



US 80/Louisville Road

A Historical and Archaeological Overview

US 80 Overview

The main subject of this historical and archaeological study was a section of US 80 outside Bloomingdale in Chatham and Effingham counties. This study provided information about the development of this road as well as about certain road building methods used in Georgia.

US 80, also known as the Louisville Road, has a long history. The road was first authorized by an act of Georgia's Colonial Assembly in 1770. The route of the original road was designed to connect the early settlement of Queensboro on the Ogeechee River to Savannah. When Louisville served as the state capital (1796-1806) the road became an important stage and post road.

During the Civil War, Union troops crossing from Atlanta to the coast marched to and from Savannah on the Louisville Road. At this time, Federal troops probably built or repaired sections of the road using logs or corduroy techniques. Civil War records indicate that Federal troops spent considerable time building log roads throughout Chatham and Effingham counties.

The Federal Government made the Louisville Road part of one of the earliest US highways, commissioning it in 1926 (Figure 38). Named the Dixie Overland Highway, it was one of the first all-weather, coast-to-coast roads available for automobile traffic. Originally US 80 was to begin in Tybee Island, Georgia and end in San Diego, California. In the 1960s, however, the design changed, and the route of US 80 now ends in Dallas, Texas.

US 80 Archaeology

The historical and archaeological study of US 80/Louisville Road took place as part of a road improvement project in Effingham and Chatham counties. Improvement of the road involved widening it from two to four lanes along a section west of Bloomingdale. Near the county line, digging for the new road ditch exposed the remains of logs below one to three feet of soil. The logs lay next to one another just south of the present-day road. This discovery prompted the historical and archaeological study because of the possibility that the log roadway was built during the Civil War.

In December 2005, archaeologists from the Georgia Department of Transportation and New South Associates of Stone Mountain, Georgia excavated two trenches in the area where the log road was discovered to examine its construction and try to determine its age .

The excavations revealed that the log roadway was made up of 10-foot long cedar and pine tree trunks laid side-by-side across the path of the road (Figure 43). These logs were placed in a single layer directly on top of muddy swamp soils and so were clearly there to help support traffic cross the boggy ground. It was expected that the logs would be on top of two or three “rails,” logs laid in the direction of the roadway that supported the crossing logs, but no evidence of these was found. Also, the logs showed no signs of wear from wagon or horse traffic, or any signs of being repaired in the past because of damage from traffic. The archaeologists did not find any artifacts that could be used to determine the age of the log roadway.

The logs were under layers of compact sandy soils and covered with a cement pavement. This hinted that the logs were used as a bedding layer to support the cement road (Figure 44). Local residents of the area remembered construction of the cement road during the 1920s, around the same time that Louisville Road became part of the US highway system. When looked at together with the absence of damage, these facts argue that the log roadway was built as part of the bedding for the cement road. The logs were probably intended to keep the sandy roadbed and cement surface from sinking into the swampy soils below them.

Although the log road did not turn out to date to the Civil War, the archaeological study showed the adaptation of the corduroy road technique for modern road construction practices. The study also illustrated aspects of the development of the Louisville Road-US 80 corridor in this part of Georgia.