

John Muir's Long Walk South

Dan Styer

Wolf Run Nature Preserve
Oberlin College

John Muir (21 April 1838 – 24 December 1914)

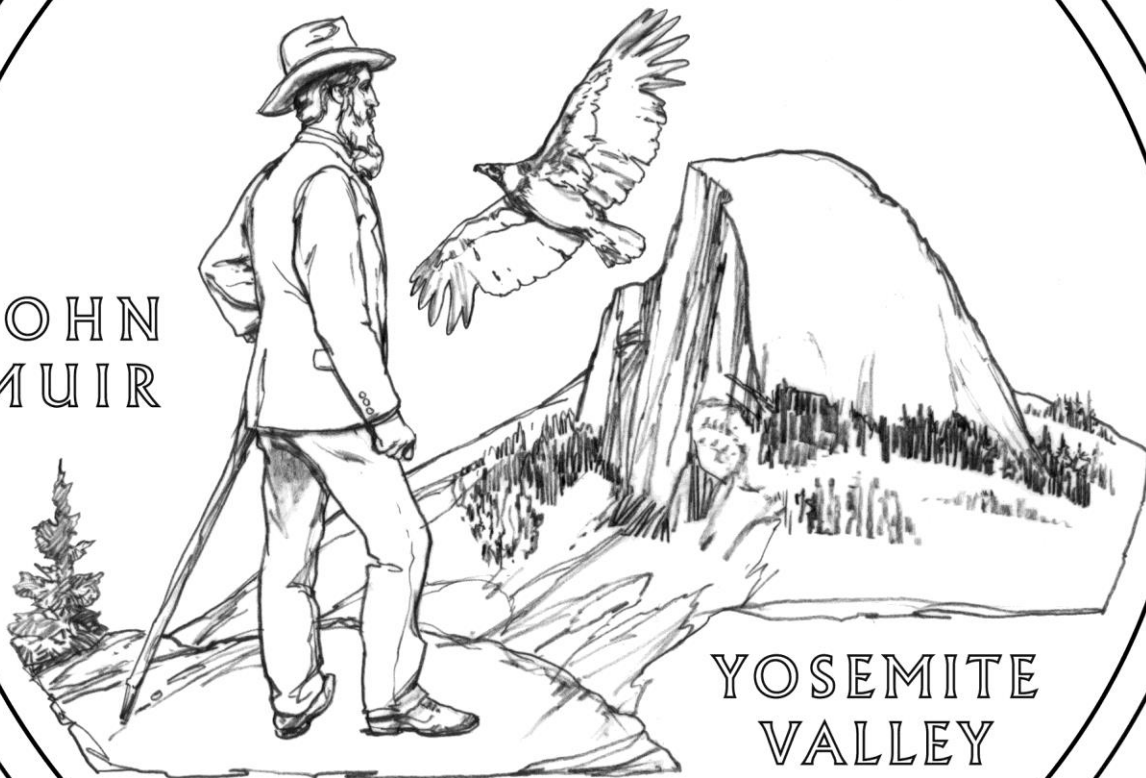
A founder of the Sierra Club

“Father of the National Parks”

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread,
places to play in and pray in,
where nature may heal and cheer and
give strength to body and soul alike.”

