

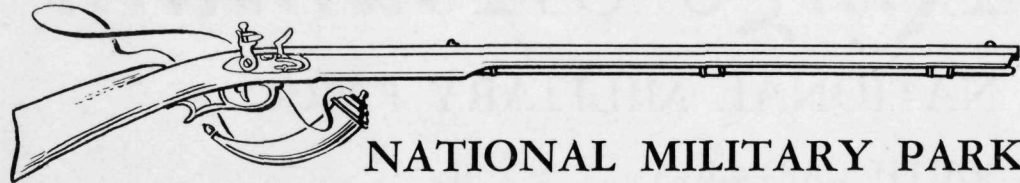
# *Kings Mountain*

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

SOUTH CAROLINA



# KINGS MOUNTAIN



## NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

*Climax of a victorious rising of American frontiersmen against British and Tories in the Carolina foothills in 1780 which foreshadowed the British military defeats of 1781*

KINGS MOUNTAIN, the fierce attack of American frontiersmen on October 7, 1780, against Lord Cornwallis' scouting force under Maj. Patrick Ferguson, was an unexpected battle in the foothills of northwestern South Carolina. This battle resulted from a sudden uprising of hardy southern Appalachian mountaineers for the protection of their homes and people from the threat of Tory invasion under British leadership. The action at Kings Mountain was clearly unforeseen in the grand British plan to subdue the South in a final effort to end the Revolution. This engagement in the Southern Piedmont delayed and seriously halted the movement of Britain's Southern Campaign.

Kings Mountain forced Cornwallis to withdraw from North Carolina, placed him on the defensive, and delayed his northward march until January 1781. It brought an immediate rise in patriot spirit in the Southern Piedmont which completely unnerved the Tory forces in that region. Finally, it led to the renewing of American resistance which resulted in the American victory at Yorktown in 1781.

### *The Southern Campaign*

The extraordinary action at Kings Mountain occurred during one of the darkest periods of the Revolution. A major change in British military strategy had again shifted the scene of fighting to the South in 1778. Faced by a discouraging Northern Campaign, and

assuming that reported Loyalist sympathies of the South would bring about victory there, the British war ministry undertook to conquer the South.

Without effective resistance, the British Southern Campaign swept unchecked through Georgia and part of South Carolina during 1778-79. The surrender of Gen. Benjamin Lincoln's American army at Charleston, in May 1780, greatly strengthened the British position. Soon most of South Carolina, except a few districts in the Piedmont, was overrun by British and Royalist forces directed by Cornwallis. His plans for an immediate invasion of North Carolina were upset temporarily by the advance of a new American army under General Gates. Near Camden, on August 16, 1780, Gates suffered a disastrous defeat, again leaving South Carolina and the route northward open to the British. Cornwallis soon occupied Charlotte, N.C.

### *Cornwallis Threatens the Frontier*

Only one Southern region near the path of Cornwallis' northward march remained undisturbed by the course of the war. It lay in the foothills and ranges of the Southern Appalachians stretching through northwestern South Carolina, western North Carolina, and into what is now eastern Tennessee. Here, the independent mountain yeomen, largely of Scotch-Irish descent, were establishing a new frontier. They were protecting their crude homes from the nearer

threat of the border Indians and were little concerned with the war on the seaboard. But their free and comparatively peaceful existence was soon to be disturbed by a threat of direct aggression.

That threat came from Ferguson, of Cornwallis' command, who, after Camden, had been ordered to operate in the Carolina Piedmont to suppress the Whig opposition remaining there and to arouse the back-country Tories. In September 1780, he undertook a raid against Gilbert Town, a Whig outpost in the North Carolina mountains, near the present town of Rutherfordton. Fearful of such an invasion were the border leaders, Col. Isaac Shelby, of Sullivan County, and Col. John Sevier, of Washington County, N.C. (both now in Tennessee). They hurried to the Watauga settlements and called for volunteers to defeat the British leader.

Upon reaching Gilbert Town, Ferguson sent his famed threat across the mountains to the backwoodsmen. He warned them "that if they did not desist from their opposition to the British arms, and take protection under his standard, he would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword."

### *Rising of the Mountain Men*

To the freedom-loving frontier leaders, the threat became a challenge which strengthened their determination to destroy the invader. Thus spurred, they assembled quickly—in hunting clothes, with knapsack, blanket, and long hunting rifle, most of them mounted, but some afoot. Meeting at Sycamore Shoals, near the present Elizabethton, Tenn., the mountaineers on September 26 began their ride southeastwardly in a swift 12-day pursuit of Ferguson. Having been warned meanwhile at Gilbert Town by British agents, he was then withdrawing into South Carolina. Joining the forces of Shelby and Sevier were Joseph McDowell's men and the Virginians under Col. William Campbell. As the expedition marched through the Catawba Valley, it was enlarged by the North Carolina border fighters under Benjamin Cleveland.

