

# THE MARY INGLES TRAIL

By Doug Wood



## *THE STORY OF MARY INGLES*

The story of the Mary Ingles Trail begins with the War for Empire between Great Britain and France, known in America as the French and Indian War. As early as 1746, Mary's father, Mr. George Draper, was living near New River (present-day Blacksburg, VA). Mary and her husband William Ingles, moved to Draper's Meadow with their family a few years later. Relative peace had reigned between the natives and the foreigners in this frontier settlement until France and Great Britain squared off in the contest for control of the continent. Both sides courted allies among the American Indian Nations of the Great Lakes, the Ohio Valley, and the southeast.

Cherokees remained loyal to their longtime allies the British. Many Mississippi Valley and Great Lakes Nations joined the French, but the Shawnees, Delawares, Miamis, and the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederation were split. Some counseled for neutrality, while others counseled to join one side or the other in the fray. After Colonel George Washington's Virginia Regiment was defeated at Great Meadows on July 3, 1754 and after English General Edward Braddock affronted the Ohio Valley Indians in the early summer of 1755 by pompously insisting that the Crown owned the region and the Indians had nothing to say about it, many warriors were influenced to join the French and attempt to force the western colonists back eastward.

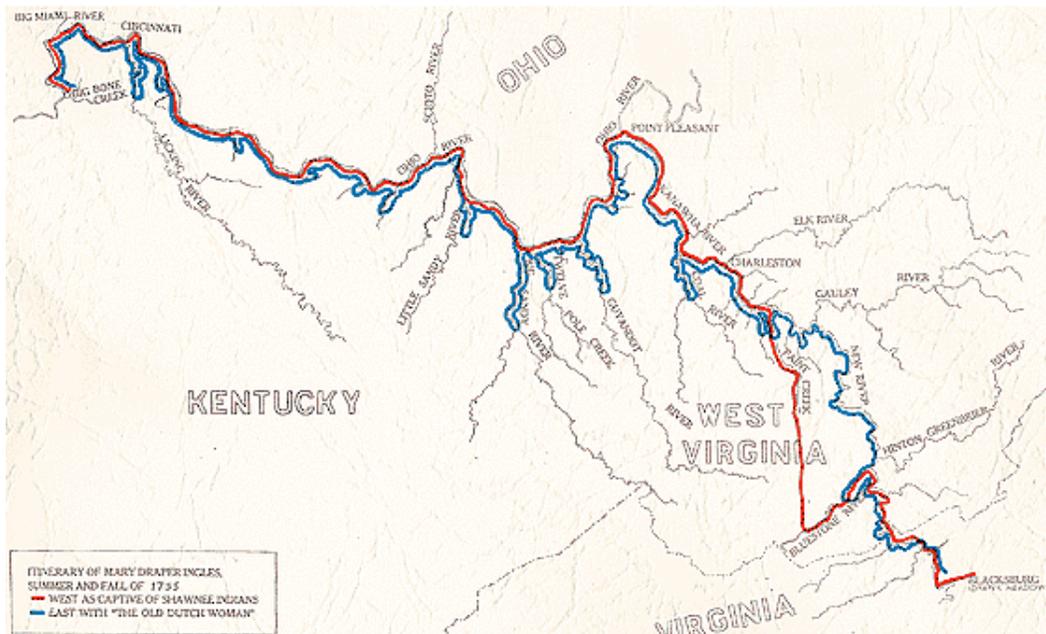
Draper's Meadow and Mary Ingles' family was sucked into the vortex of war during a raid on July 30, 1755. Mary's mother was killed. Mary's sister-in-law, Betty Draper, (wife of John, Mary's brother) was wounded and her baby was killed. Thomas and George, Mary's young sons, were taken captive along with Mary, Betty, and some of their neighbors. William Ingles and John Draper, weaponless and away from the cabins, could only hope for an opportunity to ransom their loved ones from their captors.

