

Minute Man

Minute Man
National Historical Park
Massachusetts

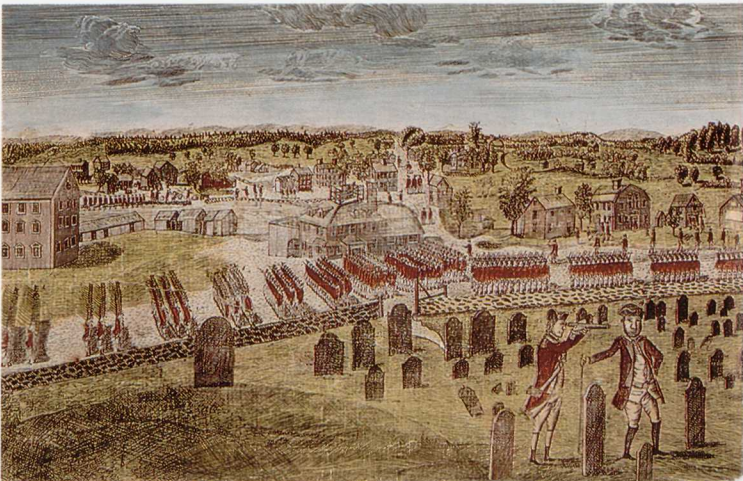
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Two weeks after Lexington and Concord, militia-man and artist Ralph Earl sketched the events of April 19 from eyewitness

accounts. Amos Doolittle's engravings of the drawings are the most reliable depiction of the fighting. On Lexington

Common British soldiers fired at American militia-men in the first hostile action of the American Revolution.



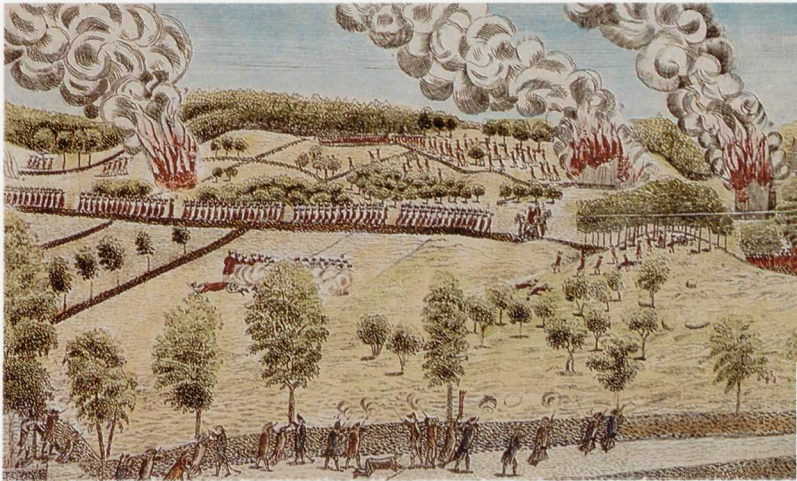
Colonel Smith and Major Pitcairn watched as British troops searched Concord door-to-door for provincial arms stores,

which they burned or threw into the town pond.



The first real engagement of the day took place at North Bridge outside Concord, where the British withdrew across the

bridge and were driven back into Concord by rebel militia.



Colonel Smith's troops (far right), retreating under American fire (foreground), were met and saved by General Percy's

reinforcements, who fired three Lexington homes and scattered Americans with cannon fire.

Connecticut Historical Society

In Service of the King



1 Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



2 Lexington Historical Society

Thomas Gage (1), Commander in Chief of the British Army in America and Governor General of Massachusetts, knew conflict was inevitable. "The first stroke will decide a good deal," he told London. Maj. John Pitcairn (2), a respected officer, was appalled at the uncontrolled firing by British soldiers. Lt. Col. Francis Smith (3) headed the expedition. Though experienced, he was slow and deliberate — a disadvantage in a surprise operation. Lord Percy (4), general of the rescue brigade, countered American tactics with artillery and saved the British column from annihilation.



3 National Army Museum, London



4 Lexington Historical Society

The American Resistance



1 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



3 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Paul Revere (1), a propagandist and courier for the Committee of Correspondence, rode to warn provincial leaders that the British were marching. Dr. Joseph Warren (2) was an orator and fighter who encouraged militia with the words: "They have begun it — we will end it." Patriot firebrand Samuel Adams (3) hoped the fighting in Massachusetts would spur other colonies to take up arms.

