

## SOUTHERN ILLINOIS AS A FOCUS FOR PRIMITIVE PEOPLE BECAUSE OF GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS

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It is a well known fact of history that a country under primitive conditions may be traversed most easily by following its water courses. The concentration of streams upon the borders of southern Illinois is extraordinary. If the Indians used these waters, southern Illinois must have corresponded to a junction point of many railroads. The mighty Mississippi flows past southern Illinois on the west. On such a splendid route of communication, northern tribes could have descended the river and southern tribes ascended it. Along the eastern and southeastern boundaries of Illinois, flow the Ohio and its tributary, the Wabash, both large rivers and also excellent routes for the travel of the Indians. Where the Ohio joins the Mississippi at Cairo, is found the chief point of water concentration of central United States. The mouths of the Cumberland and Tennessee are only a short distance away, and, though farther away, but still at the border of southern Illinois, is the Missouri bringing its tribute of water from another direction. Thus these streams coming from very distant regions could have brought into contact very distant tribes.

An unusual feature of the Cumberland is its great bend to the south. Rising in eastern Kentucky, close to the eastern border of the Cumberland plateau, its source is near the only break in the escarpment of the great

plateau highland, Cumberland Gap. From its beginning in eastern Kentucky, it swings far to the south into Tennessee, and then turns north to join the Ohio at the border of southern Illinois. The Tennessee is a longer and larger river; it has more distant sources and bends even farther south than does the Cumberland. Its sources are beyond the eastern border of the plateau region, in the Great Appalachian Valley and Ridge province, and even the Blue Ridge barrier beyond. Its great bend carries it into northern Alabama before it, too, turns north to enter the Ohio a few miles from the mouth of the Cumberland. Not only from near the sources of these two rivers could tribes have come to southern Illinois, but southern tribes from the territory touched by the great southern bends might also have been led hither.

The Ohio and its tributaries bring their water from a divide that swings in a vast arc from the mountains of North Carolina to northern Indiana. Among its southern branches, the Kentucky has its source near that of the Cumberland, not far from Cumberland Gap. The Great Kanawha and its tributary, the New, have a source near the eastern border of the Blue Ridge barrier, and provide a path from western North Carolina through this barrier, across the valleys and ridges of the great lowland between the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny plateau, and also across the roughest portion of the plateau to the Ohio. This route through the rugged mountain country of the plateau is scarcely a navigable one for the commerce of the white man, but it did provide a way for the Indian and his canoe. That this route was a favorable one is proved by the fact that the white man found it convenient to use its upper portion. Settlers that traveled southwest through the Great Valley turned eastward, ascended the New river to its source and then crossed the divide to reach the eastward flowing Yadkin or Catawba, which leads to good lands in western North Carolina. And settlers from these same lands in western North Carolina who were moved by the impulse to go west traveled the same route through the Blue Ridge to the Great Valley from which place a number of routes invited them.

The historic importance of the Ohio with the wide spread of the two streams which form it, the Allegheny and the Monongahela, as a highway for the white man across the barrier of the Allegheny plateau, is well known. It is reasonable to believe that the Indian found it as convenient to use. Northern tributaries of the Ohio, the Muskingum, the Scioto, the Miami, and the Wabash are reached from the Great Lakes region by easy portages which were used extensively by French explorers guided by Indians who were familiar with them.

From the north, the Mississippi and its tributaries, the Illinois and the Wisconsin, also furnished routes from the Great Lakes region toward southern Illinois, and the Missouri led from more distant regions. As the white man followed the last named river to reach the great western and northwestern plains, and even the distant Rocky mountains, it is reasonable to suppose that the Indians also followed it in their migrations.

The lower Mississippi borders the states of Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi and Louisiana, and restless tribes from these southern regions might have reached southern Illinois without much difficulty.

Thus the rivers that bring their waters to southern Illinois, invited the tribes not only along their courses and from their distant sources to travel to southern Illinois, but they beckoned across easy divides and thus exerted an influence over more distant regions. They set the stage for a mingling of Indian cultures. It is the task of the anthropologists to examine the evidence of the region to see whether this has happened or not.

The climate of southern Illinois is favorable for Indian life. The variations caused by the frequent passage of cyclones and anticyclones must have been stimulating to the Indian as they are to the white man. In winter, there were cold spells, but their duration is not long. The summers furnish a long growing season, from six to seven months, which gives ample time for the maturing of Indian corn. A rainfall of from 40 to 42 inches is favorable for corn and forest growth.

The topography is also favorable for Indian life. A long range of hill land from 15 to 20 miles wide extends across the state from east to west. South of this, is a lowland of about the same width and still farther south is a shorter and lower belt of hills which occupy the extreme southern end of the state. Between the hills of Illinois and the Ozarks of Missouri, the Mississippi flows in a flood-plain from 5 to 10 miles wide. This flood-plain, which is chiefly on the Illinois side, is a good site for Indian villages which could be located near the bluffs of the hill land and close to a creek or oxbow lake of the flood-plain. Such an arrangement would permit the canoes being brought to the very edge of the village site. Small streams cutting down through the wall of the bluffs give easy access to the upland. The hills and uplands were good hunting grounds. Many deep valleys with cliff-like walls provided cave-like recesses, good for rock shelters. The crests of the hills near the village sites made good burial places and excellent lookout points, while the narrow, winding valleys were admirable places for defense in inter-tribal warfare. Throughout the hills of southern Illinois are many caverns that could have been used for shelter, storage, and burial places.

Originally a splendid forest, favorable for Indian life, covered southern Illinois. It could have been used for shelter, shelter material, and for fuel. Out of it could have come material for their weapons, their canoes, and their dug-outs. The forest was also an admirable hunting ground for there is evidence that it abounded in bears, wild turkeys, squirrels, deer, raccoons, buffaloes, and wild pigeons. The streams and lakes of the flood-plains gave them fish and wild geese and ducks. Even today, the Mississippi is a favorite route for the wild geese and ducks during their spring and fall migrations, and hunters still come from many miles around during the shooting season.

Southern Illinois has some minerals that were useful to the Indians. There are three places where admirable flint for stone weapons could be secured. A short distance southwest of Cobden there is a deposit of kaolin that would have been suitable for pottery. It has been worked rather extensively in recent years by the white man.

As a summary, it may be stated that the geographical environment of southern Illinois was favorable for Indian life. There were minerals that Indians were accustomed to use, a forest friendly to his manner of life, and a topography suited to his way of living. The climate was stimulating and the water highways were concentrated to an unusual degree upon the borders of the territory.