The Shawnee war captain guided his entourage over an ancient war, hunting and trading path that climbed Flat Top Mountain, descended Paint Creek, and entered the Kanawha Valley

upstream of present-day Charleston, WV. In this valley, Mary was put to the task of rendering salt from the briny spring water exuding from the ground at a big buffalo lick. The weary party made its way downstream to the mouth of Kanawha River and crossed Ohio River. They continued walking downstream to Sonhioto, or Lower Shawnee Town, at the mouth of Scioto River, near present-day Portsmouth, OH.

Within a short time, Mary's sons and Betty were separated from her. At Sonhioto, Mary worked for a Frenchman, sewing shirts from his trade cloth so he could trade the shirts for peltry. Mary also made the acquaintance of other captives, one of which was a German woman, known in the local English vernacular as a "Dutch woman". With this new friend, Mary plotted an escape. When their captors would take the women with them to make more salt, Mary and the German woman would escape. Unbeknownst to Mary, the salt lick the Shawnees intended to visit was even further downstream, not the one in the Kanawha Valley.

Arriving at the Big Bone Lick (presently a Kentucky State Park), Mary resolved to escape even though she was nearly 150 miles further away from home than at Sonhioto. This placed Draper's Meadow at approximately 450 miles by foot from the kettle Mary then labored over. Undaunted by the distance and driven by their desire to return home, Mary and her companion slipped away from their captors and started the long journey that would test each woman's stamina, sanity, and spirit.



Walking the south side of Ohio River, Mary and the Dutch woman crossed Kentucky, Licking, Little and Big Sandy, and Guyandotte Rivers before reaching Kanawha River. The journey up Kanawha River was similar to that along Ohio River, until they came to Kanawha Falls. This spectacular fall marked the beginning of an ordeal few can claim to have surpassed; for it was here the women entered the gorge of New River. For nearly 50 miles, the women struggled over house-sized boulders, around rock scree, and across cold, rapid streams until the large bottoms of upper New River offered relief for their aching feet.

Fear of wolf packs, hungry panthers, and vengeful warriors haunted the women every step of their journey. These dangers were very real and present in 1755, as was the danger of death by exposure to cold, wet weather. The women had no way to build fires to keep warm, no means but their hands and tomahawks to procure provisions, and no medicine men or women to comfort their scratches, bruises, cuts, and coughs. After the German woman, in a hunger-induced delirium, attacked her, Mary crossed New River near present-day Hinton, WV. They continued upstream, keeping in voice contact. In early November, the ordeal ended when Adam Harman found Mary lying in one of his corn patches near present-day Eggleston, VA. He nursed her back to health and reunited her with William. Harman found the "old Dutch woman" a few days later.

### ***THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE TRAIL***

The famous battles and the famous warriors of the French and Indian War are well known, but heroic deeds were not limited to soldiers in battle. Mary Ingles, a frontier wife and mother who overcame incredible odds to find her way back home from captivity among the Shawnees, is a lesser known heroine. Her story, highlighted above, has provided inspiration to many who have read it through numerous publications. One of those inspired is Bob Tabor, one of the founding members of the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association (WVSTA). The WVSTA was in the middle of developing and maintaining the Allegheny Trail through the eastern highlands of West Virginia when Bob's vision of an east-west trail in Mary's honor began to spread among the organization's members.

Then, in 1987, an Indiana woman inspired by James Thom's 1981 novel "Follow The River," decided to retrace Mary's footsteps along the Ohio, Kanawha and New rivers. Another woman inspired by Thom's novel, Debbie Klene, joined Eleanor Lahr. In 1987 they retraced Mary's escape route from Big Bone Lick, Kentucky to Eggleston, Virginia.

Eleanor and Debbie intended their journey to be a relatively lonesome "vision quest" of sorts, but such an adventure is good press. Shortly into their trek and inspired by the Mary Draper Ingles story and informed by the newspaper articles describing Eleanor's hike, others joined them. They received offers of support from folks all along the route. "Will you have supper and spend the night with us?" "May we drive a support van for you?" "Would it be alright for us to walk with you for a few days?"

