

TAR HEEL TRACE

The route takes its name from the pine tar industry that once thrived in this portion of the state. "Tar Heel" is the nickname given to the state's residents by British General Cornwallis' troops after they emerged from the nearby Tar River with tar stuck to their boots. Another story says the ground alongside many of the state's river fronts was covered with tar that spilled from rafts bringing the product to market.

Pine trees are found in great quantities all over North Carolina, in particular the eastern region. Early residents found that it was simple to cut these trees and pile the light or fat wood into piles and cover them with soil after setting them on fire. The piles, called tar kilns, were then left to smolder causing the pine resin to run out as a dark tar. Tar was used extensively in the shipping industry. The tar was distilled into turpentine and was used to waterproof rope and wood in the form of either pitch or tar. This area also is known for its tobacco farms.

From the N.C. 42 and U.S. 301 interchange east of Wilson in Wilson County, follow this scenic byway across the coastal plain to Williamston through North

Carolina's tar producing counties. Hickory Grove, established in 1803, and Toisnot Depot, founded in 1840 when a rail line

was built, were merged in 1849 to form the town of Wilson. The new town was named for Louis D. Wilson, a resident who was killed during the war with Mexico.

This byway begins in the midst of the Toisnot Swamp, some of

which has been filled for development. From the beginning of the route it is nine miles to the Wilson and Edgecombe County line. Pass through the communities of Wilbanks and Bridgesville, both of which were established at the turn of the century. Three-tenths of a mile from the county line turn right onto N.C. 124.

Follow N.C. 124 for 3.5 miles to the town of Macclesfield. Incorporated in 1901, Macclesfield was named for the town in England from which the ancestors of the town's founder had come. Cross Bynum Mill Creek as you leave town and continue east for 5.5 miles crossing U.S. 258 before reaching the intersection of N.C. 124 with N.C. 42.

Turn right onto N.C. 42. Follow it for two miles to Old Sparta, established in 1830 and incorporated in 1876. Cross the



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Tar River immediately after passing through Old Sparta. Stories have it that the river was named for the tar that was produced in the counties through which it flowed while others suggest that the river's name is from an Indian word.

Continue on N.C. 42 for almost six miles passing through vast farms to the town of Conetoe. Conetoe, (pronounced Cuh-knee-ta), was incorporated in 1887 and named for the nearby Conetoe Creek. Continue on N.C. 42, across U.S. 64, for about eight miles to the Martin and Edgecombe County line. Again you will pass through vast fields, most of which produce soybeans and peanuts.

Continue for almost 2.5 miles to the N.C. 42/142 intersection with N.C. 11. Go straight at the stop sign and follow N.C. 142 for 2.5 miles to the community of Hassell. Hassell, settled in 1878, was known as Dogville Crossroads until 1903. Continue on N.C. 142 through Hassell for another 3.5 miles to the intersection of N.C. 142 with N.C. 125. From Hassell to Williamston the road crosses land drained by the Conoho Creek, a tributary to the

Roanoke River located to the north.

Turn right at the stop sign onto N.C. 125 and continue for nine miles to the Williamston city limits in Martin County where the route ends. Notice the numerous peanut sheds and silos along this portion of the route. Peanuts are the region's main crop.

Williamston, named in honor of Colonel William Williams who fought in the Revolutionary War, is located on the Roanoke River. Settled in 1779, the town originally was called Skewarky for the plantation lands owned by Thomas Hunter on which it was built. Follow N.C. 125 through town to the U.S. 64/17 intersection.

It is 14 miles to Windsor on U.S. 17 where the Edenton-Windsor Loop begins or 23 miles to Washington and the Pamlico Scenic Byway.

Length: 53 miles
Driving Time: One hour
Counties: Wilson, Edgecombe, Martin

