

Native Narratives of Trading and Travel

WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW FROM THE SURVIVING FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS

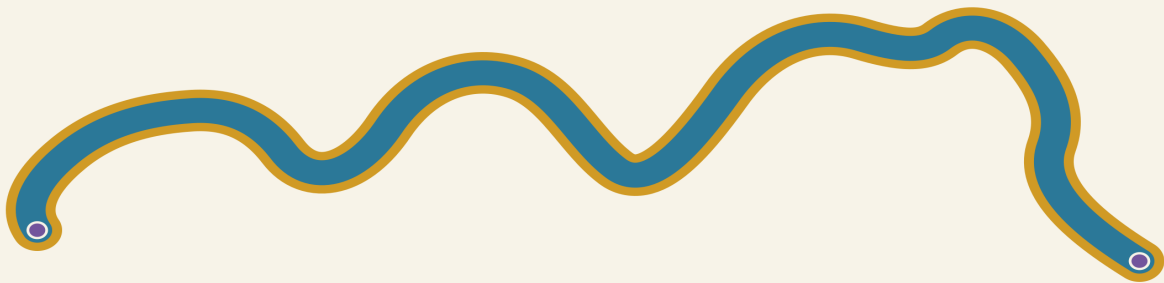
By **T.P. Calhoun**

21 September 2026

Hi. I am producing a number of these early reports and intend someday to go deeper. Maybe I will; maybe I won't. But you are welcome to!

CROWN OF THE OHIO

THE RIVER FORMS THE CROWN



CORRECTED BEAVER-WELLSVILLE TRACE • DESIGN ROUND 03 • 2026

Map: the mapped Ohio River trace from Beaver, Pennsylvania (upstream/right), to Wellsville, Ohio (downstream/left). This is an orientation emblem rather than a navigation map.

MY STARTING POINT

I have been skeptical of the familiar claim that long “Indian trails” already crossed this country as continuous east-west roads. I wanted to know what Native people themselves said about travel and trade. The surviving Native-centered narratives do document long journeys, exchange and wide relationships. But they more often describe seasonal circuits among villages, hunting territories, rivers and trading posts than repeated commercial travel along one named road. I have not yet located a first-person Native account identifying a precontact, hundreds-of-miles trading highway through the Crown. That absence is not proof that no such route existed. It is a reason not to draw the road before finding the evidence.

Researched, conceived, directed, and edited by T.P. Calhoun • RHKMI / Crockery Valley Club

Four accounts worth reading first

I began with these texts because readers can inspect the narratives themselves rather than simply accept a later historian's summary. None is an unmediated window into remote antiquity. Date, translation, editing, colonial institutions and the European fur trade shaped every surviving document.

1. Black Hawk (Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak), Autobiography (1833)

Voice and form. A Sauk leader dictated his account through Antoine LeClaire; J. B. Patterson edited it.

What it contributes. Black Hawk describes going downriver for supplies, moving to particular winter hunting grounds, returning in spring, saving furs for exchange, and traders following the Sauk back to their village. He also describes groups leaving for hunting, fishing and lead production and then returning to exchange products.

Use with care. Translation and editorial mediation are substantial. The geography is the Mississippi-Rock River country, not the Crown.

[Open the full text](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7097/7097-h/7097-h.htm)

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2. John Tanner (Shaw-shaw-wa-ne-ba-se), Narrative (1830)

Voice and form. White-born, taken as a child, adopted, and raised for roughly thirty years within Odawa and Ojibwe society; dictated to Edwin James.

What it contributes. The most concrete account here of household movement: months of travel, children carried on backs, loads abandoned when necessary, winter camps, pelts and dried food taken to trading houses, and travel by water and overland segments.

Use with care. Tanner was culturally immersed but not Native-born, and James shaped the published English text.

[Open the full text](https://ojibwegrammar.langsci.wisc.edu/Assets/Pdfs/BookTanner.pdf)

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Four accounts worth reading first — continued

3. William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibway People*

Voice and form. An Ojibwe-French American historian gathered traditions and oral statements from Ojibwe relatives and knowledge keepers in the mid-nineteenth century.

What it contributes. Collective histories of movement, warfare, trading posts and fur-trade relationships. Useful for seeing routes as social relationships among communities rather than lines drawn independently across a map.

Use with care. It is collective historical reconstruction, not one traveler's diary; it concerns the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi.

[Open the full text](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/History_of_the_Ojibway_Nation)

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4. Hendrick Aupaumut, “A Short Narration of My Last Journey to the Western Contry” (1794)

Voice and form. A Mahican leader wrote an English account of his 1791-92 mission among Shawnee, Lenape, Miami and other western nations.

What it contributes. The closest item here to a Native-authored long-distance itinerary involving the Ohio-Great Lakes world. It records named communities, councils, runners, hospitality, guides and waterways.

Use with care. The mission was diplomatic, not a trading expedition, and occurred after colonial war and commerce had reshaped travel.

