



Moores Creek visitor center overlooks the battlefield.

The park is open daily, except Christmas Day. We suggest that you go first to the visitor center, just a short distance from the park entrance, where a member of the park staff can answer your questions. Exhibits there tell about the battle—especially why it happened and what it achieved. Also, battlefield tours start from the visitor center. There are two kinds of tours: self-guided and specially guided. The latter are led by park personnel and are available for educational and other groups if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent.

On the battlefield tour, you will see the marked bridge site, old breastworks, and cannon of the type used by the patriots. Field exhibits, monuments, and markers along the earthwork trail help relate the battle story as it unfolded. The park is rich in plantlife, including the interesting Venus flytrap.

Administration

MOORES CREEK NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, established in 1926 and containing 50 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this

area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of the people.

Development of the park is part of MISSION 66, a 10-year program to develop and staff the areas of the National Park System so that they can be used and enjoyed by both present and future generations.

A superintendent, whose address is Currie N.C., is in immediate charge of the park.

America's Natural Resources

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

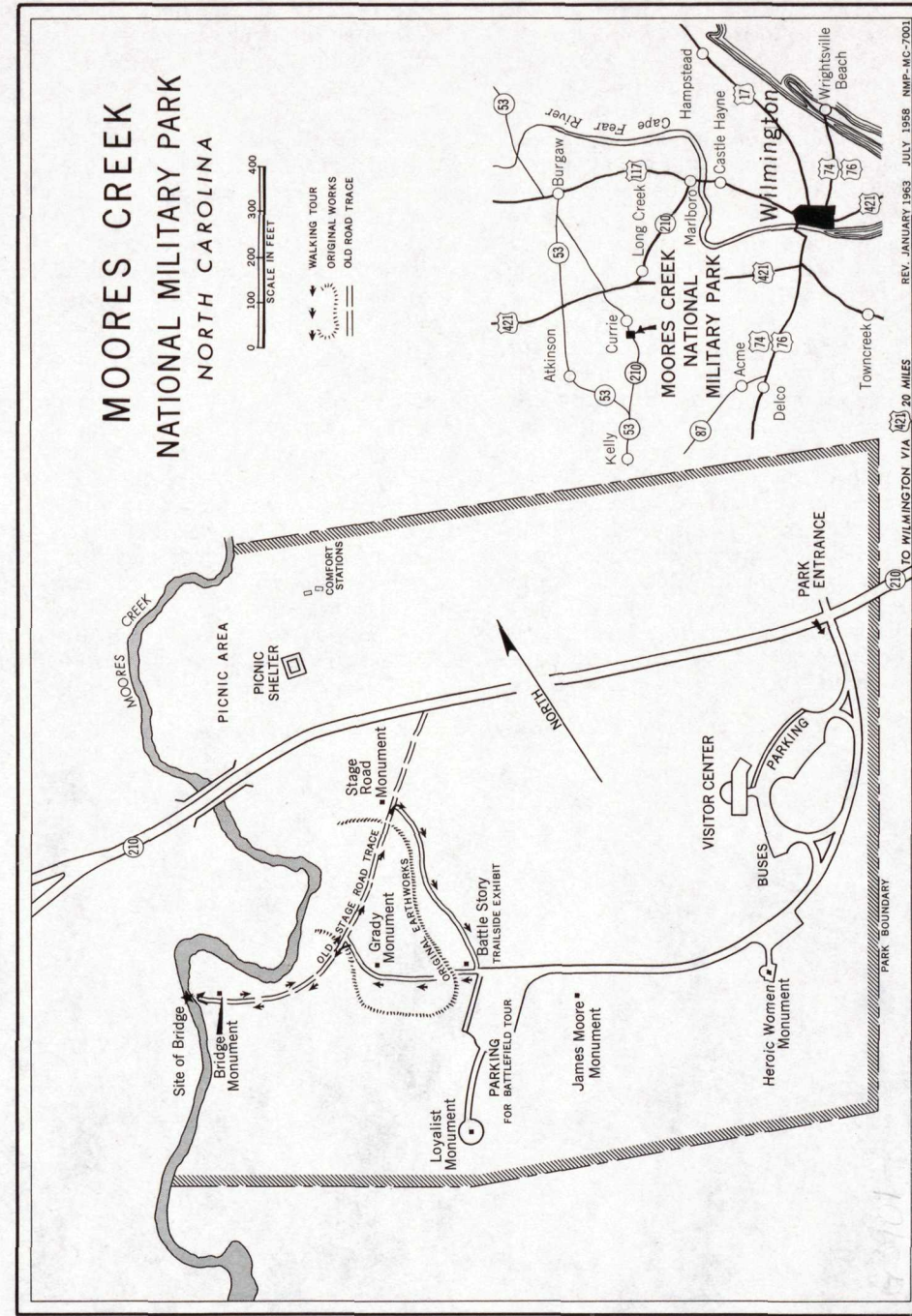
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved for the future, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Revised 1963



