

Hidden away in Howard County is a beautiful little state park with a connection to the early history of the area. Boonslick State Historic Site is located on County Road 328 off of State Highway 87. It is near Boonesboro, MO and south of Glasgow. The geo coordinates of the site are N 39° 04.919 W 092° 52.754.

The site is a salt “lick” that was a place where animals came to lick the salty soil because of the three natural salt springs located there.

. This spring was one of the primary sources of salt for the Indians in the central Missouri area and for the early settlements along the Missouri River between 1806 and 1833. The site is also significant as it was a stopping point for travelers along an ancient Indian trace which became an early highway from St. Louis extending west across Missouri, known as the Boonslick Road. The area around the salt lick, presently Howard County, became known as the "Boonslick Country," and was a prime settlement area in the early 1800s.



The Boonslick Trail began as a 1764 Indian-trapper pathway that started in downtown Saint Louis near the Old Courthouse and developed into the first road to the Far West, mother of the better known Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. Because the famous frontiersman Daniel Boone and his sons extended the early trail to the salt springs, the trail is named after him.



In 1912 the Daughters of the American Revolution sprinkled thirty-two markers along the trail, starting immediately behind the Old Courthouse on Fourth Street in Saint Louis and going as far as Franklin, Missouri. Although some of the markers are in out-of-the-way places, they are a good check for determining how close one is to the original road.

The old Boonslick Trail, with its modern DAR markers, has now become the state and county highway system identified as 94, N, M, MM, Z, F, and WW.

After Columbia, Missouri, comes New Franklin, built after the river washed away the original town. Here the Boonslick Trail turns into the Santa Fe Trail, identified by a large granite marker honoring its 1821 beginning. In 1912 the Daughters of the American Revolution put twenty-seven markers on this trail as well.

Some sources claim that the Howard County lick was discovered by Daniel Boone. While he almost certainly visited there, he was not the one who discovered the lick or who developed it. The honor of the discovery could and was claimed by several different people.

Local Native Americans knew of the salt springs and visited it often to obtain salt for their uses. The first non-native to “discover” the lick was James Mackay, a native of Scotland. Zenon Trudeau, lieutenant governor of Spanish Illinois, hired professional mapmaker and surveyor James Mackay as commander of an expedition to explore and survey a portion of the Missouri River in 1795-1797. The resulting map was known as the Mackay-Evans Map or the “Indian Map.” Lewis and Clark used Mackay’s map and notes while planning and carrying out their explorations.

Mackay and his assistant, Lt. John Evans, found and mapped the salt lick during this exploration. In return for all his services to the Spanish, James Mackay was paid in land. After the expedition was over, while serving as commandant of St. Charles, Mackay received a land grant of more than 46,000 acres, mostly in present-day St. Charles and Lincoln counties north of St. Louis. A Spanish land grant of 400 arpents, or 340.28 acres (1 arpent equals 0.8507 acre), to James Mackay on May 21, 1797, included the saline springs and trail known as Mackay’s Lick.

Interviews by Lyman Copeland Draper paint a picture of the area in 1814: “Mackey’s Saline is about 180 miles, northwest of St. Louis, situated on the North Side of the Missouri. About two hundred families are settled at that place, within the skirt of a bottom extending twenty or twenty-five miles. The soil is said to be the most fertile of any in America and abounding in Salt Springs.” (Collection of State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Draper Manuscripts, Vol. 22s, p. 162.)

James Morrison, Nathan Boone and Daniel M. Boone were all officers of the territorial militia for the District of St. Charles during the time the area was transitioning from a Spanish possession to an American territory. James Mackay was the commandant of St. Charles, and Jesse Morrison (father of James Morrison) was a citizen of St. Charles and a businessman. Around 1799, Daniel Boone had moved with a group of settlers to that area and became a guest and friend of the Mackays. Daniel’s sons, Nathan and Daniel Morgan seem to have profited from that friendship.

James Mackay’s true story of his mapping and ownership of the saline spring in Howard County is contradicted by the popular story told by Nathan Boone: “In 1851 Nathan Boone recounted to Historian Lyman Draper how he and a partner had stumbled upon salt springs over forty-five years earlier.” “He returned to the salt springs in 1805 and began production at the site.” (Hammon, Neal, ed. My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone; Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1999, p. 123)

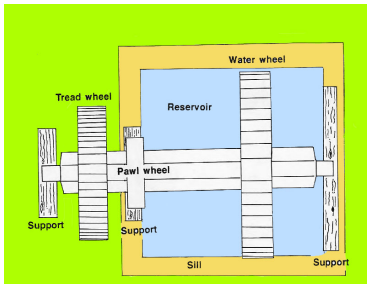
Nathan Boone and his brother-in-law, Mathias Van Bibber, said they came across the springs without being aware of Mackay's existing claim. James and Jesse Morrison of St. Charles leased the lick from James Mackay and went into partnership with the Boone brothers, Nathan and Daniel Morgan, and started working the salt lick in 1806.

In 1807, the Boones and Morrisons founded the Boone's Lick Salt Manufacturing Co. at this spring. The method used by the Boone brothers in manufacturing this salt is not definitely known; however, descriptions of contemporary salt works indicate that the water was first boiled in iron kettles until almost all was evaporated. The



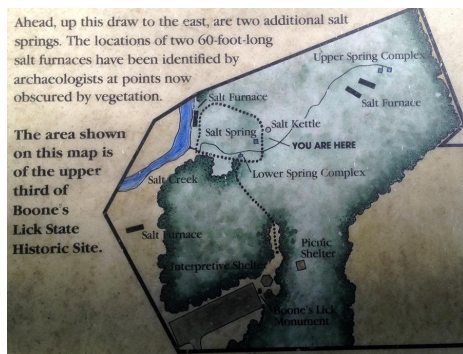
remainder was then placed in the sun or "salt house" for natural dehydration.

