

George Washington: Local History Myth and Mystery

By Larry Gordon Somers

I was born and raised on a Somers family farm in the Williamsburg community of Rockingham County, North Carolina. I read family histories about my fourth-great grandfather Captain Peter Summers being a friend of George Washington and how he led a delegation of Revolutionary War veterans to meet with the President at Guilford Courthouse during Washington's Southern Tour in 1791.

And somehow I have been living with the belief that Washington traveled through the Lenox Castle neighborhood of the Williamsburg community where Mary Lynn and I now live as he traveled from Iron Works in Rockingham County to Gatewood in Caswell County on Friday, June 3, 1791.

In April of 2019 Dr. Lindley S. Butler, professor emeritus of history at Rockingham Community College and noted North Carolina historian, made the keynote address when the Museum and Archives of Rockingham County dedicated the High Rock Park just a couple of miles from our home. I came to realize then that actually no one knows the route that President Washington took through Rockingham and Caswell counties. Dr. Butler's thought provoking and illuminating remarks inspired me to do some research and try to separate the myths and mysteries from these beliefs.

I immediately sought guidance and advice from Rockingham County Historian Robert Wray Carter, Jr., whose extraordinary knowledge of the history and people of Rockingham County is legendary. As we begin to examine the possible routes that Washington may have taken in his exhaustive travel from Iron Works to Gatewood, his knowledge of the roads in existence in 1791 is essential to this presentation.

First, let us examine any purported relationship between Peter Summers and George Washington.

Let me be clear. Any references to a personal relationship between the Captain and the President are frankly nothing but pure myth. There is no history of Peter Summers traveling into Virginia. The only time Washington was in North Carolina was on his Southern Tour in 1791 with the exception being 1763 when Washington supervised the surveying of land in the Dismal Swamp of the northeast of the state. Peter was seven years old at that time. Peter Summers was a first generation American whose parents were from Ober Bexbach in the Palatine region of what is now southwest Germany. That family spoke a Germanic dialect. Washington spoke English.

Unfortunately most, if not all, of Peter Summers' records (along with his trench "war spear") and the Summers family history from Ober Bexbach disappeared in 1916.

Neracissa Summers was the daughter of Ludwig Summers and granddaughter of Peter Summers. She lived in the Ludwig Summers home overlooking the Summers mill on Reedy Fork Creek on what is now NC Hwy 61 near Gibsonville. Ludwig Summers had been entrusted with keeping a large trunk that had belonged to his father Peter and his grandfather Jacob. That trunk contained much of the family history. When Ludwig died in 1871 possession and safekeeping of the trunk fell to Neracissa.

Neracissa died during the night of December 4, 1916, at the age of 95 years. Members of the family were present when she died. Following her death that night the families went back to their homes. When they returned the following morning the trunk had disappeared.

To this day the trunk has never been found.

As to meeting with the President at Guilford Courthouse, Peter did lead a delegation of former Revolutionary War soldiers in the hopes of seeing President Washington. Washington writes in his diary "On my approach to this place (Guilford) I was met by a party of light horse which I prevailed on the Governor (Martin) to dismiss and to countermand his orders for others to attend me through the state." Family histories do say that Peter was present when the President and the Governor toured the Guilford Courthouse battlefield.

Washington did not like for horsemen to try to lead him into any gathering of people. The horses kicked up dust and even more importantly the President liked to get out of the coach in which he usually rode, mount his white stallion, and lead his entourage to any gathering.

Washington so disliked the dust and escorts that he sometimes resorted to clever tactics to avoid such inconveniences. On April 15 he wrote " Having suffered very much by the dust yesterday-and finding that parties of horse & a number of other Gentlemen were intending to attend me part of the way today... I caused their enquiries respecting the time of my setting out, to be answered that, I should endeavor to do it before eight o'clock; but I did it a little after five, by which means I avoided the inconvenience above mentioned."

But despite the myth about any relationship between my esteemed ancestor and President Washington, Peter Summers led a remarkable life that needs no embellishment.

On May 16, 1771, Peter Summers celebrated his fourteenth birthday fighting alongside his father, Jacob, at the Battle of Alamance. Think about that for a minute. Fourteenth birthday.

Peter was made a Captain in the First North Carolina Battalion militia while still a teenager. He was twice wounded in battle and was included in the 5,266 colonial forces taken prisoner of war during the Siege of Charleston. That siege lasted from March 29 to May 12, 1780. He was paroled along with other militia following the colonial defeat with the promise that they would not take up arms again against the Crown. Of course that promise and oath were promptly broken by many of the men.

He was not present at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse on March 18, 1781, as he was recovering from a wound most likely suffered at the skirmish at Weitzel's Mill very near his home twelve days earlier. He would later own that very mill where the remains of several British soldiers were found buried some years later when a new raceway was being built. For his services he was awarded one thousand acres of land in the state of Tennessee.

Peter Summers died a proud patriot and devout Christian in 1837. He is buried at Friedens Lutheran Church near Gibsonville, North Carolina.

Now, on that day in early June of 1791, as to whether President Washington traveled through the Lenox Castle neighborhood of the Williamsburg community, we can only examine possible routes he may have taken from Iron Works to the home of Dudley Gatewood and analyze what might have been. As difficult as this may seem, Washington left some important clues to this mystery in his diary that will help in our study.

Here are the possible routes Washington may have taken based primarily on the Samuel Lewis Map of 1795 or 1796 and the Price Strother Map of 1806. I will examine each of these possible routes in greater detail later.

(A) Iron Works Road to Gatewood : 30.0 Miles

(Primary roads now are Old US Hwy 29/Shady Grove Rd)

(B) Dix Ferry Road to Gatewood : 32.0 Miles

(Primary roads now are Grooms Rd/Lick Fork Creek Rd/Longbranch Rd to Anderson Rd/Old US Hwy 29/Shady Grove)

(C) High Rock Road to Gatewood Via Quick Road/Dix Ferry : 38.7 Miles

(Primary roads now are NC 87/Gilliam/High Rock/NC 150/Ashland/Park Springs/Quick/Anderson/Old US Hwy 29/Shady Grove)

(D) High Rock Road to Gatewood Via Old NC 86 : 38.8 Miles

(Primary roads now are NC 87/Gilliam/High Rock/ NC 150/Ashland/Park Springs/Old NC Hwy 86 through Purley and Providence)

(E) High Rock to Gatewood Via Quick Road/Old Hwy US 29 : 42.1 Miles

(Primary roads now are NC 87/Gilliam/High Rock/ NC 150/Ashland/Park Springs/Quick/Lick Fork Creek/Old US Hwy 29/Shady Grove)

All of the mileage is estimated based on the analysis included in this presentation using current streets and roads that have been actually measured. Where the roads no longer exist I have estimated mileage based on current maps and scales using our best thoughts as to where those roads existed in 1791.

What is important is the relationship of the various routes to each other and why the mileage is crucial to understanding which routes Washington may have taken. So, here are the details of the mileage calculations of each of the possible routes.

(A) Iron Works to Gatewood : 30.0 Miles

	<u>Miles</u>
1. Iron Works to Linders Via Monroeton Rd/Irons Works/ US Hwy 158/Richardson Drive	4.6
<p>Note: Iron Works is located on the Monroeton Road at Troublesome Creek. Linders was located at the intersection of Richardson Drive and Coach Road in Reidsville where the Holy Lutheran Church is now located.</p>	
2. Linders to Way Street via Richardson/Crescent/S.Park/ Pennrose/Parkway/S. Scales/Turner Drive	1.4
3. Way Street to Madison St via SW Market/NW Market (NW Market has been renamed Martin Luther King St)	2.1
4. Madison Street to Old US Hwy 29	1.1
5. Old US Hwy 29 to Shady Grove Rd	14.4
6. Shady Grove Rd to NC Hwy 86	4.6

7. NC Hwy 86 to Historical Marker on NC Hwy 86 at North Elementary School	0.3
8. Historical Marker to (last) Dudley Gatewood house location	1.0
9. (Last) Gatewood house location to original location	0.5 *
TOTAL MILES	30.0

Note: *The original Gatewood house location is estimated to be 0.5 miles further towards the Dix Ferry as follows:

The estimated distance from the Dix Ferry to the last location of the Gatewood house off Walters Mill Rd is 2.5 miles by current map scale. In his diary Washington wrote "...Gatewood's (was) within two miles of Dix' Ferry over the Dan..."