At the Cowpens in upper South Carolina, the expedition, now under the command of

Colonel Campbell, was joined on October 6 by further volunteers under local Whig leaders. Included were the forces of William Chronicle, James Williams, Edward Lacey, and James Hawthorne. Recruits brought definite word of Ferguson's whereabouts near Kings Mountain. There, in a final council of war, were selected some 900 stalwart fighting men, all mounted. They immediately moved through the night upon the position of Ferguson's provincial Corps and Tory militia 1,104 strong, now encamped atop the Kings Mountain spur.

### *Battle of Kings Mountain*

Pushing northeastwardly through the cold night rain, the expedition forded Broad River at dawn in the continuing downpour. But by midday on October 7 the rain had ceased. As the frontiersmen neared Kings Mountain, their scouts confirmed Ferguson's position there. Quickly the mountain leaders agreed upon a final plan of attack, which was to surround the ridge upon which Ferguson camped and to close in gradually from all sides.

After dismounting and passing through Hambright's Gap, some three-quarters of a mile west of Kings Mountain, the frontier detachments moved rapidly into their pre-assigned positions around the ridge. Seeking cover in the wooded ravines, the Whigs advanced, Campbell and McDowell hurriedly passing through the gap at the southwestern end of the ridge. They took positions respectively on the southeastern and eastern slopes. Sevier formed along the western slope, while Shelby took position on the northwestern slope. Meanwhile, the other Whig detachments were forming along the bottom of the ravine leading around the northern and northeastern base of the ridge.

Ferguson's main camp was near the northeastern end of the ridge, but his picket line extended along the crest nearly to its southwestern end. About 3 p. m., as the Whigs began to encircle the ridge, Ferguson's pickets sounded the alarm and engaged the advancing mountaineers in a brief skirmish. Then, as they reached their positions, Campbell and Shelby almost simultaneously opened



### THE FERGUSON RIFLE

*PATRICK FERGUSON, the best shot in the British army, invented a rifle in 1776 that loaded at the breech. It was the first breech-loader carried by the troops of any country. The Provincial Regulars are believed to have used this splendid weapon at Kings Mountain. The rifle was ahead of its time and was discarded after his death. It is now rare.*

the main attack. From the crest the Tories and the Provincials replied with a burst of trained volley firing. But Campbell's and Shelby's men moved steadily up the slope Indian fashion, from tree to rock. For 10 to 15 minutes they maintained their attack, while the other Whig detachments moved into position around the ridge.

As the two Whig commands neared Ferguson's lines, the Tories charged and drove them down the slope at the point of the bayonet. Though they had no bayonets, the Whigs rallied at the foot, and the unerring marksmanship of their deadly Kentucky rifles forced their pursuers to retire. Slowly following the retreating Tories and Provincials, Campbell's and Shelby's men were again driven down the rugged incline by the Tory bayonets. Taking cover behind trees and rocks, the two Whig commands again forced the Tories to retreat toward the crest.

Much of the volley firing of the Provincials and Tories, with their muskets and a possible scattering of Ferguson breech-loading rifles, was aimed too high. It passed harmlessly over the heads of the two Whig detachments, which now pushed even higher toward the crest. As the Tories began their third bayonet charge upon Campbell and Shelby, they were suddenly attacked along the northern and eastern slopes by the other Whig de-

tachments. Moving to meet the Whig attack from these quarters, the Tories allowed Campbell and Shelby to gain and hold the southwestern summit.

Now completely surrounded, Ferguson's disorganized and rapidly diminishing force was gradually pushed toward its campsite on the northeastern end of the ridge. In this desperate situation, with attacks and counterattacks raging on all sides, the piercing note of Ferguson's silver whistle urging his forces on continued to be heard above the shooting and shrill whoops of the mountaineers. Suddenly, Ferguson attempted to escape through Cleveland's lines near the northeastern crest, but was struck from his horse by at least eight balls fired by the mountain sharpshooters. He died a few minutes later.

Capt. Abraham de Peyster, his second in command, attempted to rally the confused surviving Tories and Provincials, but his efforts were useless and he ordered a surrender. During the bloody 1-hour engagement that raged along the heavily wooded and rocky slopes, the mountaineers gained a complete victory. These veterans of countless frontier clashes, even though untrained in formal warfare and having only a slight loss of 28 killed and 62 wounded themselves, had killed, wounded, or captured Ferguson's entire force.





