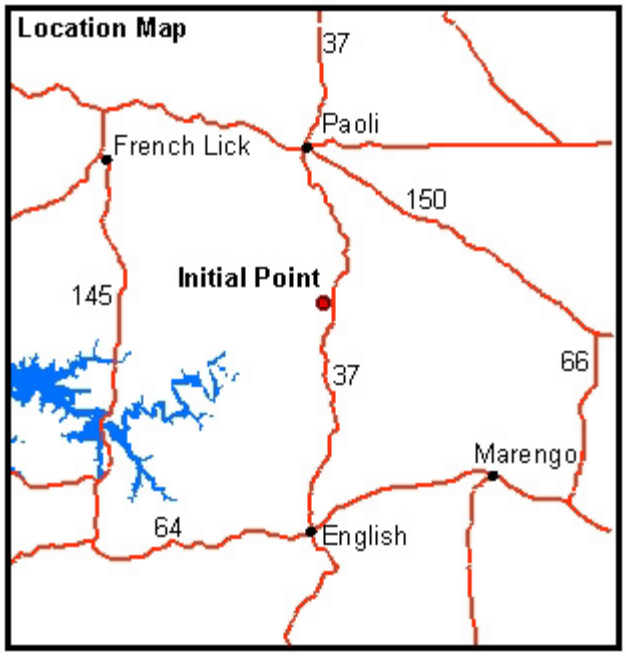
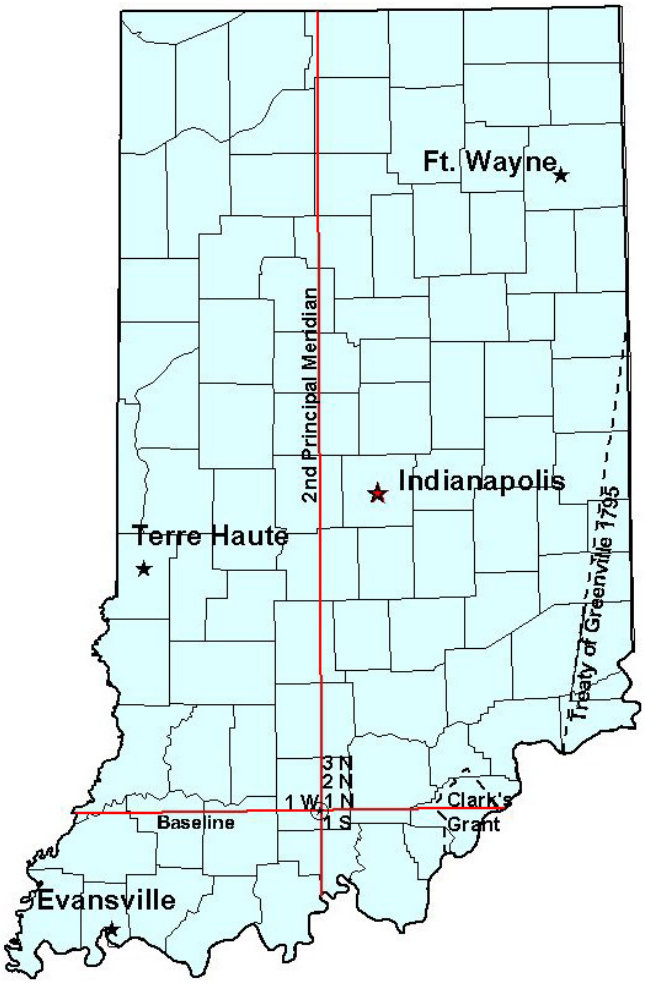
Initial Point

USDA Forest Service | Hoosier National Forest | 9/2007

Initial point, also known as Pivot Point, marks the initial survey point for Indiana. Ebenezer Buckingham Jr., U.S. Deputy Surveyor, surveyed west to establish the original wooden post on September, 1, 1805. The corner stone, which now marks Initial Point, replaced the wooden post in 1866. It was inscribed with an "S 31" for Section 31 by J.H. Lindley, Orange County Surveyor.

This point represents the intersection of the Base Line with the 2nd Principal Meridian. Meridians are the lines of longitude running north and south on a map between the north and south poles. The 1st Principal Meridian is the boundary line between Ohio and Indiana.





The system was planned by a committee from the Continental Congress headed by Thomas Jefferson. In accordance with the Land Ordinance of May 20, 1785, the rectangular system of public land surveys was initiated in Ohio and Indiana. Indiana was the first state to be completely laid out under this survey system.

The Initial Point may be referred to as the beginning of almost all real estate legal descriptions in the State of Indiana. Legal descriptions include a reference to Township and Range.

The State is divided into Townships, which are squares that are 6 miles by six miles in size. Each contains 36 numbered sections of 640 acres each. Section 16 in each 36 section block was reserved for schools. Today many modern schools are still located in Section 16, but others sold the land to fund construction and maintenance of schools. The Initial Point marks the beginning of the Public Land Survey System numbering of Townships (in a north-south direction) and Ranges (in an east-west

direction). The Public Land Survey System was created to easily describe land sold to early settlers by the U.S. Government.

Previous survey systems had been fraught with problems. Abraham Lincoln's family left Kentucky and moved to Indiana because his father had purchased a farm in Kentucky which he later found out he didn't own due to a bad survey.

Early surveying was a dangerous business. The crew who established Initial Point was a testament to the sacrifices made by many of these early surveyors who laid out the system in 1805. Three members of that crew died in this area. A panther killed Thomas Shay and severely mauled George Tate in Pike County. David Sanford, a young graduate just out of Yale, died of malaria, and Ziba Foote drowned in a swamp.

In Buckingham's survey notes from September 1, 1805, there is nothing special to indicate establishing Initial Point was a milestone for his crew. He merely described the soil and timber. Once he set Initial Point, Buckingham turned north and continued along the 2nd Principal Meridian to the Indiana Treaty Line. At 77 chains north of Initial Point, he noted that he had crossed the Buffalo Trace (see related flier on this topic).

In recognition of the importance of this point, a group of people from the Indiana Society of Professional Land Surveyors, Indiana County Surveyors Association, and citizens of Paoli decided to protect the site. They purchased 18 acres around the point and in 1968, made a cooperative agreement with the Forest Service to maintain the site. Title of the land was later conveyed to the Forest Service.

In 1973 a large limestone and bronze monument was dedicated near the parking lot at the site describing the importance of Initial Point, In 1977 the monument was vandalized and eventually removed. A similar monument was set on the lawn of the Court House in Paoli where it would be more accessible to the general public and safer from vandalism.

The numbering system beginning at the Initial Point is still used in legal descriptions today, just as it was intended in 1805. From this point west, most of the United States is laid out with the surveying system first established at this point.

VALLEY OF HOGS DEFEAT

Another interesting bit of history is also tied to this valley. The creek bed and bottomland around Initial Point is called Hogs Defeat. According to legend, a large herd of wild hogs roamed this area of the forest and raided early settlers' gardens and croplands.

Seeking an end to their problems with the wild hogs, the settlers banded together and hunted the herd down. The hogs were destroyed in this valley.

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