Eventually, a manually operated treadwheel was used to power a pump that moved water from the spring into troughs made of hollowed half logs which carried the water to large iron kettles to be boiled.



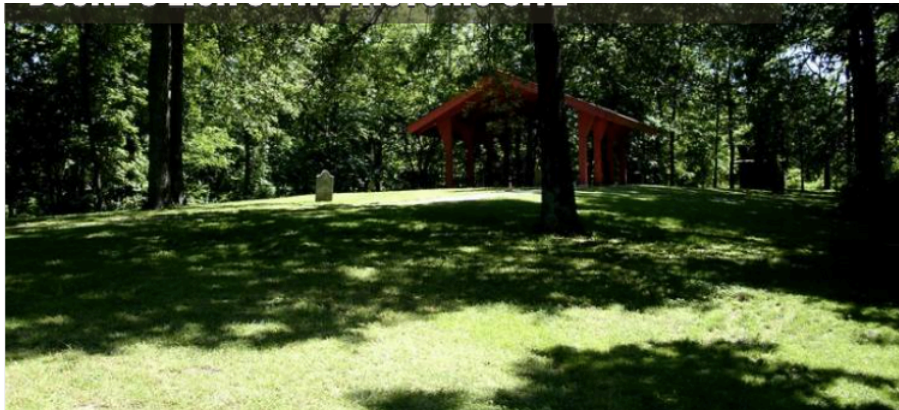
The workers produced salt and shipped it on keelboats back to the eastern river settlements more than 100 miles away. At this time they had one furnace with 40 kettles, which six to 10 men operated. The "furnace" was a long stone lined trench over which the iron kettles were placed. Forty kettles produced from 25 to 30 bushels of salt per day. This was shipped to settlements along the Missouri River and to St. Louis, where it sold for \$2 to \$2.50 per bushel.

The salt works were later expanded by enlarging the existing furnace and erecting a new one, enabling each furnace to hold sixty kettles. Each furnace produced about 100 bushels of salt per day. According to Boone, 300 gallons of water were required to make one bushel of salt. Keeping so many kettles going required many more men. The wood required to feed the fires was harvested from the nearby forest which were cleared in an area within a 5 mile radius of the springs.



This procedure of salt production and manufacturing at such a distance from the population centers did not prove profitable for the brothers. In 1810 Daniel M. sold his interest to James Morrison of St. Charles. Nathan continued in the venture with Morrison, but in the fall of 1811, he also disposed of his interests. Nathan attributed the failure of the salt works to the troubles and pilfering of the local Indians "... chiefly in stealing and killing the working and beef cattle"

Between 1812-1834 Jesse and James Morrison worked the salt lick, operating on the same scale as the Boone Brothers. After the Morrises' enterprise, the lick remained idle until 1869 when the Boonslick Salt Manufacturing Company was organized. This company conducted rather extensive drilling operations at the site, digging one of the springs to a depth of 1001 feet. However, when the water from the well was chemically tested, it was found to be insufficiently saline to support the operations. The salt works being situated quite a distance from a large population center also prompted the company to dissolve in 1879.



Today, the site is a well maintained quiet peaceful spot with historical markers, a large shelter house with picnic tables, and pit toilets. While the salt manufacturing process was in operation, it would have been a very busy place. Cabins for

the large crew would have dotted the ridge. Teams of animals hauling loads of wood to feed the furnaces would be constantly coming and going. Smoke from those fires, no doubt hung low over the site.



Today, a lone grave is a poignant reminder of the humanity and the hardships endured by the men who worked the salt factory. James Morrison's son, Joseph, is buried on the hill above the lick.

While it is known that he died and was buried there, there is some confusion about the exact circumstances. The current grave marker was placed by the DAR In 2002. The marker's position would have been in the very heart of the worker's activities. I believe that the actual grave is located nearby, but in a less central location.

Some sources indicate he died on Aug. 10, 1833, at the age of 16. Others say he died on March 16, 1828, when he was 11. Accounts of how Joseph died also vary. One tradition says he fell into a boiling kettle and was scalded to death. Another says he died of a fever. Yet a third says he was accidentally shot. In any case, his death must have been painful and would have been counted as a great loss by his family and the men working there.

In addition to the short-lived attempt to revive the commercial manufacture of salt. There were other attempts to profit from the springs. The "Oyster Plan" of 1900 sought to dam the springs to raise oysters and saltwater fish, but the plan quickly collapsed.

In 1959, an eight acre tract which included the salt lick, was donated to the state of Missouri for use as a state park. [This area has now expanded to 51 acres]

Today, the site has picnic facilities and a short, steep trail that winds its way to the spring site where wood remnants of the saltworks and an iron kettle are still visible.



Outdoor exhibits interpret this unique saltwater environment and center of frontier industry. Archaeological excavations have uncovered many features of the salt manufacturing industry and some of the artifacts found are on display at the Arrow Rock State Historic Site Visitor Center in Arrow Rock. The museum at Arrow Rock also has dioramas showing the salt works. Some photos of these are on the signboard at the Boonslick site.