(B) Dix Ferry Road To Gatewood : 32.0 Miles

	<u>Miles</u>
1. Iron Works to Linders Via Monroeton Rd/Iron Works/ US Hwy 158/Richardson Drive	4.6
2. Linders to Way Street via Richardson/Crescent/S. Park/ Pennrose/Parkway/S. Scales/Turner Drive	1.4
3. Turner Drive/Way St/ to Barnes St	0.3
4. Barnes St to Holiday Loop	1.1
5. Holiday Loop to Grooms Rd	0.2
6. Grooms Rd to Lick Fork Creek Rd	8.1
7. Lick Fork Creek Rd to Longbranch Rd	1.7
8. Longbranch Rd to dead end	1.2
9. Dead End of Longbranch Rd to Quick Road (estimated by scale)	1.1

10. Quick Rd to Dead End of Anderson Rd (estimated by map scale)	0.8
11. Anderson Road to Old US Hwy 29	1.4
12. Old US Hwy 29 to Shady Grove Rd	3.7
13. Shady Grove Rd to NC Hwy 86	4.6
14. NC Hwy 86 to Historical Marker on NC Hwy 86 at North Elementary School	0.3
15. Historical Marker to Last Gatewood House Location	1.0
16. (Last) Gatewood House Location to Original Location	0.5 *
TOTAL MILES	32.0

(C) High Rock Road to Gatewood Via Quick Rd/Dix Ferry Rd : 38.7 Miles

	<u>Miles</u>
1. Iron Works to Linders Via Monroeton Rd/Iron Works/ US Hwy 158/Richardson Drive	4.6
2. Linders to Way St via Richardson/Crescent/S. Park/Pennrose Parkway/S. Scales/Turner	1.4
3. Turner/Way St to Barnes St	0.3
4. Barnes St to Holiday Loop	1.1
5. Holiday Loop to NC Hwy 87 (Barnes St)	1.3
6. NC Hwy 87 to (Hills Loop, Perkins Loop) Gilliam Road	2.8
7. Gilliam Road to High Rock Rd	2.1
8. High Rock Rd to Lenox Castle Historical Marker on NC Hwy 150 (Estimate)	2.4 *

9. Lenox Castle to Ashland Road	2.7
10. Ashland/Park Springs Rd to Quick Rd	5.6
11. Quick Rd to Dead End of Longbranch extended Across Quick Rd to Dead End of Anderson Rd (estimate by map scale)	2.9 *
12. Dead End of Anderson to Old US Hwy 29	1.4
13. Old US Hwy 29 to Shady Grove Rd	3.7
14. Shady Grove Rd to NC Hwy 86	4.6
15. NC Hwy 86 to Historical Marker on NC Hwy 86 at North Elementary School	0.3
16. Historical Marker to Last Dudley Gatewood House Location	1.0
17. Last Gatewood House Location to Original Location	0.5 *
TOTAL MILES	38.7

(D) High Rock Road to Gatewood Via Old NC Hwy 86 : 38.8 Miles

	<u>Miles</u>
1. Iron Works to Linders Via MonroetonRd/Iron Works/ US Hwy 158/Richardson Drive	4.6
2. Linders to Way St via Richardson/Crescent/S. Park/Pennrose/ Parkway/S. Scales/Turner Drive	1.4
3. Turner/Way St to Barnes Street	0.3
4. Barnes Street to Holiday Loop	1.1
5. Holliday Loop to NC Hwy 87 (Barnes St)	1.3
6. NC Hwy 87 to (Hills Loop, Perkins Loop) Gilliam Road	2.8

7. Gilliam Rd to High Rock Road	2.1
8. High Rock Road to Lenox Castle Historical Marker on NC Hwy 150 (Estimate)	2.4
9. Lenox Castle to Ashland Road	2.7
10. Ashland Rd to Park Springs Rd to Old NC Hwy 86 (through Purley and Providence) to Gatewood House Historical Market on NC Hwy 86 at North Elementary School	18.6
11. Historical Marker to Original Dudley Gatewood House Location	1.5
TOTAL MILES	38.8

(E) High Rock Rd To Gatewood Via Quick Rd/Old US Hwy 29 : 42.1 Miles

	<u>Miles</u>
1. Iron Works to Linders Via Monroeton Road/Iron Works/ US Hwy 158/ Richardson Drive	4.6
2. Linders to Way St via Richardson/Crescent/S. Park/Pennrose/ Parkway/S. Scales/Turner Drive	1.4
3. Turner/Way St to Barnes Street	0.3
4. Barnes St to Holiday Loop	1.2
5. Holiday Loop to NC Hwy 87 (Barnes St)	1.3
6. NC Hwy 87 to (Hills Loop, Perkins Loop) Gilliam Road	2.8
7. Gilliam Road to High Rock Road	2.1
8. High Rock Rd to Lenox Castle Historical Marker on NC Hwy 150 (Estimate)	2.4
9. Lenox Castle to Ashland Road	2.7

10. Ashland/Park Springs Road to Quick Road	5.6
11. Quick Road to Lick Fork Creek Road	4.4
12. Lick Fork Creek Road to Old US Hwy 29	0.1
13. Old US Hwy 29 to Shady Grove Road	6.8
14. Shady Grove Road to NC Hwy 86	4.6
15. NC Hwy 86 to Historical Marker on NC Hwy 86 at North Elementary School	0.3
16. Historical Marker to Last Dudley Gatewood House Location	1.0
17. Last Gatewood House Location to Original Location	0.5
TOTAL MILES	42.1

Washington wrote in his diary “Took my leave of the Governor, whose intention was to have attended me to the line, but for my request that he would not and about four o’clock I proceeded on my journey, breakfasted at Troublesome Iron Works, called fifteen but at least is seventeen miles from Guilford, partly in the rain and, from my information, or for want of it, was obliged to travel twelve miles further than I intended to-day, to one Gatewood’s within two miles of Dix Ferry over the Dan, at least thirty miles from the Iron Works.”

So Washington traveled twelve miles further than he intended with two of those miles being from Guilford to Iron Works and ten more miles being from Iron Works to Gatewood. When he refers to Gatewood’s as being at least thirty miles from Iron Works he most likely means the distance via the Dix Ferry Road (calculated by current road mileage adjusted for abandoned roads to be 31.4 miles) based on his travels that day compared to whatever maps or directions he had available; or someone could have told him it was thirty miles.

The mileage from Guilford to Iron Works is almost certainly based on the route General Nathaniel Greene took following the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. It has been only in recent years that a map was discovered that one of the soldiers from Greene’s army made along the route.

Washington would have had access to General Greene's maps and information concerning the region. And equally important he would have whatever information Governor Martin would have given to him as we will examine later in this presentation.

How accurate was Washington in his mileage calculations? He based his mileage estimates based on time. He knew from many years in the saddle as a surveyor and later as a military officer that a horse's normal gait was five miles per hour. Hence, he simply keep track of the time of a trip and converted it into miles adjusting for any stops along the way.

In its January of 1932 edition, the National Geographic magazine's feature article was entitled "The Travels of George Washington – Dramatic Episodes in His Career as the First Geographer of the United States." The author of this comprehensive article was William Joseph Showalter.

Showalter wrote "The accuracy with which Washington on horseback gauged distances well may excite our wonder. Often he tells in his notes how far he traveled on a given day. In many places where a staff member of the National Geographic Magazine was able to check these distances with speedometer readings, they corresponded remarkably with Washington's mileage record."

