

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

NOV 14 1986
DEC 24 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Rome Ferry

and/or common same

2. Location

street & number Highway 70 at Cumberland River

N/A not for publication

city, town Rome N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee code 047 county Smith code 159

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. Paul Capleanor
Smith County c/o Jack Kittrell, County Executive

street & number Rome Road
Smith County Courthouse

city, town Dixon Springs Carthage N/A vicinity of
state Tennessee 37057 Tennessee 37030

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Smith County Courthouse,
Registry of Deeds

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Carthage state Tennessee

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	1920's
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Rome Ferry (landings, boat, and water passageway) is located on the Cumberland River in a rural area of western Smith County bordered by the rolling farm land in Beasley's Bend to the north, and the small community of Rome (population ca. 200) to the south. The ferry is situated at a point approximately 200 feet north of State Route 70, four miles east of the Wilson County line, between Lebanon and Carthage, at river mile 292.4, on the west bank where Round Lick Creek enters the Cumberland River.

The Cumberland River originates in Kentucky, not far north of the mountainous region of East Tennessee, and enters Tennessee through Clay County. Two of its largest tributaries, the Caney Fork and the Obed Rivers have their origins on the Cumberland Plateau. The Cumberland River is almost 600 miles in length. At Carthage, the river cuts through the Highland Rim into the Central Basin and follows the northern edge of the Rim on through to Nashville. The river's course through Smith County is characterized by a series of meanders running approximately north to south. The town of Rome is located on the southside of the river at the southern end of a large meander that forms Beasley's Bend.

The ferry passage crosses at a point in the river 740 feet wide on a northwest to southeast axis. It connects the community of Rome in the county's 12th District to the Beasley's Bend-Dixon Springs area in the 4th District. The approaches and landings of the ferry, originally dirt surfaces, are covered with asphalt and crushed rock. The approaches descend from the road to the river's edge on the south at a 10 degree slope, and the north at an 18 degree slope, and are a continuation of federal aid secondary road #6296 (Beasley's Bend Road). The north landing is located at the edge of pastureland in Beasley's Bend, about 150 feet southwest of the old site of the ferrykeeper's house, since relocated to the town of Rome. The present north landing, established in the 1920's, is nearly 200 yards west of the old landing site. The old north landing site, with a 30 degree slope, had to be abandoned with the advent of the automobile. The south landing lies approximately 15 yards below the mouth of Round Lick Creek, and is essentially unchanged. The original water level of the river has been raised approximately 10 feet from 435 Mean Sea Level to 445 MSL by the inundation of Old Hickory Lake in the mid 1950's.

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Rome Ferry

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The present ferryboat, Jere Mitchell, was purchased by Smith County in 1949. The flatbottom, steelhulled craft is 60 feet X 30 feet, and is one of only two sternwheelers with on-board power operating on the Cumberland River. The fate of the other sternwheeler, located at Clees Ferry is uncertain. The Jere Mitchell has stern enginehouse that encloses a six cylinder, 235 horsepower gasoline engine that turns a wooden stern paddlewheel. Capable of transporting up to four cars, six passengers, a captain, and mate, the ferryboat has an asphalt and steel deck, wheel, and cableraised landing aprons, that allow vehicles to load and unload on both the port and starboard sides of the vessel. A small flat roofed enginehouse near the stern of the vessel protects both the engine and crew from the elements. The vessel can be maneuvered by either of two large wheels located on the port and starboard sides of the barge just forward of the enginehouse. The ferry transports an average of about 50 vehicles per day day. The price of riding the ferry continues to be free as the expenses for the operation and maintenance are provided by Smith County.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates ca. 1843- 1949 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Nominated under National Register criterion A, the Rome Ferry in Smith County is one of only three ferries still operating on the Cumberland River, one of six within the State, and has been in continuous operation since the mid 1840's. Important to the area as a vital transportation link between the southern and northern part of western Smith county, the Rome Ferry represents a once common form of transportation that has been virtually extinct by the advent of a modern transportation network. A 1930 Corps of Engineers Cumberland River Survey map for the navigation, flood control, power development, and irrigation, showed that 34 ferries were in operation on the Cumberland River within the State of Tennessee. Today, only three ferries continue in operation on the Cumberland, Rome, Cumberland City, and Clees Ferry. Only three other ferries on the Tennessee River continue in operation, Saltillo, Washington (Hastings- Locke), and Blythe Ferries. Of these three Tennessee River ferries, both the Washington (Hastings-Locke) and the Blythe Ferries were listed on the National Register (1/5/83) as part of the Meigs County Multiple Resource Nomination.

