

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

The Amazing Escape of Mary Ingles

From

Inside Fort Thomas
December 2000 - February 2001

www.nkyviews.com

This is the true story of Mary Ingles, a pioneer woman who was captured by Shawnee Indians in 1755 and escaped by following the Ohio River and New River for 1,000 miles back to her home in Virginia.

Route 8 along the river in Fort Thomas also goes by the name Mary Ingles Highway. Mary Ingles walked along what is now Route 8 in Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties while making her escape.

Her story begins in a tiny settlement in Virginia where Mary Ingles lived with her husband and two sons. Her captors took her to their village in what is now Ohio and then down the Ohio River to the present location of Big Bone Lick State Park in Boone County.

Part I of this series will cover her capture and journey with the Shawnee Indians to their Ohio village and then on to Big Bone Lick in Northern Kentucky. Parts II and III of the series will describe her incredible escape and 1,000 mile journey home to Virginia.

Setting the Stage

Mary Ingles was born in Philadelphia to Irish immigrants named George Draper and Eleoner Hardin who came to this country in 1724. Mary was born in 1732. Her brother John was two years older. The family moved to Virginia and settled on the James River around 1742. George Draper and others cleared the land and planted crops.

In 1746, George Draper and five other men pushed further into the wilderness to hunt and explore. They were never heard from again and probably died during a Shawnee Indian attack.

Meanwhile, Thomas Ingles and his three sons had started a ferry at the New River along the Wilderness Road that would eventually lead settlers westward into what is now West Virginia and Kentucky.

In 1748, Thomas Ingles led a group of settlers, including his three sons and the widow of George Draper and her two children, to a new settlement that they named Draper's Meadow. It was located close to the present location of Staunton, Virginia.

At the age of 18, Mary Draper married William Ingles, a son of Thomas Ingles. They were the first white couple married west of the Allegheny Mountains. Her brother, John, had married a few years earlier.

Mary Ingles grew up close to her brother. They played together and rode together. Mary Ingles was strong and athletic.

Thomas and Mary Ingles owned a mill in the years following their marriage. They had two sons, Thomas and George. Thomas was four years-old and George was two years-old when their world would be turned upside down by a Shawnee Indian attack. Mary Ingles was pregnant with a third child at the time.

The Attack: July 8, 1755

William Ingles and Mary's brother, John Draper, were in the fields working when Shawnee Indians attacked the settlement. They captured Mary Ingles and her sons, Thomas and George. They also captured Betty Draper, her sister-in-law, and some other settlers at Draper's Meadow.

Twenty or thirty Shawnee Indians were involved in the attack. Betty Draper was shot during the attack and her arm was broken. She held onto her baby until an Indian hit her in the back with a tomahawk. The baby was killed and scalped as Betty Draper lay on the ground unable to move.

The elder Col. James Patton attempted to protect a number of women and children in his cabin and shot and killed the first Shawnee to swing open his door. He killed another with his sword before a Shawnee shot and killed him. Another Shawnee shot and kill Mary Ingles mother and scalped her.

The chief of the Shawnee Indian attackers ordered his men not to harm Mary Ingles or her two children. They were to be his captives along with Betty Draper.

Many of the cabins in Draper's Meadow were torched after the Shawnee had pillaged them. The men working in the fields noticed the smoke rising from the burning cabins and began running to the settlement. They saw the Shawnee and their prisoners but were unable to do anything because they had no weapons. They hid in the field until the Indians had left.

The Shawnee Perspective

The Shawnee Indians were alarmed at the encroachment of white settlers into land that had been exclusively theirs for as long as they could remember. The Shawnee had been pushed into what is now Ohio after being nomadic for centuries. They were constantly at odds on how to deal with the white settlers and often their anger spilled over into violence.

