



## 1777-78 Winter Encampment

On December 19, 1777, more than 12,000 soldiers and hundreds of civilians marched into Valley Forge. They began to build what would become the fourth largest city in America, with 1,500 log huts and two miles of fortifications. Lasting six months, the encampment was as diverse as any city. Residents were free and enslaved, wealthy and impoverished, speakers of several languages, and followers of several religions.

ENCAMPMENT ILLUSTRATION—NPS / KEITH ROCCO; BUTTON—NPS

## “We were determined to persevere.”

Private Joseph Plumb Martin, shown above with his journal, wrote these words exemplifying the resolve of the Continental Army. In this third winter of the eight-year American Revolutionary War, soldiers continued to face hunger, sickness, and hardship. Their tenacity and triumph in the face of this adversity form the inspiring story of Valley Forge.

In late 1777 the British occupied the patriot capital of Philadelphia. The Continental Congress fled to York, Pennsylvania, leaving General George Washington—leader of the new country’s army—to keep alive the hope of independence.

Washington decided to have his troops winter at Valley Forge, a day’s march from Philadelphia. They could train and recoup from the year’s battles while winter weather, impassable roads, and scant supplies stopped the fighting.

Even before Congress fled the capital, the leaders had difficulty supporting the war effort. They were unable to fully supply the army, which had been plagued by inadequate food, clothing, and equipment since war broke out. Conditions reached their worst at Valley Forge. As Private Martin wrote, “We are now in a truly forlorn condition, no clothing, no provision and as disheartened as can be.”

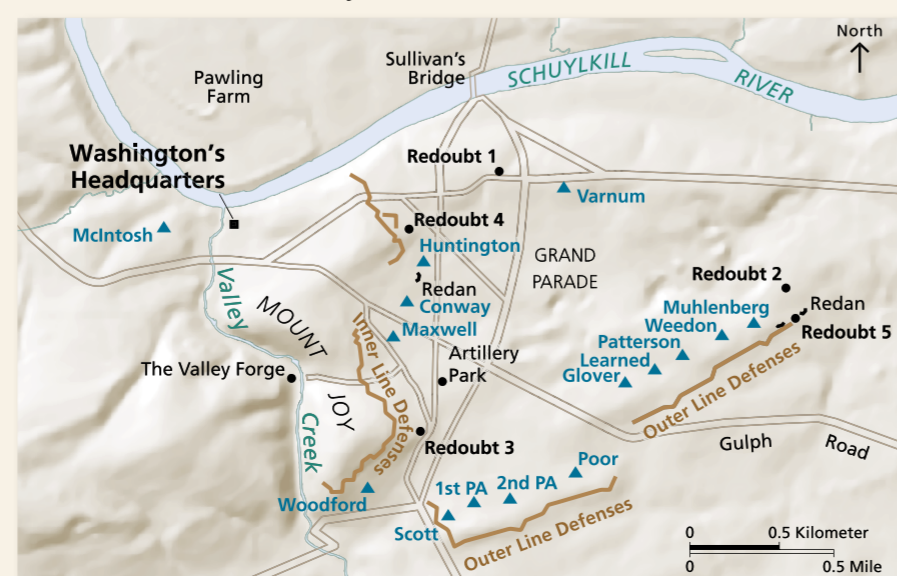
Concentrating the soldiers in one vast camp made sense strategically because they could

protect the countryside and be better able to resist a British attack. But it became costly when diseases like influenza and typhoid spread through the camp. Disease killed nearly 2,000 people during the encampment.

As tenacious as the soldiers, Washington inspired them through his own resilience and sense of duty. He persuaded Congress to reform the supply system and end crippling shortages. He attracted experienced officers to the cause, including former Prussian officer Baron Friedrich von Steuben, who was given the job of training the troops. Von Steuben taught the soldiers new military skills and to fight as a more unified army. These reforms in supply systems and fighting tactics, along with reforms in military hygiene and army organization, became the foundation of the modern United States Army.

In May, word came to General Washington that the long-sought alliance with France was secured. The British soon evacuated Philadelphia and headed north to defend their stronghold in New York City. On June 19, 1778, Washington’s troops marched out in pursuit. The Continental Army departed camp as a unified army capable of defeating the British and winning American independence. The war would last five more years, but Valley Forge was a key turning point.