"A People Armed and Numerous"



Art by Louis Glanzman

To British soldiers trained in formal European warfare, the militias' tactics were cowardly and undisciplined, but British General Percy recognized that their "irregular" attacks were carried out with "perseverance and resolution." The militias' preference for individual firing from behind cover nullified the British tactic of close-range volleys at opposing ranks followed by a bayonet charge.



The smoothbore musket was a reliable but inaccurate weapon that a trained soldier could fire four times a minute.

The Public Reaction



American Antiquarian Society

The Provincial Congress's official narrative of the day's events exaggerated British atrocities and American helplessness. The account was sped by couriers to newspapers along the coast which further embellished the story. The *Salem Gazette* broadside, complete with coffins, was typical. As a propaganda tool, the report was highly successful. Colony after colony, enraged by the "dismal carnage," called up militia and prepared to fight. In England, the Whig opposition also profited, lampooning the King's army in widely circulated cartoons.

The discontent smoldering in the American colonies under British rule flared into open hostilities on April 19, 1775. On a stretch of country road outside Boston, a prolonged skirmish between 3,500 colonial militiamen and 1,700 of His Majesty's redcoats opened the American Revolution. The initial fighting in the war was a local action between Britain and her recalcitrant colony of Massachusetts. The government had clamped down in reaction to the colony's resistance to the Mother Country's economic policies. For a year a British army, under Gen. Thomas Gage, had occupied Boston. Pressed by the ministry in London to quell rebellion by arresting the rabble-rousers Samuel Adams and John Hancock, Gage chose instead to take what he thought was the less inflammatory step of confiscating the patriots' arms supply in Concord. But incompetence and miscalculation doomed what he meant to be a limited, routine operation. Gage depended on secrecy to seize the arms before the people of Concord could resist, but Boston knew of the operation before his troops left, and the arms at Concord were soon hidden. Couriers Paul Revere and William Dawes notified Adams and Hancock in Lexington that the British were on their way. Mixups delayed the British departure for hours, giving the colonists more time to prepare. Finally, the local militia and minute men were not the contemptible, undisciplined mob Gage took them to be. They had trained for months and had well-rehearsed plans for immediate reaction to a British incursion.

Gage gave command of the British troops to Lt. Col. Francis Smith, a ponderous, tactically unimaginative officer who slowed an already delayed operation. By the time Smith's advance troops under Maj. John Pitcairn arrived in Lexington it was dawn and Capt. John Parker had his militia lined up on Lexington Common. Because he had only 77 men, Parker had no thought of impeding the 700 British soldiers. He wanted to make a display of patriot resolve. But as the militiamen slowly obeyed Pitcairn's order to disperse, a shot was fired — it is not clear from which side — and the green British soldiers, ignoring orders to stop, began firing at will at the fleeing Americans. When Pitcairn and Smith regained control, eight Americans lay dead. As the British troops continued down the road to Concord, news of the shooting spread to neighboring communities, and militiamen flocked to the British line of march between Boston and Concord.

At Concord, British soldiers began searching house-to-house for arms. Smith sent seven companies across the North Bridge to seize the supplies hidden at Col. James Barrett's farm. The militiamen who had fallen back to Punkatasset Hill advanced on the three companies left to guard the bridge. As the militia approached, they saw the smoke of burning military supplies rising from town. Fearing that their homes were being put to the torch, they set out to save them. After the British withdrew across the bridge the colonials continued to advance until the British

