

Route 29

Tiny Buckland Wants Respect, Traffic Bypass

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David Blake, clad in a tweed coat with a handkerchief folded neatly in his breast pocket, is tromping through brush, crushed beer cans and other roadside detritus alongside a brook that divides Fauquier and Prince William counties. The horse breeder marvels at an up-close view of Civil War history: stone embankments in the village of Buckland.

On Oct. 19, 1863, these structures supported a bridge where Confederate troops ambushed 6,000 Union troops, then chased them for several miles. Among the Union soldiers was George Custer. More than 200 men were killed and wounded as they fled in what Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart called the "Buckland Races." Eight hundred were taken prisoner in that last Southern cavalry victory of the war.

Now, a new battle is being waged here. Led by Blake, 42, Buckland's 20 residents and about 500 other Fauquier and Prince William residents are fighting officials at the nearby Manassas National Battlefield Park over the design of a federally funded road in the area.

For years, battlefield officials have argued for a new road that would cut down on the cars and trucks that daily clog two-lane Route 29 through the park. But residents of the small village of Buckland at Routes 29 and 215 believe that their traffic is just as bad and that they need relief as well.

Of the five proposals for a new road under study by the Federal Highway Administration, the Buckland group favors only one route, which it says would benefit both the village and the battlefield.

Jack Van Dopp, the director of the highway study, said federal and National Park Service officials will decide on a route when the study is completed early next year. A construction schedule has not been decided upon.

"Solving Buckland's problems is not what our purpose and need is," he said, noting that the study was authorized by Congress for the sole purpose of easing the traffic woes at the Manassas battlefield.

But Blake, who has spent the past year researching Buckland's history in a handful of libraries across the East Coast, believes his village's antebellum history also warrants special consideration from federal offi-



PHOTOS BY TRACY A. WIGGOWARD—THE WASHINGTON POST

David Blake, at his farm with his springer spaniels, cites Buckland's connections with the Founding Fathers.



Blake studies a map of possible road routes. The drawing above it depicts the "Buckland Races" battle in 1863.

cials who have a chance to shape the future of Route 29.

"I wouldn't say we're better, but we have a richer history [than the Manassas battlefield]. We have connections with the Founding Fathers," argued Blake, who said he has unearthed correspondence between Buckland landowners and several U.S. presidents, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe and James Madison. "I'd love to work together. That's what we should be doing, but it doesn't seem to be working that way. We shouldn't preserve one place at the expense of another."

Buckland locals are lobbying the federal govern-

ment to build a bypass from their village, which is right off Route 29, straight to Interstate 66.

In the past 10 years, the traffic volume has grown inexorably, from 31,000 to 44,000 cars traveling daily between Buckland and I-66 at Gainesville, said Steve Stevens, an engineer for Prince William County.

The bypass supported by Buckland residents would rule out the Virginia Department of Transportation's need to widen Route 29 to six lanes in the next 15 to 20 years, which could force the destruction of some of Buckland's historic homes, said Del. Robert G. Marshall (R-Prince William), who supports the Buckland bypass.

"We need to remove the traffic on Route 29 right before you get to Prince William, at Buckland. Any other proposal . . . would screw it up," he said.

Much of the village's history occurred on Blake's property, the 500-acre Buckland Farm that he purchased four years ago from Thomas Mellon Evans for nearly \$3 million. In the past year, Blake has dug up letters in libraries written by previous Buckland Farm owners hawking horses to George Washington and fly-resistant wheat to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

Calder Loth, a senior architecture historian in the state's historical resources division, said Blake's efforts could persuade state officials to expand Buckland's boundaries on the state and national historic registers.

"And that would help establish the credentials of Buckland and could give us more leverage in dealing with proposed highway projects in the area," he said.