Private Martin explained why: “We had engaged in the defense of our injured country and were willing, nay, we were determined to persevere.”



Why Valley Forge? It was near the patriot capital of Philadelphia, which was occupied by the British that winter, but far enough away to be safe from surprise attack. The terrain formed a triangle of defense, which the army strengthened by constructing defensive lines. In the end, the British did not attack.

Historic trace (road)  
 Brigade encampments in 1777-78

## Out of Many, One (E Pluribus Unum)

The new country did not have a standing army when the revolution began, so General Washington had to organize one while fighting the war itself. Part of his challenge was to shift soldiers’ allegiance from their home states to the United States. Another challenge was to train the entire army to use the same fighting tactics, which allowed the officers to organize a more unified fighting force.

The intertwined letters of the uniform button symbolize these transformations, as does the motto “Out of Many, One.” In 1776 American leaders started thinking about using its Latin translation, *E pluribus unum*, as the new country’s motto. It still appears on the Great Seal of the United States and remains a motto worthy of soldiers’ perseverance at Valley Forge.



## Recovery and Honor

After the winter encampment, General Jedediah Huntington called the valley “a starved country.”

The encampment left behind a ruined land. Soldiers had cleared forests from many miles around for wood to construct their huts and to build fires for warmth and cooking. They also had requisitioned farm animals and supplies from local farmers, leaving some families with little food for themselves or to sell. Winter’s constant rains and the activity of thousands of people turned the fields into deep mud. The fields were so spoiled that no crops could be planted that summer.

Soon after the army left, farmers quickly took apart the huts and reclaimed the wood. They also plowed down most of the defensive earthworks that soldiers had so laboriously built. By the next summer, farmers were growing crops again where the encampment had once stood. General Washington returned to the site in 1787. A farmer himself, he noted with pleasure that agriculture had recovered from the occupation.

A century later, citizens began the ongoing work of preserving the land where the encampment had stood. This commemorative landscape embodies the peace that the Continental Army earned for us, and honors their sacrifice and triumph at Valley Forge.

# Grateful Americans will come to this shrine of quiet valor, this forge of our Republic's iron core.

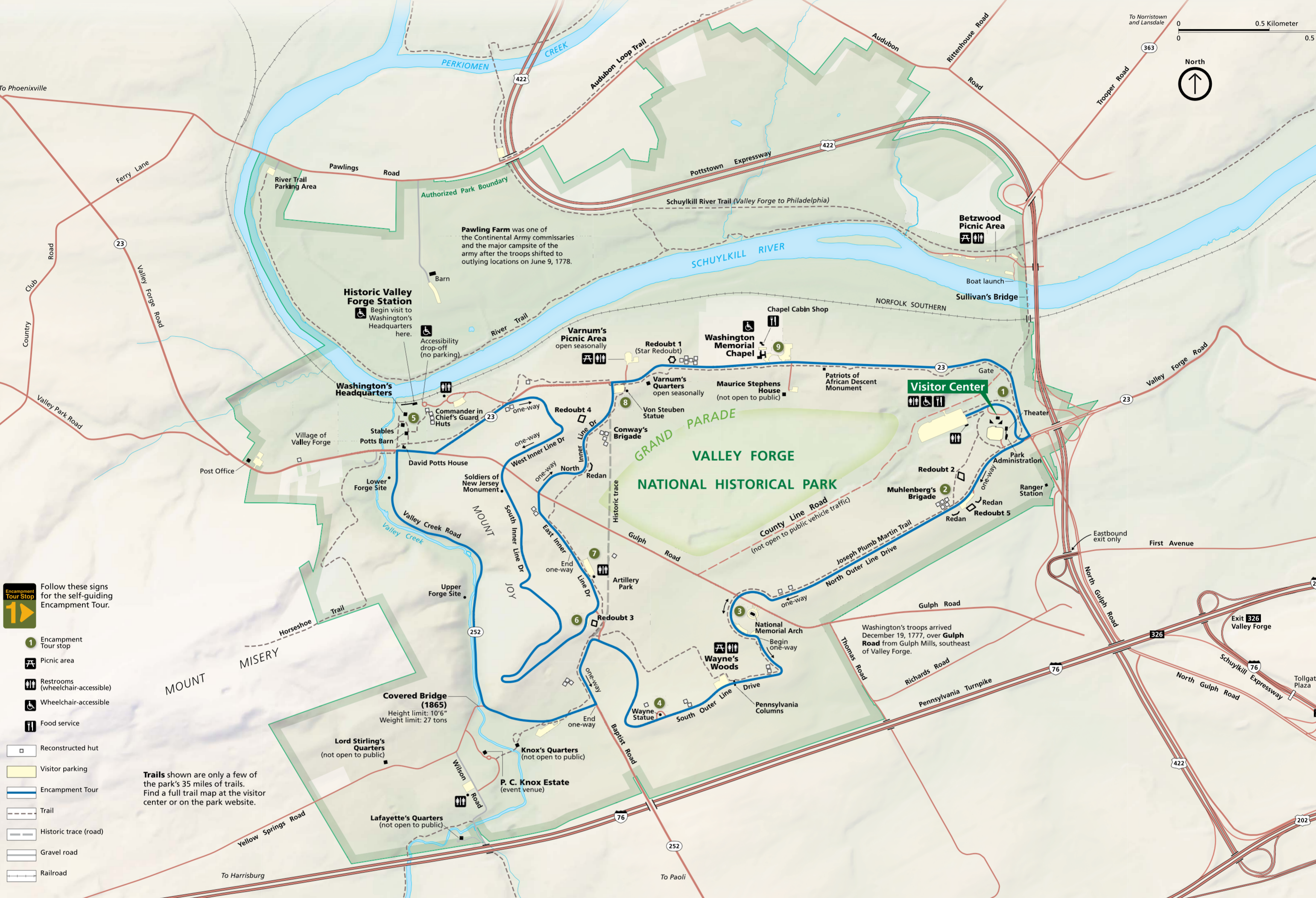
President Gerald R. Ford at Valley Forge, July 4, 1976