The town of Rome, located on the south bank of the Cumberland River, was established by an act of the state legislature on October 10, 1843. Virtually bisected by the Cumberland River, early Smith County record books show many ferries were established throughout the county along the 47 river miles that the Cumberland River flows through Smith County. While the exact date for the establishment of the Rome Ferry has not been determined, it is reasonable to assume that the ferry began operations shortly after the creation of the town. Major A. Beasley, born in North Carolina and an early settler in Smith County, probably established the ferry. Beasley's Bend on the northside of the ferry landing takes its name from this prosperous farmer. While owning the ferry, Beasley probably employed others to operate the ferry and see to its day to day activities. The 1850 census showed that Edward Parker was listed as the ferrykeeper at that time and lived next door to Beasley.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approximately 12.5 acres

Quadrangle name Dixon Springs, TN 317SE

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 1 6 5 8 3 3 8 0 4 0 1 3 5 4 0
Zone Easting Northing

B 1 6 5 8 3 4 9 0 4 0 1 3 5 9 0
Zone Easting Northing

C 1 6 5 8 3 5 6 0 4 0 1 3 2 5 0

D 1 6 5 8 3 4 8 0 4 0 1 3 2 4 0

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Faith Young and Bettye Andrews

organization Friends of the Rome Ferry

date August 1986

street & number Highway 25

telephone 615/735-1862

city or town Dixon Springs

state Tennessee 37057-9701

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Herbert L. Ingers*

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

date 11/6/86

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

[Signature]

date 12/24/86

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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In 1859, Ellis Beasley, brother of Major, sold the ferry to Richard C. Nolen, and it was during Nolen's ownership that the most colorful event in the long history of the Rome Ferry occurred. Confederate General John Hunt Morgan occupied the nearby town of Lebanon on May 4, 1862, when Union troops under the command of General Dumont surprised Morgan with a large mounted force. Morgan's hasty retreat took him to the Rome Ferry where he was fortunate to find the ferryboat on his side of the river. He narrowly escaped the pursuing Union forces, however his flight north across the river to freedom was not complete, as he was forced to leave *Black Bess*, his prized Kentucky thoroughbred mare on the southside of the ferry landing. Morgan, one of the Confederacies finest cavalry officers forever grieved the loss of his valued horse.

Ownership of the ferry after the Civil War changed hands several times. By 1870, Robert H. Cato acquired the ferry operation and William Mayfield was listed as the ferrykeeper. The ferry landings were natural gathering points for all types of people. Rev. Oakley, a Baptist minister, used the ferry landing to baptize seven new converts in 1883.

During the 1920's, the ferryboat was powered by an unusual source. Comer Haley, who owned the ferry from 1925 until 1929 when he sold it to Smith County, used a mule to propel the boat. Built by Thomas Fisher of Carthage, out of yellow poplar, Haley's wooden-hulled boat was powered by a blind mule walking on a circular treadmill fastened to the deck which turned the large paddle wheel.

It was during the 1920's that the north landing was relocated approximately 200 yards to the west. The change was necessitated by the fact that automobiles could not negotiate the steep 30 degree slope. The new north landing site, with only an 18 degree slope, was much more accessible for the modern day horseless carriage.

Also during this period, operation of the ferry was turned over to Ike Napier on December 13, 1924. Napier operated the ferry seven days a week from sunup to sundown for 47 years. After Napier's retirement in 1972, his son Joe Napier replaced his father and continues as the Captain of the Jere Mitchell .

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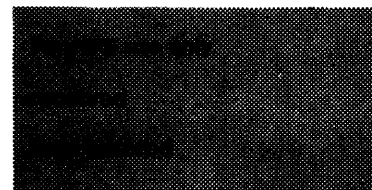
During World War II, the Rome Ferry was the site for another set of military maneuvers. The United States Army, Second Armored Division, under the command of General George S. Patton, used the Rome Ferry site by constructing a pontoon crossing at the Ferry. This allowed Patton to conduct military maneuvers in middle Tennessee, an area similar topographically to the Rhine River Valley in Germany.