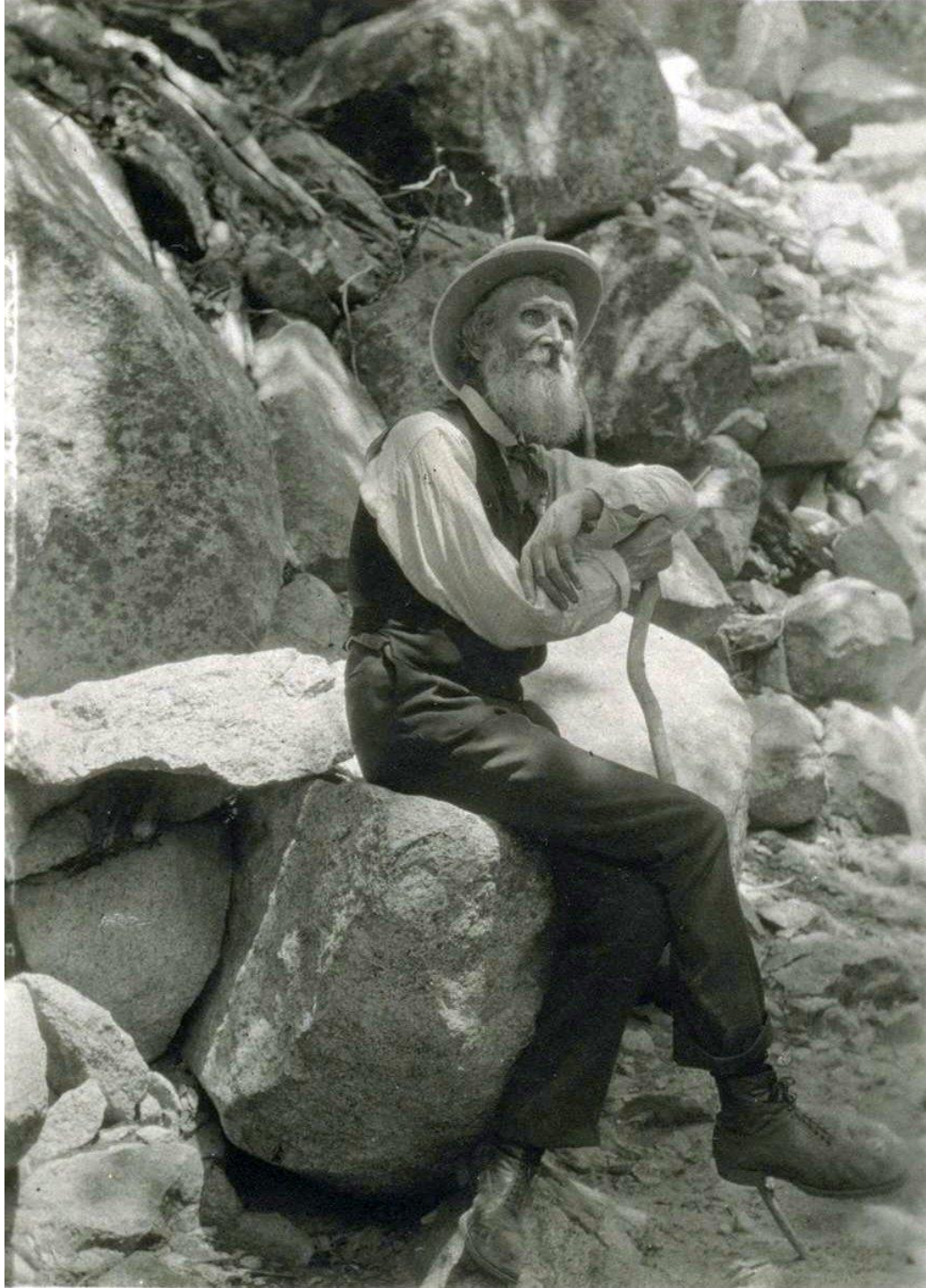
CALIFORNIA
1850

JOHN
MUIR



YOSEMITE
VALLEY

2005
E PLURIBUS UNUM





On 2 September 1867,
at age 29 years,

Muir set off for a walk
from Louisville, Kentucky,
to Cedar Key, Florida.

This was just two and a half years
after the end of the Civil War.

The walk would require 52 days.

The journal he kept was edited and
published posthumously as

A Thousand-Mile Walk To the Gulf.

This book contains a lot of thoughtful musing:

On relationship between humanity and nature
(in Florida)

On death (in Bonaventure graveyard in Savannah)

On technology (with Mr. Cameron in Georgia)

On “unfailing [human] kindness”
(in Cedar Key, Florida)

And it has a lot of human stories,
some positive, some negative:

The “young man on horseback ... [who] intended to rob me if he should find the job worth while.”

The blacksmith and his wife, a “bright, good-natured, good looking little woman,” with whom Muir discussed Solomon’s love of botany.

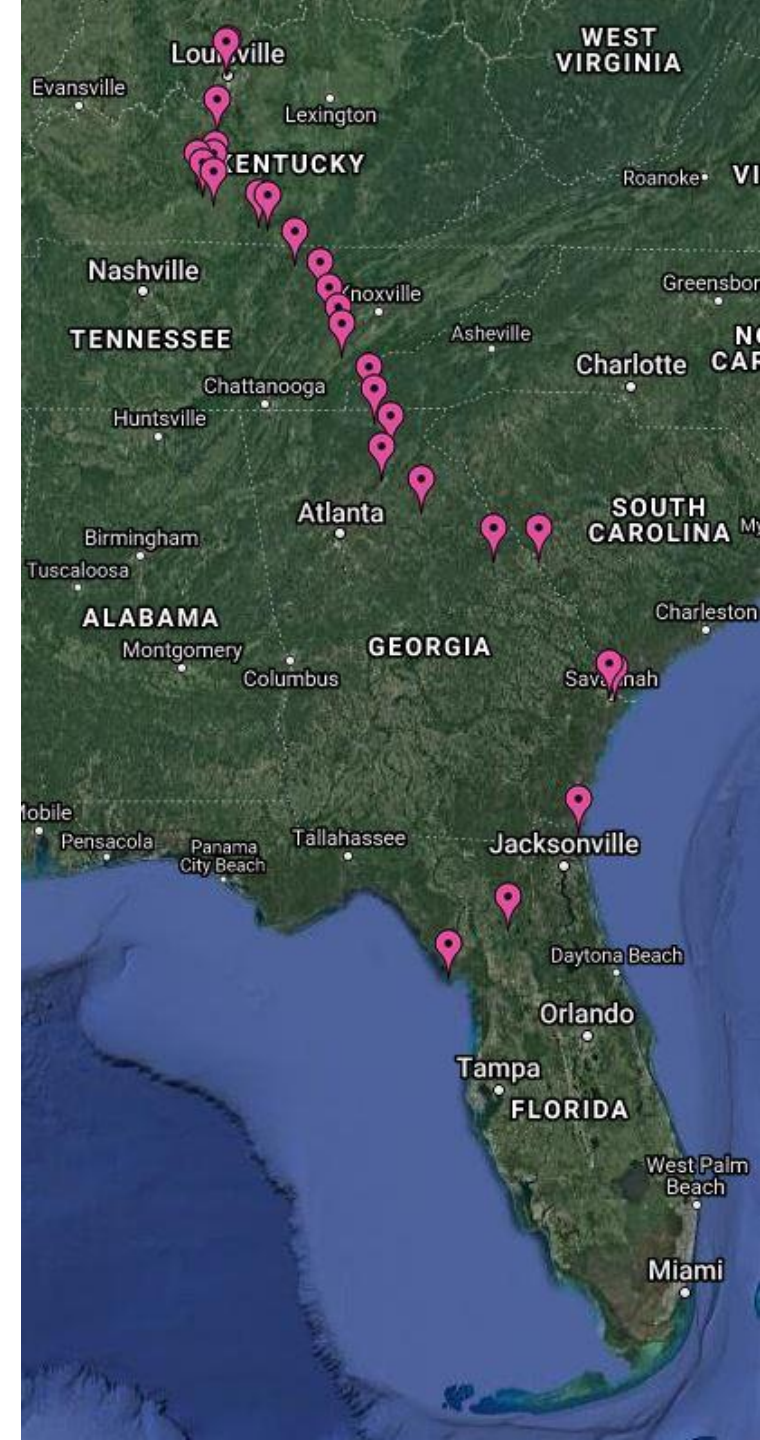
A harrowing encounter with “the most irreclaimable of the guerrilla bands who, long accustomed to plunder [during the Civil War], deplored the coming of peace.”

