



# History - Wayne N. F.

U.S.D.A. Forest Service

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The area which is now the Wayne National Forest is believed to have been inhabited continuously from as early as 12,000 years ago. American Indians traveled through the area as bands of hunters, in a time when mastadons roamed the land. They established trails, temporary camps, and quarries to extract stone for their tools. They also set wildfires to drive the game from the forest and to create openings where they could forage for berries and seeds.

Later, these people settled the area with seasonal camps or villages and cultivated native seed plants and crops such as corn, beans, and squash. They farmed with hand tools and selected the lands easiest and most fertile to cultivate -- river bottoms and terraces. Fields were farmed until they were no longer productive, then new fields were cleared and the village moved on.

Yet for centuries the forest was largely undisturbed. The barrier of trees, mountains, and mysterious native Indians stemmed the onrush of colonists. Eventually, though, by the mid 1700's, traders and adventurers came into the area.

In the late 1700's, when colonists first began to settle the area, 95 percent of Ohio was forested. Primarily the forest was large hardwoods with clearings in which Native Americans had grown their crops. Early settlements were concentrated along the Ohio River and other major rivers and streams.

As European Americans acquired land to settle, one of their first concerns was to clear the land of trees. The forest was an obstacle to be conquered. The settlers harvested timber to use as building material or fuel, or simply cleared fields to provide farmland for crops and pasture. Other than the area adjacent to the Ohio River, the hills of the Wayne were some of the last areas in Ohio to be settled. Southeastern Ohio's rocky slopes and narrow ridge-tops were hard to clear and the soil poor for farming.

Though these were some of the finest hardwoods in the world there was little commercial lumbering until 1800. At it's peak in 1849, Ohio ranked 4th among the states in lumber production. But the marketable trees were soon gone and by 1920 there were virtually no areas left uncut in Ohio. The cut-over lands sold for less than \$1 per acre.

The type of cutting that occurred in the 1800's had a profound effect on the composition of the

present forest. The high quality trees were cut off first: black walnut, black cherry, and white oak. Later cuts removed most of the remaining trees. Those that remained were small or defective or of undesirable species. The areas were also often burned repeatedly.

Many of the early settlers were of Scotch-Irish descent who had routinely burned the heath in their homeland. Burning the land was a way of life, considered the right thing to do. It kept the sprouts and brush killed back, killed snakes, ticks, and other varmints and encouraged grass for their cattle to graze. Many also believed it killed fever germs that lurked in the woods. In some areas, there are people who still believe this today. Over a century of burning and grazing have taken their toll. Only the most resilient species of trees such as oak and hickory could withstand the repeated fires and are the hardest survivors in our forests today.

While digging a water well in Noble County, Ohio in 1814 someone first tapped into one of Ohio's oil reservoirs. Oil and brine shot out of the hole to a height of 30 feet. Within a few years oil wells were being sunk throughout southeastern Ohio. The oil was used in lighting lamps and for medicinal purposes. Used in a product called "Seneca Oil" it was believed to be a remedy for rheumatism and healed sores in livestock.

Further discoveries in the 1860's of a heavy paraffin-based oil which could be used for lubricants focused more interest in Ohio's oil potential. By 1900, as tools and drilling techniques improved, wells were drilled deeper, and more oil and gas were encountered. Today, most wells are less than 5,000 feet in depth, and there are now close to 5,500 wells within the National Forest boundary.

At the same time as the timber was being cut and burned, and oil wells were being drilled, coal mining and iron smelting were also introduced. The

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seams of coal and iron ore were of more interest in the steep hills and narrow valleys of much of the Forest area than were the possibilities of farming. By 1875, the Hanging Rock Iron district had 69 charcoal furnaces. Each furnace was dependent upon the forest for charcoal which was used to smelt the iron ore. At that time, southeastern Ohio led the nation in iron production. What timber had been left was repeatedly cut to feed the iron furnaces which caused complete destruction of the forest cover.

