

Salt Licks ^[1]

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by John R. Kennedy, 2006

Salt licks are places on the ground where salt appears naturally or has been deposited by humans and where birds and animals congregate to savor the taste. Parts of the modern-day highway system were originally animal trails and later [Native American](#) ^[2] trails that led to salt access-either salt licks or the ocean. Rest stops and both temporary and permanent villages were established along these trails, which were used and improved upon by [early explorers](#) ^[3] to permit horse and wagon traffic.

[American Indians](#) ^[4], and later European settlers, held salt in high esteem. Since the region lacked natural salt, even the salt "waste" from preserving hides and meats was put to use. The Indians carefully saved the salt remnants and placed them strategically on their hunting grounds to attract wild animals and birds. These recycled salt licks were enhanced at every opportunity with additional salt scraps. They became tribal property, not to be infringed upon by neighbors, although they were often discovered and seized by settlers. Local names such as "Big Lick," "Licking Creek," and "White Lick" appear in various parts of the state. These salted areas lasted for centuries, perhaps with some assistance by later settlers who dumped their salt scraps on the old salt licks.

A modern-day salt lick, located on Boy Scout property near [Hickory](#) ^[5], provides a "wildlife observation" area. The site had served as a dairy farm "cow lick" 50 years earlier, when the farmer provided the salt in block form. Wildlife officers in the western half of the state continually deal with poachers who hunt deer over salt licks, which is illegal. For some reason, deer in the east are not attracted to salt licks, but rabbit, raccoon, skunks, small rodents, and birds are. Occasionally, rogue hunters will unlawfully pursue dove over salt.

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)^[13]

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