



The explorers gather the first morning at the Hudson-Essex Garage in Harrisburg.

## Trigg's Trails, Tours and Detours

### PART ONE: THE FIRST EXPLORATION - 1931

Todd Carr

Photos courtesy of the Trigg Collection curated by Charles Hammond

In the 1930s, southern Illinois was depending on the National Forest Reservation Commission to approve purchase units in the region for a national forest. The Harrisburg Kiwanis Club foresaw the need of a local group to spearhead the establishment of the forest. The Illinois Ozarks Reforestation Unit, a nine-member committee of men from Gallatin, Hardin, Pope and Gallatin Counties, was formed. Newspaper Publisher L.O. Trigg served as vice-president of the organization and chief promoter.

In the guide book *How to Camp Out* it states: "Where there are many there must be a captain,—some one that the others are responsible to, and who commands their respect." From thereafter L.O. Trigg was known as "Captain" Trigg. As he led these annual three-day excursions into the forest the trips soon became known as Trigg's Ozark Tours

and later Trigg's Trails, Tours, and Detours. This series of articles is based on newspaper accounts and the travelogues of L.O. Trigg.

**Monday, July 27, 1931**

Nineteen men began arriving in Harrisburg, Illinois, at August Zvara's Hudson-Essex Garage on East Poplar Street. The men would be led on an "exploration and vacation trip" into the proposed Shawnee Purchase Units of Gallatin, Hardin, Pope and Saline Counties. Leading the expedition were Clarence Bonnell, L.O. Trigg and J.E. Raibourn, local educators and promoters familiar with scenic and historical curiosities within the four-county region.



The Explorers at Tunnel 1 on the Illinois Central Edgewood Cutoff.

### **In the touring party:**

From Harrisburg – Leonard Penrod, driver; attorneys W.W. Wheatley and Jacob W. Myers; professor Clarence Bonnell; August Zvara, auto dealer; W.J. Davidson, conservation officer; D.E. Cavendar, abstractor; Roscoe Metcalf, photographer; Casey Dempsey, *Daily Register* reporter; John B. Lee, Banker; and Dent Ferrell.

From Eldorado – professor J.E. Raibourn; L.O. Trigg, *Daily Journal* publisher; Otis Carter, chickery owner; attorney S.D. Wise and Norman Moore, teacher.

From Dixon Springs – resort owner Charles B. Wheeler.

From Chicago – J.H. Morris, representative of the Illinois Central Railroad; and Dr. A.C. Noe, geologist with the University of Chicago.

At 8 a.m. the men set out, riding with their feet dangling over the sides of a flat-bed truck. Luggage was piled in the middle of the truck bed. One man's belongings for the three days were tied up in a bandana handkerchief and thrown on the pile. Temperatures for the three days were highs in the upper 80s and lows around 65 degrees. Two cars followed. A food truck operated by Mr. and Mrs. Cal Weideman, their daughter, Freda, and Miss Georgia Dunn and Orville Phillips travelled ahead of the touring group to prepare meals. *The Daily Register* reported the group was armed with "Skeeter Scoot" and squeaky shoes and had John M. Gould's *How to Camp Out* (1877) as their field guide to camping and hiking in the forest.

After 45 minutes of driving, the group's first stop was at the Ellis File farm about 6 miles southwest of Carrier Mills. Here the men walked to the remains of the old Stone Fort. At the time of the tour, the site was thought to be the remains of a Spanish fortification left by De Soto during his explorations of North America in the 1500s. Many of the rocks that originally made up the walls of the fort had been carted off by homesteaders or thrown over the cliff. There were signs of excavations within the fortification that the group speculated to be from fortune hunters looking for Spanish doubloons. The men also took note of the spectacular scenery of the horseshoe basin below where the Little Saline River wound around the base of the cliff. Although still mysterious in origin and purpose today, the stone fort site is one of eleven stone wall fortifications found across southern Illinois. Based on artifacts found near these sites, it's now believed they were built by Native Americans.

After exploring the site for 45 minutes, the tour was again on its way. Their next stop was to the farm of Sidney Smith arriving about 10:30. Here the party hiked to the first tunnel of Illinois Central Railroad's Edgewood Cutoff. The 800 foot long tunnel is the smallest of the three tunnels of the Edgewood Cutoff, a parallel rail line completed in 1928 to ease congestion over the bridge at Cairo. Mr. Smith presented Bonnell with a piece of petrified root that had been found during the tunnel's excavation. The party hiked through the tunnel and was on their way again 30 minutes

later.