Chikska, eldest brother of Tecumseh, said it this way in 1779:

"When a white man kills an Indian in a fair fight it is called honorable, but when an Indian kills a white man in a fair fight it is called murder. When a white army battles Indians and wins it is called a great victory, but if they lose it is called a massacre and bigger armies are raised. If the Indian flees before the advance of such armies, when he tries to return he finds that white men are living where he lived. If he tries to fight off such armies, he is killed and the land is taken anyway. The white man seeks to conquer nature, to bend it to his will and to use it wastefully until it is all gone and then he simply moves on, leaving the waste behind him and looking for new places to take. The whole white race is a monster who is always hungry and what he eats is land."

Taken Away by Shawnee Warriors

The caravan of Shawnee Indians and their captors headed northward and an hour or so into their journey stopped at the home of Phillip Barger where they killed the old man, cut off his head, and took it with them in a sack. They resumed their journey until arriving at Sinking Creek where they stopped at the home of Phillip Lybrook. Phillip Lybrook wasn't home but his wife was alone at the cabin. The Shawnee gave Lybrook's wife the sack with the head of Phillip Barger in it.

The walk through the wilderness resumed and was difficult for the Mary Ingles, who was nine months pregnant, and her two little boys. It was even more difficult for Betty Draper, who had been shot in the arm and had witnessed the brutal death of her baby.

Mary Ingles realized that the only way she and the other captives would survive was to prove their worth to the Shawnee. She helped with the cooking and she made a splint for Betty's broken arm.

Giving Birth to a Daughter

The chief, who could speak some English, allowed Mary Ingles and her two small sons to ride on a horse from that point on. Betty had to walk.

For now, at least, Mary Ingles figured their lives were not at risk. The Shawnee reached an abandoned cabin near a river and looted it before crossing the river by canoe. They made several trips across the river before taking the captives across. By this time Mary Ingles was in pain because she was about to give birth.

Mary Ingles gave birth to a healthy baby girl with black hair on the third night of their journey. Betty assisted her. Despite her pain she knew she had to get back on her horse in the morning because the Shawnee would not tolerate any delays in their travel. Her strength and determination allowed her to do just that with her three children in tow. She gained the admiration of the Shawnee Indians because of her strength and courage.

Planning Her Escape

Mary Ingles never let a day go by without thinking of escape. Her husband, William, and Betty's husband, John, had been part of a search party looking for their wives since the day they were captured. Unfortunately, the search was abandoned a few days after it started because the search party lost the tracks of the Shawnee. Mary Ingles decided to tie knots in a string that went around her dress at the waist for each day she was gone. This would help her to remember how many days she would have to walk to return to Draper's Meadow. She also looked back from her horse as often as she could to memorize landmarks on the route in the direction of home.

The Salt Spring

Near what is now Charleston, West Virginia, the party stopped at a salt spring and began manufacturing salt to take with them for the remainder of their journey. Mary Ingles condition improved greatly in the days that followed but Betty Draper's arm remained deeply inflamed.

They remained at the salt spring for two weeks before beginning their journey again. Mary insisted to the chief that Betty and George ride the horse at that point and the chief consented. Mary walked while carrying the baby. Her oldest son, Thomas, also walked.

On to the Ohio River

They followed the Kanawha River until reaching the Ohio River at present-day Point Pleasant, West Virginia. They crossed the Ohio River at this point and then headed downstream to Shawnee Indian settlements at the mouth of the Scioto River in what is now the state of Ohio.

The returning Shawnee let out "war whoops" that frightened Mary Ingles and the other captives. The residents of Lower Shawnee Town — older warriors, children, women and their dogs — came to meet the returning warriors and their captives. Guns were fired and many of the Indians brandished knives. Mary Ingles thought her death was imminent.

Running the Gauntlet

Mary Ingles and her children were safe but Betty Draper was about to be put through a test of survival called "running the gauntlet." The Shawnee formed two long rows that included warriors, children and old men and women. The passageway was a few hundred feet long. Each Indian held a stick, club or other weapon. Betty Draper had to run through the gauntlet from one end to the other. If she didn't make it, she had to come back and start over again.