Let us now begin to examine each of the possible following routes and see which one(s) was or were the most likely that Washington traveled on June 3, 1791. Of course some of these conclusions may be speculative in nature so the reader will have to exercise prudent judgment as to the reasonableness of the analysis.

(A) Iron Works to Gatewood : 30.0 Miles

This would have been the shortest route but obviously it was not the one he traveled. It would have meant that Washington traveled zero miles further than he intended. Also it just barely meets his observation that Gatewood's was "...at least thirty miles from the Iron Works." Most likely Washington had maps, information, or as previously noted, he had been told that it was thirty miles from Iron Works to the Dudley Gatewood home.

Why this route was not chosen may be one of the real mysteries of the day. Most of this route is present day US Hwy Business 29 and follows the top of a ridge. There are no creeks to cross and it was the shortest way to Gatewood.

A logical explanation as to why the route was not taken could be simply that Washington did not take the Iron Works to Linders road at all. Instead he followed another of General Greene's routes down the Flat Rock road and the Mizpah Church road. We will examine these options later.

Or maybe he just missed the turn shortly after leaving Linders.

Perhaps this is why Washington wrote "...from my information, or want of it, was obliged to travel twelve miles further than I intended to-day...".

(B) Dix Ferry Road to Gatewood : 32.0 Miles

This would have been the most likely normal route from Iron Works to Gatewood but obviously it was not the chosen one because, again, it would have meant that Washington traveled virtually no miles further than planned.

But there could be another more practical reason he did not take the Dix Ferry Road. Here another clue appears in Washington's diary "...I proceeded on my journey...partly in the rain...".

The Dix Ferry road proceeded down Grooms road to Longbranch road. Today Longbranch dead ends about 1.1 miles from the Quick road. In 1791 it would have proceeded to Quick Road and across it about another 0.8 miles to the Anderson road. The Longbranch dead ended before proceeding to the Quick road and was abandoned for a very practicable reason. It may have been impassible during much of the year.

The Longbranch to Quick road would have passed very near to the confluence of Lick Fork Creek and Hogans Creek. That area today is a low lying marsh. And in 1791 I suspect it was the same. Travel over that section of the Dix Ferry road would have been nearly impossible during the summer months except during extended dry periods. And the road from the marsh up to Quick Rd is very steep making difficult and dangerous footing for horses. Washington spent a lifetime taking exceptional care of his horses. He would not have wanted to expose them to such dangers.

Washington had spent nights with Governor Martin at Salem and Guilford Courthouse and a full day traveling with him from Salem to the Guilford Battlefield. There can be little doubt that the President and the Governor discussed the routes Washington might take on June 3. Governor Martin, being a long-time resident of the area, and others would have been quite familiar with the Dix Ferry road terrain and its possible condition.

I should here interject some personal observations. During my rockhounding days more than four decades ago, Charlie "Red" Setliff, who grew up nearby this area in the Mayfield community, and I went searching for gold in what is now the abandoned parts of the Longbranch and Anderson roads. There was supposed to be an old gold mine somewhere behind the former Ruffin High School but the only things we found were insect bites, blisters, and bruises. The abandoned part of the Anderson road is hilly and has some small branches and streams. The terrain is very rough but somewhat more suitable for travel than the abandoned part of Longbranch.

As I shall discuss in more detail later, I am most familiar with the area around the Quick Road bridge over Hogans Creek.

Of course there is another reason Washington did not take the Dix Ferry Road from Iron Works. He wrote he traveled twelve miles further than he intended (including two miles further from Guilford to Iron Works) "...from my information, or for want of it..." This leaves the possibility that rather than avoiding the Dix Ferry Road due to terrain issues he simply missed the turn off shortly after leaving Linders and proceeded by a detour route via High Rock.

For these reasons I have concluded that the Dix Ferry Road was not an option for Washington with the possible exception of the long since abandoned Anderson road portion.

(C) High Rock Road to Gatewood Via Quick Rd/Dix Ferry Rd : 38.7 Miles

This is the shortest of the three routes from High Rock to Gatewood and this is a good time to review several matters along this route.

In 1791 Lenox Castle was known as Rockingham Springs. And the route from High Rock to Rockingham Springs was well known to both General Greene and Governor Martin. On June 24, 1790, Governor Martin had convened a meeting of the North Carolina Council of State at Rockingham Springs and one of the items on the agenda of that meeting was writing a letter to President Washington expressing their well wishes. So, Washington could have been familiar with Rockingham Springs as well.

The route from High Rock to Rockingham Springs is basically unchanged today from High Rock to NC Hwy 87. However in 1791 High Rock Rd continued straight across NC Hwy 87 through farms owned at one time by Annie Belle Dawson McKinney and her husband Albert R. "Bud" McKinney and a farm owned by my grandparents Ira Lawrence Somers and Lillie May Dawson Somers, sister of Annie. Annie had inherited her farm as a child from her aunt Jerusha Dawson Robertson.

The two farms are now owned by Rodney C. Ross and Melvin Lee Blackwell. Very near the boundary line of these farms is a small stream believed to have once been known as Robertson branch. That branch is spring fed and, along with other springs, provides water for a pond on the now Blackwell farm.

The road then joined what is now City Store road at the Blackwell home at 516 City Store Rd.

City Store road then ends at Somers Loop. My Somers grandparents also owned the farm at that intersection and Mary Lynn and I now live on part of that farm. The High Rock road then kept straight at the intersection of now City Store Rd and Somers Loop across to what is now NC Hwy 150. The road then went behind what is now the Ira Lee Somers home at 3060 NC Hwy 150, the Monroe (Bud) Hemperly and Beverly Somers Hemperly home (3072), the Donald L. Brown home (3114) and the William Dewey Brown and Hannah Stadler Brown home place at 3130 NC Hwy 150 and then joins NC Hwy 150 at the Lenox Castle historical marker at 3230 NC Hwy 150. I estimate the original High Rock road from Gilliam Rd to the historical marker for Lenox Castle on NC Hwy 150 to be 2.4 miles.

All three of the High Rock Rd routes to Gatewood require crossing Hogans Creek. When I first began this study I was concerned about problems related to crossing creeks as, of course, there were no bridges over Hogans Creek at that time. But that should have been no concern.

Roads crossed creeks where the terrain and water levels would allow for safe passage for wagons or coaches. Such crossings could be dangerous to animals and people alike if the water levels were too high or the hills too steep.

And to this I will add another personal observation. My cousin Gerald Lynn "Jerry" Williamson and I spent the first three years of our lives living with our mothers, Geneva Morefield Clayton Williamson and Ada Helen Clayton Somers at grandpa George Lee Clayton's home less that one half mile south of Hogans Creek on the Quick Road.

Jerry's sister Patricia Ann "Pat" and my brother Danny George joined us in 1944. Our fathers, Lynn Banks Williamson and Gordon Lawrence Somers were serving in the US Army during World War II until December, 1944. Grandpa Clayton was sharecropping that farm on the Quick Road where we spent many happy times swimming in Hogans Creek during our childhood years.

The water levels at the bridge over Hogans Creek were never more that a foot or so deep when we where children and have changed very little over the past seventy plus years. I suspect the water levels in 1791 were much the same. Hence the lack of any bridge was no issue for travels.

Now, Washington wrote that "... Gatewood's (was)...at least thirty miles from the Iron works." And we have deducted that he traveled ten miles further than he intended from Iron Works to Gatewood. Meaning he traveled at least forty miles from Iron Works to Gatewood. This route is 38.7 miles and probably too short to qualify as the route Washington took. One of my favorite sayings is "Possible But Not Probable". And this is how I would judge this route.

(D) High Rock to Gatewood Via Old NC 86 : 38.8 Miles

This route also falls in the "Possible But Not Probable" category. And it's an intriguing possibility.

In 1791 the Caswell County seat and courthouse was in Leasburg. It was not until a year later that Person County was formed from Caswell and the seat of government and courthouse for Caswell was relocated to present day Yanceyville, a more central location for the county.