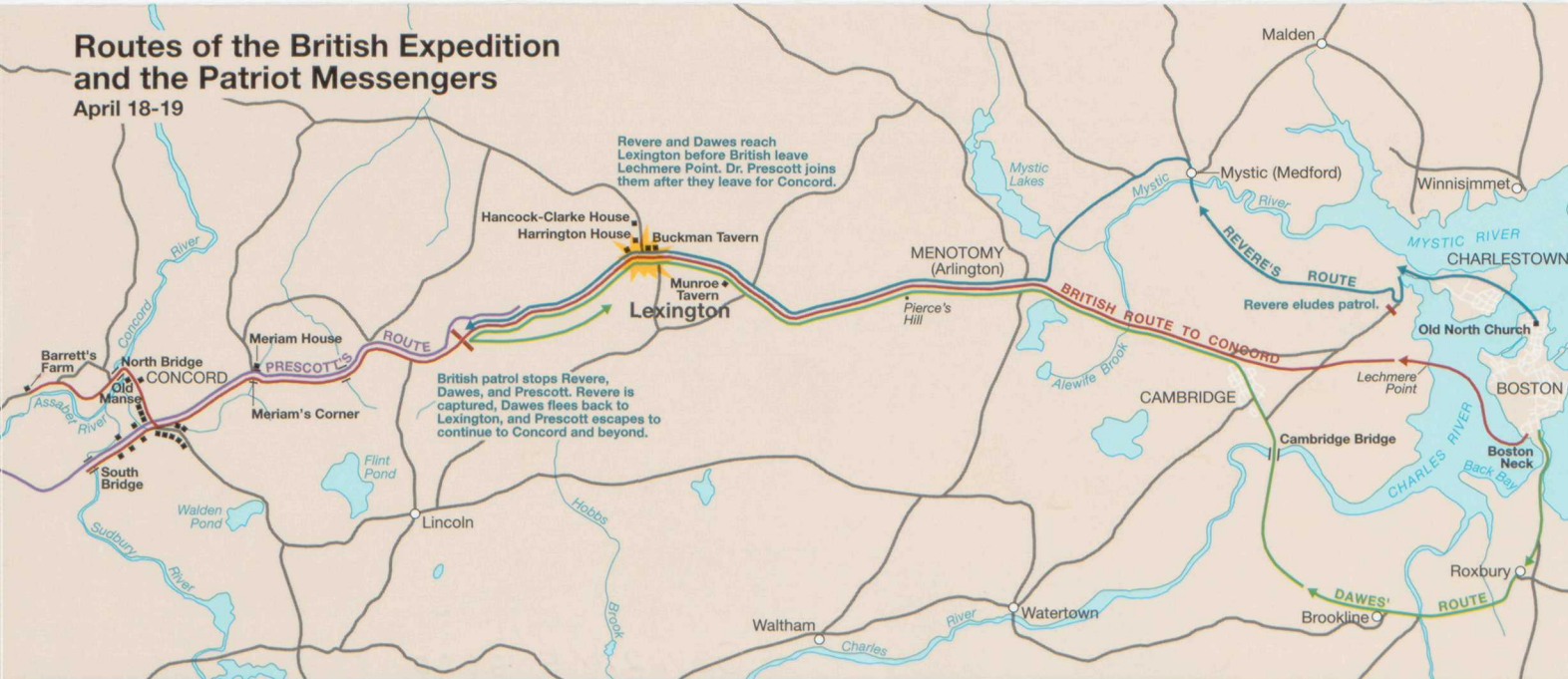
fired a volley. Major Buttrick of Concord then gave the order, "Fire, fellow soldiers, for God's sake, fire!", and for the first time Americans fired a volley into the ranks of British soldiers. The British, outnumbered four to one and with half of their officers wounded, retreated to the center of town. The troops returning from Barrett's farm were allowed to march by unharrassed. After pausing about two hours to regroup and feed his troops, Smith began the march to Boston. Flankers moved along the mile-long ridge on the left that separated the column from the colonials. At Meriam's Corner, where the ridge ended, the flankers had to be drawn in to cross the narrow bridge, and the militia, reinforced by companies from towns to the north, gathered near the road, taking cover where they could. Here began the running skirmish which continued to Boston. The British encountered heavy, unrelenting fire from the hundreds of militiamen behind building, wall, and tree, but the range was too great for the muskets to do much damage, and the British escaped with relatively few injuries.

Having attacked a British column, the Americans had committed themselves. From this point on, the British ranks had to run a gauntlet of colonial fire. Already there seemed to be a musket behind every tree, and fresh militiamen were pouring in from towns like Reading, Salem, and Lexington. Luckily for the British, the Americans were far enough from the road most of the day that few of the thousands of bullets fired found their

mark. When the flanking parties could operate, most of the militiamen were driven out of range. But British soldiers fell steadily at every hill or curve where the Americans had position. After the column had passed one spot, the militiamen would cut across country and be ready for them farther up the road. Exhausted and near panic, the British troops staggered into Lexington at about 2:30, where they were met at last by 1,000 reinforcements under Lord Percy. Under cover of artillery, the British rested briefly before starting the final retreat to Boston. Percy knew that his troops were in danger of annihilation unless they kept moving. The worst fighting occurred on the road into Menotomy (now Arlington), where over 5,000 men were involved and both sides lost more men than in any other fighting along the road. After escaping Menotomy, Percy had to use cannon several times to scatter the Americans concentrated at his rear. That was probably the edge that allowed him to make it across Charlestown Neck after nightfall to the safety of Bunker Hill, where he was protected by the guns of HMS *Somerset* in Boston Harbor. But he had lost 73 dead and 174 wounded, with 26 missing. The American losses were 49 dead, 40 wounded, and 5 missing. Soon after, Boston was under siege and Gage was reduced from governor to a general of forces occupying one city. The performance of the militia that day convinced Percy that this rebellion ran deeper than he or the ministry had suspected. The Americans were indeed prepared to fight for their rights.