Betty Draper decided to run as fast as she could. About a third of the way through she was struck on the nose and fell on her back. Her nose was bleeding and a dog had grabbed onto her ankle. She got back up and continued running as she was hit from all sides by the Shawnee. A blow to her injured arm stopped her in her tracks and then she was felled by a blow to the head. She landed face down. The Shawnee near her in the gauntlet continued to beat her as she was down. Betty Draper grabbed the sharpened lance of a woman and pulled the woman to the ground. She jumped back up and despite a constant beating made it to the end of the gauntlet before collapsing.

Mary Ingles helped nurse her sister-in-law back to health.

Losing Her Children

On the third day at the Lower Shawnee Town, The Shawnee leaders made a decision to split up the captives. Mary Ingles two sons were sent to another Shawnee village. (Some experts believe Mary Ingles infant daughter was also taken from her at this time. Others believe she gave up the baby when she made her escape from Big Bone Lick in Boone County.)

September brought an increase in trade at Lower Shawnee Town and French traders from Detroit came to trade with the Shawnee. The traders brought bright cloth and Mary Ingles obtained enough of it to make the chief a long shirt which reached all the way to his heels. The French traders offered Mary a deal to make shirts and the French traded the shirts with the Shawnee for furs and silver.

Heading for Northern Kentucky

Three weeks later Mary Ingles was told that she would be leaving Lower Shawnee Town and traveling to another location to help make salt. She assumed she would be heading back to the salt springs she saw after being abducted from Draper's Meadow. Instead she was taken by canoe down the Ohio River and further away from home. Mary Ingles accompanied the French traders and 20 to 25 warriors on the three day canoe trip. They paddled past what is now the Little Miami River and the Licking River and turned into what is now Big Bone Creek in Boone County. Three miles from the mouth of the Ohio River they got out of their canoes at a place that Mary Ingles couldn't believe. It was swampy and smelled bad and had prehistoric bones that rose right out of the earth to a height of 12 feet. They made camp at a spot where the Shawnee could use the bones as chairs as they ate around the campfire.

Part II

The Amazing Escape of Mary Ingles

This is Part II of the true story of Mary Ingles, a pioneer woman who was captured by Shawnee Indians in 1755 and escaped by following the Ohio River and New River for 1,000 miles back to her home in Virginia.

Route 8 along the Ohio River in Fort Thomas is also known as Mary Ingles Highway. Mary Ingles walked along what is now Route 8 in Boone, Kenton and Campbell Counties while making her escape.

Her story begins in a tiny settlement in Virginia where Mary Ingles lived with her husband and two sons. Her captors took her to their village in what is now Ohio and then down the Ohio River to the present location of Big Bone Lick State Park in Boone County.

Part I of this series described her capture and journey with the Shawnee Indians to Big Bone Lick in Northern Kentucky. Parts II and III of the series describe her incredible escape and 1,000 mile journey home to Virginia.

Arriving at Big Bone Lick

Three weeks after arriving at Lower Shawnee Town at the mouth of the Scioto River in what is now Ohio, Mary Ingles was told that she would be leaving to go to another location to help make salt. Mary Ingles was taken by two French traders and 20 to 25 Shawnee warriors on a three day canoe trip down the Ohio River. They paddled past what is now the Little Miami River, the Licking River and the Great Miami River before turning into Big Bone Creek in Boone County.

Three miles from the mouth of the Ohio River they got out of their canoes at a place that Mary Ingles couldn't believe. It was swampy and smelled bad and had prehistoric bones that rose right out of the earth to a height of 12 feet. They had arrived at the Big Bone Salt Lick.

Big Bone Lick

Mary Ingles was taken to Big Bone Lick in Boone County in October and had been forced to give up her two sons at Lower Shawnee Town before her trip. Mary Ingles' daughter, who was born three days after her capture by the Shawnee, may also have been taken from her at Lower Shawnee Town. "Follow the River" author James Alexander Thom believes Mary Ingles brought her infant daughter to Big Bone Lick and left her behind when she escaped. He speculates that Mary Ingles knew that the baby would starve to death in an escape attempt. The baby had a better chance for survival by being left with the Shawnee Indians. No one knows for sure if Mary Ingles' baby was taken from her or if she gave the baby up when she escaped. It is assumed that the baby died before her first birthday.