Also, in 1791, people from the northwestern parts of Caswell County would have traveled to Leasburg primarily via Old NC Hwy 86. At its northern most location Old Hwy NC 86 joined the Old Dix Ferry Road near present day North Elementary School.

The map of George Washington's travels included with the 1932 National Geographic article is both interesting and confusing with regards to the President's travels from Iron Works to Gatewood. It shows his route as being to the east of any of the routes herein identified and passing just west of Leasburg and heading north to Halifax Old Town. Most importantly it does not show any stop at Gatewood nor does it recognize that Washington wrote that he "Left Mr. Gatewood's about half after six o'clock and between his house and the Ferry passed the line which divides the state of Virginia and North Carolina and...lodged at Halifax old Town". This would have been an impossible day's trip of well over seventy miles.

Apparently those who made the map knew virtually nothing about Washington's route from Iron Works to Gatewood or his overnight stay there. Hopefully with this study we now have a better idea of the President's route.

Again, the day's journey from Iron Works to Gatewood was more than forty miles. This route is about 38.8 miles. It falls in the Possible But Not Probable category.

(E) High Rock Road to Gatewood Via Quick Rd/Old US Hwy 29 : 42.1 Miles

Finally we have a route that meets the "at least" forty miles measure. And it makes a lot sense.

If Washington had avoided or missed the Dix Ferry Road from Linders by way of present day Grooms, Lick Fork Creek, and Longbranch roads as previously discussed, it seems probable he would have continued to avoid the Dix Ferry road as it crossed the Quick Rd and continued on via the present day Anderson Road.

From where the Dix Ferry Road intersected with the Quick Road it was only about 1.5 miles to Old US Hwy 29.

In his magnificent book "When the Past Refused to Die - A History of Caswell County, North Carolina 1777-1977" noted Professor William S. Powell of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill wrote in 1982 that "Washington's journal indicates that he was not well informed concerning the route he was to follow and he was obliged to ride twelve miles farther than he had intended. It must have been late in the day when he arrived at "One Gatewoods' within two miles of Dix' ferry..."

Let's see how this route would have matched up with the famous historian's comment that "It must have been late in the day..."

Apparently Washington traveled between fifty-nine and sixty miles on June 3, about twice as many miles as he would have normally traveled in a day's journey. Of course, he would not have had to make any social or official visits along the way. That's seventeen miles from Guilford to Iron Works, more than thirty miles he calculated the distance from Iron Works to Gatewood plus ten additional miles unaccounted for on the Iron Works to Gatewood route.

According to the Showalter article in the National Geographic magazine "He (Washington) modestly says his habitual gait on horseback was five miles an hour". Allowing for his coach to travel four and a half miles per hour, which was normal for the times, that means he spent about thirteen and one half hours in route and allowing another one and a half hours or so for breakfast at Iron Works and to water his horses and take care of any necessities along the way resulting in a days trip of nearly fifteen hours.

From Guilford he wrote "...about four o'clock I proceeded on my journey..." This means he would have arrived at Gatewood by somewhere around six forty five o'clock in the afternoon. That would be only about forty five minutes before sunset At 7:31 p.m. Eastern Standard time (no Daylight Savings time in those days). He would most definitely have arrived "...late in the day..."

That was a very long day's journey for sure, and obviously most tiring. Maybe that is why Washington wrote that he "Left Mr. Gatewood's about half after six o'clock ..." instead of his normal four o'clock morning departure. Or maybe the ferry wasn't available until after he left Gatewood's.

Before concluding, we must examine another possibility. Let us assume that Washington did not travel from Iron Works to Linders. Instead he chose to follow another of General Greene's routes from Iron Works to High Rock via the Flat Rock/Mizpah Church roads.

These routes would have been Iron Works on Monroeton Rd/US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/Old Hwy US 29/Mizpah Church/Cooks Florist/Freeway Drive to Barnes Street (NC Hwy 87). This distance measures 11.7 miles.

A second route would be Iron Works on Monroeton Rd/US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/Old Hwy US 29/Mizpah Church/NC Hwy 87 / Gilliam Road/High Rock Rd. This distance measures 14.5 miles.

(A)(1) Iron Works to Gatewood Alternate Via Flat Rock/Mizpah Church Rds

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Iron Works to US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/Mizpah Church/
Cooks Florist/Freeway Drive/Barnes Street (NC Hwy87) | 11.7 Miles |
| 2. Barnes Street to Grooms/Holiday Loop/Barnes/Turner to Way St | 2.7 |
| 3. Way Street to Original Gatewood House Location | 24.0 |

TOTAL MILES 38.4

(B)(1) Dix Ferry Rd to Gatewood Alternate Via Flat Rock/Mizpah Church Rds

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Iron Works to US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/Mizpah Church/
Cooks Florist/Freeway Drive/Barnes Street (NC Hwy 87) | 11.7 Miles |
| 2. Barnes Street to Grooms Rd | 1.1 |
| 3. Grooms Rd to Original Gatewood House Location | 24.0 |

TOTAL MILES 37.2

(C)(1) High Rock Rd to Gatewood Alternate Via Flat Rock/Mizpah Church Rds

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Iron Works to US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/US Hwy 29 Business/
Mizpah Church/NC Hwy 87/Gilliam Rd/High Rock Rd | 14.5 Miles |
| 2. High Rock to Original Gatewood House Location | 25.1 |

TOTAL MILES 39.6

**(D)(1) High Rock Road to Gatewood/Old NC Hwy 86 Alternate
Via Flat Rock/Mizpah Church Roads**

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Iron Works to US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/US Hwy Business 29/
Mizpah Church/NC Hwy 87/Gilliam Rd/High Rock Rd | 14.5 Miles |
| 2. High Rock Rd to Original Gatewood House Location | 25.2 |

TOTAL MILES 39.7

**(E)(1) High Rock Road to Gatewood/Quick Rd/Old Hwy US 29
Alternate Via Flat Rock/Mizpah Church Roads**

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Iron Works to US Hwy 158/Flat Rock/US Hwy Business 29/
Mizpah Church/NC Hwy 87/Gilliam Rd/High Rock Rd | 14.5 Miles |
| 2. High Rock Rd to Original Gatewood House Location | 28.4 |

TOTAL MILES	42.9
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COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL ROUTES TO ALTERNATE ROUTES

(A) Original Route	30.0 Miles
(A)(1) Alternate	38.4
(B) Original Route	32.0
(B)(1) Alternate	37.2
(C) Original Route	38.7
(C)(1) Alternate	39.6
(D) Original Route	38.8
(D)(1) Alternate	39.7
(E) Original Route	42.1
(E)(1) Alternate	42.9

A logical conclusion is that of all the possible routes Washington could have taken on June 3, 1971, the most probable routes would have been the High Rock to Lenox Castle routes. The alternate High Rock Route would have taken a few minutes longer than the original route and would have meant that he would have traveled a little less than a mile farther. Traveling either route he would have arrived at Gatewood's about forty-five minutes before sunset.

Conclusion – Iron Works to Gatewood

Again, of all the possible routes Washington could have taken on June 3, 1791, the most probable routes would have been from Iron Works to Linders to High Rock to Lenox Castle (Route (E)); or from Iron Works to High Rock to Lenox Castle by way of the Flat Rock Road and the Mizpah Church Road (Route (E)(1).) From Lenox Castle (Rockingham Springs) he would have traveled down NC Hwy 150 to Ashland and taken the Ashland/Park Springs Road to Quick Road. From Quick Road he would have traveled to Lick Fork Creek Road over to Old US Hwy 29. From Old US Hwy 29 he would then travel to the Shady Grove Road to Old US Hwy 86 down to the Dix Ferry Road to Dudley Gatewood's home.

The distance of these routes would have been about forty-two or forty-three miles. Of course, he had already traveled seventeen miles from Guilford to Iron Works.

And yes, he would have traveled through the Lenox Castle neighborhood of the Williamsburg Community. So maybe I didn't just dream this up after all.

Most certainly, we might never be able to prove this hypothesis unless more information becomes available. Therein lies the challenge to future historians.

