

valley forge

Of all the places associated with America's War for Independence, no name conveys more suffering, sacrifice, and triumph than Valley Forge. No battles were fought here, no bayonet charges or artillery bombardments took place, but during the winter of 1777-78 some 3,000 American soldiers died here nonetheless. Famished, naked, and ill, Gen. George Washington's untrained and disorganized "rabble in arms" struggled against cold, hunger, and disease. But instead of dissolving, as might have been expected, the American army under Washington's leadership emerged from Valley Forge a better fighting force than ever.

The ragged, hungry Continentals who staggered into this camp on December 19, 1777, were short of food, clothing, and supplies of all kinds. Officers and men alike endured the winter as best they could in hope that spring would bring a lessening of their trials. Both accepted their tragic plight with extraordinary forbearance and a sense of humor, often tinged with bitter irony.

Washington's 11,000 soldiers were mostly unfit for service when he took them into winter quarters at Valley Forge. They had experienced a series of fruitless marches and costly skirmishes. They had failed to keep the British out of Philadelphia, the patriot capital. From this camp, named for a small iron mill which the British had destroyed, the American army could defend itself and also observe the approaches to Philadelphia. Approximately 900 log huts were raised. Fortifications were thrown up to protect the camp and command the nearby roads and water courses.

The soldiers did not just huddle in their cabins out of the cold; they were rigorously drilled and disciplined by "Baron" Frederick von Steuben who, even if he did magnify his own European rank and title, was nevertheless a drillmaster of surpassing skill. When spring came the army was ready for the field as never before. At

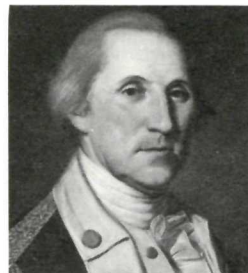
Monmouth, N.J., on June 28, 1778, it made its debut as a skilled fighting force able to meet the British on even terms for the first time. The encampment that had begun as an ordeal had ended as a success.



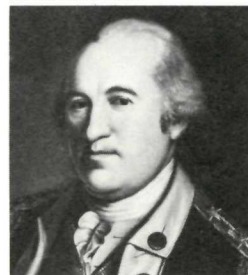
"To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lie upon, without shoes . . . without a house or hut to cover them until those could be built, and submitting without a murmur, is a proof of patience and obedience which, in my opinion, can scarcely be paralleled."

—George Washington at Valley Forge, December 23, 1777

George Washington



Gen. Frederick von Steuben



How to Reach the Park

Entrances to the park from the major highways are well signed.

