



The Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge

The Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge was a brief, violent clash at daybreak on February 27, 1776. It saw patriots defeat a larger force of loyalists marching toward a rendezvous with British reinforcements coming by sea. Brief but important, the battle effectively ended royal authority in the North Carolina

colony and stalled a full-scale British invasion of the South. The patriot victory emboldened the colony. On April 12, 1776, North Carolina instructed its delegation to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia to vote for independence from Great Britain. It was the first American colony to do so.

The colony was deeply divided and fractured before the American Revolution, making it a prime target for British invasion. To take advantage of the situation, the British Crown planned to send 7,000 regular British troops and 10,000 muskets and small artillery to supply those colonists still loyal to the British.

First Moves Toward War By summer 1775 British Royal Governor of North Carolina Josiah Martin had lost control of the colony and was sent into exile aboard a British warship. While in exile Martin laid plans to retake North Carolina by raising an army of 10,000 loyalists and marching it to the coast. His plan would restore royal rule in the Carolinas. In the end, Martin raised only 1,600 soldiers.

At news of loyalists assembling under Gen. Donald MacDonald at Cross Creek (Fayetteville), the patriots began gathering forces in August 1775. Col. James Moore was given overall command of patriot forces in the colony. In Wilmington they put up breastworks and prepared to fight. New Bern authorities mustered minutemen and militia under Col. Richard Caswell with orders to defend the colony.

The loyalists planned to join British forces at the coast to restore royal authority in the colony. On February 20, 1776, they moved toward the coast, but Moore's patriot forces from Wilmington blocked

them. The loyalists then moved east to evade Moore while hoping to slip past Caswell's forces coming from New Bern.

For the next few days the loyalists sought an open route to the coast, but Caswell's forces blocked their path along the Black River. The loyalists ultimately found a different crossing point over the river and attempted to flank the patriots and force them into battle. At the last moment Caswell and his men abandoned their position, departing their encampment on February 25, and headed toward the bridge crossing Moore's Creek.

Engagement at the Bridge Caswell was reinforced by 200 minutemen from the Wilmington District at Moore's Creek Bridge, bringing his total force to around 1,000. The patriots used the creek's natural terrain to their advantage, placing strong earthworks on a ridge overlooking the creek on the east bank. By February 26, 1776, the loyalists were camped six miles from the patriot position.

Late that afternoon the loyalists sent a courier to Caswell's camp to offer a chance for the patriots to lay down their arms. Caswell refused. Upon returning to Gen. MacDonald, the courier conveyed that the patriots were camped on the west bank of Moore's Creek and vulnerable to attack. The courier did not see the earthworks on the east bank. With only partial information about the