And it has a lot of human stories,
some positive, some negative:

While “oblivious to everything” due to illness,
“I was nursed about three months with
unfailing kindness, and to the skill and
care of Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson I doubtless
owe my life.”

While all these facets are worth pursuing, this talk focuses on Muir's route.

Map of sites mentioned in book:



Route details – four step process:

1. Sketch out route on Civil War era maps
2. Transfer that route to the earliest
USGS topographic maps (from the 1890s)
3. Transfer that route to modern USGS topos
4. Traverse the route myself

Illustrate this process for

12 September 1867:

Muir has breakfast at Montgomery, Tennessee,
descends off the Cumberland Plateau,
spends night at Kingston, Tennessee.

First, find a Civil War era map:

These are scattered in the David Rumsey Map Collection,
the North Carolina Maps project,
the Library of Congress,
university libraries.

Some of these have been digitized, some have not.
Some are accurate, some are not.

MILITARY MAP
of the States of
KENTUCKY and **TENNESSEE,**

within eleven miles of the 35th Parallel of Latitude or Southern Boundary of Tennessee;

Compiled from the best authentic original maps, various documents, and miscellaneous latest sources of information;

Commenced under the Authority of Major General DON CARLOS BUELL, Commanding the Department of the Ohio, by Capt. N. MICHLER, Corps Topog^t Engrs. U.S.A., continued under Major General H. G. WRIGHT by Maj. L. SITGREAVES Corps Topog^t Engrs. U.S.A., and completed under Major General AMBROSE E. BURNSIDE, Commanding the Department, by Lieut. Col. J.H. SIMPSON, Corps Engrs. U.S.A., Chief Engr. in the Department.



1: 550,000 or 5.524 Miles to One Inch.

Memoranda.

Drawn by Charles E. Swann, Asst. Engr. Jr.

1863 map from the David Rumsey Map Collection
<http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps2433.html>

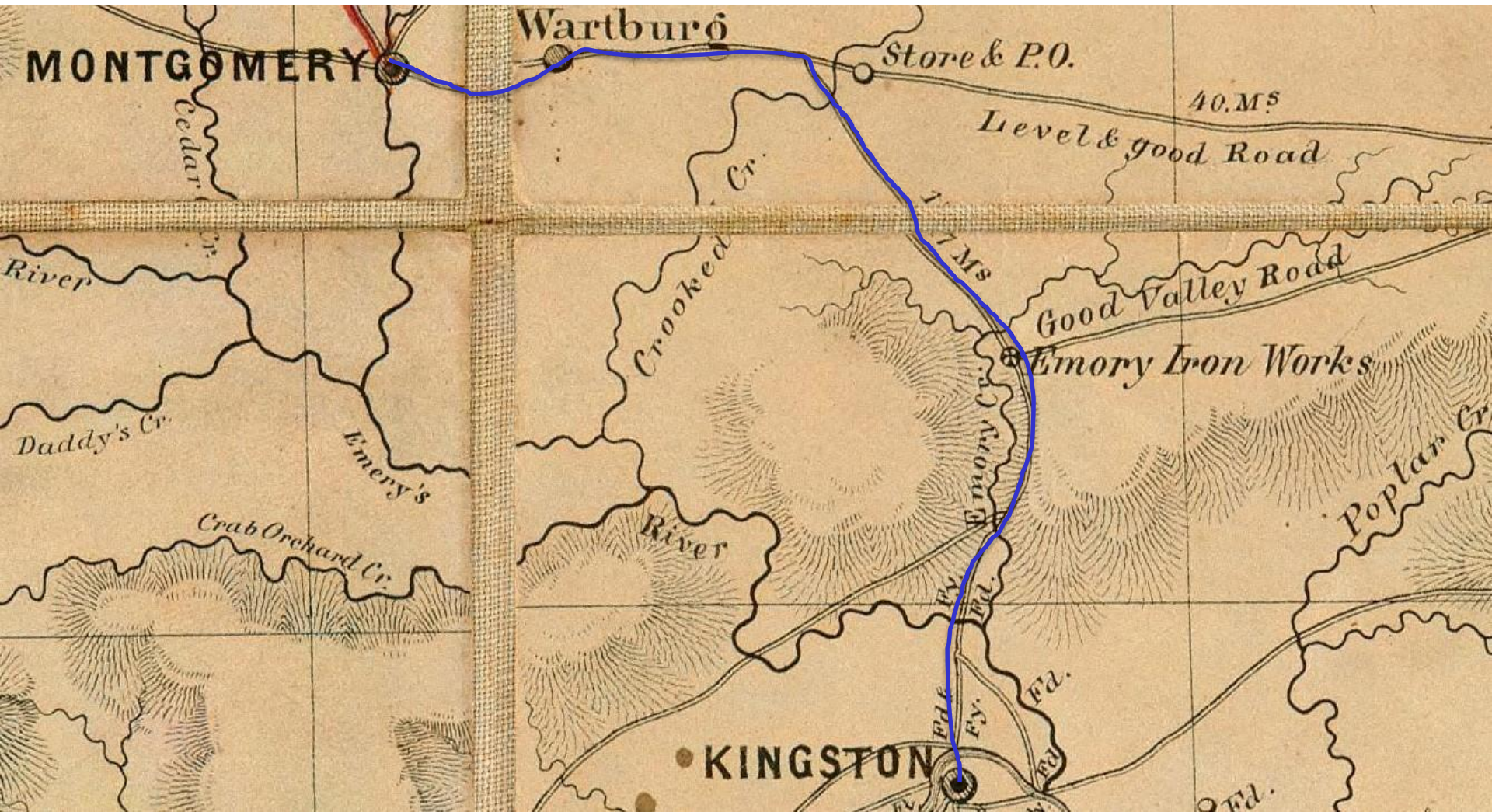
12 September 1867:

Muir has breakfast at Montgomery, Tennessee,
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12 September 1867:

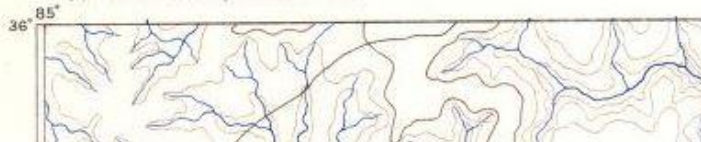
Muir has breakfast at Montgomery, Tennessee,
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National Geologic Map Database:

<http://ngmdb.usgs.gov>

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY,
J. W. POWELL, DIRECTOR.