The aftermath of the war brought a change to the Rome Ferry. In 1949, Smith County officials purchased a 60 foot steel hulled barge and sternwheeler to continue the ferry operations. Originally named the Rome Ferry, the boat was renamed the Jere Mitchell in 1949 after a local soldier who died during the invasion at Normandy beach. While the Jere Mitchell is less than 50 years old, the ferryboat has exceptional significance as a rare surviving form of what was once a common mode of transportation, and should be considered a contributing element to the nomination. In addition to be one of only two paddle sternwheelers currently operating in Tennessee, the longevity of the Jere Mitchell is unusual due to the short-lived duration of life usually associated with ferryboats. Operating daily for over 37 years, the Jere Mitchell continues the long tradition of ferryboat service to the Rome community and Smith County. Historically, hundreds of ferries were in operation on the many navigable waterways of Tennessee; however, the improvements made by a modern highway system, additional bridge construction, and the general costs and economic conditions associated with operating a ferry, have made the continued existence of ferries very uncertain, and the Jere Mitchell plays an important role in continuing this tradition.

Today, Rome Ferry continues to provide an important service to this rural area in western Smith County. The ferry serves as a vital link to the surrounding area for Beasley's Bend farmers who use the ferry to transport everything from corn harvests to herds of cattle to market. The fate of the six still operating ferries in Tennessee is tenuous at best. With the soon-to-be completed Cockrill Bend Bridge over the Cumberland River west of Nashville, the continued operation of Clees Ferry, the only other remaining sternwheeler, remains in doubt. The expected loss of the Clees Ferry will reduce the number of operating ferries on the Cumberland River to just two. The Rome Ferry, which has been in continuous operation for over 140 years, is the oldest, and continues it's long service to the citizens of middle Tennessee.

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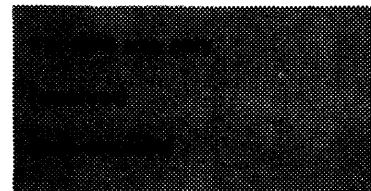
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The boundaries begin at a point on the south bank of the Cumberland River at the north side of the right of way of State Route 70 and proceed north 198 feet to the riverbank, thence in a northerly direction 740 feet across the river, continuing northerly 193 feet, thence northeast with the general course of the river 500 feet, thence in a southerly direction approximately 1,200 feet (including 740 feet of river crossing), to the west bank of Round Lick Creek, thence in a westerly direction 450 feet along State Route 70 to the beginning. The boundary include the 1.8 acre tract of land owned by Smith County on the southside of the ferry landing, the water passageway of approximately 8 acres, and 3 acres on the northside of the river which included the original ferrykeeper's house site on a promontory northeast of the crossing and both the current and historic landing sites. Total acreage of land and water is approximately twelve and a half acres.

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Ferries were once an important and widely used form of transportation along the Cumberland River in Tennessee. Today, only three ferries still operate on the Cumberland. Many of the old ferry routes, especially the most vital ones, were replaced by bridges. Of the ferries still operating in the state, few are boats that are less than fifty years old because of the fragile nature of the resource. ^{over?}

The Rome Ferry has served as an important link between the northern and southern portions of west Smith County for over 100 years and several interesting events have occurred at the landing sites. The sternwheeler Jere Mitchell, first used in 1949, is a rare survivor of a once prominent method of water transportation. However, there is some concern that the boat may not meet the National Register requirements of exceptional significance under criterion A merely because it is an unusual form of transportation today. (No claim is made that the boat has exceptional significance under criterion C.) The nomination does not present evidence that the ferry had an extraordinary impact on the (economic) development of Rome or that it was a vital transportation route into the town. No event of exceptional merit occurred on the boat or at the landings.

The State Review Board determined that the boat was an integral part of the resource and that it would not be feasible to exclude it from the nomination. The consensus appeared to be that without the boat, only a portion of an historic resource was being nominated. If only the landing site was nominated, other questions of eligibility are raised. The site might then be considered as one of thirty-four known ferry sites along the Cumberland River. All of these sites, then, could be potentially eligible.