MOORES CREEK

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

North Carolina



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1963—O-675129

MOORES CREEK

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

"The Lexington and Concord of the South"

THE BATTLE OF Moores Creek Bridge was fought on February 27, 1776, on a branch of the Cape Fear River some 20 miles from Wilmington in eastern North Carolina. It was a major factor in preventing a full scale British invasion in the South in the opening phases of the American Revolution. It supplied, too, a needed stimulus for the country as a whole in the movement toward independence. This victory had a significant role in North Carolina's decision, on April 12, 1776, to instruct her delegates in the Continental Congress to vote for independence. This was the first colony to take such action.

Before the Moores Creek Campaign, 1776

The settlement of North Carolina in the decades before the American Revolution had not produced a fully united population. There was stress between inland and seaborde elements which in 1771 had produced armed conflict at Alamance Creek. Here the "Regulators" (from the inland section) had been defeated and paroled to the King through the Royal Governor. This strife still left its mark. In the central part of the colony were many Scottish Highlanders who had been living in their new home only a few years and who still maintained many of their old customs and loyalties. Chief among these were Allan MacDonald and his wife,

Flora. The latter is credited with saving the life of "Bonny Prince Charlie" when he became a fugitive after the battle of Culloden Moor (1746).

When armed conflict came at the outbreak of the Revolution, it was natural that the British would look hopefully at this factional unrest and seek to capitalize on the seeming strong loyalist sentiment. Initially, in 1775, trouble began when North Carolina's Royal Governor, Josiah Martin, as a result of opposition to parliamentary taxation, was forced to take refuge on a ship in the Cape Fear River. Considering his parole authority over the "Regulators," and the loyalist feelings of the Scottish Highlanders, he believed that he could muster at least 10,000 men and regain control of the colony. To this end he appealed to the Crown for supplies. He was instructed to assemble his force and to be in readiness to cooperate with a strong British expeditionary force under Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis scheduled to arrive late in February. The combined forces would occupy North Carolina and adjacent areas and would strike an immediate blow at the American cause. This, however, did not take into account the action of the patriots who had assumed leadership of the colony in Martin's absence.

Martin issued a call for his supporters to assemble under Donald McDonald near Cross

Creek (Fayetteville) and to arrive on the coast late in February. When organized, about February 15, there were approximately 700 Highlanders, 700 loyalists, and 130 regulators—a force of 1,500 to 1,600 men.

In the meantime, the patriots had not been idle. Since Governor Martin was technically out of the colony, they appointed a Provincial Council to rule in his stead. Upon the recommendation of the Continental Congress, two Continental regiments had been raised, as well as several battalions of minutemen and militia. With the first news that the loyalists were assembling at Cross Creek, the Continental troops, minutemen, and militia gathered at various points and marched to encircle them. Col. James Moore, of the first regiment, was in command.

The plan of the loyalists was to advance along the southwest side of the Cape Fear River to the coast, provision the British troops, and then cooperate with them in the conquest of the colony. McDonald began his movement toward the coast on February 20. Blocked by Moore from his planned route, he marched eastward, crossed the Cape Fear River, and proceeded toward the Black

River Road to Wilmington, along which he expected little opposition. Patriot forces from New Bern, under Col. Richard Caswell, were outmaneuvered and withdrew toward Moores Creek, 17 miles nearer Wilmington. Meanwhile, Colonel Moore had ordered a concentration of the forces from the north and west at Cross Creek to prevent loyalist retreat or reinforcement. He dispatched Col. Alexander Lillington to join Caswell with all possible speed. Colonel Moore then marched to follow or, if possible, to get ahead of the loyalist force.

