerous since the bike line was only a couple of feet wide and the traffic was moving at interstate speed. Once we turned off at Snow Creek Road the conditions were much improved. This is where Linda heard a common yellow throat and we saw wild turkeys and a red tailed Hawk.

In another mile the pavement turned left onto Leipers Creek Road which ran beside a beautiful little stream and offered many more opportunities for viewing wild life. After three hours on the bike our legs were burning with the activity and we were happy to see the car and load up for the trip home. The biggest negative about the trip is the better than two-hour drive through Nashville traffic just to get to the trace.

Editor's Note: George Robertson is a physician with Family Medical Associates, PC, in Lebanon.