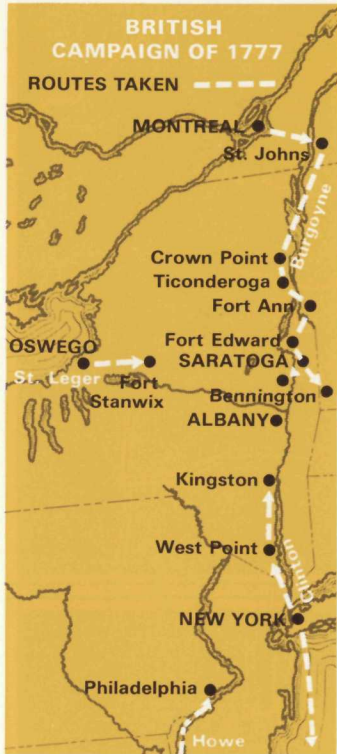


National Historical Park • New York

SARATOGA

The decisive American victory here over Burgoyne in 1777 marked the turning point of the American Revolution



"Rebellion which a twelve-month ago was a contemptible pygmy, is now in appearance a giant." So spoke a contemporary after the Battle of Saratoga. Burgoyne's surrender on October 17, 1777, was one of those signal events that shape the destiny of nations. The American success encouraged a hesitant France to intervene openly on the side of the colonists. Without this support, America's bid for liberty might have been lost. At home, Saratoga was equally decisive. Though 4 more years of fighting were necessary to bring final victory at Yorktown, the success here brightened a desperate cause at a moment when failure would have been disastrous.

THE BURGOYNE CAMPAIGN

For centuries the Lake Champlain-Hudson River route had been a strategic highway through the northeast. In pre-Revolutionary years this route was bloodied during the wars between England and France for control of North America. Once again it was to be a theater of historic events, this time the drama of a people aiming to establish a free nation.

Gen. John Burgoyne's plan for the British campaign of 1777 called for his army to move southward from Canada along the Champlain-Hudson route to Albany. To support him and create a diversion, Col. Barry St. Leger was to march east from Lake Ontario with a smaller force and penetrate into the upper Mohawk Valley. After reaching Albany, Burgoyne would place his force under Sir William Howe, who headquartered in New York City with a sizeable army of his own. If successful, the expedition would secure British control of the strategic Hudson River and militarily isolate the New England colonies.

Sir William, however, had his own plans. Taking the bulk of his forces, he would move on Philadelphia, the patriot capital, by way of Chesapeake Bay. He left only a small force under Sir Henry Clinton in New York. Thus it happened that the troops best positioned to help Burgoyne were not available in the required numbers.

Colonial Secretary George Germain had endorsed Howe's plan, trusting that he would return to New York in time to cooperate with Burgoyne. But Howe was already at sea and deeply committed to the Philadelphia campaign when he received Germain's conditional approval.

To succeed, Burgoyne's campaign depended on mutually supporting armies. When his army advanced from Canada without support from New York City, it became an isolated column in a vast and hostile wilderness.

Burgoyne embarked from St. Johns (now St. Jean), Canada, on June 17, 1777. His total force of 9,400 men included some 4,200 British regulars, 4,000 German troops, and several hundred Canadians and Indians. Confidently, Burgoyne advanced southward to attack Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. On July 6, after a 4-day siege, the fort fell.

Moving on southward through Skenesboro, Fort Ann, and Fort Edward, Burgoyne was impeded by rough terrain and the delaying tactics of Gen. Philip Schuyler, then commanding American troops in the Northern Department. Schuyler's troops felled trees, destroyed bridges, and burned crops before the path of the British.

Time and the tide of events now began to run against the British. St. Leger halted his advance down the Mohawk Valley to besiege Fort Stanwix. In the battle of Oriskany, August 6, he stopped an American column marching to aid the fort. But learning that a strong relief force under Gen. Benedict Arnold was on its way, he raised the siege and retreated toward Canada.