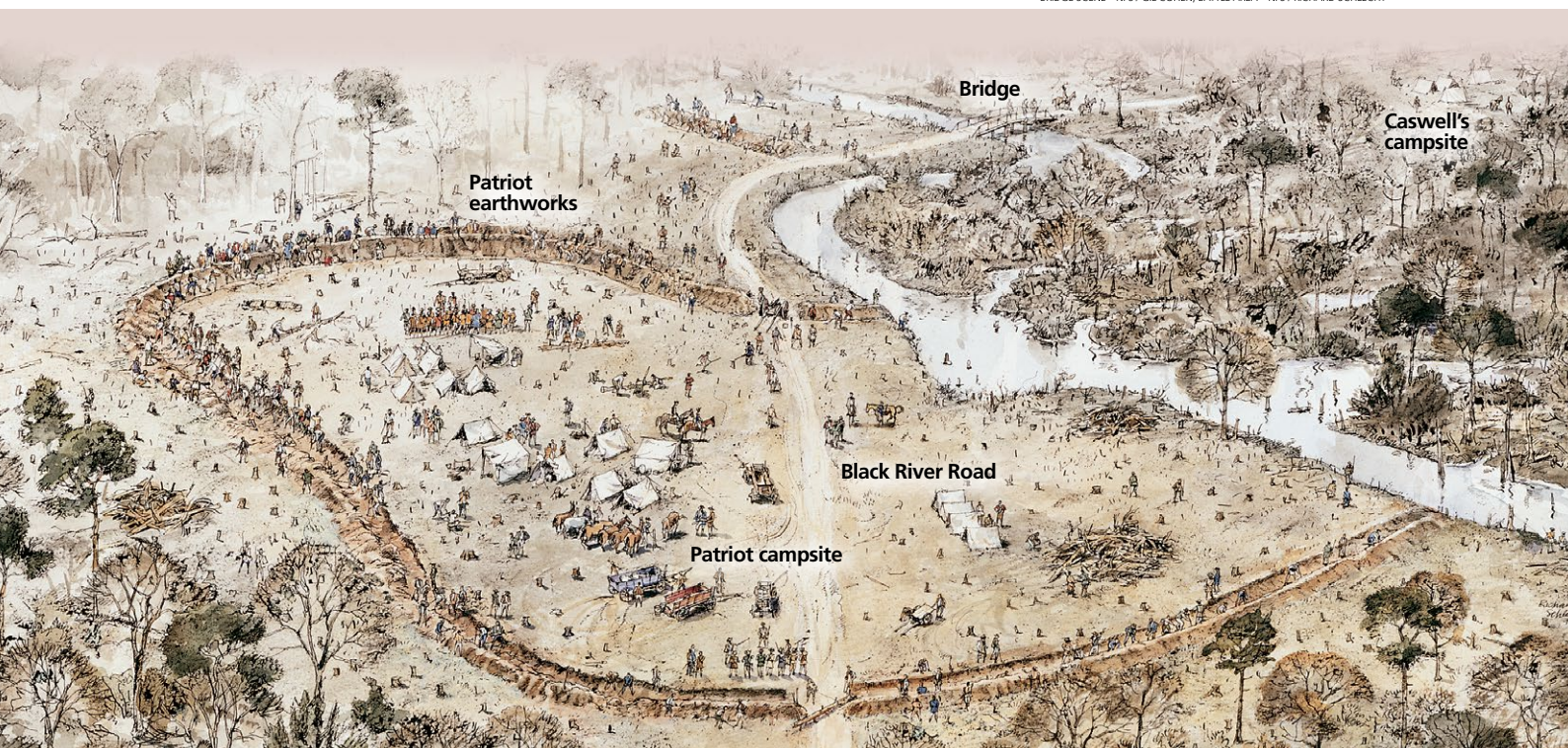
patriot position, the loyalists planned their attack. They began marching about 1 am on February 27. During the night the patriots moved their forces to the east bank to await the loyalist attack.

At 5 am the loyalists learned the patriots had abandoned their camp on the west bank. Believing the patriots were fast retreating, the loyalists pushed across a partially dismantled Moore's Creek Bridge and up a long, narrow, dark causeway. Here they were met with musket and cannon fire from the patriot earthworks. The battle of Moore's Creek was brief, possibly only three minutes. The loyalist march to the coast had been blocked. This battle marked the first decisive patriot victory of the American Revolution in North Carolina.

This battle, along with the June 1776 patriot victory at Sullivan's Island off Charleston, South Carolina, ended any British hope of slowing down the rushing tide of rebellion in the southern colonies. Had the British conquered the South in early 1776, historian Edward Channing concluded, "It is entirely conceivable that rebellion would never have turned into a revolution." Here at Moore's Creek, and then again at Sullivan's Island, "Carolínians turned aside the one combination of circumstances that might have made British conquest possible."

Paintings of the engagement at the bridge (top) and the battle area (bottom)

BRIDGE SCENE—NPS / GIL COHEN; BATTLE AREA—NPS / RICHARD SCHLECHT



Traces of the Past

This 87-acre park preserves the site of the American Revolutionary War Battle of Moores Creek Bridge fought February 27, 1776, between loyalists supporting the British crown and patriots of North Carolina. Remnants of Black River Road and earthen mounds marking the patriot earthworks are visible today.

Col. Alexander Lillington's troops, the first patriots to reach the bridge, built the line of earthworks. They took advantage of high ground, anchoring one end of the earthworks in swampy ground and the other at the creek. In this position Lillington could fend off his enemies fording the creek to attack from the rear and straddle the road the loyalists were forced to use to cross the bridge. His troops removed deck timbers from the bridge to impede the loyalist advance (*right*, Lt. Col. Donald McLeod's highlanders muster near the partially deconstructed bridge). A reconstructed bridge sits in its place (*bottom left*).

Patriot artillery fired with great effect in the battle. A reproduction Dutch two-pounder cannon mounted on an English "galloper" carriage (*bottom right*) sits along the earthworks today.



HIGHLANDERS—NPS / GIL COHEN; BRIDGE AND CANNON—NPS

Plan Your Visit

Directions The park is 20 miles northwest of Wilmington, NC. From Wilmington take I-40 or US 421 north to the junction with NC 210, then travel west on 210 to the park entrance.

Hours The visitor center is closed Sundays, Mondays, and federal holidays. Trails are open daily. Check the website or contact the visitor center for seasonal hours. Groups may contact the park in advance to arrange for a guided tour.