Another white woman accompanied Mary Ingles to Big Bone Lick. She was Dutch, spoke with an accent, and was older and bigger than Mary Ingles. She had been captured by the Shawnee in Pennsylvania a few years earlier and taken to Lower Shawnee Town.

The two women struck up a friendship and talked about the possibility of escape. They knew if they didn't try to escape soon they would have to wait through the winter for warmer weather in the spring.



A desolate view from the banks of the Licking River near where Mary Ingles and the old Dutch woman waded across.

Mary Ingles and the old Dutch woman were able to wander freely around the Shawnee camp at Big Bone Lick and spent much of their time in the woods gathering herbs and wild grapes. They had a tomahawk and each of them had a blanket to sleep on and wrap up in to keep warm.

The Escape

It was now or never as far as Mary Ingles was concerned. She could wait no longer. The old Dutch woman was also ready. Both would rather die trying to escape than live among the Shawnee.

They told the French traders that they were going into the woods to gather grapes and hurried off with the tomahawk and their two blankets. Mary Ingles and the old Dutch woman never looked back.

It was a difficult three mile walk through marshy wet lands to the Ohio River. When they reached the mouth of Big Bone Creek, they turned east and began to follow the river upstream. Their escape took them into virgin forests where they had to be on alert at all times for roving bands of Indians. This meant staying off paths made by the Indians and walking through rough terrain covered at times with undergrowth. They also had to never lose sight of the Ohio River. The river was Mary Ingles' road home.

At night the two women slept close together wrapped in their blankets. They ate hickory nuts and the fruits of paw-paw trees. They climbed steep hills, waded small creeks and struggled for three days before coming down a hill and finding their way blocked by a river running into the Ohio River. They had reached what is now Covington and were blocked by the Licking River.

Crossing the Licking River

Mary Ingles didn't know how to swim. The old Dutch woman also couldn't swim. Mary Ingles remembered that the Shawnee Indians called the river before them the Buffalo River. They had no choice but to walk upstream until the river became shallow enough to cross on foot. The two women made their way 10 to 20 miles upstream before they were able to enter the cold water and cross to the other side. They slept on the river bank and hiked back to the Ohio River the next day.

Subsisting on blackberries and nuts, Mary Ingles continued her walk through what is now Fort Thomas and along the Ohio River toward what is now Augusta and Maysville.

William Ingles and John Draper

Mary Ingles' husband, William, and Mary Draper's husband, John, had never given up hope of finding their wives and bringing them home to Draper's Meadow in Virginia. At the time Mary Ingles was crossing the Licking River, William Ingles and John Draper were deep in Cherokee Indian country in Tennessee. They had hired an Indian scout in hopes that they would meet a Cherokee chief who would help them find their wives. They were willing to trade with the Cherokee for information about their wives. They sought a sympathetic chief who would contact the Shawnee to work out a deal for the return of their wives.

Their journey was dangerous and turned out to be a lost cause.

Passing Lower Shawnee Town

Mary Ingles and the old Dutch woman continued their walk along the Ohio River. They were hungry and cold most of the time. Their travel time was slow because of the weather, terrain, and number of streams they had to cross.

Mary Ingles knew that one of the most dangerous parts of their journey would be when they had to pass Lower Shawnee Town, even though they would be on the opposite side of the Ohio River. A number of Shawnee lived and farmed on the Kentucky side and the Shawnee used a number of trails on the Kentucky side. They would be entering an area that put them at great risk.

They were also hopeful that they would find food at Lower Shawnee Town.

The two women knew they were getting close when they saw warriors in canoes on the Ohio River and heard voices and dogs barking across the river. Soon they were directly across from the mouth of the Scioto River and Lower Shawnee Town.

Mary Ingles could see a corn field and a Shawnee hut ahead. They watched from a distance. There was no sign of Shawnee Indians and there were no barking dogs on their side of the river. After dark, Mary Ingles and the old Dutch woman moved closer to the Shawnee hut. They hid for hours to be absolutely sure the hut was empty. Finally, they crawled to the hut and went inside. Before long they were sound asleep.