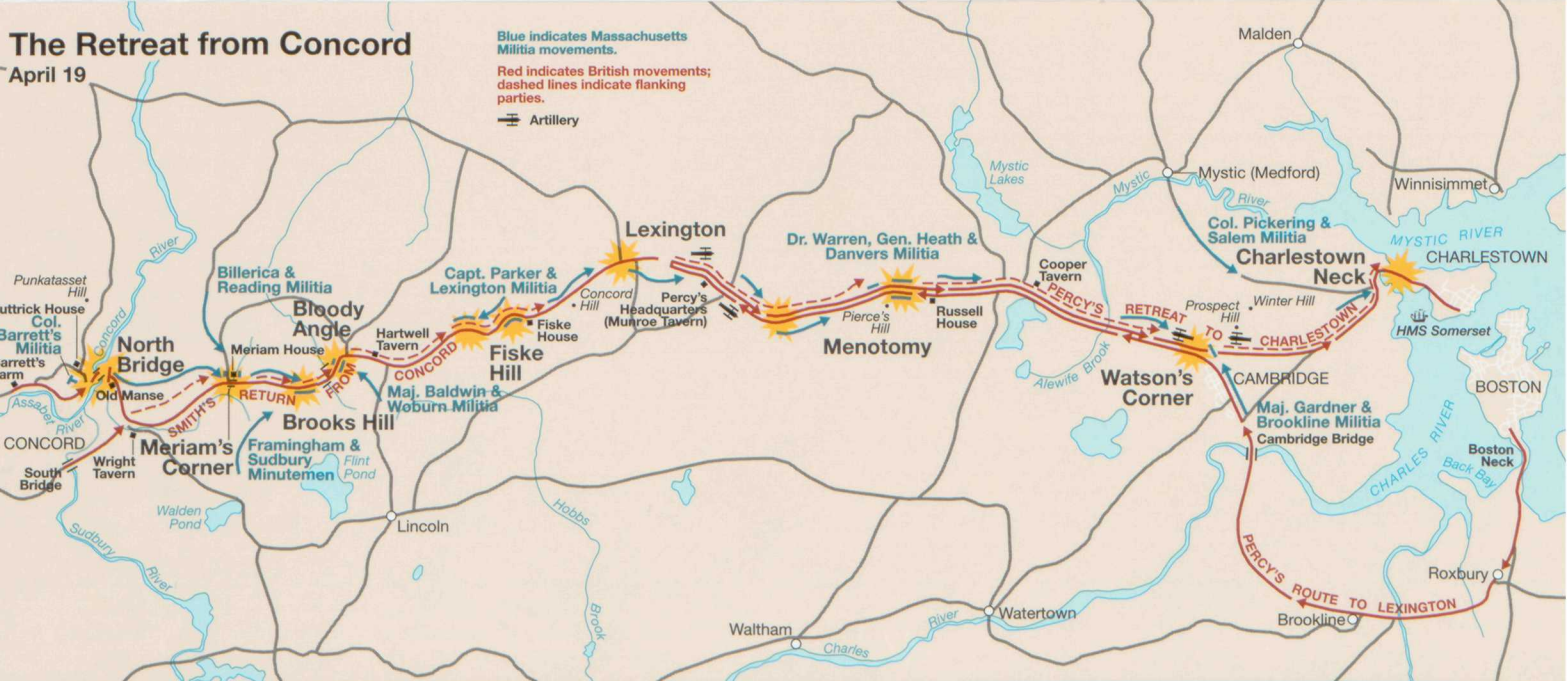
Routes of the British Expedition and the Patriot Messengers

April 18-19



The Retreat from Concord

April 19



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The Battle Road has undergone many changes in these two centuries since the fight. This section near the Minute Man Visitor Center has been

restored to a dirt and clay surface that represents the original surface of the entire road.



Hartwell Tavern—a 1733 building with later additions—was the typical country inn of the period. British soldiers marched

proudly by on their way to Concord, but they returned under heavy fire.



