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For more information, contact

Marilyn Heifner

Executive Director

Fayetteville Advertising and Promotion Commission

P. O. Box 4157

Fayetteville, AR 72702-4157

479-587-9944

479-530-0676 cell

Statewide Heritage Trail System Authorized As Beebe Signs Bill Into Law

FAYETTEVILLE, Arkansas (March 30, 2009) – Governor Mike Beebe will sign the statewide Historic Trails System legislation on Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. in Little Rock. This legislation establishes a statewide system of historic trails that will not only educate residents and promote state history, but it will also encourage cultural and heritage tourism.

Marilyn Heifner, executive director of the Fayetteville Advertising and Promotion Commission, said, “Arkansas is rich in historic and other sites which are at the core of heritage travel. Increased heritage travel to Arkansas can enhance the state’s image as an attractive destination.”

Heritage tourism has the potential to increase overall travel and tourism in the state with accompanying economic benefits and broadening the state’s travel objectives.

Designated as heritage trails will be:

The Butterfield Overland Stage Route extends from Pea Ridge to Ft. Smith and from Memphis to Ft. Smith. The Butterfield Overland Mail has been heralded by some as one of the “greatest events of the age”. From 1858 until 1861, John Butterfield began operating the longest stagecoach run in the history of the world. It connected Tipton, Mo., and San Francisco, Calif., a 2,812-mile trip. Coaches ran each way twice a week. Having 25 days to make each run, the coaches traveled day and night to meet this deadline. There were stage stops every 15 miles or so to change teams. Cost of the trip was \$200 gold, the equivalent of \$1,500 today.

The Southwest Trail begins at the Missouri border and runs south to the Texas border. During the first decades of the 1800s, Missouri received most of the new settlers. This was due in large part to the Boone’s Lick Road that was built by the famous Daniel Boone. As Missouri began to fill up, a fork developed in the road near St. Genevieve, leading southward into Arkansas. By 1821 this road, known as the Southwest Trail, or the National or Military Road, extended from the northeast corner of Arkansas to the southwest corner, along the border between the lowlands and the highlands, all the way to

the Red River. It is estimated that 4/5 of the population of Arkansas after 1817 came by way of the Southwest Trail.

American Indian removal routes across the state include both land and water routes for the Cherokee, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Chickasaw and Seminole tribes. Arkansas was a very important state for the forced Indian removal of the southeast tribes to Oklahoma. At UALR, the Sequoyah Research Center is a national repository for information regarding all the 5 civilized tribes.

Civil War troop movements are those routes designated by the Arkansas Parks and Tourism department indicating the path troops took during the Civil War. With the sesquicentennial of the Civil War coming in 2012, it is fitting to recognize the important part Arkansas played in the “War Between the States”.

Other studies can be conducted to determine the feasibility of designating additional trails as historic trails.

The Statewide Heritage Trail System bill was introduced in the Arkansas House of Representatives by Rep. Lindsley Smith (Fayetteville), and in the Arkansas Senate by Senator Cecile Bledsoe (Rogers).