Early Travel in Eastern OC

From Frank Walker in *Remembering*:

The Long Road to Germanna
"It should come as no surprise to learn that the earliest of Virginia's major settlements away from the coast were on its great tidal rivers. Those streams offered relatively safe, convenient, and inexpensive routes into the interior. Where those rivers left the Coastal Plain and entered into the steeper Piedmont, they became narrower and shallower, with stretches of rapids. The first set of unnavigable rapids was commonly referred to by the Tidewater folk as the 'falls' of the river. At those falls, trading posts were set up, followed in time by docks and warehouses to serve the ships that could go no further upstream. Settlements then soon appeared, several of which grew into prominent Virginia towns and cities that survive to the present.[1]

"Fredericksburg, at the falls of the Rappahannock, began developing early into an internationally known port of entry for the Virginia colony. At an inland port, it offered convenient trade connections for the settlers of our region. By the time of the Act of 1727, which directed Col. Henry Willis and others to 'lay off' that town, ocean-going ships from most trading nations in the world on friendly terms with England had already visited its docks. Goods were also moving briskly over the many other public and private docks along the Rappahannock, among them: Falmouth, Hobbs Hole (Tappahannock), Port Conway, and Port Royal. It would be another ten years before Rocketts Landing at the falls of the James would evolve into the inland port of Richmond, and it would be another dozen years after that before Bellhaven at the falls of the Potomac would become the bustling inland port of Alexandria. (The fourth major coastal river, the York, divides into the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi before becoming unnavigable. No present-day major cities developed at their falls. The 'fall line,'an imaginary line connecting the falls of Virginia's eastern rivers', is recognized as the dividing line between the Tidewater and the Piedmont.)

"Commercial travel into the interior above the fall line would require that roads be hacked through the forest, then traveled with uncertainty as to what might be lying in wait alongside them. Those roads were also going to be horribly expensive to create and maintain. In any event the Virginia colony needed to grow and use up the land in the Tidewater before there would be a serious need to look to the interior. As it turned

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[1] Frank Walker, *Remembering: A History of Orange County* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 44-45.

out, a little over a century would pass after the establishment of Jamestown before the Virginia colonists finally started building roads into the upland.

"Those first inland roads continued the general east-west course originally charted by the rivers and the colony developed along them. North-south roads soon followed, and by the time Orange County was formed, one had been found within its borders. It was called the 'Carolina Road' but was more of an interrelated collection of game trails and Native American paths than a road. It was passable, however, and Europeans quickly took to using it. This particular Carolina Road ('Carolina Roads' and 'Great Roads' appear in many places in Virginia) crossed the Rapidan into today's Orange County in the vicinity of Raccoon Ford.[2]

"The roads from the Rappahannock docks into the interior, and most particularly those from Fredericksburg, were the initial trading and development roads for this part of the colony. A number of the patrons of Fredericksburg's facilities lived on the north side of the Rappahannock, and getting goods to and from them presented the problem of crossing the Rappahannock. During dry spells there were any number of fords upstream from the town where a crossing was possible, but the best crossing was reached by traveling west, beyond the Great Fork where the Rapidan splits off from the Rappahannock. Above there, it might be necessary to ford both streams to reach a destination, but both by then were relatively small and usually easy to cross. It also made sense to keep going far enough west to avoid most of the low, swampy areas around Wilderness Run and the same type of terrain across the river in the Great Fork area.[3]

"If a wagoneer journeyed west as described above, and then turned north towards the Rapidan, he would be traveling in what was to become a commercial corridor in eastern Orange County and he was headed towards an excellent natural ford at a place called Germanna. Today's Route 3 is the current version of that road, though the historic route to Germanna has occupied various roadbeds over time, generally farther to the east than Route 3."[4]

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[2] *Ibid.*, 45.
[3] *Ibid.*, 45-46.
[4] *Ibid.*, 46.