Centennial Monument

Ferguson's Grave

United States Monument

### The Park

Kings Mountain National Military Park, established by act of Congress on March 3, 1931, contains 4,012 acres. Near the center of the rugged park area is the historic Kings Mountain battlefield ridge on which the engagement occurred. Here four monuments have been erected, notable among which are the Centennial Monument, dedicated in 1880, and the United States Government Obelisk, erected by the Congress in 1909.

### How to Reach the Park

The park is best approached over N.C. Route 216 from U.S. 29, which is 4 miles to the north, and is equidistant from Charlotte, N.C., and Spartanburg, S.C. It is also accessible over S.C. Route 161 from York, S.C.

### About Your Visit

You may obtain further information about this and other areas of the National Park System at the museum and administration building near the main parking area. It is suggested that you first visit the museum, which is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., except on Christmas and New Year's Day. Among the exhibits are an electric map showing routes of the forces which met at Kings Mountain, a diorama of the battle, and a rare

Ferguson rifle. From the administration building, a park road and a trail climb the south-western slope of the ridge to the upper parking area. Here you may take a self-guiding tour along foot trails leading to the chief features of the battlefield. There is an amphitheater a short distance east of the battlefield ridge, near the main park road, where an outdoor historical drama on the Battle of Kings Mountain has been presented in late summer during recent years. Adjoining the park on the east is Kings Mountain State Park, where you may picnic and swim in season.

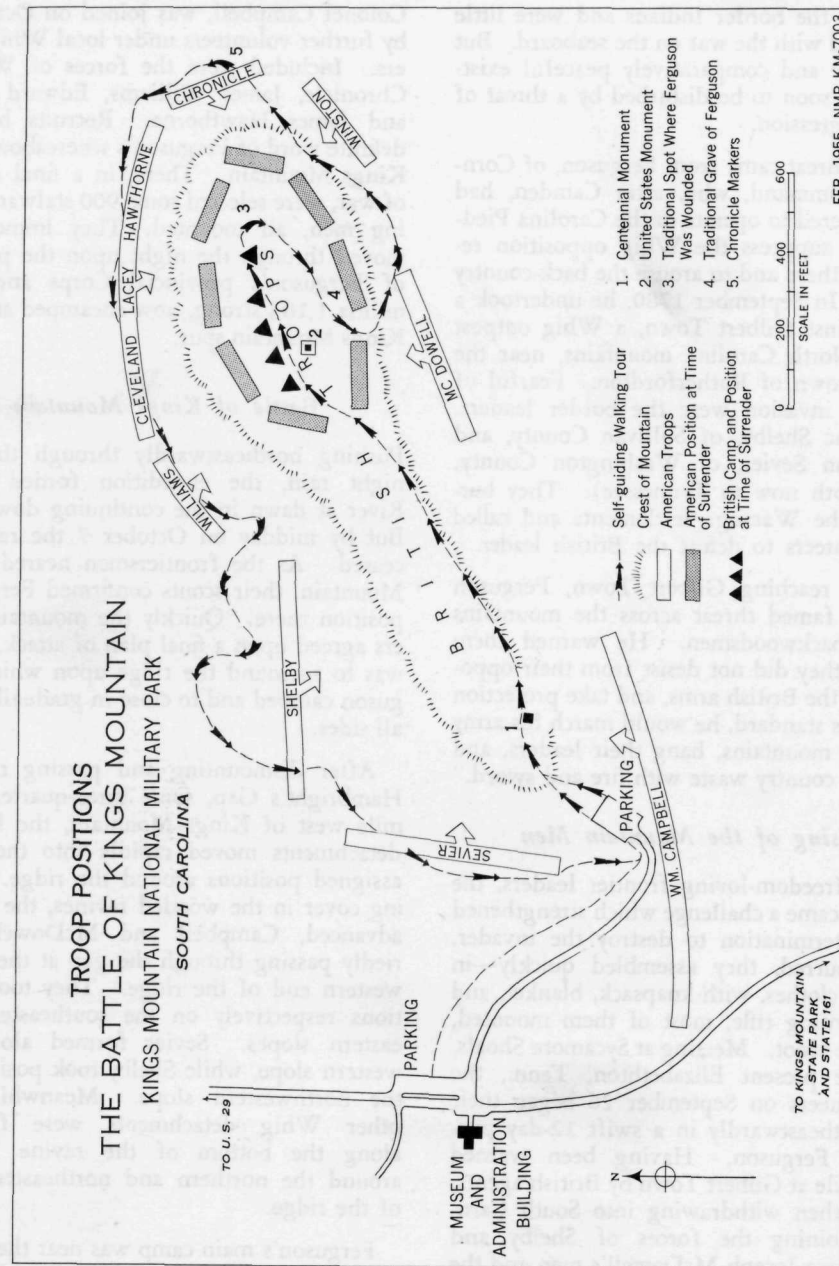
### Administration

Kings Mountain National Military Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 31, Kings Mountain, N.C., is in immediate charge.