The Horse

Mary Ingles was awakened early in the morning by the sound of a horse. She was sure a Shawnee Indian was approaching the hut. She woke up her companion and the two of them fled into the brush and hid.

A riderless horse with a bell around its neck appeared in the field near the hut. Mary Ingles was able to approach and calm the horse. She excitedly told the old Dutch woman that they would take the horse with them for the rest of their journey and that the horse would make their journey much easier. The two women picked corn from the field around the hut and loaded it on the horse in one of their blankets. Then they departed with the horse along the south bank of the Ohio River. The bell was removed from the horse's neck to make sure the clanging would not lead Indians to them. After several hours they stopped and ate raw corn. It tasted delicious.

February 2001

Part III

The Amazing Escape of Mary Ingles

This is the final segment of the true story of Mary Ingles, a pioneer woman who was captured by Shawnee Indians in 1755 and escaped by following the Ohio River and New River for 1,000 miles back to her home in Virginia.

Route 8 along the Ohio River in Fort Thomas is also named Mary Ingles Highway. Mary Ingles walked along what is now Route 8 in Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties while making her escape.

The story of Mary Ingles begins in a tiny settlement in Virginia where she lived with her husband and two sons. Her captors took her to their village in what is now Ohio and then down the Ohio River to the present location of Big Bone Lick State Park in Boone County.

Part I of this series described her capture and journey with the Shawnee Indians to Big Bone Lick. Part II described her escape and torturous journey through Kentucky and into West Virginia.

Struggling to Stay Alive

Mary Ingles escaped with an old Dutch woman and the two of them struggled to survive on their long walk through wilderness in Kentucky and West Virginia in route to Virginia. They battled starvation and frigid temperatures and were barefoot and in tattered clothing by the time they reached what is now West Virginia. The old Dutch woman was going mad from physical and mental strain and Mary Ingles fought bouts of blindness.

Old Dutch Woman Tries to Kill Mary Ingles

At one point the old Dutch woman attacked Mary Ingles with a tomahawk and Mary Ingles had to run and hide along a bank of the Kanawha River.

The next morning Mary Ingles climbed up from the riverbank and began walking down river alone. She reached an area she recognized as a place she had been forced to camp with the Shawnee Indians after she and her sons had been kidnapped. She found a submerged canoe, emptied it, came up with a makeshift oar, and paddled across the river to the other side. She knew this was the only way she would be safe from the old Dutch woman.

Within minutes Mary Ingles found a little cabin and went inside and fell asleep wrapped up in her blanket. She found several turnips and a bunch of kale in the cabin and ate before setting out again in her quest to reach her husband in Virginia.

Late November in the New River Narrows

It was late November now and Mary Ingles was exhausted and afraid that she would freeze to death. She could hear the old Dutch woman on the other side of the river occasionally but was afraid to rejoin her.

The terrain was getting rougher and rougher as Mary Ingles followed the New River. Somehow she was able to pass through the New River Narrows, climb the butte of Wolf Mountain and wade across the mouth of Wolf Creek. She just barely survived these obstacles. Next, Mary Ingles passed Angel's Rest Mountain, 4,000 feet high, and somehow climbed up and over two miles of cliff overhangs near Walker's Creek. It wouldn't be long before Mary Ingles would be forced to scale another seemingly impassable cliff. She was barely alive but knew she was getting closer to home.

Salt Pond Mountain

When Mary Ingles arrived at Salt Pond Mountain it was snowing and the obstacle before her, a giant cliff hundreds of feet high, appeared impossible to climb. She decided to wade across the icy New River but found the water too deep when she reached the middle of the river and retreated back to the riverbank. Exhausted, Mary Ingles gathered a huge pile of leaves and buried herself deep within them in an attempt to sleep that night.

The next morning she realized that her only way out was to climb the cliff. She moved slowly and deliberately, crawling at times, and was always careful to pick the right footholds and handholds. Cold, sore and hungry, she somehow managed to reach the mountain top by mid afternoon. The next day she began her climb down the opposite side of the mountain and did so by sunset without injury.