Henry Gannett, Chief Topographer.
Gilbert Thompson, Chief Geographer.
Triangulation by S.S. Gannett.
Topography by F.M. Pearson, 1884-5.
C.E. Cooke, 1891.

My suggested route:



Modern topographic map:

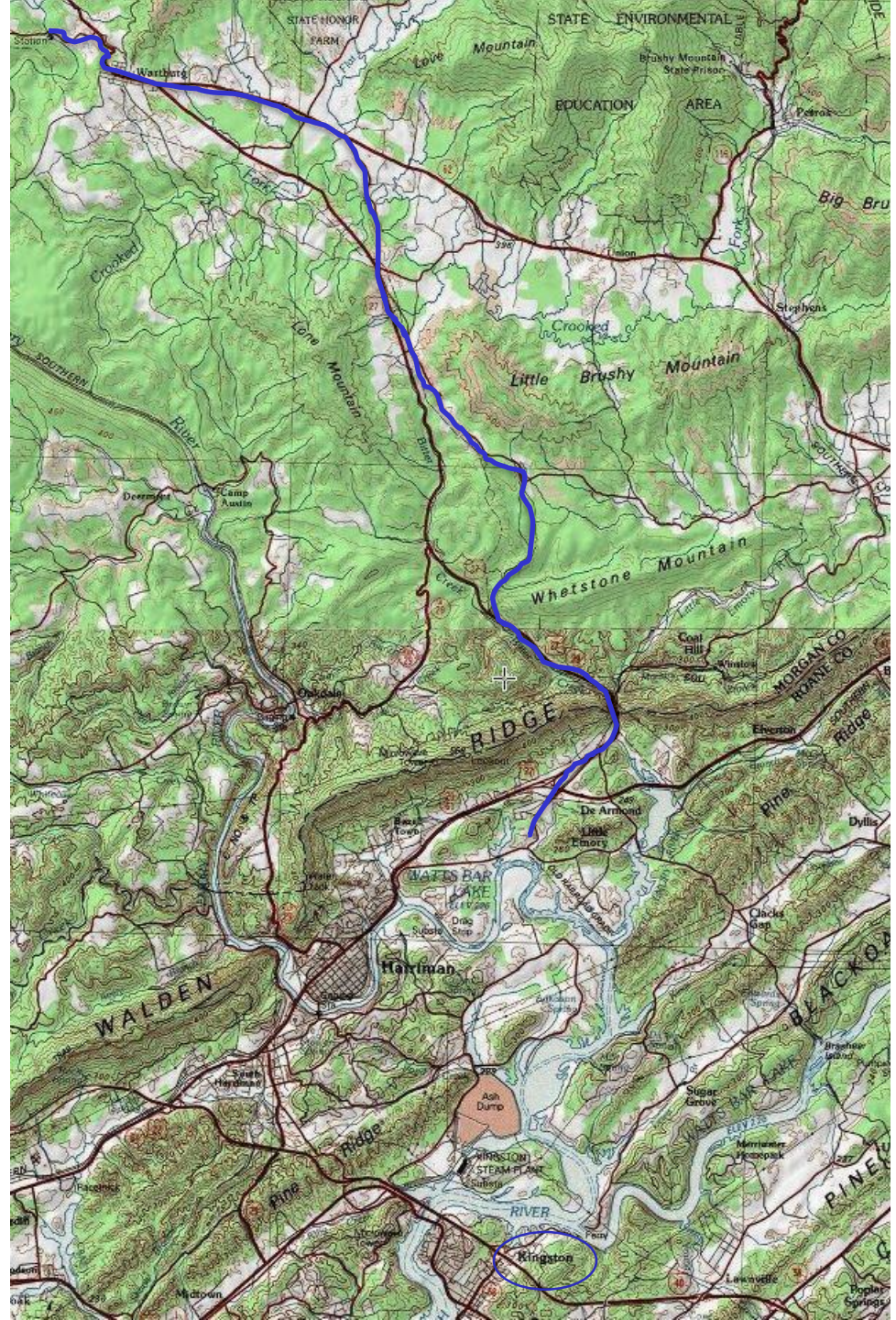
Higher accuracy

State and federal roads

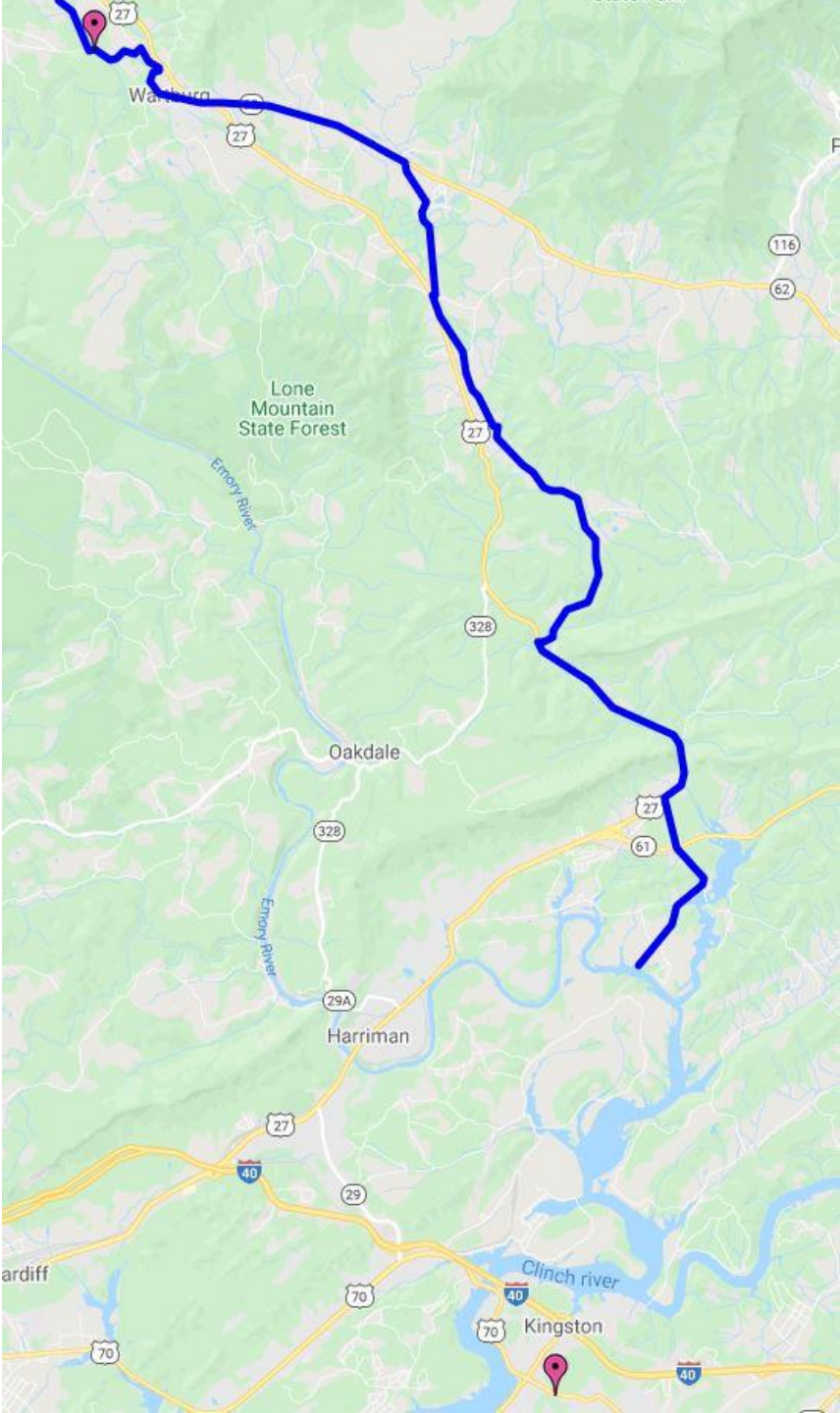
TVA reservoirs

More towns

(Montgomery is gone!)



Prepare a route map using Google maps



This process is not and does not pretend to be definitive, but it's better than shrugging.

I did this about 52 times:
some were easier, some were harder.

You can access the results through
<http://www.oberlin.edu/physics/dstyer/Muir>

Why did I use the example of 12 September,
Montgomery to Kingston?

“There is nothing more eloquent in nature than a mountain stream, and this is the first I ever saw. ... Every tree, every flower, every ripple and eddy of this lovely stream seemed solemnly to feel the presence of the great Creator. Lingered in this sanctuary a long time thanking the Lord with all my heart for his goodness in allowing me to enter and enjoy it. ... Near this stream I spent some joyous time in a grand rock-dwelling full of mosses, birds, and flowers. Most heavenly place I ever entered.”