[Open the full text](https://open.maricopa.edu/earlyamericanliteratureanthology/chapter/a-short-narration-of-my-last-journey-to-the-western-contry-1794/)

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What I think these narratives permit us to say

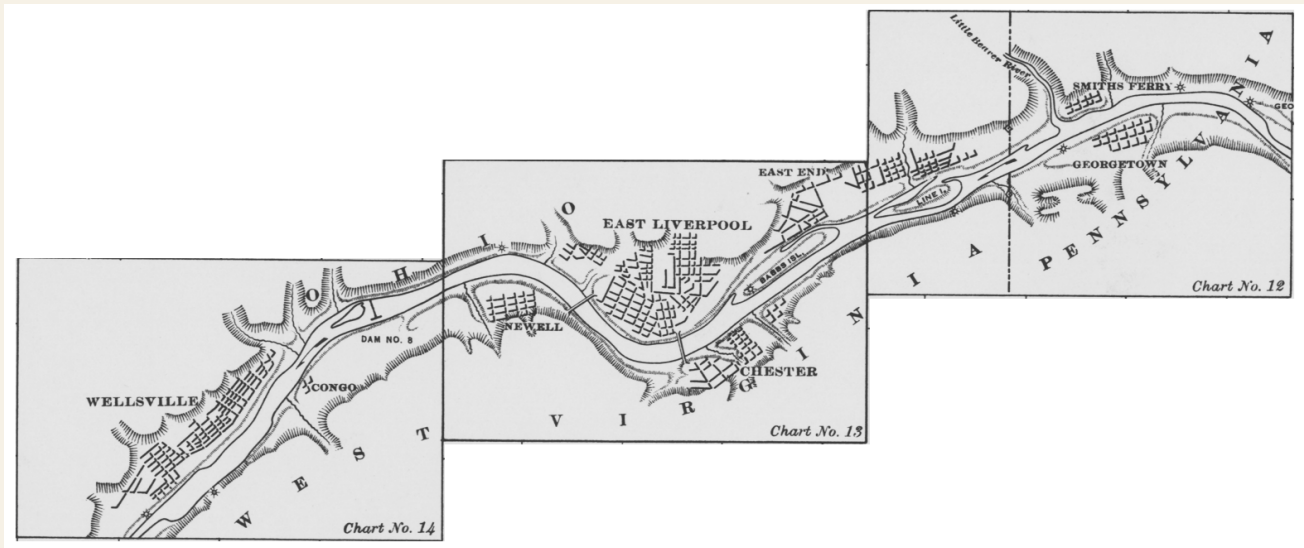
For me, five points stand out. They make Native travel neither small nor simple, but they also do not turn every later road into an ancient transcontinental trail.

- Long travel was real, but purpose-specific. Diplomacy, warfare, kinship, migration, hunting and trade could take people far from home.
- Trade was often brought to communities. Traders established posts, visited villages, extended credit and followed hunters rather than waiting at a distant terminal.
- Movement was seasonal and household-based. Families dispersed, hunted, fished and gathered; they returned with products to a village, rendezvous or post.
- Waterways supplied continuity. Canoe travel joined local paths, portages, landings and community knowledge. A long journey could be assembled without one continuous overland road.
- Objects could travel farther than people. Materials could pass through successive exchanges, gifts, marriages and ceremonies. Provenance does not identify one traveler or one road.

What I do not think they establish

- A routine precontact east-west commute across hundreds of miles.
- A single, permanently maintained “Indian trail” later inherited intact by a modern road.
- A Crown-specific trading itinerary through Beaver, Vanport, Smiths Ferry, Babb’s Island, East Liverpool or Wellsville.

The Crown corridor: evidence before assumption



Historic orientation: U.S. river-chart panels showing Wellsville, Newell, East Liverpool, Chester, Babb's Island, Georgetown and Smiths Ferry. The chart is much later than Indigenous occupation, but it makes visible the narrow river corridor, islands, landings and hillside constraints that any earlier traveler confronted.

MY CROWN RESEARCH RULE

I do not want to convert a later map line into an ancient highway. I want to test every claimed segment for its earliest documentation, users, purpose, mode of travel and Native destinations. I would begin with crossings, landings, tributary mouths and short ascent paths, and allow a long route to emerge only where the evidence actually joins the segments.

Crown-specific work still required

- Moravian diaries: extract journeys and reported statements by Lenape travelers around the Upper Ohio, while clearly identifying the missionary recorder and translator.
- Treaty and council minutes: search for Native delegates describing where they came from, why they traveled, which waterways or communities they used, and where trade occurred.
- Trading-post records: determine whether Native families traveled to traders or traders moved outward to villages and hunting territories.
- Crossing reconstruction: map Vanport, Smiths Ferry and Babb's Island as landing-and-ascent complexes rather than dots or presumed through-roads.

Sources and working links

All links below were opened or resolved during preparation of this note on 21 September 2026. Public hosts can later reorganize files; titles and authors are included so that a broken URL remains searchable.

Black Hawk autobiography - full searchable HTML	OPEN https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7097/7097-h/7097-h.htm
John Tanner narrative - complete 1830 PDF	OPEN https://ojibwegrammar.langsci.wisc.edu/Assets/Pdfs/BookTanner.pdf
William W. Warren - History of the Ojibway Nation	OPEN https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/History_of_the_Ojibway_Nation
Hendrick Aupaumut - complete "Short Narration"	OPEN https://open.maricopa.edu/earlyamericanliteratureanthology/chapter/a-short-narration-of-my-last-journey-to-the-western-country-1794/
Delaware Nation - tribal history and geographic context	OPEN https://www.delawarenation-nsn.gov/history/
Onondaga Nation - timeline including travel and trade rights	OPEN https://www.onondaganation.org/history/timeline/
National Park Service - Oneida Carrying Place: travel, trade and conflict	OPEN https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/through-the-oneida-carrying-place-travel-trade-and-conflict.htm
Library of Congress - published sources on Native paths and trails	OPEN https://guides.loc.gov/native-american-spaces/published-sources/trails

My provisional conclusion: I find strong evidence for Native mobility and exchange, but not yet for treating the Crown as one segment of a fixed, ancient east-west commercial highway. For now, I think the Ohio itself - together with its tributaries, crossings, landings and local access paths - is the better model from which to investigate how people actually moved.