Even more serious was the fate of the detachment Burgoyne sent to Bennington, Vt. On August 16 John Stark's and Seth Warner's New England militia shattered this force, inflicting about 800 casualties.

Despite these setbacks, Burgoyne decided to sever his communications with Canada and risk all on a push to Albany. On September 13 he crossed to the west bank of the Hudson at Saratoga (now Schuylerville) and began marching southward toward Albany.

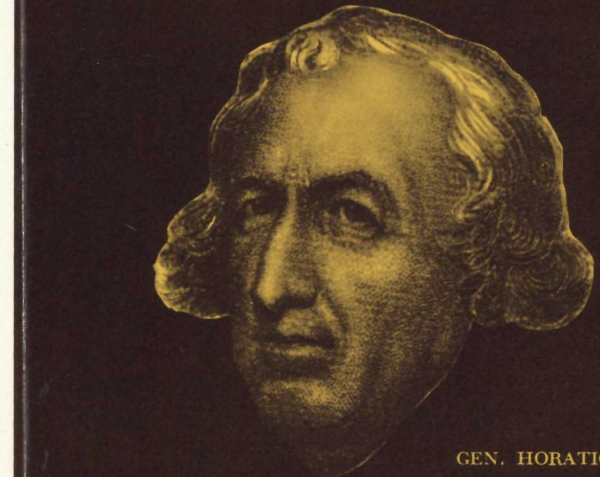
Four miles north of the village of Stillwater, Burgoyne came upon the Americans, 9,000 strong. In command now was Gen. Horatio Gates, who had replaced Schuyler. The Americans were entrenched on Bemis Heights, a strong position where the road to Albany squeezed through a defile between the hills and river, as does today's U.S. 4.

American artillery on the heights and in redoubts along the Hudson commanded the road and river. Burgoyne's heavily burdened army had to pass through this defile to get to Albany, for the surrounding country was rough and roadless. Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a Polish military engineer serving with the Americans, had chosen and fortified the site.

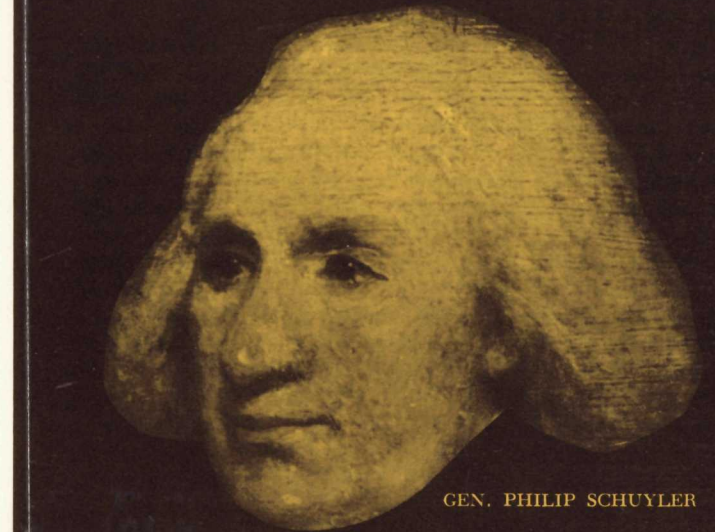
Burgoyne had either to run the gauntlet between the hills and the river, thus risking destruction, or drive the Americans out of their fortifications. He chose to fight.



GEN. JOHN BURGOYNE



GEN. HORATIO GATES



GEN. PHILIP SCHUYLER

THE BATTLE OPENS AT FREEMAN FARM

On September 19 the Royal Army advanced upon the American camp in three separate columns. Two of them headed through the heavy forests covering the region; the other, composed of German troops, marched down the river road. The British objective was to occupy a strong position from which to conduct field operations against the American fortifications.

American scouts operating on the east side of the Hudson detected Burgoyne's army in motion. When advised of this, Gates ordered Col. Daniel Morgan's corps to reconnoiter the enemy's march. About 12:30 p.m. a detachment of Morgan's men brushed with the advance guard of Burgoyne's center column in a clearing known as the Freeman Farm, about 1 mile north of the American camp.