Alas, until such time in the future the actual route can be verified the President's journey through Rockingham and Caswell counties must remain a mystery.

But for me, I think I will continue to believe that President Washington traveled through our part of Rockingham County.

As Marguerite Holt, former President of the Museum & Archives of Rockingham County is fond of saying "And who's to say any different".

Yes indeed.

Larry G. Somers
321 Somers Loop
Reidsville, North Carolina 27320

ADDENDUM

When I began this quest, I had no idea where it might lead, what the possible routes might be or what the conclusion, if any, might be. In fact, I didn't even know where the Dudley Gatewood house had been located. That is a story that needs to be told.

During the 1970's my brother Danny and our cousins James William (Jimmy) Cobb and Joseph Elwood (Joe) Cobb delivered liquid propane gas to a tobacco barn located behind the Gatewood house. The barn and house were on a farm owned by George Rosser Carter who lived nearby on NC Hwy 86.

They each tried to tell me where they remembered the house was located and Jimmy drove me down to Gatewood and indicated to me where he remembered it was located across an open field.

I wrote down the address nearby as 533 Walters Mill Road and called the telephone number at that address. A very nice lady who identified herself as Marie Gilliam was willing to help me locate the exact location of the Gatewood house. She verified it was exactly where my cousin Jimmy had pointed out. It was located between the Gilliam home and the home of her next door neighbor Peggy Martin, a retired employee of Rockingham Community College. There is an open field and a distance of several hundred yards between the Gilliam and Martin homes. The Gatewood house was located in a grove of trees about one hundred yards or so north of Walters Mill Road.

But then things really got complicated.

I found this article in the December 12, 1924 edition of The Bee, Danville, Virginia, newspaper titled "Too Valuable To Be Lost".

It reads as follows "Relics of the administration of George Washington are too valuable to be allowed to escape preservation and for that reason one may hope with all earnestness that the house in which the patriot was sheltered near Danville 133 years ago, will be fortified against the ravages of time. The historic event amounts almost to a discovery for comparatively few living in Caswell county the passing visit of Washington in these parts in 1791 remained virtually unknown until recently proof of the visit was revealed in Washington's own diary. **While it is true that the historical value of the house is somewhat depreciated by reason of the fact that the dwelling today is not where it was when Washington spent the night in it, there is sufficient atmosphere which warrants its preservation, especially since in the rebuilding of the Dudley Gatewood home the room which Washington stayed in was carefully reproduced with its original material.** (Bold lettering is by the author).

Article continues as “The structure now is perilously near ruin but it is not too far gone to be made proof against the unfailing aggression of time. Perhaps now that the authenticity of the Washington visit has been substantiated, Mr. E. W. Carter, the present owner, will take such steps as are necessary to preserve it. The American Daughters of the Revolution, of Danville, who are already interested in the Gatewood Home, are planning to place a permanent marker on the dwelling. Doubtless they would like to acquire the property, but it could not be expected that the local organization could undertake perpetuation on such a scale as this, even if the present owner were willing to dispose of it. It would, however, be a pity in view of the established antiquity of the old homestead to be lost entirely.”

So the location of the Gatewood house about a hundred yards or so north of the Walters Mill road was not where Washington actually slept. It was the right house but the wrong location. By my calculations, the original location was at least a half of a mile down the Dix Ferry Rd nearer the ferry from its last location.

The historical marker on NC Hwy 86 says the Dudley Gatewood home “...stood 1 mi. N.E.” of the marker. I do not know whether this makes reference to the final location of the home or its original location. If it refers to the original location the sign might more accurately say 2 miles. But I defer to the judgment of the good people of Caswell County as to the proper wording.

Sadly the old house was sold and torn down and much of the timbers and wood moved to Hillsborough about 1978. The rebuilt portions of the house are now in a restaurant in Boone Village off Business I 85 and I 40.

Regardless of which route Washington took from Iron Works to Gatewood, there would have been precious few people through this “backcountry” that might have witnessed the procession. That is a real shame, not only because there are apparently no oral histories that can be verified but also because they would have been treated to a spectacle to behold.

Washington rode in the “presidential limousine” of the day. It was a white coach drawn by what were probably four dark chestnut brown horses. The coach was adorned with ivory and gilt trim with the Washington coat of arms decorating the quarter panels.

There was a second wagon to carry the baggage of the entourage. Washington was accompanied by his private secretary, Major William Jackson, his personal valet, and as many as a four or five coachmen and assistants. Washington’s white stallion “Prescot” was available for the President to mount when arriving at any gathering of people in towns or villages.

The coachmen and assistants were all decked out in bright red dress and provided a most impressive appearance.

Even if there were people along the route to see Washington, very few would have recognized who he was. He was tall, standing six foot three or more, had light brown hair and unlike most of his contemporaries never wore a wig. He did, however, powder his hair white on formal occasions.

Finally, I conclude by examining speculation that Washington “got lost and went up in Virginia” on his way to Gatewood. I have not included the mileage calculations in the primary analysis because I believe if Washington had traveled into Virginia on June 3 he would have noted such in his diary as he wrote the following day that he “...passed the line which divides the state of Virginia and North Carolina...” Crossing that state line was a noteworthy event. It meant he had no official functions left and was on his final leg home. There is no mention of crossing the state line in Washington’s diary of June 3.

Nevertheless, here are the mileage numbers for the possible routes if the President “got lost and went up in Virginia”.

(B) Took Wrong Turn at Old Hwy US 29 and Shady Grove Road And Doubled Back to Shady Grove Road

	Miles
1. Intersection of Old Hwy US 29 and Shady Grove Road to Virginia state line on Old Hwy US 29	2.0
2. Virginia state line on Old Hwy US 29 back to Shady Grove Rd	2.0
TOTAL MILES	4.0

This route assumes Washington got “lost” and continued down the Old Hwy US 29 to the Virginia state line. Upon realizing his mistake he then turned around and headed back to the Shady Grove Road to continue on to Gatewood. Turning around a coach or wagon drawn by four horses would have been difficult. The roads were narrow and would have been tree lined with very few open spaces.

(C) Took Wrong Turn at Old Hwy US 29 and Shady Grove Road and Continued Up Old US 29 to VA Hwy 86 and South to Gatewood

	Miles
1. Intersection of Old Hwy US 29 and Shady Grove Road to dead end of Old Hwy US 29 at Corning Drive in VA	2.2
2. Corning Drive to West Main Street	0.3
3. West Main Street through Schoolfield and Ballou Park to VA/NC Hwy 86	4.3
4. VA/NC Hwy 86 to Historical Marker on NC 86	3.7
5. Historical Marker to Original Gatewood House Location	1.5
TOTAL MILES	12.0

This route assumes that Washington got “lost” and continued down Old Hwy US 29 until it intersected with VA/NC 86 and then turned South on VA/NC 86 until reaching the Dix Ferry Rd before continuing to the Dudley Gatewood House.

In order for this route to be plausible, one would have to conclude that Washington was willing to travel nearly seven miles into Virginia when he most certainly would have known that the Dudley Gatewood house was in North Carolina.

Let us now compare the effect of “getting lost” on all of the identified routes. When we consider lost route **C** the net effect is 5.6 miles (12.0 miles less the 6.4 miles from the intersection of Old Hwy US 29 and Shady Grove Road down Shady Grove Road to Gatewood.)

Route	Miles	Additional “Lost” Miles	Total Miles
A(B)	30.0	4.0	34.0
A(1)(B)	38.4	4.0	42.4
A(C)	30.0	5.6	35.6
A(1)(C)	38.4	5.6	44.0

Route	Miles	Additional Miles	Total Miles
B(B)	32.0	4.0	36.0
B(1)(B)	37.2	4.0	41.2
B(C)	32.0	5.6	37.6
B(1)(C)	37.2	5.6	42.8
C(B)	38.7	4.0	42.7
C(1)(B)	39.6	4.0	43.6
C(C)	38.7	5.6	44.3
C(1)(C)	39.6	5.6	45.2
D(B)	38.8	NA*	38.8
D(1)(B)	39.7	NA*	39.7
D(C)	38.8	NA*	38.8
D(1)(C)	39.7	NA*	39.7
* Additional miles are not applicable since this route never travels down Old Hwy NC 29.			
E(B)	42.1	4.0	46.1
E(1)(B)	42.9	4.0	46.9
E(C)	42.1	5.6	47.7
E(1)(C)	42.9	5.6	48.5

Here is the mileage and projected time of arrival at Gatewood's for all of the possible routes.