By age 29 years, Muir had lived in
Dunbar, Scotland



Muir had lived in
Fountain Lake Farm, Wisconsin



Muir had visited
Observatory Hill, Wisconsin



Muir had visited the
Mississippi bluffs near McGregor, Iowa



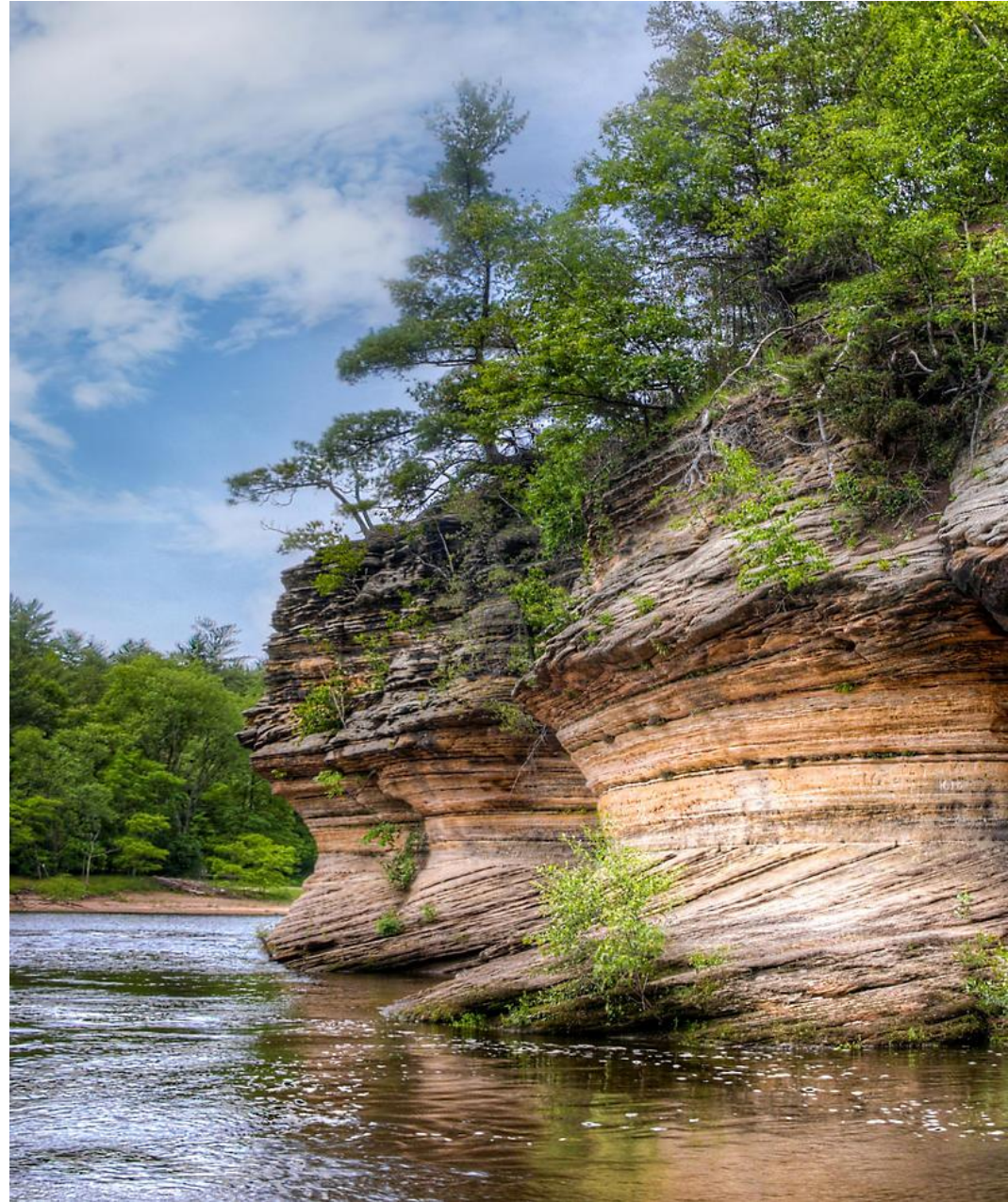
Muir had lived in Upper Canada (today Ontario)
where he located a *Calypso borealis* (today *Calypso bulbosa*)



Muir had visited
Niagara Falls



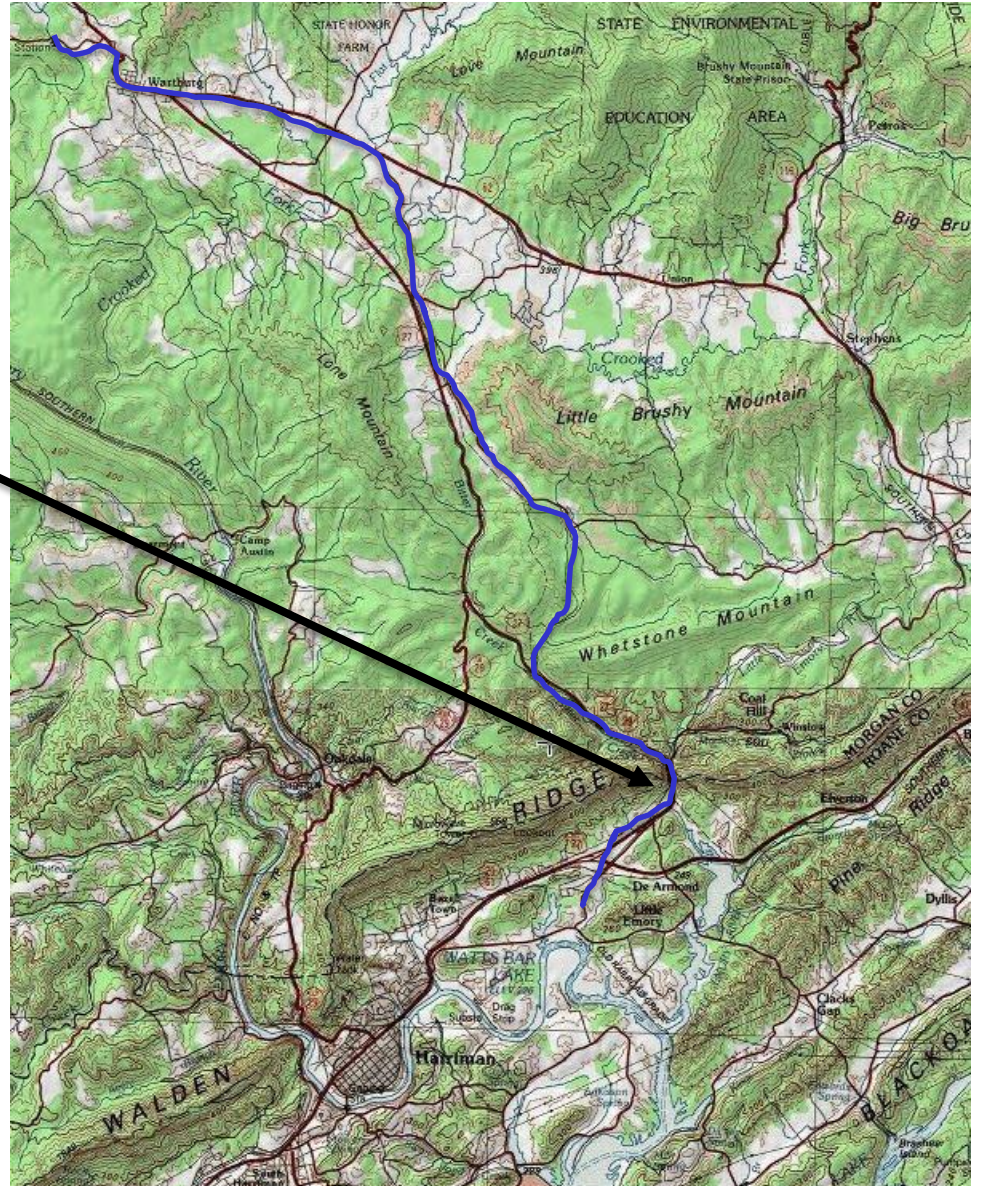
Muir had visited
Wisconsin Dells



So if Muir considered this streamside overhanging cliff to be the “most heavenly place I ever entered”, it is surely worth visiting.

