

# *Central Ohio And The National Road*



*A Portion Traveled  
by Molly & Bob Hillery  
March 2008*

*This was another of our “mini-vacations” in which we selected a route based on the book “Day Trips from Cincinnati”. In this case, we went in a northeasterly direction as far as Zanesville and then returned via a stretch of The National Road.*

*This turned out to be a very interesting drive and we were able to see the road and the impact it had on opening up the western United States as far as the Mississippi.*

*In addition, we saw many fine buildings in several towns along the way and drove through some very attractive farmland in rural Ohio.*



# Central Ohio and The National Road, March 2008

Friday March 28

We got on the road about 10am and drove around I-275 to Route 50, which we then followed east across central Ohio. We passed through Hillsborough and made our first stop at Seip Mound. This is a 2000 year old Hopewell Indian burial mound and is somewhat smaller than Serpent Mound in total area but appeared to be significantly higher. We walked across a grass path to the mound, passing information boards and the outline of Indian homes which had been excavated as late as 1973.

We walked all the way around the base of the mound and saw “the square”, a large rectangular area that had been part of the compound. It was very cold (only about 35F) so we didn't spend more time than necessary outside.



Our next stop was for lunch in Chillicothe which, as the first capital of Ohio, has some very striking buildings. We didn't walk around here but had done so last August and recall seeing the site of the original capital building.

We then drove another 60 miles east to Athens where we did stop for a walk along the main streets. This is a beautiful college town and the majority of the campus buildings are red brick, in a style very similar to that at Miami. This university was actually planned in 1804 (making it older than Miami) but since it didn't graduate its first student until 1815 we suspect it was a while in the planning and building stages. Interestingly, a major benefactor at that time was a black man who had recently been released from slavery.



*Athens*



From Athens we drove the remainder of our journey in a northerly direction through the rolling farmlands of eastern Ohio until we reached Zanesville. We checked in at the Fairfield Inn and the receptionist proudly announced us as the “guests of the day”.

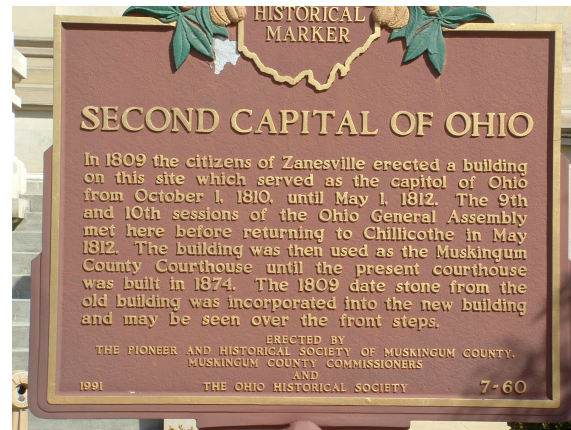
We went to dinner at the Old Market Inn, a few blocks from the hotel. This was billed as “the best restaurant in Zanesville” and it turned out to be a good meal in a pleasant, pub-like atmosphere.

Saturday March 29

After breakfast we drove about 10 miles further east in search of the Zane Gray Museum which supposedly had a section on the National Road, which we were planning to follow today through central Ohio. When we did find it we saw that it was open only from Memorial Day so all we could do was stroll the grounds and see some of the milestones that had been taken from the Road as it had been replaced by US40 and, later, Interstate 70.

The National Road had been authorized by Congress in 1806 and construction began in Cumberland, Maryland in 1811. It was 1830 before the Road reached Zanesville and another ten years before it reached Vandalia, Illinois, then the capital of the state. As with many projects of this scale, its usefulness was almost eclipsed before its completion; in this case as the railroads became more prevalent. However, the National Road did open the nation to the west and became a major corridor for the transport of both goods and people. Many towns owe their existence to the Road and this was essentially the case for our starting point, Zanesville. However, Zanesville itself does date back a little further as it was the home of Ebenezer Zane who in 1798 had obtained permission to build a track from Wheeling (West Virginia) to Maysville, Kentucky. This track followed old animal and Native American routes and between Wheeling and Zanesville was essentially the precursor to the National Road.

With the museum closed, we next decided to try the Tourist Information Center in downtown Zanesville. Unfortunately, this too was closed but it sits in the same building complex as the library. Here we found two very helpful people on the reference desk who gave us a very informative booklet on the route we would be following. So, with book in hand and having spent a little more time taking in the sites of Zanesville (including the unusual “Y” bridge) we set out on our journey into the past on the National Road.



## Zanesville and the “Y” Bridge



As we had found with our trip along Route 66, the National Road as originally built exists now in only relatively short segments and in most area it has been superseded by US40. That's where the booklet became so useful since it gave us directions from US40 to what are now county or township roads but which follow the National Road route. The booklet also pointed out many historic places along the route; old coaching inns, original stonework from bridges, old road segments (such as the first concreted surfaces) and, from a later age, thirties and forties gas stations, motels and even the depots for the inter-urban electric cars that ran along the road from Columbus.



**The First Concrete Section of Pavement  
And a Commemorative Marker**



**Cooperation.....or Competition?**



As with our travels on Route 66, we found here that there were (apparently) some errors in the book and we missed a number of sites simply because the directions (or our ability to follow them) were less than clear. However, it was a fascinating drive all the way to downtown Columbus. Here we stopped first for coffee and then to walk around the Statehouse before continuing west along US40.



**The Statehouse, Columbus**

At the intersection with Route 42 we turned off the National Road and followed the new route diagonally across the state all the way home. We got back about 5:30 pm after a very interesting drive and a pleasant two day excursion.