

ROSS, S. W.

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Elizabeth Ross,
Field Worker.
September 23, 1937

An Interview With S. W. Ross,
Park Hill, Oklahoma

OLD FORDS.

There were various fords along the Illinois River in long past years which bore distinctive names now largely forgotten. One of the long-used fords was that which was designated as the Slippery Rock Ford, and sometimes, as the "Slick Rock Ford". As the names imply the rocky bottom of the river was quite slippery.

It is probable that the ford was first used by the members of the western Cherokee band, if not by white men of Arkansas Territory, some of whom are said to have lived in the then far-western sections in 1819 or thereabouts. Anyway, the Slippery Rock Ford was in existence at an early period.

The road leaving from points in Arkansas wound through hills and woodlands and low-lying bottom lands along the streams. There was much wild cane in the early times and that portion of the road which reached the ford led through tall cane which had grown up among the large trees and smaller saplings of the Illinois River bottom.

Travelers in wagons, horseback and on foot crossed the river at the Slippery Rock Ford, which was not as desirable a crossing place as some of the other fords at some distance away. The current of the river was rather swift at the ford first mentioned and portions of the rocky bottom more than ordinarily slippery. Horses sometimes lost their footing and their riders were thrown into the water, or horses or mules hitched to wagons sometimes slipped to such extent that difficulty was experienced in drawing the vehicles to the opposite bank.

In course of time the Slippery Rock Ford was largely abandoned, there being two other fording places below the Slippery Rock Ford, one of them near the mouth of the Barren Fork where this stream flows into the Illinois.

In these days the buildings of the Sequoyah Club stand on a tract of land through which once wound the road which led to the Slippery Rock Ford. Across the river faint traces may be seen of the old road which was first used in the pioneer days of the present state of Oklahoma, but which was then a portion of the western Cherokee Nation. And there

yet stands some of the tall sycamore trees which once were numerous wild turkeys sometimes roosted in the tallest sycamores in the bottom, and hunters occasionally shot turkeys from their high perches when the moon was full and gave plenty of light.

In slough and pools of water in the bottom land, in vicinity of the old road leading to the Slippery Rock Ford large numbers of hard shell turtles, some of them of large size, could be seen sunning themselves on fallen and decaying logs and driftwood.

Many persons traveling toward the west or the east utilized the old ford during old Indian Territory times.

Authority: S. W. Ross, Park Hill, Oklahoma.

Facts known to many old residents of the Park Hill locality.