Action was renewed after a brief lull, and for more than 3 hours fighting swayed back and forth over the farm. Repeatedly the British regiments had to re-form their lines and charge with fixed bayonets, only to be stopped short by the deadly fire of American riflemen, who used natural cover to great advantage. It was European versus frontier tactics; and in this forested, ravine-slashed terrain irregular riflemen proved superior to the formal line of battle.

On the advice of Benedict Arnold, American reinforcements were placed where they threatened to outflank the British right. At this crucial point, German reinforcements arrived from the river road. Hurling them against the American right, Burgoyne steadied the wavering British line and gradually forced the Americans to withdraw. Except for this arrival and near exhaustion of the American's ammunition, Burgoyne might have been defeated that day.

Though he held the immediate field of battle, Burgoyne's advance had been stopped about 1 mile north of the American line and his army roughly treated. Shaken by this "victory," Burgoyne ordered his troops to entrench in the vicinity of the Freeman Farm and awaited help from Clinton, who was preparing to move toward Albany from New York City.

Nearly 3 weeks of anxious waiting brought no aid from the south. True, Clinton did capture the forts along the Hudson on October 6. But Burgoyne did not know this, nor was Clinton's distant success an immediate threat to Gates.

THE DRIVE ON BEMIS HEIGHTS

By now Burgoyne's situation was critical. Faced by a growing American army (4,000 militiamen had heeded Gates' call), without hope of help from the south, and supplies rapidly diminishing, the British army became weaker each passing day. Burgoyne had to choose between advancing or retreating. He decided to risk a second engagement.

On October 7 Burgoyne ordered a reconnaissance-in-force to test the American left flank. Aply led, and supported by 10 cannon, a force of 1,500 men moved out of the British camp.

After marching southwesterly about three-quarters of a mile, the troops deployed in a clearing on the Barber farm. The larger part of the British front faced an open field, but

both flanks rested in woods, thus exposing them to surprise attack by the enemy.

As the Royal Army advanced, the American scouts retired and the alarm was beaten in Gates' camp. About 3 p.m. the Americans attacked in three columns under Colonel Morgan, Gen. Ebenezer Learned, and Gen. Enoch Poor. Repeatedly the British line was broken, then rallied, and both flanks were severely punished and driven back.

At this critical point, Gen. Simon Fraser, who commanded the British right rode among his men in a desperate effort to encourage a stand and cover the developing withdrawal. In the fog of battle, Fraser was shot, possibly by a member of a party detailed by Colonel Morgan for that purpose. Mortally wounded, Fraser was borne from the field.

Before the enemy's flanks could be rallied, Arnold—who had been relieved of field command after a quarrel with Gates—rode onto the field and led Learned's brigade against the German troops holding the British center. Under tremendous pressure from all sides, the Germans joined a general withdrawal into the fortifications on the Freeman Farm.

Within an hour after the opening clash, Burgoyne lost 8 cannon and more than 400 officers and men. Flushed with success, the Americans believed victory was near. Led by Arnold, one column launched a series of savage attacks on the Balcarres Redoubt, a powerful position on the Freeman Farm.