Ralph Waldo Emerson coined the phrase “the shot heard ‘round the world” to describe the significance of the brief battle that took place at

the North Bridge. Visitors should take the time to walk across the bridge to see Daniel Chester French’s Minute Man statue.



The Meriam House, at Meriam’s Corner, is one of the oldest houses in Concord, Mass. The shots exchanged here between Colonists and

British troops began the fighting along the Battle Road that continued for 16 miles.



Once the home of Samuel Whitney, muster master for the Concord Minute Men, The Wayside gained fame in the 19th century through

three literary families. Louisa May Alcott’s childhood here inspired her scenes in *Little Women*. Nathaniel Hawthorne named it The Wayside—

it was the only home he ever owned. Margaret Sidney, author of *Five Little Peppers*, preserved this “Home of Authors.”

Where the Revolution Began

It was an unusual field of battle for the opening of the American Revolution: 20 miles of winding, hilly road connecting a port city and several country towns. But word of the fighting on Lexington Common, at Concord Bridge, and on the road to Boston raced throughout the American colonies to unite men and women behind the patriot cause. What had begun as a struggle between the British authorities, determined to enforce the will of Parliament, and the people

of Massachusetts, determined to retain their rights as English citizens, soon grew into a war for independence that lasted more than eight years. Today, much of that country road is an urban highway, but the Battle Road still follows generally the same route, passing the sites of the bitterest fighting and the buildings nearby, helping recall the dramatic events of April 19, 1775.

Following the Battle Road Trail



A good place to begin your tour is with the exhibits and orientation program at the Minute Man Visitor Center.

Battle Road Trail
Connecting many of the park’s historic sites, this pathway follows remnants of the historic road and also traverses farming fields, wetlands, and forests. You can explore this route on foot, or by bicycle or wheelchair. Enjoy the entire 5.5-mile trail or visit portions of it. Secondary walking trails in many areas allow you to loop back to the main trail. Take the time to explore the trail and enjoy the rich historical and natural resources that the park offers. The Bat-

tle Road Trail was not designed for high speed use. Bicyclists: watch out for pedestrians, wheelchairs, and children in strollers. Walk bicycles on wetland boardwalks.

Meriam’s Corner
The Meriam House and barn gave cover to the militia, allowing them to get close to the British column as it crossed the narrow bridge there. The shots exchanged between Colonists and British Redcoats opened the running battle on the road to Boston.

Historic Farming Fields
Follow the Battle Road Trail through open countryside. These fields have been farmed since the 17th century. In the 18th century, on the day of the battle, the Colonists ran through these fields to take up their positions ahead of the British column.

Bloody Angle
The trail joins the historic Battle Road here, where some of the most intense fighting occurred. Minute and militia men set up an ambush and

caught the British column in a crossfire from both sides of the road. When the smoke cleared, eight British soldiers lay dead.

Hartwell Tavern
The home of Ephraim and Elizabeth Hartwell and their children was a prosperous farm that also operated as a tavern. Travelers to and from Boston stopped here, shared the latest news, and discussed important issues. Living history demonstrations bring this site to life.

Captain William Smith House
This 1693 structure was the home of the Captain of the Lincoln Minute Men and his wife Catherine.

Paul Revere Capture Site
A historic stone monument marks the approximate site where the famous “midnight ride” of Paul Revere came to an end. Although Revere was captured and William Dawes turned back, Samuel Prescott escaped to carry the alarm to Concord.



The Minute Man statue was sculpted by Daniel Chester French to honor the citizen-soldier of 1775.

Fiske Hill
There was close-quarter fighting as British flankers tried to flush out ambushers on Fiske Hill. The historical park ends here, but the fighting continued on through Lexington, Menotomy (today’s Arlington), and Cambridge until the British reached Bunker Hill.

About the Park

For Your Safety
The Battle Road is not a park-owned road; many areas have heavy traffic. It may not be safe to slow down and sightsee.

Please respect the rights of private families living within the park boundary.

Historic and natural features within the park are protected by federal law. Do not excavate, remove, disturb, deface, or destroy any structure, exhibit, artifact, animal, or plant life. The park has instituted a “Park

Watch” program to protect the park and to provide a safer environment for our visitors. You can help by reporting any criminal activity or safety hazard to park rangers: 508-254-7491.

In an emergency call 911.

More Information
Write: Minute Man National Historical Park, 174 Liberty Street, Concord, MA 01742-1705. Call: 978-369-6993, ext. 22. Internet: www.nps.gov/mima.

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