Upon reaching the New River gorge, their adventure intensified. Few riverside improvements had yet been constructed by the National Park Service. Access for support vehicles was limited and the terrain grew increasingly difficult. Here was the greatest opportunity for communion with the wraith of our frontier heroine. Members of the Mary Ingles Trail Club, a Fayetteville area chapter of the WVSTA, guided the handful of adventurers through the gorge.

Sites mentioned by Thom in his novel had particular significance to Eleanor and Debbie; they became the mileposts that reminded them of the hardships overcome by Mary on her arduous trek. The climb over the Palisades at Eggleston, Virginia was a spiritual experience of catharsis unsurpassed by any the women had experienced up to that point for it represented the end of their adventure at the very place where Mary was reunited with the culture she understood best. It was just beyond the massive columns of rock along New River that a ragged, half-starved Mary passed from hope into the realization of that hope in a cornfield tended by a

German immigrant neighbor of hers, Adam Harman. After Eleanor and Debbie completed their journey, the WVSTA formed the Mary Ingles Trail Blazers chapter to begin the work of building “her” trail through the Kanawha Valley region. Mary’s journey reminds us of a time in this country’s history when walking was the primary mode of travel through the Allegheny Mountains westward into and eastward from the Ohio River Valley.

This Trail also honors those who traversed the same ancient travel corridor along Ohio, Kanawha, and New Rivers for tens of thousands of years before Mary made her incredible journey. Moccasined feet followed the great West-East river corridor that pierced through the heart of the rugged Alleghenies. First, the natives hunted and gathered from seasonal base camps under rock ledge shelters. Then they established villages, and later, cities with magnificent political and religious centers marked by huge earthworks and stone structures. Next, they fought intertribal wars for control of the skin and fur trade in the beaver-rich valleys of the western Allegheny Slope. Finally, they defended hunting grounds and warpaths from encroachment by Europeans seeking new lives in the “New World” - better lives than they could have in their homelands torn by political and religious upheaval. Soon, the immigrants and their offspring wrested the land from its former occupants, and changed its face forever. The land’s timber was felled, its “old fields” were plowed, its streams were dammed, and its footpaths became wagon roads, railroads, and, eventually, highways.

Storied individuals made treks afoot on the great East-West river corridor. In 1763, Cornstalk marched his army along the route to attack Virginian plantations west of the Blue Ridge. In 1774, Andrew Lewis marched his wing of Dunmore’s army on the part of the route that follows the Great Kanawha Valley. Simon Kenton trapped and hunted along the route. In 1791, Daniel Boone, his wife Rebecca, and their youngest child Nathan walked to Richmond VA and back over a portion of the route when Daniel represented Kanawha County in the Virginia legislature. George Washington Carver made his trek as a freed man from a plantation in Virginia to Malden, West Virginia to work in the salt industry. Myriad others, unknown to history, have passed this way to seek their fortunes and raise their families.

### ***FULL CIRCLE***

Gone are the bison, elk and wolf that saw Mary Ingles pass this way in 1755. No longer do the red folk burn the woods to drive game. Many of the remains of the great Pleistocene mammals mired in the briny mud of Big Bone Lick, KY were removed by curiosity seekers, museum collectors, and early American scientists. All but a few of the magnificent earthen mounds in the Great Kanawha River Valley have been plowed, excavated, or bulldozed to ground level. The remains of the fort at Dunkards Bottom, where Mary and Will took refuge after Mary returned from her stay among the Shawnees, lie under a reservoir on New River. But, much of the forest has returned to the once-pastured hills and many of the old wagon roads tributary to the major river corridor have become footpaths again. The log cabins of 18th and early 19th century settlers, loathsome to the former native inhabitants of this land, are now the gems of history, waiting for discovery and appreciation by new generations of outdoor enthusiasts.

Foot travel has again become a common activity, except now, it is engaged in for recreational pleasure, nature study and exercise, not for necessity. Walking, hiking and backpacking have all experienced a surge in participation in recent years. While modern highways and railroads now carry travelers to and fro along the ancient route, the surrounding

hills are ready once again to feel the steps of humans on foot. The opportunity has never been better for establishing a trail in honor of the resilient spirits of Mary Ingles and others who passed this way on journeys of peril or adventure.