At 11:40 the group stopped to explore Jackson Hollow and view another section of the Illinois Central Railroad. Bonnell declared the hollow "one of the prettiest places in all of southern Illinois." They returned to the truck two hours later for the drive to Bell Smith Springs. The mid-day meal was served on the truck bed around 3:00 in the afternoon. At 4:00 the party set off for a cross-country hike to see the Natural Bridge, Sand Cave, Indian Ladder, Clarida Springs and interesting points in between such as the Bay, Honeycomb Rock, Mushroom Rock, Balanced Rock, Deer Lick Cave and a prospector's ill-fated gold mine. Bell Smith Springs was one of the first recreational areas developed by the Shawnee National Forest when they began acquiring land in 1933. Many of the improvements at the site today were first built in the 1930s.

The vehicles motored around and met the group at Cedar Grove Church. Apparently the truck had some difficulty getting out of Bell Smith Springs. The hike ended at 6:30, but it was some time before the group was picked up. A full two and a half hours later the group arrived at nearby Eddyville making repairs on the truck and having refreshments.

The vehicles left Eddyville and used a combination of "slab" and gravel roads to reach August Zvara's summer cottage on the Ohio River three miles north of Golconda. They arrived at 10:30 p.m. and had supper and went to bed. It

was reported the mosquitoes moved in at midnight. Most slept on cots or blankets on the ground. Myers brought a hammock. Wheeler and Lee had a car pick them up and take them to Dixon Springs resort for the evening, returning the following morning. Judge B.F. Anderson, from Golconda and president of the Illinois Ozarks Reforestation Unit, joined the group at Zvaras the evening of the first day bringing the total of explorers to 20. The group had travelled 51 miles.

### July 28, 1931

The exploring group was up early, had breakfast at 7:00 a.m., and left Zvara's cottage at 8:20 headed north. They stopped at the "wye" on Route 34 and walked to a disappearing creek, an area where surface water drains through various ditches into a small cave or "sink." It was believed the water emerged from a cave spring about a half mile away. Today this area has been quarried and the drainage isn't like it was during the Trigg Tours. After an hour the group resumed travel north and turned onto the gravel road to Karber's Ridge. They stopped for twenty minutes to examine a deposit of sulfurous rocks and fossils near a creek south of the road before continuing east.

The party spent the mid-day exploring the bluffs and hollows of Buzzard's Roost including Long Cave and Parton Spring. It was reported that the rounded hills of Kentucky



The explorers eat their first meal from the bed of the truck at Bell Smith Springs.



The explorers view the remains of the Illinois Iron Furnace, built between 1837-1839.

could be seen from this high promontory in southern Gallatin County. When the touring group returned to the truck they motored back to Karber's Ridge and took the road to Elizabethtown (Bassett Road) to the Big Creek crossing. Here they stopped at 1:45 for dinner. While waiting for the meal to be served, a few took the opportunity to shave and several took their shoes off to wade in the creek.

After dinner the tour continued south and turned west to the ruins of the Illinois Iron Furnace arriving around 4:00. James Cowsert lived on site and told the history of the workings of the furnace through the mid 1800s. Iron ore, limestone, and charcoal were deposited from a nearby hillside into the top of the furnace and smelted into pig iron. The group explored the grounds finding several pieces of slag and ore. Just a few years after the Trigg Tour's visit, dynamite was used to blast rock from the furnace to build the abutments for the nearby Big Creek bridge. In 1967 the Golconda Job Corp cleared the remaining rocks and interior of the original furnace and rebuilt it in its original appearance as an attraction.

The group then left to find the remains of the Martha Furnace. After asking for directions and making several wrong turns they arrived at Birch's Spring (Decker Springs) and found they had passed it. They retraced their steps and stopped a few minutes at the site but found mostly a pile of rubble and stones. In the mid 1930s, while doing road work, the Hicks C.C.C. Camp uncovered a stone marker in-

scribed Martha B. F. (Blast Furnace). It was transported back to the C.C.C. camp. When it was discovered by local officials, they demanded its return, and the stone was placed on the roadside at the furnace's original location as a memorial.

At 6:00 the tour started toward Elizabethtown and had a flat tire about half-way there requiring a 20 minute stop near Moore's Spring to change the tire. Again on the road, they turned left on the Cave-In-Rock road, stopped at Peter's Creek store for information and telephoning, then drove on to the Benzoin Mining Company's fluorspar mine arriving about 8:00 p.m. Moore, Raibourn and Davis had left the touring party during the afternoon. The remaining group ate supper and camped outside on rock piles. The group had traveled 52 miles the second day.