Route	Short Description	Iron Works to Gatewood's	Total Miles	Projected ETA
A	Iron Works	30.0	47.0	4:00 PM
B	Dix Ferry Road	32.0	49.0	4:30
A(B)	Iron Works/VA	34.0	51.0	4:50
A(C)	Iron Works/VA	35.6	52.6	5:10
(B)(B)	Dix Ferry/VA	36.0	53.0	5:15
B(1)	Dix Ferry/Flat Rock	37.2	54.2	5:30
B(C)	Dix Ferry/VA	37.6	54.6	5:35
A(1)	Iron Works/Flat Rock	38.4	55.4	5:50
C	High Rock/Quick/Dix Ferry	38.7	55.7	5:55
D	High Rock/ Old NC 86	38.8	55.8	5:55
D(B)	VA Route Not Applicable	38.8	55.8	5:55
D(C)	VA Route Not Applicable	38.8	55.8	5:55
D(1)(B)	VA Route Not Applicable	38.8	55.8	5:55
D(1)(C)	VA Route Note Applicable	38.8	55.8	5:55
C(1)	High Rock/Flat Rock	39.6	56.6	6:05
D(1)	High Rock/Old NC 86	39.7	56.7	6:05
B(1)(B)	Dix Ferry/Flat Rock/VA	41.2	58.2	6:25
E	High Rock/Quick	42.1	59.1	6:40
A(1)(B)	Iron Works/Flat Rock/VA	42.4	59.4	6:45
C(B)	High Rock/Quick/VA	42.7	59.7	6:50
B(1)(C)	Dix Ferry/Flat Rock/VA	42.8	59.8	6:50
E(1)	High Rock/Flat Rock/Quick	42.9	59.9	6:50
C(1)(B)	High Rock/Flat Rock/VA	43.6	60.6	7:00
A(1)(C)	Iron Works/Flat Rock/VA	44.0	61.0	7:00
C(C)	High Rock/VA	44.3	61.3	7:05
C(1)(C)	High Rock/Flat Rock/VA	45.2	62.2	7:20
E(B)	High Rock/Quick/VA	46.1	63.1	7:30
E(1)(B)	High Rock/Flat Rock/VA	46.9	63.9	7:40
E(C)	High Rock/Quick/VA	47.7	64.7	7:50
E(1)(C)	High Rock/Flat Rock/VA	48.5	65.5	8:05

Note: Sunset was at 7:31 PM.

About the Author

Larry G. Somers graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with BSBA and MBA degrees. His "Grow Vinifera in North Carolina – But Where-Hope for the Tobacco State" article published in the Vinifera Wine Growers Journal in 1986 pioneered efforts to grow vinifera wine grapes in North Carolina. He formerly served on the Reidsville City Board of Education and Reidsville City Council. He has written several opinion editorials in local newspapers about issues of local interest.

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Rick Frederick. Long time member, Archivist and Webmaster of the Caswell County Historical Association.

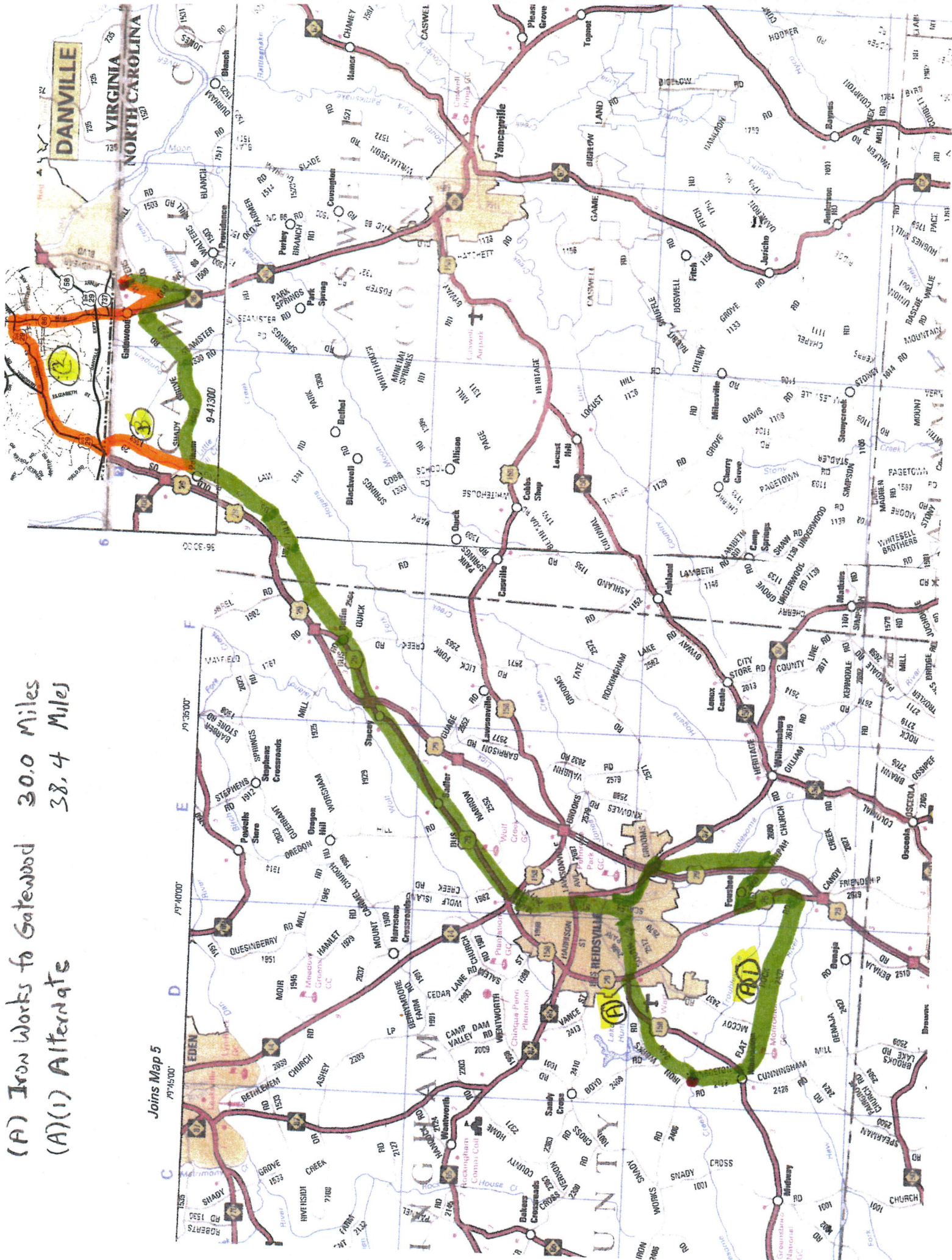
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Marguerite Harris Holt and my wife, Mary Lynn Bowen Somers, former teachers whose edit skills were sorely needed.

My brother Danny George Somers and our cousins Jimmy and Joe Cobb.

And last, but most certainly not least, my nearly ninety-eight years old mother Helen Clayton Somers whose memory is still much better than mine.