Explore the Park Allow at least 90 minutes to tour the battlefield and see the visitor center exhibits and movie. A diorama depicts the bridge scene as patriots opened fire early on February 27, 1776. Displays feature original weapons—a Highland pistol, Brown Bess musket, half-pounder swivel gun, and broadsword.

History Trail (¾ mile) Starts at the visitor center, connecting the battlefield's historical features and briefly following the trace of Black River Road.

A boardwalk across Moores Creek leads to Caswell's campsite with its view of the bridge. Cross the bridge to the Bridge Monument and reconstructed patriot earthworks, where the partly dismantled bridge was key to the patriot

victory. Rehabilitated in the late 1930s, these earthworks line up accurately, but their true original height is unknown.

Stop along the trail to visit four more monuments. The 1857 Patriot (Grady) Monument commemorates the battle and Pvt. John Grady, the only patriot killed in the battle. The 1909 Loyalist Monument honors supporters of the British cause who "did their duty as they saw it." The James Moore Monument recognizes the first Moores Creek Battleground Association president. The Women's Monument honors heroic women of the Lower Cape Fear region and the role of women in the American Revolution.

Tarheel Trail (¼ mile) Starts near the end of the History Trail. Pathside exhibits describe the production of naval stores (tar, pitch, and turpentine), the region's main Revolution-era industry.

Woodpecker Trail (.3 miles) Starts near the Tarheel Trail and ends at Black River Road. Pathside exhibits explore the park's varied ecosystems and wildlife.

Black River Road (½ mile) This colonial road, dating from 1743, was used by both the patriots and loyalists leading up to the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the website.

Safety and Regulations Be careful; banks along the creek are slippery.

- The park is home to several species of poisonous snakes; do not approach or startle snakes or any other wild animals.
- For firearms regulations check the park website.
- Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park.

Emergencies call 911

More Information
Moores Creek National Battlefield
40 Patriots Hall Dr.
Currie, NC 28435-5177
910-283-5591
www.nps.gov/mocr

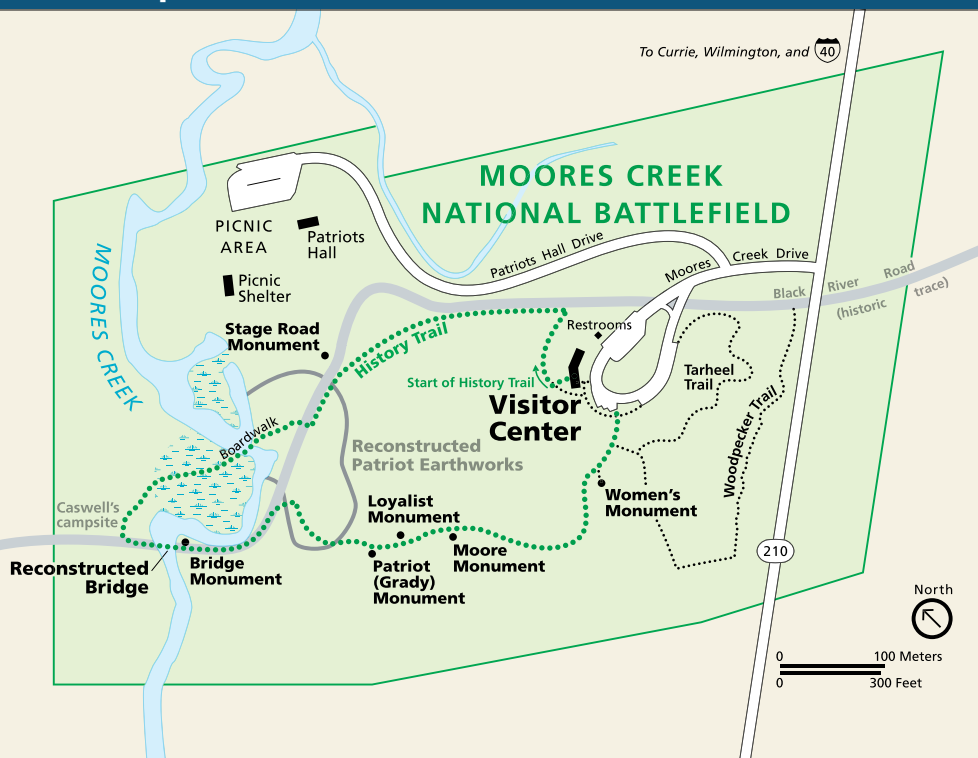
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Moores Creek National Battlefield is one of over 20 national parks that primarily commemorate the American Revolutionary War and one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

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Park Map



Area Map