Herbert L. Snyder 11/6/86



Rome Ferry
 Highway 70 at Cumberland River
 Rome, Smith County, Tennessee

TAX MAP 1" = 400'
 #1 of 3

77
 36 ACs
 N

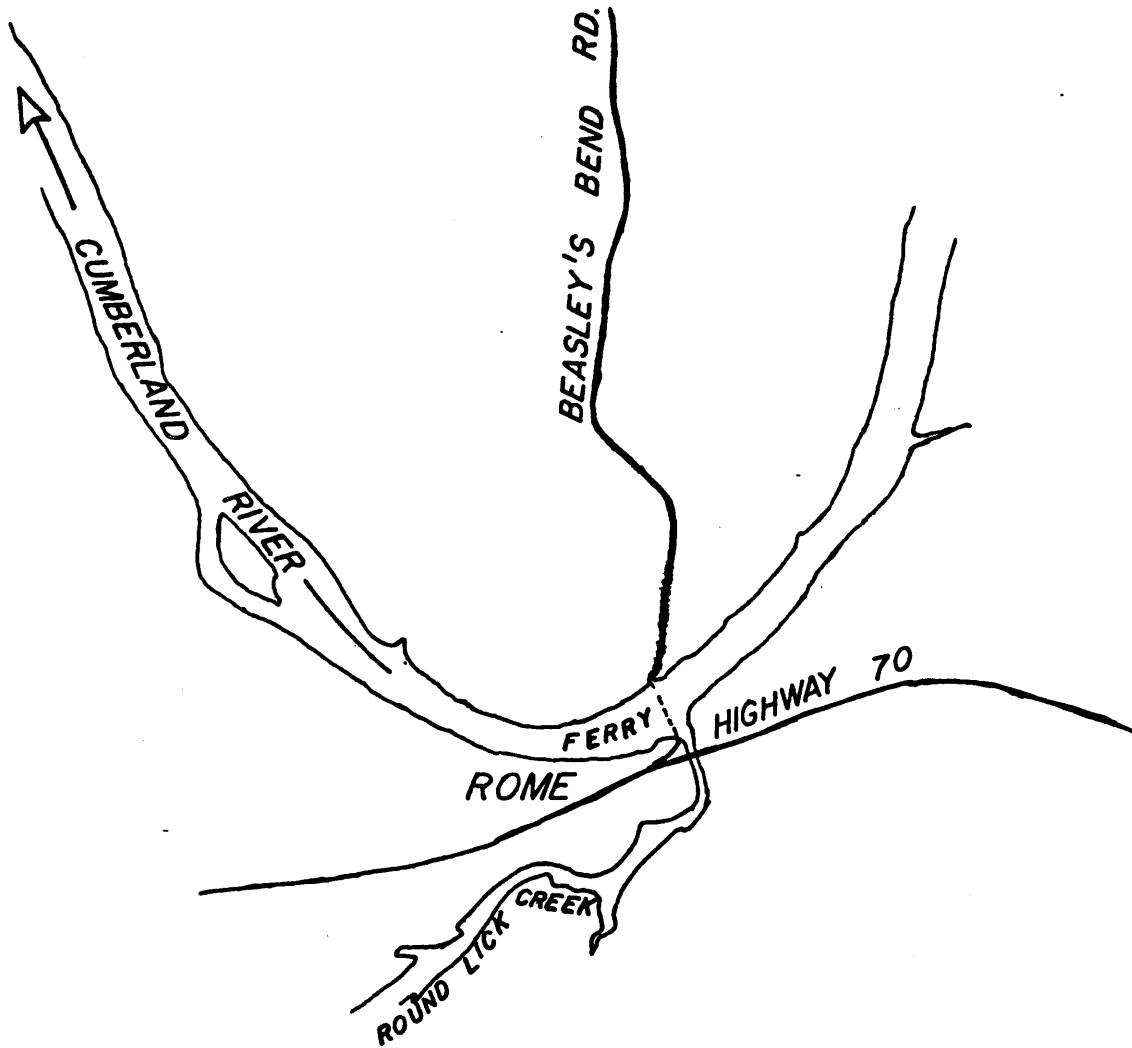
SEE 1-100
 MAP 48-0

70
 1.5 ACs

71
 2 AC