(A) Iron Works to Gatewood 30.0 Miles
(A)(1) Alternate 38.4 Miles



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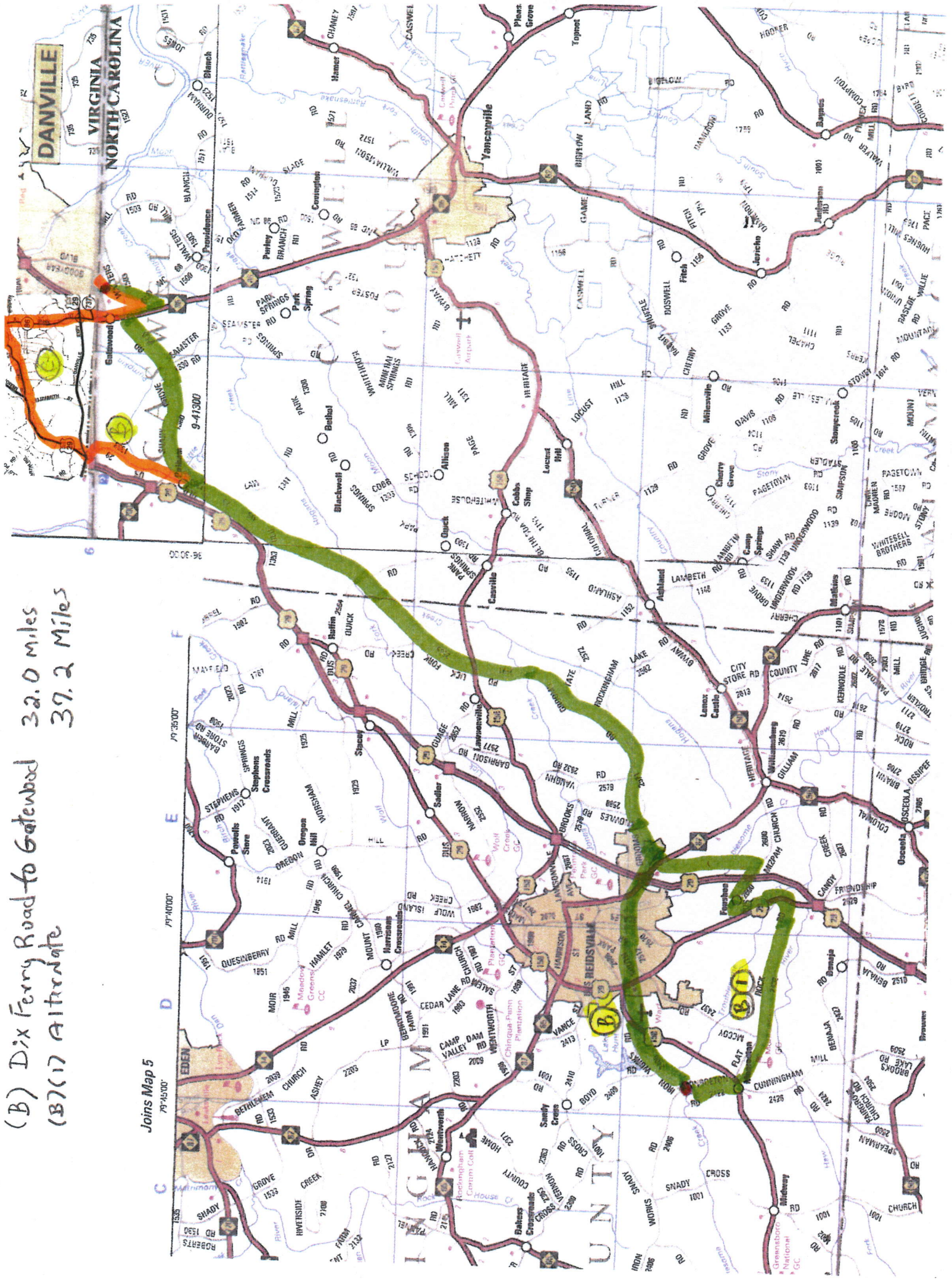
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(B) Dix Ferry Road to Gatwood 32.0 Miles
(B7) Airtelate 39.2 Miles



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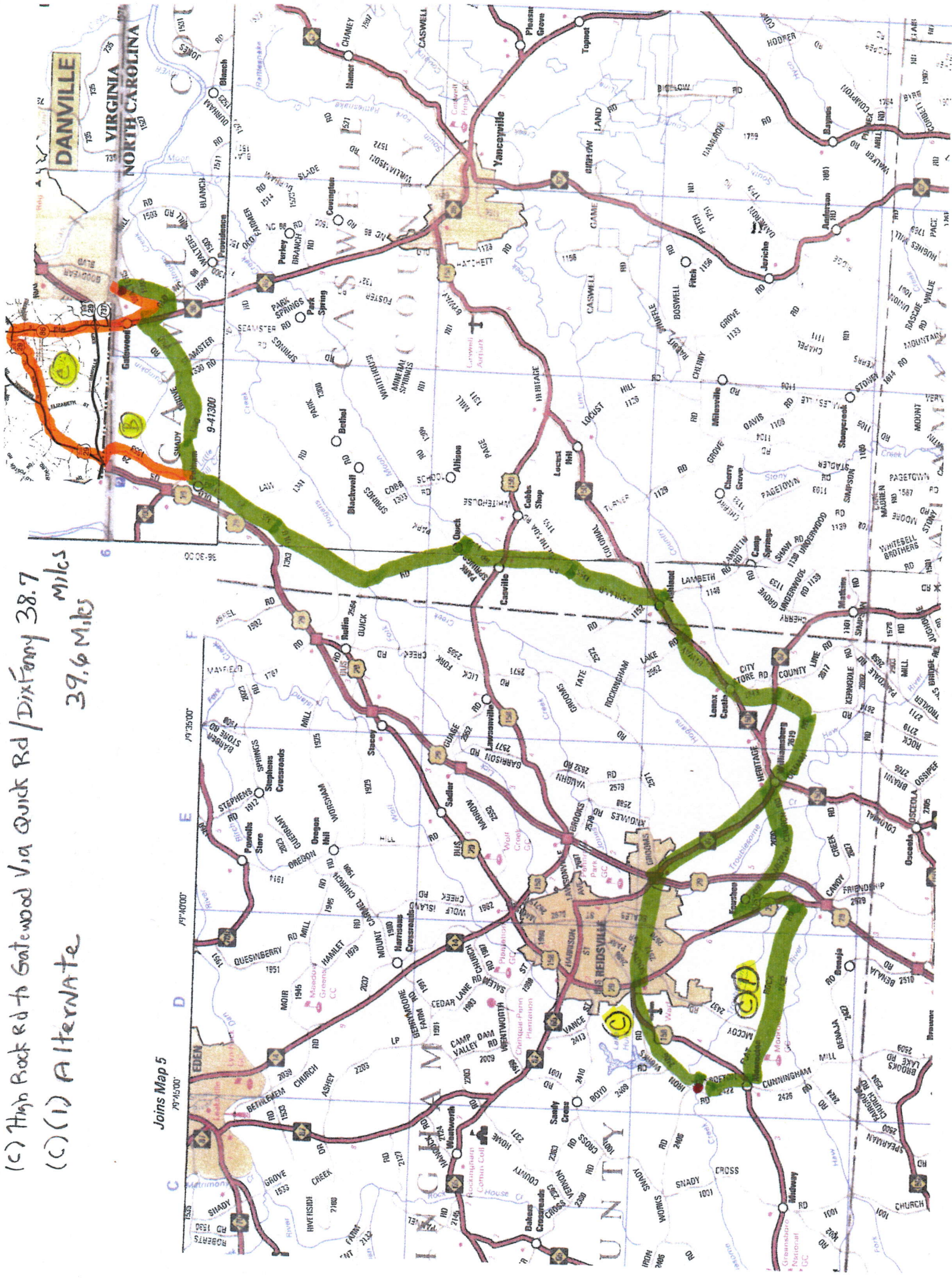
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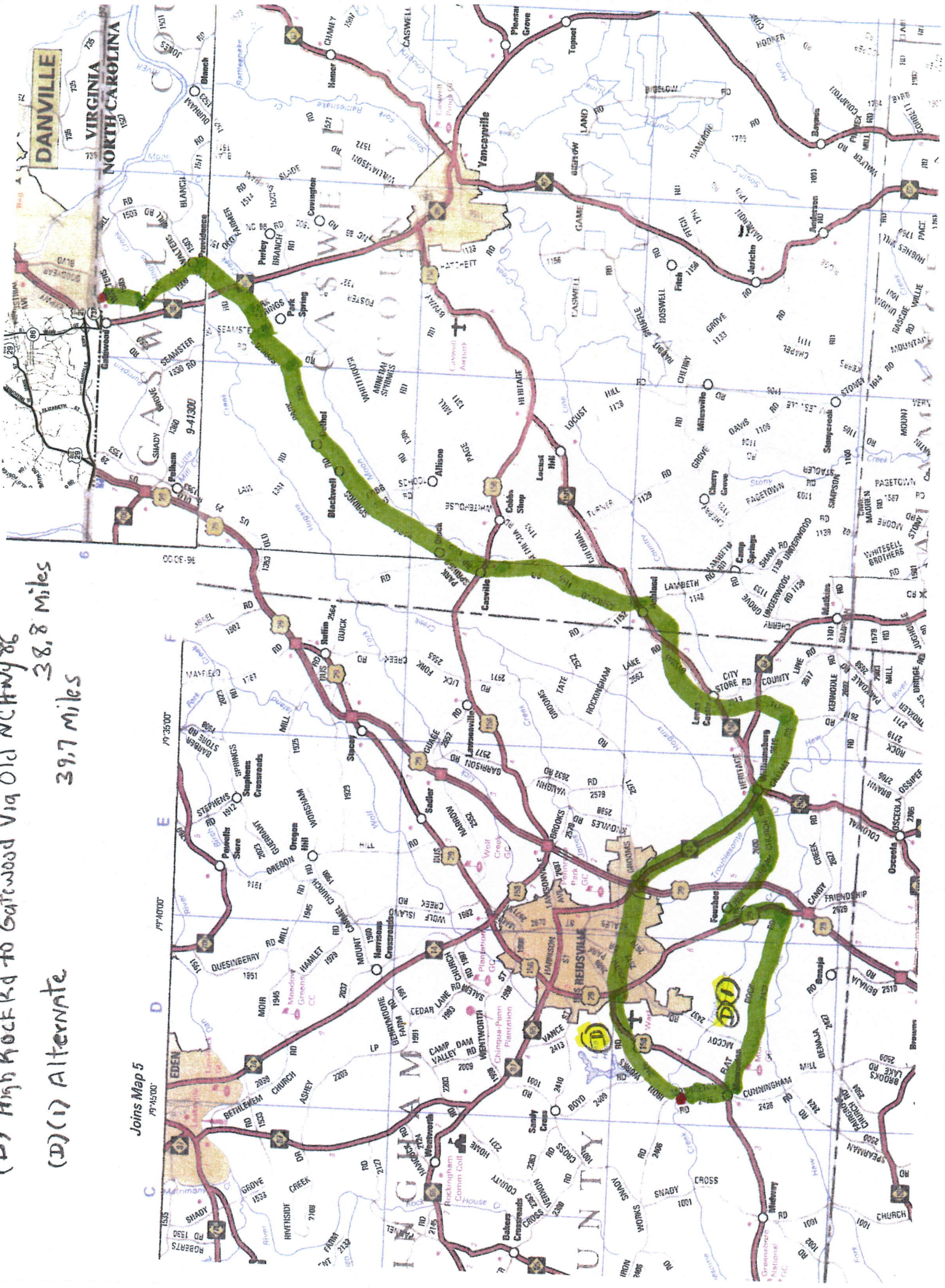
WILKINSON COUNTY