Civilization

Struggling to keep moving, Mary Ingles continued to follow the New River until she came to a rail fence. She saw no evidence of a home but began yelling in a weak voice for help. It was dusk when Adam Harman, Jr. was returning from an afternoon of hunting and heard Mary Ingles crying for help. At first he thought Indians were nearby. Mary Ingles hollered again and young Adam Harman could tell this time that it was someone in distress. Mary Ingles collapsed as Harman approached. He ran and found his father and the two of them returned to the river where they found Mary Ingles and helped her to a sitting position.

Mary Ingles Makes It Home

Adam Harman couldn't believe the condition of the woman on the riverbank and it took him a few moments to realize it was Mary Ingles. They had been good friends before Mary Ingles was taken away during the Indian attack. The Harman's carried Mary Ingles to their home and wrapped her in warm blankets. They fed her a small bowl of porridge with bits of venison. After resting Mary Ingles asked for more porridge.

The Harman's were shocked at the condition of Mary Ingles. Her hair had turned completely white and she had no teeth. She was thin and looked no bigger than a child.

Reunited with Her Husband

William Ingles, Mary's husband, was returning from a Cherokee town on the Little Tennessee River in a desperate effort to find his wife. He was on his way to the fort at Dunkard's Bottom and was close by when Mary Ingles was found by the Harman's. William Ingles was traveling with John Draper, the husband of Betty Draper. Betty Draper had been kidnapped with Mary Ingles and had been forced to remain in the Shawnee Village in Ohio when Mary Ingles was taken to Big Bone Lick in Kentucky.

William Ingles and John Draper were informed that Mary Ingles had been found at the Harman cabin. The two men quickly rode to Adam Harman's cabin where William was reunited with his wife.

The Old Dutch Woman is Rescued

Adam Harman and some others took off the next day in search of the Old Dutch woman and found her after three hours. The old Dutch woman had had an easier time of it than Mary Ingles after the two separated. She had come across a cabin on her side of the river with plenty of food and clothing. She rested there for a few days before continuing her journey.

Mary Ingles and the old Dutch woman were reunited at the Harman cabin and their reunion was filled with tears of compassion and (SEE ESCAPE, PAGE 17)

(ESCAPE, CONT. FROM P. 7) concern.

The old Dutch woman joined a wagon train heading east after she regained her health.

Conclusion

Mary Ingles survived her ordeal and had four more children, three girls and a boy, with her husband William. They raised their children around Ingles' Ferry. The family survived at least one other Indian raid on their home. Mary Ingles died in 1815 at the age of 83.

William Ingles passed away in 1782 at the age of 53.

George Ingles, Mary and William Ingles son who was two when he was kidnapped with his mother by Shawnee Indians, reportedly died in the Shawnee nation shortly after being separated from his mother.

Thomas Ingles, their oldest son, returned home to Mary and William Ingles after 13 years with the Shawnee. He had forgotten how to speak English. Thomas wasn't happy in the white man's civilization and often would disappear into the wilderness for long periods of time with his bow and arrows. He was educated in the white man's culture, however, and got to know Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry. Thomas Ingles eventually married and became a farmer. He moved around a lot and always lived close to the wilderness in Virginia. In 1782, while he worked in the fields, a large group of Indians surrounded his house and kidnapped his wife and three children. He led a search party that caught up with the Indians five days later. His daughter, named Mary after Mary Ingles, and a son were tomahawked to death when Thomas arrived. He was able to rescue his wife and their infant daughter.

Betty Draper was returned to her husband, John Draper, after six years in captivity with the Shawnee Indians. She had seven children and died in 1774 at the age of 42. John Draper remarried two years later and fathered two more children. He died at the age of 94.

The old Dutch woman is believed to have made her way back to Pennsylvania and was never heard from again by Mary Ingles.

Mary Ingles was an illiterate and what is known about her amazing escape was passed down by her youngest son, John Ingles, who heard his mother talk about her escape many times.