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It must be here,
where Little
Emery River
(and now US-27)
cut through
Walden Ridge



So with great anticipation I approached Muir's
“most heavenly place” ...



... only to find that in the construction of US-27
it had been blasted away and replaced with a concrete wall.

“all men kill the thing they love”

– ‘The Ballad of Reading Gaol’ by Oscar Wilde

There must be other streams falling off the Cumberland Plateau.

There must be other streams falling off the Cumberland Plateau.









Southward.

On 14 September 1867, south of Madisonville, Tennessee, Muir
“came in full view of the Unaka Mountains, a magnificent sight.”



“Most glorious billowy mountain scenery. Made many a halt at open places to take breath and to admire.”



Most of the tracks
Muir walked on along his
route have been paved
over, but this trail in
the Unaka Mountains
between Madisonville,
Tennessee, and Murphy,
North Carolina,
(a remnant of the
“Unicoi Turnpike”)
is probably the very same
path that Muir sauntered.



In Murphy, North Carolina, Muir spent two nights (19 and 20 September 1867) at Mr. Beale's "house decked with flowers and vines, clean within and without, and stamped with the comforts of culture and refinement."
(Photo from *A Pictorial History of Cherokee County*.)



That house has been torn
down, but I did find
Mr. Beale's gravestone.

Wm Beal
Born
Yorkshire Eng.
Oct 27 1820
Died
Oct 3 1898



Southward.

South of Blairsville, Georgia, about noon on 22 September, Muir “reached the last mountain summit on my way to the sea. It is called the Blue Ridge ...”.

Probably crossed on the “Union Turnpike”
(called “Logan Turnpike” after 1871)
over Tesnatee Gap.







“How glorious a greeting the sun gives the mountains!”
– John Muir

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– John Muir

“In the Heart of the California Alps”

Scribner's Monthly, July 1880

Southward.

Muir spent the night of 2 October at the home of Dr. Perkins.



On 7 October he passed
“Impenetrable taxodium
[baldcypress] swamp,
seemingly boundless.”



On 8 October, Muir arrived at Savannah, Georgia, with “only about a dollar and a half left in my purse”.

He was “searching for a place to sleep beneath the tall flowers, free from insects and snakes, and above all from my fellow man” when he found “the few graves of Bonaventure”.

There, he thought, “no superstitious prowling mischief maker dares venture for fear of haunting ghosts, while for me there will be God’s rest and peace ... in ... this lonely beautiful place.”



Sketch from Muir's journal: Spanish Moss hanging from Live Oak



From Muir's journal: "Owls, crickets, pinch-bugs, & mosquitoes"