(c) High Rock Rd to Gatewood Via Quick Rd/Dix Ferry 38.7 Miles
(c)(1) Alternate 39.6 Miles



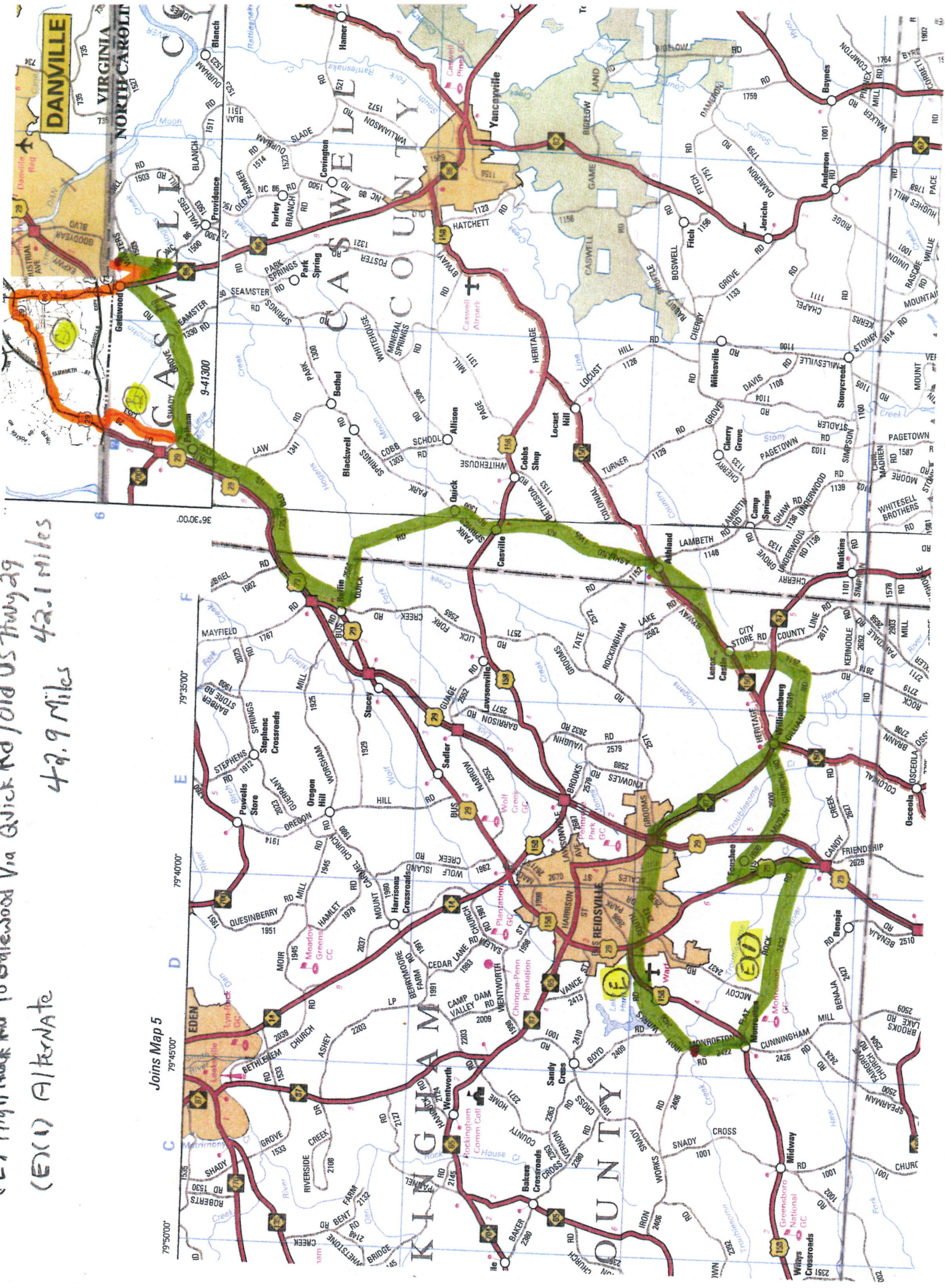
Joins Map 5

(D) High Rock Rd to Gatewood Via Old NCHwy 86
38.8 Miles
(D)(1) Alternate
39.7 Miles



Joins Map 5

SE High Back Run to Gatewood Via Quick Rd 1010 US Hwy 29
(E) Alternate
42.1 Miles
49.9 Miles



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