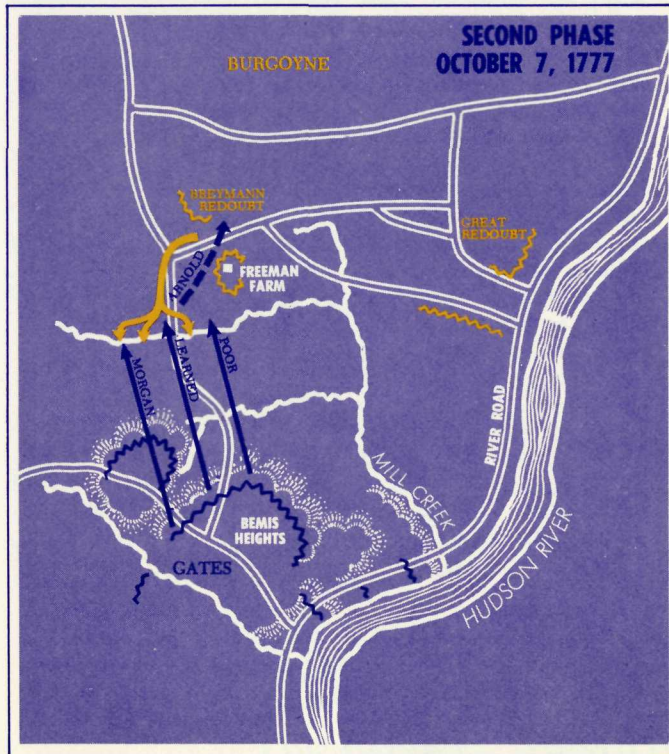
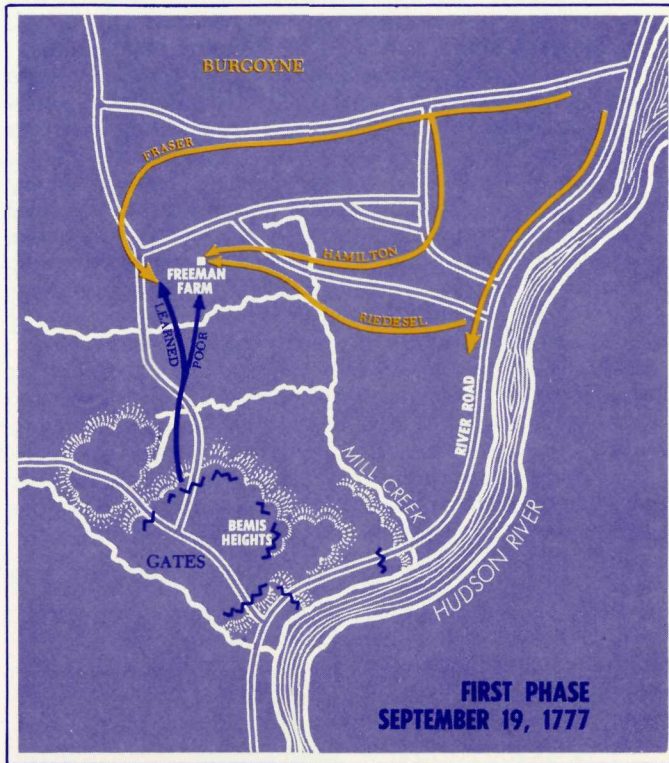
After repeated attacks failed to carry this position, Arnold wheeled his horse and, dashing through the cross-fire of both armies, spurred northwest to the Breyman Redoubt. He arrived as American troops began to assault the front and left of the fortification. Arnold joined them in the final surge that overwhelmed the redoubt. Upon entering the work, he was wounded in the leg. Had he died there, posterity would have known few names brighter than that of Benedict Arnold.

Darkness ended the day's fighting and saved Burgoyne from immediate disaster.

RETREAT AND SURRENDER

That night Burgoyne withdrew his troops behind the Great Redoubt, which protected the high ground and river flats at the northeast corner of the battlefield. The next night, after burying General Fraser in the redoubt, the British began their retreat northward. Burgoyne had suffered 1,000 casualties in the fighting of the past 3 weeks; American losses numbered less than 500.

After a miserable march in mud and rain, Burgoyne's troops took refuge in a fortified camp on the heights at Saratoga. There an American force that had grown to nearly 20,000 men surrounded his exhausted army. In the face of these great odds Burgoyne was forced to surrender on October 17, 1777. By the terms of the Convention of Saratoga, Burgoyne's depleted army, some 6,000 men, marched out of their camp "with the Honors of War," and stacked their arms along the west bank of the Hudson. Thus was gained one of the most decisive victories in American and world history.





A GUIDE TO SARATOGA BATTLEFIELD

For a tour of the battlefield we suggest that after stopping at the visitor center you follow the auto route which begins at the south end of the parking area.