### Mission 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

*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 its people.*

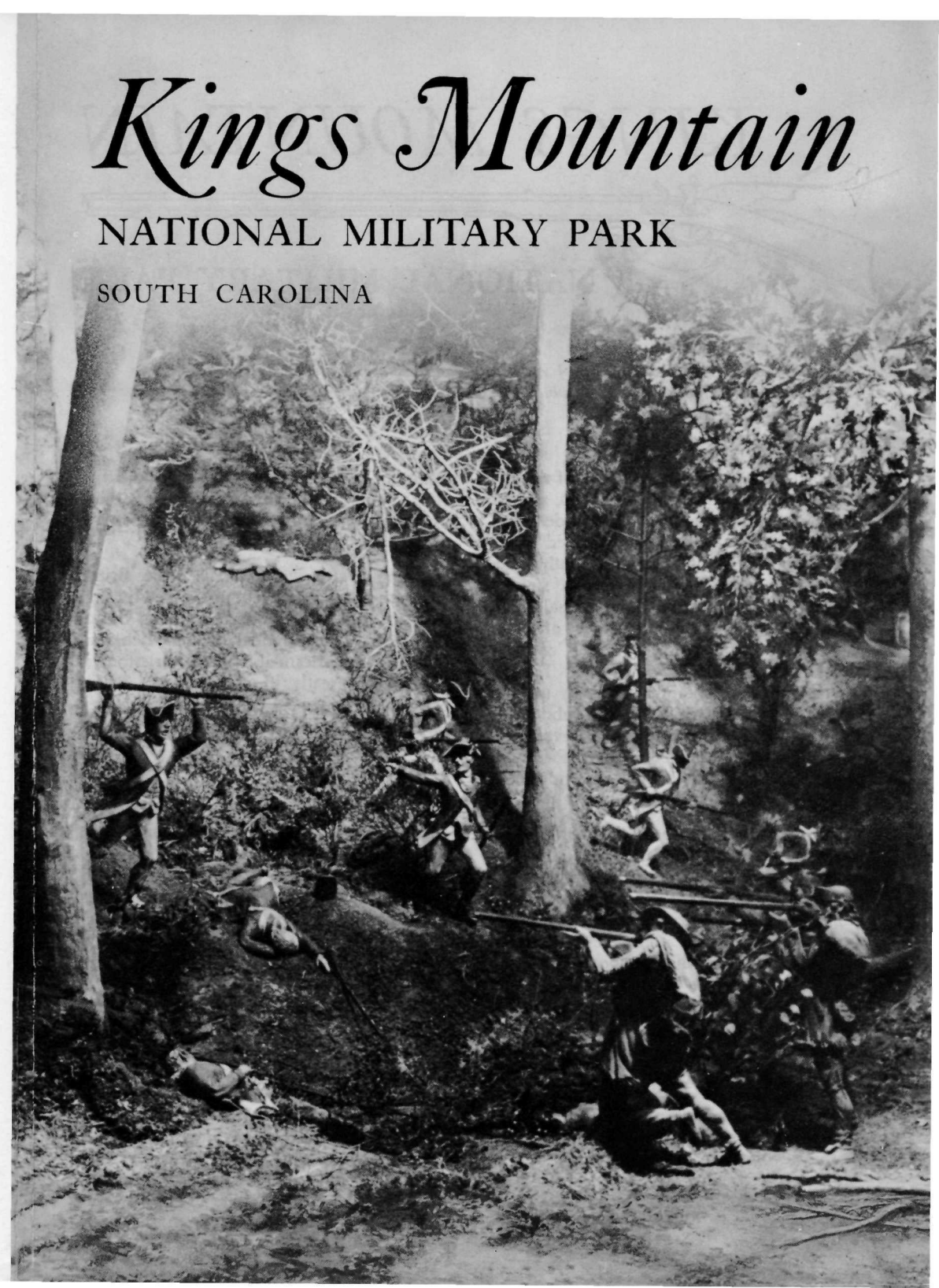


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