Traveling eastbound or westbound via the Pennsylvania Turnpike, take Exit 24

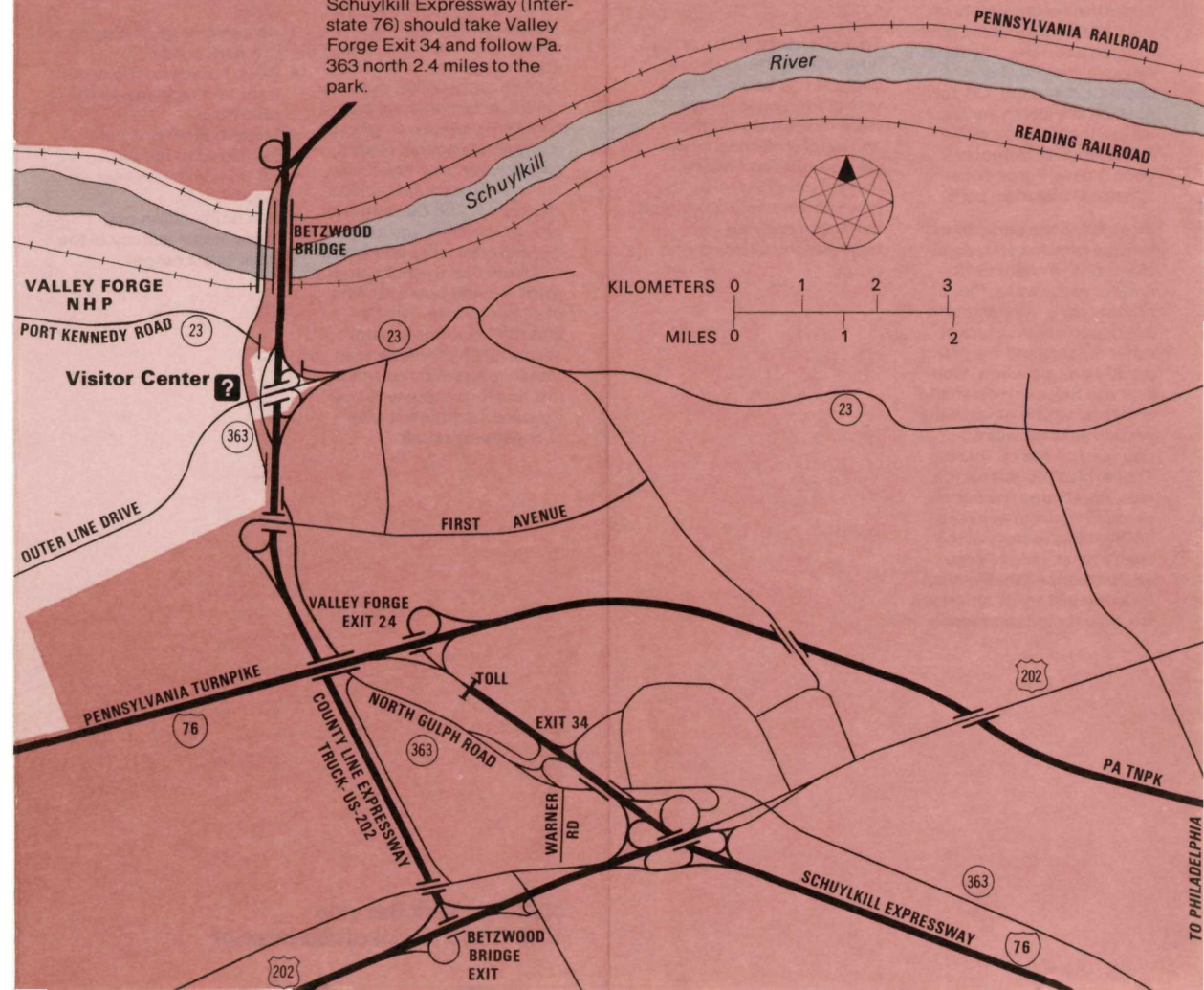
(Valley Forge). Stay in the right lane for the toll booth and then immediately take the next right (Exit 34) onto Pa. 363 north. This will take you to the park visitor center, located at the intersection of Pa. 363 and 23.

Westbound travelers on the Schuylkill Expressway (Interstate 76) should take Valley Forge Exit 34 and follow Pa. 363 north 2.4 miles to the park.

Travelers on U.S. 202 must take the Valley Forge-Betzwood Bridge exit (truck route U.S. 202 north) and proceed 2 miles to the Valley Forge exit (Pa. 23 west). Turn right at the exit and follow Pa. 23 to the park entrance and visitor center.

Rail transportation to the park is available via the

Reading Railroad from Philadelphia. For information stop at the Reading Terminal at 12th and Market Streets in Philadelphia or call (Area Code 215) 922-6530.



About Valley Forge National Historical Park

The first "tourist" to visit Valley Forge was George Washington himself, some 10 years after the 1777-78 encampment. Interest in the site continued to grow throughout the 19th century, and in 1903 the State of Pennsylvania established the area as a State park under the responsibility of the Valley Forge Park Commission and, later, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. On July 4, 1976, the 200th anniversary of the passage of the Declaration of Independence, Valley Forge became a national historical park.

Included in the park are extensive remains and reconstructions of major forts, lines of earthworks, the artillery park, Washington's headquarters, quarters of other officers and the grand parade ground where General von Steuben rebuilt the army and where news of the French alliance was announced on May 6, 1778. These, plus reconstructed huts, handsome memorials, monuments, and markers, help to tell the story of the men who at Valley Forge wrote an imperishable chapter in the history of America's struggle for independence.

A dominant feature of the park is the massive National Memorial Arch bearing on one face the inscription: "Naked and starving as they are, we cannot enough admire the incomparable patience and fidelity of the soldiery. Washington at Valley Forge, February 16, 1778."

To make the best use of your time while at the park, we suggest that you start your visit at the visitor center. Here interesting exhibits and helpful attendants will tell you what and where things happened. Also, the principal park tour, shown on the accompanying map, begins at the visitor center.

Valley Forge National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, is in charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

Please . . .

- For your safety, and the safety of others, drive carefully and observe the posted speed limits. Park roads are narrow and, during heavy visitor use, often congested.
- Do not stop your car on any of the park roads and park only in designated areas.
- All vehicles must stay on the park roads.
- Keep horses on the horse trails and bicycles on the bike trails.
- Skate boarding is not permitted in the park.
- All dogs must be kept on leashes.
- If in doubt about any recreational activity in the park, see a ranger.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