1. FREEMAN FARM OVERLOOK. In the fields to the east occurred the major fighting of September 19. Col. Daniel Morgan's Virginia riflemen opened the clash shortly before noon by firing on the advance guard of Burgoyne's center column from their post in the Freeman House, a stout cabin of logs. Toward dusk it appeared that the British would be driven from the field, but the timely arrival of German troops saved them. Shortly after, with ammunition running low and darkness setting in, the Americans retired to their camp on Bemis Heights, about 1 mile south.

2. NEILSON FARM. Both before and after the battle John Neilson farmed these heights. His restored home stands today as it did when American staff officers used it for quarters. The high ground here takes its name from Jotham Bemis, who kept a tavern at the foot of the hill.

Stakes outline the American fortified line that extended toward the southeast. The other half of the line ran southwestly along the Quaker Springs Road and the ridge south of the D.A.R. Monument. The ridge across the vale from the parking area marks the British commander's objective on October 7.

3. AMERICAN RIVER FORTIFICATIONS. This strongpoint was the key to the American strategy in 1777. Infantrymen and cannon here, with batteries along the near riverbank, commanded the road, the flood plain, and the river, closing off the Hudson Valley route to Albany.

This powerful position forced Burgoyne to move through rough, wooded terrain west of the valley to attack the main American line on Bemis Heights. The result was the clash on September 19.

4. CHATFIELD FARM. An American outpost placed on this ridge, the site of Asa Chatfield's farm, could observe any advance against the center and left of their line. Beyond the ridge before you is the Middle Ravine, where pickets of both armies were posted.

5. BARBER WHEATFIELD. In this field and in one farther west (beyond the first row of trees), the Americans on October 7 intercepted 1,500 British and Germans advancing southwest in an attempt to outflank the American left. Fierce fighting developed, and as American reinforcements rushed in, the British were forced to withdraw to fortifications on the Freeman Farm. Northwest of this point is the spot where General Fraser was mortally wounded while attempting to rally his men.

6. BALCARRES REDOUBT (Freeman Farm). After the September 19 fighting, Burgoyne hurriedly constructed a fortified line from the river to Breymann Redoubt. The strongest part of his line was located on the Freeman Farm. Here the British built a redoubt 500 yards long and 12 to 14 feet high, manned by 1,500 men and mounting 8 cannon. Stakes outline the redoubt, named for Lord Balcarres, one of Burgoyne's officers.

On October 7 Burgoyne's flanking column from the Barber Farm withdrew into these works under pressure. Benedict Arnold led Poor's brigade and parts of Learned's and Brig. Gen. John Paterson's commands in a series of costly and unsuccessful attacks against this work.

7. BREYMANN REDOUBT. The path leads to the location of the right anchor of the British line. This redoubt was a single line of log breastworks about 200 yards long and from 7 to 8 feet high, covering the British right flank and the road to Quaker Springs. Stakes also outline the extent of this fortification. Canadians posted in two log buildings defended the ground between the Breymann and Balcarres Redoubts.

While Arnold led the attacks on the Balcarres Redoubt, other American troops prepared to attack this redoubt. Driving the Canadians from their position, they launched an assault against the riflemen moving against the flank and rear of this work. As Learned, Morgan, and Col. John Brooks led their men over the front of the breastwork, Arnold entered from the rear. He fell with a leg wound as the position was captured.

8. BURGoyNE HEADQUARTERS. The path leads to the site of Burgoyne's headquarters, established after the September 19 action. This area was the center of command and camp life between engagements. Burgoyne chose the site because of a nearby spring.

9. GREAT REDOUBT. On this hill and two others to the north, the British built a system of fortifications, known as the Great Redoubt, to guard the hospital, artillery park and supplies on the river flat, and the boat bridge crossing the river. Burgoyne withdrew his army to this vicinity during the night of October 7. The dying Fraser was brought here to a house near the base of these hills.

After Fraser's burial on the night of October 8, Burgoyne began his retreat through rain and mud, with the Americans following closely. Encamping in Saratoga on October 10, the British were surrounded by an overwhelming force of American troops. A week later Burgoyne surrendered to Gates, realizing that further resistance would be futile.