### ***A PATH THROUGH THE WOODS***

The vision for the Mary Ingles Trail is simply a path through the woods. In cooperation with landowners, trail development enthusiasts propose to establish a long-distance trail running parallel to the ancient West-East river valley route. The proposal is simple and therefore flexible to meet the various desires of different landowners. At its most basic level, the trail will be a footpath through forested terrain. It will offer opportunities for day hiking, nature study and overnight backpacking. Several publicly owned lands currently have their own systems of trails. A few private lands host other trails, such as the Boy Scout maintained Kanawha Trace. The Mary Draper Ingles Trail provides a way to link many of these separate trails into a significant regional trail network.

### ***WHO BENEFITS?***

Obviously, hikers will benefit by having more trail miles upon which they can recreate. But, what about others? Will the landowners benefit? Certainly. The vision of cooperative development of the trail with no possible use of eminent domain creates an environment in which landowners and recreationists can appreciate each other's desires and concerns. By negotiation, the trail that "best fits" will be the trail developed.

Perhaps most important, future generations will benefit by having a cooperatively-developed recreational resource as a model for low-impact, outdoor recreation facilities developed on public and private lands. The precedent for such a model has been set by such projects as the Kanawha Trace and the Allegheny Trail.

The Kanawha Trace was developed on private lands by boy scouts of the Tri-State Area Council to provide long-distance hiking opportunities primarily for scouts (both boys and girls), but also for the general public in the Tri-State region (KY, OH and WV). It is likely that the Trace will host a portion of the Mary Ingles Trail. The Allegheny Trail was developed in cooperation with three national forests, the state of West Virginia, individual landowners and corporate land managers to provide long-distance hiking opportunities in the Allegheny Highlands of the two Virginias.

These trails provide opportunities for recreationists to learn how diverse land management practices support rural lifestyles. The landowner or land manager learns how provision for recreation can do a great deal to promote understanding between rural landowners and the increasingly non-rural majority of citizens. The Mary Ingles Trail will provide the same learning opportunities.

### ***COOPERATORS***

As previously mentioned, the Mary Ingles Trail is the brainchild of a few early West Virginia Scenic Trails Association members. Other cooperators include, the Mary Ingles Trail Heritage Trust, the Tri-State Area Boy Scout Council, the West Virginia Trails Coalition, the Mountain Resource Conservation and Development Area Office, the Great Kanawha RC&D

Area Office, the West Virginia agencies over Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas, New River Gorge National River, the Benedum Foundation, and several private landowners. In the Kanawha Valley, the first section of trail was developed as a loop on the property of Bob and Pat Weiford. This loop trail has been the stage for an annual outdoor living history event in honor of Mary Ingles, and is put on by the Mary Ingles Trail Associates in cooperation with the Putnam County Visitor's Bureau. History has become recreation.

The next portion of Mary's trail in the Kanawha Valley area was developed in Kanawha State Forest. Utilizing several trails established by the Kanawha Trail Club, as well as constructing a few new link trails, the Mary Ingles Trail Blazers cooperated with the West Virginia Parks and Forests agency of the Division of Natural Resources. The relationship has been very productive, and should help expand the trail in other state facilities along the proposed corridor.

Most recently, American Electric Power has joined the effort to establish Mary's trail. Offering to provide a corridor of land in Putnam County between the John Amos Power Plant and Winfield, WV, the community-minded company has agreed to develop the trailhead parking areas and signs, while members of the Mary Ingles Trail Blazers will develop the footpath and vistas along the way. This new phase of trail development bodes well for the future of Mary's trail in the Kanawha Valley.

### ***CAN YOU HELP?***

This synopsis is made available to provide information on the proposed Mary Draper Ingles Trail to prospective cooperators. If you are interested in helping or finding out more, write to:

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P.O. Box 4042  
Charleston, WV 25364

Or E-mail at: [wvscenictrailsassn@yahoo.com](mailto:wvscenictrailsassn@yahoo.com)

To learn about the Allegheny Trail, visit our website:  
<http://wvscenictrails.org/>