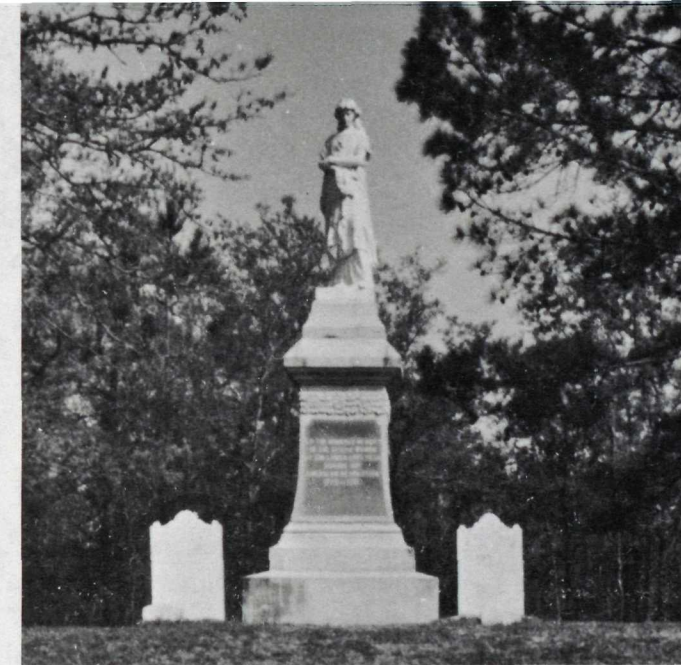
The Engagement at Moores Creek

On February 26, 1776, Moore encamped halfway between Wilmington and the Moores Creek Bridge with a force of about 1,000 men. Lillington camped on the east side of Moores Creek with about 150 men and Caswell camped on the west side with about 800 men. McDonald's loyalists, 1,500 strong, camped 6 miles away. A messenger from the loyalist's camp reconnoitered Caswell's position and returned with the news that Caswell was on their side of the bridge in an exposed position.

The fight at Moores Creek bridge. From a diorama in the park museum.



Monument dedicated to the heroic women of the American Revolution.



At a council of war it was decided to move forward at once with a party of 75 picked broadswordsmen in the lead. The advance was begun at 1 a. m. About an hour before daybreak the party marched to Caswell's camp. They found the fires burning low and the camp deserted. During the night, Caswell had abandoned his camp, leaving the campfires burning to deceive the loyalists. The floor of the bridge over the creek had been taken up and the girders greased. Around his new camp across the creek, Caswell had thrown up a breastwork and posted artillery to cover the road and bridge. Here the patriot force waited in the darkness. Believing that the patriots had fled, the loyalists pushed over the partly demolished bridge, but were met by a deadly fire as they approached the earthwork. The small advance party, under Capt. Donald McLeod and Capt. John Campbell (McDonald was ill in camp), was practically annihilated, and the whole force was soon in retreat. The patriots lost only one man.

Following this initial success, the patriots captured or dispersed the entire body of loyalists. Within 2 weeks they had captured most of the leaders, about 850 soldiers, and a large quantity of supplies, including 1,500 muskets, 350 guns and shot bags, 150 swords and dirks, 2 valuable medicine chests, and

about \$75,000 in gold. The leaders were imprisoned, some being sent out of the colony. The soldiers were paroled to their homes.

The defeat of the loyalists at Moores Creek thwarted the intended invasion of North Carolina. The British force moved on to Sullivan's Island in Charleston harbor in South Carolina where it failed again. Their promising hopes in the South did not materialize and no attack was launched here again until late in the Revolution. Edward Channing has concluded that "*Had the South been conquered in the first half of 1776, it is entirely conceivable that rebellion would never have turned into revolution.*" He contends, too, that "*At Moores Creek and Sullivan's Island the Carolinians turned aside the one combination of circumstances that might have made British conquest possible.*" There is no question that following the events at Moores Creek Bridge the movement toward independence quickly gained momentum. In this, North Carolina was the first to act.

About Your Visit

MOORES CREEK NATIONAL MILITARY PARK is about 20 miles northwest of Wilmington, N.C., and can be reached via U.S. 421 and N.C. 210.