Visitor Center | Muhlenberg's Brigade | National Memorial Arch | Wayne Statue | Washington's Headquarters and office | Redoubt 3 | Artillery Park | Varnum's Quarters | Washington Memorial Chapel

## Explore Valley Forge on the Self-Guiding Encampment Tour

- 1 Begin at the Valley Forge Visitor Center. Its exhibits and film introduce the park story. Visit the store, which has books, souvenirs, and snacks. Open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.
- 2 Reconstructed army huts on the site of General Muhlenberg's brigade give glimpses into soldiers' lives. A nearby redoubt (a type of defensive earthwork) highlights the importance of camp security.
- 3 Dedicated in 1917, the National Memorial Arch honors soldiers' perseverance and expresses hope for future generations. Take time to read the inscriptions and contemplate the classical symbols.
- 4 This statue stands near the site of a camp of Pennsylvania soldiers led by General Anthony Wayne. The general seems to look toward his home, Waynesboro, five miles away.
- 5 Stop at the 1911 Valley Forge Station for exhibits about the headquarters and Washington's leadership. Then visit the original stone house (above) that served as residence and office for Washington and his staff. Stroll around the grounds, which have displays about the old ironworks and Washington's guard, and an impressive statue of the general himself.
- 6 The drive to Redoubt 3 passes trenches built for defense on the left of Inner Line Drive. The redoubt anchored the south end of the inner, or second, line of defense.
- 7 General Henry Knox kept most of the cannon here so they could be moved quickly to any threatened area of the encampment. Artillery repair shops were located here too.
- 8 General James Varnum shared this house with its owners during part of the encampment. His brigade included many African American soldiers, both free and enslaved.
- 9 This chapel, still an active Episcopal parish, honors soldiers of the American Revolution. The Chapel Cabin Shop behind the church sells souvenirs and serves lunch.



## Preserving Valley Forge for the Future



Citizens joined together in the 1870s to preserve the inspirational story of Valley Forge—a story that continues to inspire us today. The park landscape, with its vistas and monuments, was

created to honor the soldiers' perseverance. The tradition of citizen involvement continues. Volunteers and partners help with the ongoing work of preservation and interpretation. Thousands of people invest their time in the park. (The family at left is removing invasive plants.) They share the vision of Valley Forge National Historical Park as a place of commemoration, inspiration, refuge, and pleasure.