### **July 29, 1931**

Everyone was out early the third day with breakfast served about 6:30 a.m. Judge Anderson returned to Golconda. The food truck was sent back to Harrisburg since the tour didn't know where they might be for the mid-day meal. The remaining fifteen men spent an hour touring the mine. At one time, Hardin County provided 80% of the United States' supply of fluorspar. The fluorite is used as a flux in the steel industry, ceramic glass manufacture, toothpaste and has many other many industrial uses. The industry had its base in Rosiclare which still processes and dis-



Above, the Explorers wake from their second night camping on rock piles at the Benzon Fluorspar mine. Left, newspaper publisher L.O. Trigg after completing the first three-day Ozark Tour.



tributes fluorspar, though large-scale mining hasn't occurred since the mid 1990s.

The Benzon Mining Company was a British company based in London, England. The mine was unusual in that sandstone capped the underground fissures where fluorspar formed causing the mineral to spread horizontally rather than vertically in the rock. The group also saw a 26 year old mule named "Red" who had been with the mine since it opened.

The tour left the mine and drove to Cave-In-Rock State Park to explore the infamous pirate cave. They climbed to the upper room of the cave where river pirates were supposed to have hidden their treasure. This small upper chamber of the cave was sealed by park staff in later years

due to the presence of "foul air" in the small cavern. After touring the cave, the group climbed to the top of the bluff and explored the Indian mound and observation point where one could see for miles both up and down the Ohio River.

The party shopped in Cave-In-Rock until midmorning then headed north out of town past Love's School to the crossroads at the top of the hill. Turning northwest the group drove past Oak Grove and Rock Creek Schools coming to Shawnee Hollow road. The truck suffered another flat tire traveling southwest on Shawnee Hollow road. At Jackson's store the party turned west and then shortly turned north to arrive again at Birch's Spring. It was noon and the group had a chicken dinner at 25 cents each. The tour stayed two hours resting, drinking cold spring

water, and washing their feet in the spring. Today, nothing remains of the improvements Trigg's tour saw at Decker Springs but the water still flows from under the rocky bluff.

At 2:00 the group drove on north for four miles and hiked to one of Hardin County's volcanic plugs—lava rocks considered to be signs of an extinct volcano. Only seven men actually made the side trip: Bonnell, Ferrell, Trigg, Carter, Casey, Lee and Myers. Nearly 90 minutes later the tour continued north and then west to Philadelphia School. The group decided to not go on to the "Pounds" as originally planned, but continued west through Karber's Ridge to the "slab" at Route 34. There they turned north and returned to Harrisburg arriving at the Hudson-Essex garage just after 6:00 p.m. It was noted the group had never been more than 40 miles from Harrisburg and had seen a mere fraction of the sites available in the four counties. The last day the group traveled 51 miles. The exploration and vacation trip had covered a total of 154 miles, over three days, sitting on the edge of a flat-bed truck.

*Golconda Herald-Enterprise*, May 28, 1931  
"Prominent Visitors Guests of Rotary to Boost Reforestation"

*Gallatin Democrat*, June 4, 1931  
"Forest Preserve Making Progress"

*Daily Register*, June 6, 1931  
"Trigg Paints Ozark View: Eldorado Editor Says that Egypt Greatest Land For Vacation"

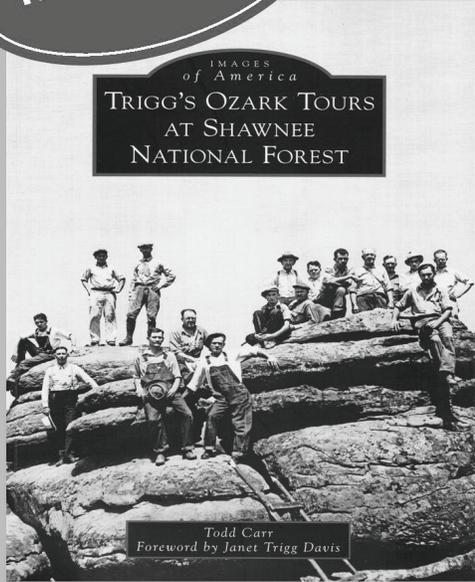
*Daily Register*, June 20, 1931  
"Reforestation Plans Ready for Action: County, Municipal and Civic Organizations Pass Petitions Asking Forest Units"

*Golconda Herald-Enterprise*, June 25, 1931  
"Hardin is for Reforestation: County Commissioners Approve Movement Which Judge Anderson Heads"

*Daily Register*, July 14, 1931  
"Plan Jaunt Into Ozark Forest: Three Day Trip Will Be Made in Interest of Reforestation Move"

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