The Hanging Rock area, now part of the Ironton District, has preserved several of its iron furnaces and much of the area is still scarred with the coal and iron ore mines. Vesuvius furnace, named for an Italian volcano, dates back to 1833. At the height of its glory, it was a leading example of ingenuity and efficiency. The Vesuvius furnace, under the direction of William Firmstone, pioneered a new technique to reduce heat requirements and increase production of "hot blast" furnace systems. The furnace employed about 100 men. Each ton of ore required 190 bushels of charcoal, three tons of iron ore, and 300 pounds of limestone. Once produced, wagons pulled by oxen hauled the pig iron to the shipping point and the ore was then taken by river boats to Pittsburgh. In 1851 rail lines were completed to many furnaces providing more efficient transportation.

In time, the iron seams played out and the circle of denuded land required ever further hauls of wood for charcoal. The last furnaces closed in 1906 and the laborers drifted west to active ore fields.

The Depression then sealed the fate of the small farms in southern Ohio. Times were hard, and many of the settlers gave up and moved on. The hills were eroding and the soil was depleted of nutrients. Crop prices were low and droughts occurred several years in a row. Between 1900 and 1930, as a result of both the farmers and iron workers departure, census records show a 40 percent drop in the population of the area.

As the farmers and iron workers moved out, generally just abandoning their farms and homes, local officials became concerned about the growing amount of tax delinquent lands on the tax rolls. In 1932, approximately 36 percent of the area which is now the Wayne National Forest, was tax delinquent.

In 1911, recognizing the need to protect our nation's watersheds, Congress passed the Weeks Law which, with concurrence of state legislatures, allowed for the purchase of land to create national forests. The Ohio State legislature approved a bill on November 22, 1934, authorizing the U.S. Government to acquire land for the purpose of creating a

national forest.

Five purchase units were established in areas where land use problems were greatest. The Forest Supervisor operated out of the Post Office building in Columbus, Ohio. Purchase Unit Offices, originally operated out of Marietta, Athens, Jackson, Portsmouth, and Ironton. These offices in the early days had a high of 120 land examiners who appraised land. Approximately 77,000 acres were acquired between 1935 and 1942. The price ranged from \$4 to \$5.50 an acre. Acquisition was suspended during the war, but since the war the Forest has steadily grown. The first priorities of the Forest Service were to stabilize erosion, rehabilitate the damaged land, and control wildfires.

A Forest Service nursery was established near Chillicothe (now run by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources) to produce trees for reforestation. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Program of the 1930's provided jobs for the unemployed and manpower to begin reforesting the hillsides and controlling the massive erosion problems. They also constructed fire towers across the countryside and strung telephone lines to relay messages to control wildfires.

A large CCC camp at Vesuvius provided the labor to construct the Vesuvius Lake dam and Recreation Area at the site of the old Vesuvius iron furnace. The narrows of Storms Creek offered a good dam site for a lake and the rugged hills and out-cropping cliffs formed a scenic backdrop on the historical site. The old oxen road which had hauled out the pig iron was widened and graveled, and trees were planted on the barren hillsides.

In 1951, when the Wayne Purchase Units had acquired 97,000 acres, it officially became a National Forest. The Wayne National Forest continued to grow until the 1980's when acquisition dollars mostly dried up. In 1983, the Wayne was targeted under the Asset Management Program which was intended to improve management of Federal assets by disposing of those which were difficult or uneconomic to manage. Approximately 63,800 acres of the then 169,000-acre Forest were identified for disposal. A strong public reaction not only saved those acres, but resulted in an increased land acquisition program which continues today.

What is now forest was once farms. As the scars left on the land are healed, the gravestones of the pioneers may be some of the last evidence of their lives here. It's a stark reminder of how tenuous our place on the land can be. A reminder too, of the importance of stewardship of the land, and the value of places like the Wayne National Forest to each of us, whether or not we ever visit them. Conservation of our nation's Forests and other natural resources, are a legacy we, as a people, leave our children.