## Natural Treasures

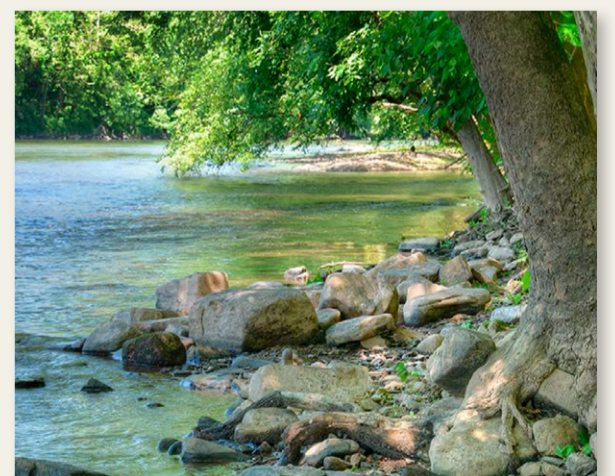
This urban park protects remarkable natural features. A park ranger and volunteers (right) show the crayfish they have found in Valley Creek. This spring-fed stream also supports a healthy trout population despite its urban location. Upstream neighbors and towns and passionate citizens work hard to keep it healthy. The park's tall-grass meadows are the most extensive in the region. Forests and wetlands support a wide range of plants and animals.



The quiet north side of the park, across the Schuylkill River (right), was not so quiet during the encampment. The army used the area to store supplies, pasture animals, and operate a farmers' market that added fresh food to soldiers' rations. Major General John Sullivan supervised construction of a bridge across the river to join this area with the main camp.

## Across the River

The south side became increasingly foul during the encampment. General Washington ordered the army to move across the river to "good air and good water." Here they completed preparations for a new campaign. After the encampment, farmers returned and prospered, especially once a canal and railroad were built in the 1800s. But over the years, upstream mines polluted the river. By the 1940s, it had turned black. Cleanup included building immense stone embankments to help filter the water. They remain, now protecting ponds that help make the park's north side a natural treasure. Today you can walk



quiet trails, watch wildlife, and enjoy access to the river.

## Plan Your Visit

**Valley Forge National Historical Park has miles of paved trails linking encampment sites, monuments, and other features. Enjoy exploring the park on your own or with a park ranger or other guide.**

**Trails** Valley Forge has 35 miles of trails, including the paved Joseph Plumb Martin Trail. Exhibits and historic plaques explain aspects of park history. Pick up trail maps and guides at the visitor center and trailheads, or view them on the park website.

**Auto Tour** Follow the 10-mile Encampment Tour (described above and shown on the map). The Encampment Store in the visitor center sells an audio version of the tour.

**Cell Phone Tour** Hear the stories of Valley Forge and learn about its natural history too. Pick up a guide at the visitor center or online, then call 484-396-1018 to reach the tour menu.

**Ranger Tours** At the visitor center, ask about the ranger-led tours, offered seasonally. On the ranger-led walk to the Muhlenberg Brigade camp, you will hear about camp life and the war, and tour the

huts and defensive earthworks known as redoubts. Rangers are often present at the Washington Headquarters area.

**Trolley Tour** Available seasonally, an open-air trolley tour gives you a comfortable way to learn about the park. Tours leave from the visitor center and make extended stops at the Muhlenberg Brigade and Washington's Headquarters. 90 minutes; fee. Tickets at The Encampment Store in the visitor center, call 610-624-5010, or go to [encampmentstore.org](http://encampmentstore.org).

**Remember, your safety is your responsibility.**

**Park Rules** Camping is not allowed. • Skates, skateboards, and inline skates are prohibited. • Bicycles must stay on marked trails and park roads. • Do not travel crosscountry between trails and across fields. • Do not engage in recreational activity near historic buildings. • Metal detectors, remotely piloted air-

craft like drones, and alcohol are prohibited. • Park in designated areas. • Pets must be leashed and attended; dispose of their waste in trash cans. • For firearms and other regulations check the park website. • Plants, animals, and natural or cultural features are protected by federal law.

**Picnicking** The picnic areas at Varnum's, Wayne's Woods, and Betwood are first-come, first-served. Groups of 30 or more require permits. Propane and charcoal grills are allowed only in these designated areas. Open fires are prohibited. Betwood has a few charcoal grills. Go to the park website for other details and regulations.

**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 park website.

## More Information

Valley Forge National Historical Park  
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King of Prussia, PA 19406  
610-783-1000  
Para Español 484-396-1015  
[www.nps.gov/vafo](http://www.nps.gov/vafo)

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