To proceed to the Schuyler House from this point, return to U.S. 4 and turn left. Schuylerville is 8 miles north.



THE SCHUYLER HOUSE

Situated in Schuylerville (historic Saratoga), this estate was the country home of Gen. Philip Schuyler both before and after the battle. When the British retreated to Saratoga, they burned the buildings of General Schuyler's estate, fearing that the Americans would use them for cover during an attack. The British and American commissioners who drew up surrender terms met on Schuyler's property.

The present house, erected in 1777 shortly after Burgoyne's surrender, was the center of Schuyler's extensive farming and milling operations in the Saratoga area. The house and 25 acres of land were acquired for the park in 1950. The National Park Service restored the house, and it is now being furnished and operated by the Old Saratoga Historical Association of Schuylerville. A small admission fee is charged to help in acquiring furnishings.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The park's entrances lie 30 miles north of Albany, N.Y., on U.S. 4 and N.Y. 32. Taxi service is available from Saratoga Springs, Mechanicville, and Schuylerville.

The visitor center is open all year from 8 a.m. to dusk, weather permitting. Both the John Neilson House and the Freeman House are usually open during summer, and park roads are open from about April 1 to November 30 as weather permits. The Schuyler House is open from late June to Labor Day.

ADMINISTRATION

Saratoga National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the natural, historical, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of all the people.

A superintendent, whose address is R.F.D. 1, Box 113-C, Stillwater, New York 12170, is in immediate charge of the park.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

Cover: This engraving of an American gun crew limbered up is taken from a powder horn made in New York State.

U. S. Department of the Interior



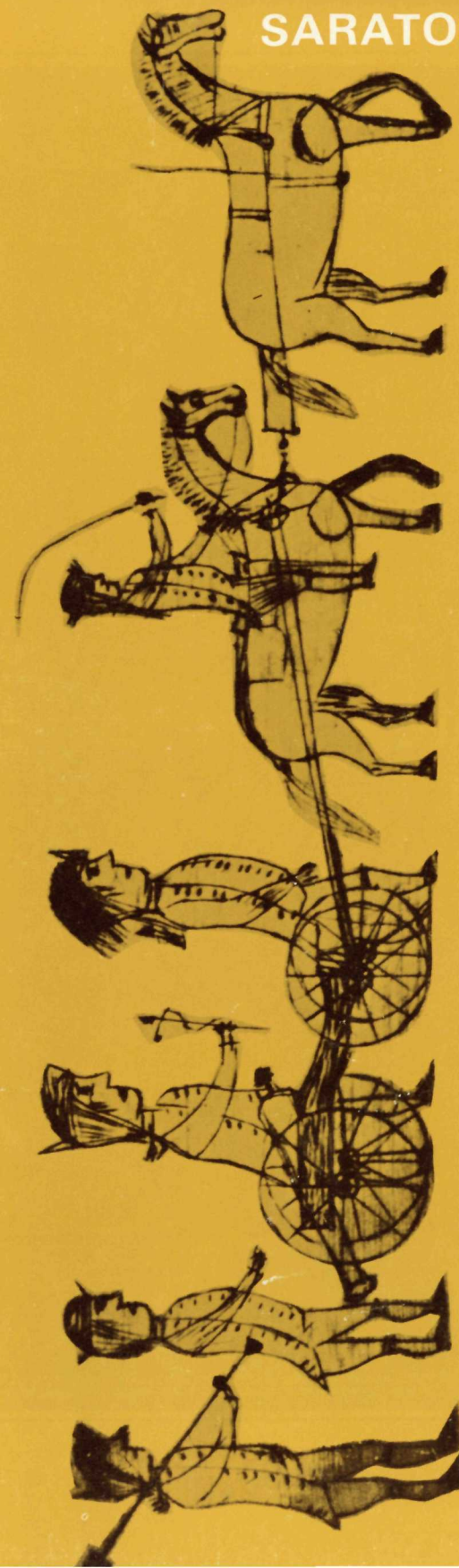
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