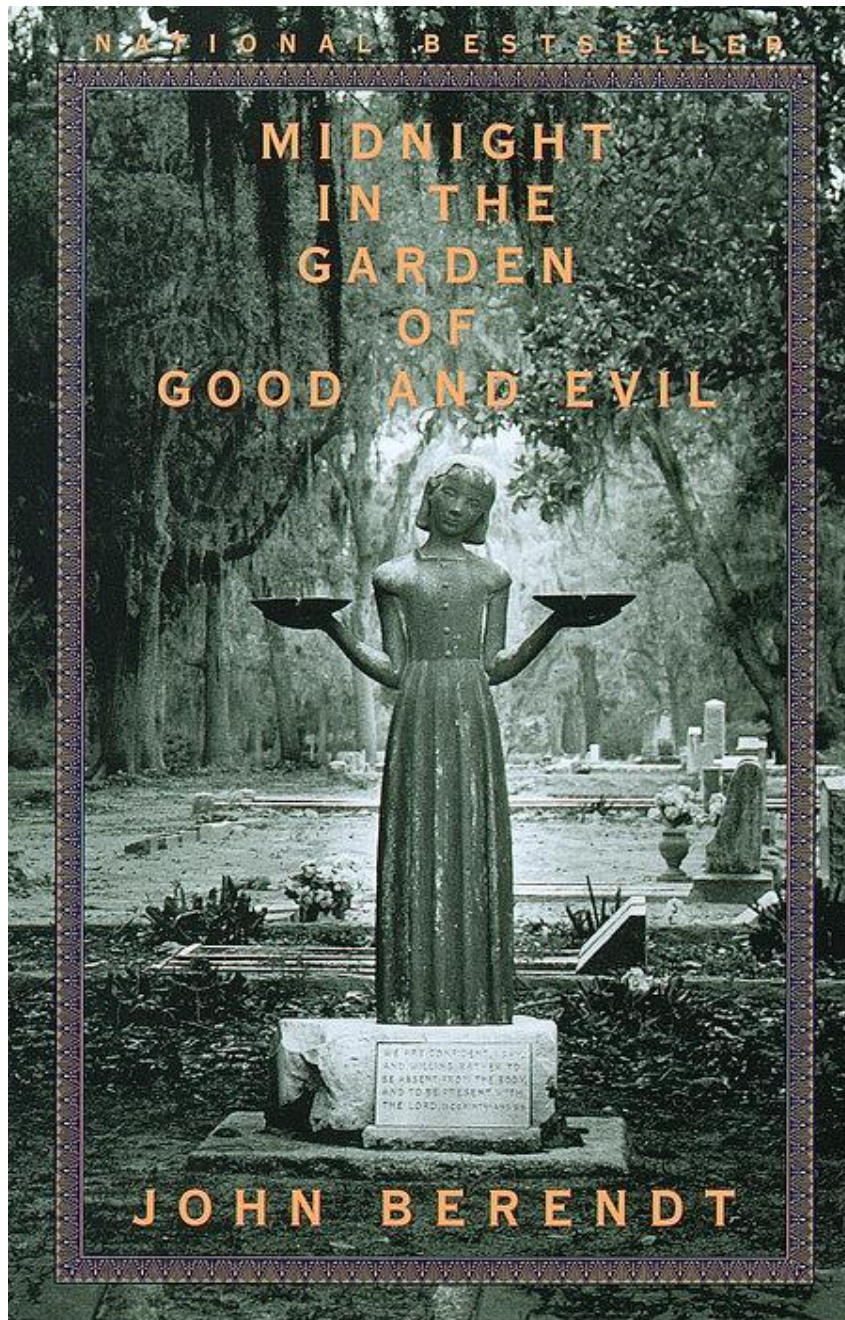


“the beautiful light, birds, squirrels, and insects”

At the time of Muir's 1867 visit, Bonaventure graveyard was the private cemetery of the Wiltberger family, which owned Bonaventure Plantation.

On 12 June 1868, it opened as the commercial Evergreen Cemetery.

On 7 July 1907, it became the City of Savannah's Bonaventure Cemetery. It remains famous today as a "garden cemetery".



the 1994 bestselling
non-fiction book

But I was looking for a gravestone like this:







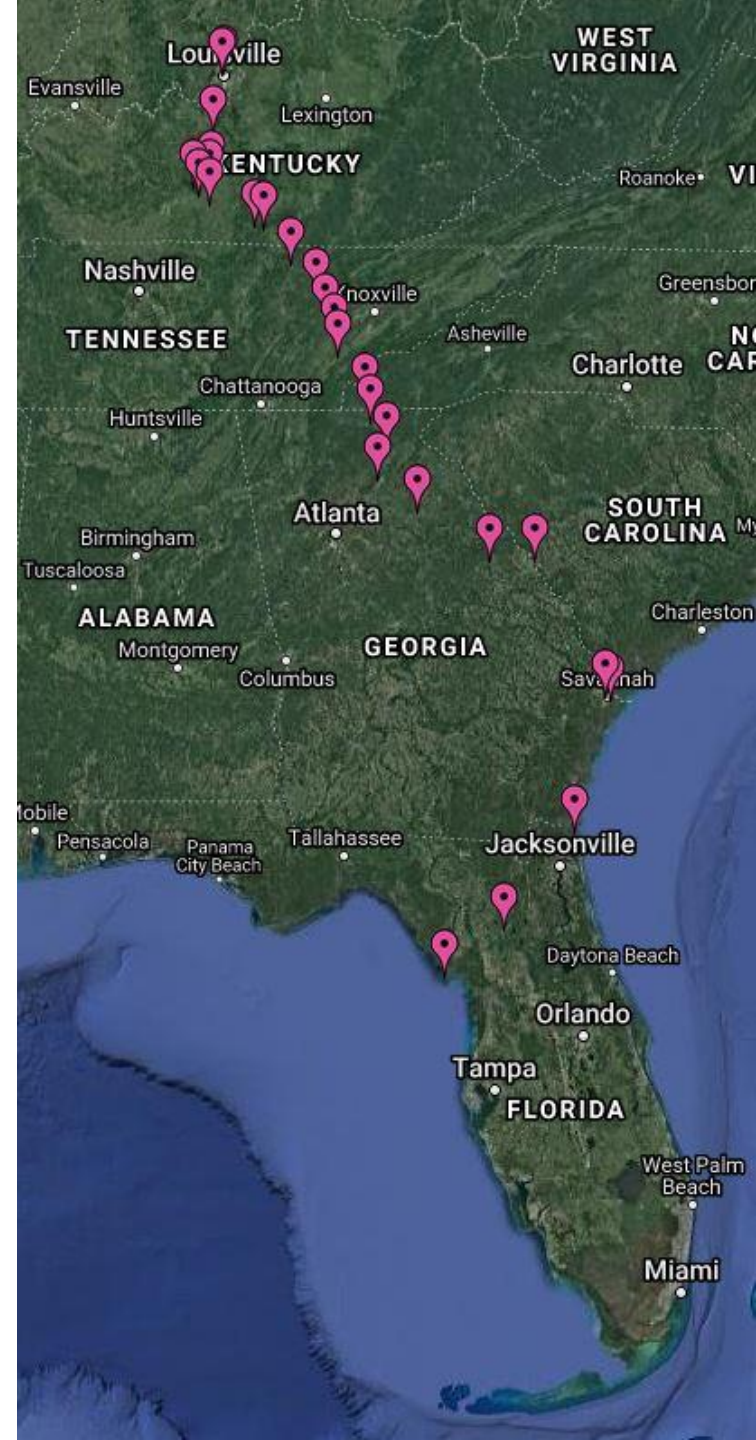
GEORGE

I was looking for a gravestone like this:



I never found one.

What place interests you?



My Muir retracing project has taken me to heavenly places “quite unknown to tourists”.

I have met new people:

Pastor of William Beal’s church in Murphy, NC

Auto mechanic in Murphy, NC

Porch-sitter in Oakdale, TN

Deed room clerk in Gainesville, GA

Nature interpreter in Gainesville, FL

Visiting these sites in person has deepened, for me, Muir’s spiritual musings.

Everyone loves Yosemite Valley, justifiably.



But let's follow Muir and love also less stupendous places like Fountain Lake, Wisconsin.



Visit Yosemite Valley, yes.

But also go off the beaten track.

“To the sane and free, it will hardly seem necessary to cross the continent in search of wild beauty, however easy the way, for they find it in abundance wherever they chance to be.”

– John Muir

“Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West”
The Atlantic Monthly, January 1898