

Packhorse Ford, the Potomac Crossing of Philadelphia Waggon Road

Physical Description:

The site of Packhorse Ford, the Potomac Crossing of the historic Philadelphia Waggon Road, is located in eastern Jefferson County, West Virginia, a half mile below Shepherdstown. The property, owned by the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission, is bisected by River Road and adjoins the Potomac River.

Historic Description:

The Packhorse Ford is actually located in the State of Maryland as the Maryland state line extends to the low water mark of the south bank of the Potomac River. The ford is identified by a ripple in the river during low-water, by its alignment with Trough Road on the West Virginia side of the river, and by a wayside sign located on the Maryland side of the river on the C&O Canal towpath. Use of the Packhorse Ford dates from the pre-contact period through its peak use during the 1730s-1750s settlement period and use during the Civil War, after which it was likely only rarely used. Though the ford is no longer in common use, Civil War re-enactors do use the ford to re-enact Potomac River crossings.

Trough Road (Great Waggon Road segment):

Trough Road (WV Co. Rte 31/1) is an asphalt-paved county road that follows the path of the settlement-era Great Waggon Road to Philadelphia as it rose out of the Potomac River at the Packhorse Ford crossing. The road, today's Trough Road, passes through the limestone hills on the south side of the river through a narrow gap or ravine along the west bank of a drainage creek. The wooded hillsides loom over the road as it winds up toward the crest of the hill. The road/path has been in use since the pre-contact period and continues in use today (2012).

Nomination Criteria:

The JCHLC nominates this site under Criteria A for inclusion on the list of registered county landmarks. Criteria A states that a site may be nominated if, in the opinion of the Landmarks Commission, it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The property's owner, Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission, has voted to list the Potomac Mills site as a Jefferson County Historic Landmark.

Nomination Action:

The JCHLC voted unanimously to add the Packhorse Ford/Philadelphia Waggon Road Crossing site, under Criteria A, to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks on September 19, 2012.