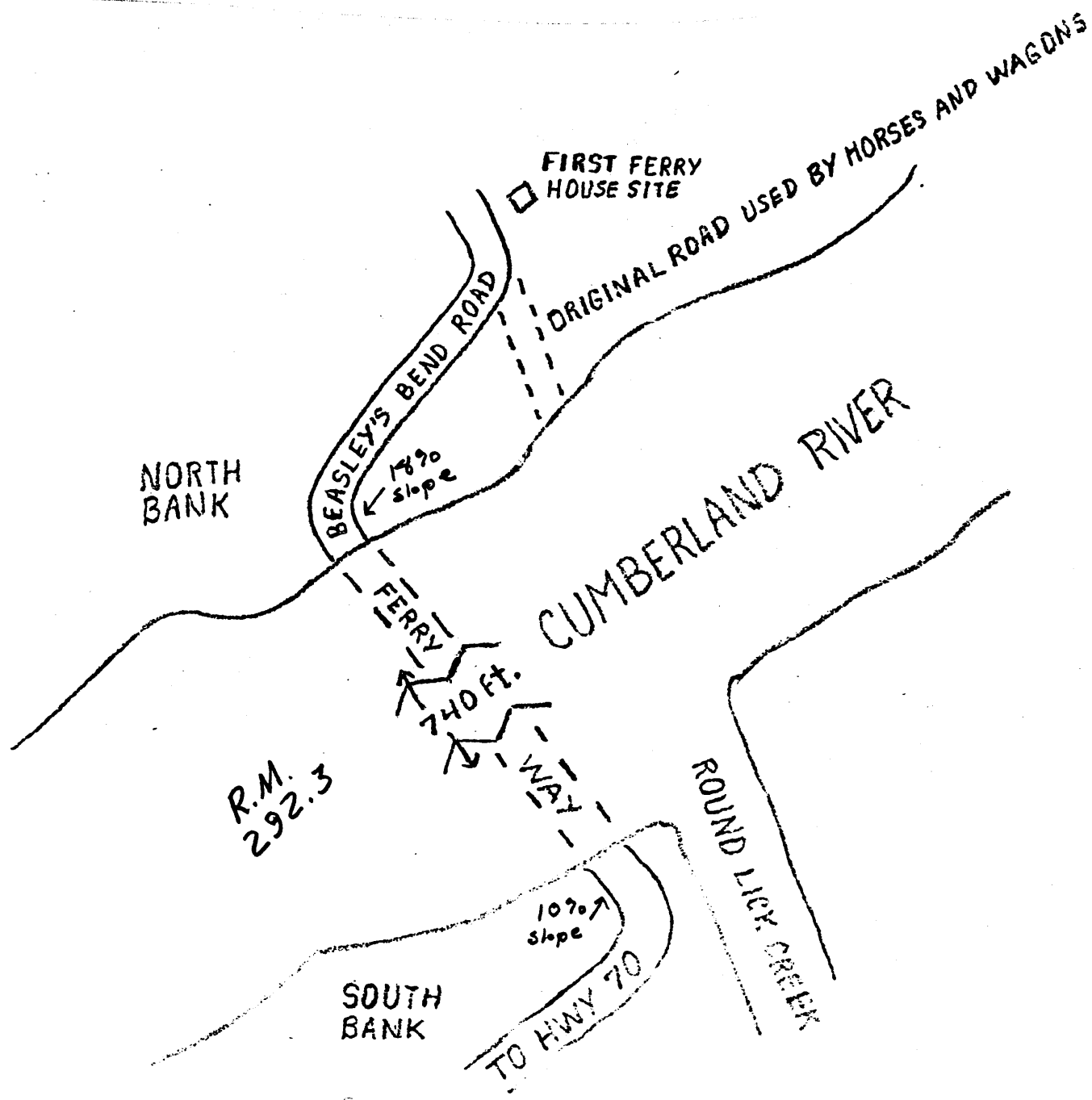
73
 31 ACs

51
 500



Rome Ferry
Highway 70 at Cumberland River
Rome, Smith County, Tennessee

MAP 1" = 2000'
#2 of 3



Rome Ferry
 Highway 70 at Cumberland River
 Rome, Smith County, Tennessee

SITE PLAN No scale
 #3 of 3