

Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Corps of Engineers
U.S. Army

Overmountain Victory
Trail Association



"Gathering of the Mountain Men at Sycamore Shoals" From a painting by Lloyd Branson, Tennessee State Museum Collection

Stalemate in the North Brings the King's Armies South

In Search of Loyalists

In the summer of 1780, the Southern American colonies - and hopes of independence - seemed at the mercy of an invading British army. Believing the Southern colonies mostly loyal, the Royal army planned to conquer the South and recruit Loyalist militia (local volunteer soldiers) to help British regulars and British Provincial troops defeat the Continental Army and the local Patriot militia.

Only Patriot Militia Remain

When Charleston, South Carolina, surrendered May 12th, 1780, the British captured most of the Continental troops in the South. Additional large losses occurred later in the summer with Patriot defeats at Waxhaws, South Carolina, May 29th, and Camden, South Carolina, August 16th. Only Patriot militia remained to oppose a British move through North Carolina into Virginia, America's largest colony. Victory for Royal troops and an end to talk of independence seemed near.

Ferguson Offers Loyalty or Defeat

Lord Charles Cornwallis, the British commander, appointed Major Patrick

Ferguson as Inspector of Militia for South Carolina to defeat the local militia and to recruit loyalists. Ferguson's opposition included men from South Carolina's backwoods under Thomas Sumter, North Carolinians commanded by Charles McDowell, and Overmountain men from today's Tennessee under Isaac Shelby.

With Fire and Sword

Moving into North Carolina, Ferguson attempted to intimidate the western settlers, threatening to march into the mountains and "lay waste the country with fire and sword" if they did not lay down their arms and pledge allegiance to the King.

Battle of Kings Mountain, October 7, 1780

The response was a furious army formed on the western frontier. Growing in numbers as they marched east, some 900 men gave chase to Ferguson, surrounding his army on Kings Mountain, South Carolina. In a little over an hour, they killed or captured his entire command.



"The Battle of Kings Mountain" From the original oil painting by Andy Thomas

An American Beginning

Kings Mountain was the beginning of the successful end to the Revolution, assuring independence for the United States of America. On an unimposing and obscure mountain, Americans fought Americans to determine their destiny. The citizen militia of the community, the predecessors of today's National Guard and Reserves - like volunteer fire departments - organized to protect their

community. Men without formal training or recognized social standing - Ferguson called them mongrels - took hold of their destinies, just like the men who began the American War for Independence on April 19, 1775, at Lexington and Concord. They relied upon their individual initiative, skills with the rifle, and courage to ensure the success of their cause.

"...That Turn of the Tide of Success..."
- Thomas Jefferson

"...The First Link in a Chain of Evils... the Loss of America."
- British Sir Henry Clinton

Few Loyalists, New Continentals

Ferguson's defeat was a stunning blow to British fortunes. The strength of the Patriot militia was affirmed. The hoped for Loyalist support did not materialize. Cornwallis was forced to pull back from North Carolina, giving the Continental Army time to bring fresh regulars and new commanders south.

Victory Without Success

At Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina, on March 15th, Greene finally turned to face Cornwallis. Greene's army was driven from the battlefield, but Cornwallis suffered severe losses that he could not replace.

Cornwallis' World Turned Upside Down

Cornwallis pulled back to recuperate, finally moving his army north into Virginia without subduing North Carolina. In the fall of 1781, George Washington rushed his army south to join French reinforcements. When French warships fortuitously gained control of the Chesapeake Bay, Cornwallis was besieged and forced to surrender on October 19, 1781, just over a year after Kings Mountain.

Morgan Bloodies Tarleton

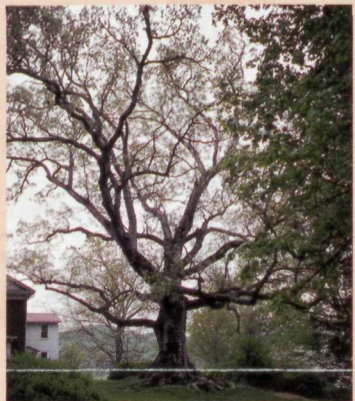
On January 17, 1781, Daniel Morgan, using Continentals and militia, defeated Colonel Banastre Tarleton's British army at Cowpens, South Carolina.

Greene Leads Cornwallis Astray

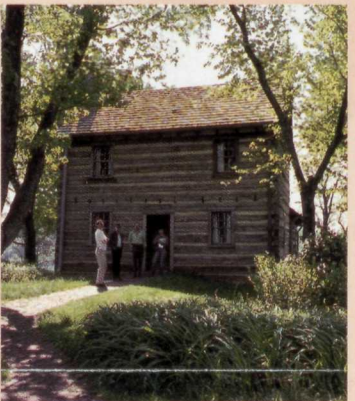
That winter saw a running campaign between Cornwallis and the armies of Morgan and Nathanael Greene. Try as Cornwallis might, the Americans always seemed to cross the river to safety before Cornwallis could cut them off.



Dunn's Meadow muster site for Washington County, Virginia.



Pemberton Oak, on the road to Sycamore Shoals.



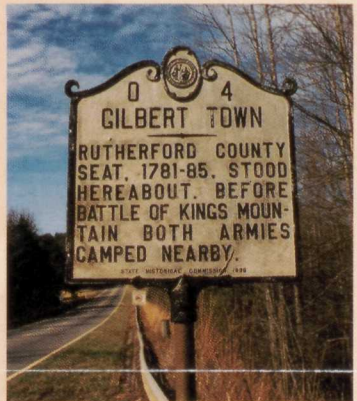
Rocky Mount, the William Cobb home.



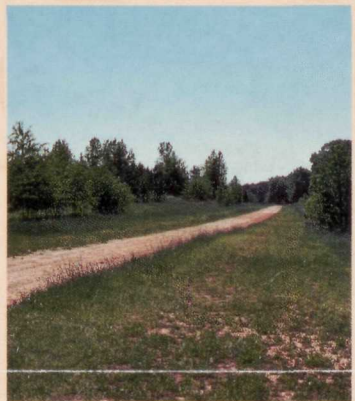
Robert Sevier wounded at Kings Mountain, buried beside the Toe River.



Fort Defiance, home of William Lenoir.



Gilbert Town, campsite for Patriot and Loyalist forces.



Cowpens, Green River Road, final Patriot campsite.



US Monument at Kings Mountain honoring Patriot victory.



William Campbell



Isaac Shelby



Patrick Ferguson

The Major Figures

Patriots

William Campbell
Leading the largest contingent, Virginian Campbell was chosen by his fellow colonels to command in Charles McDowell's place. Campbell died in 1781, just before Yorktown.

Charles McDowell

A tireless campaigner in 1780, he stepped down from command rather than split the Patriot army.

Isaac Shelby

Later first governor of Kentucky, Shelby was a strong, forceful influence the summer of 1780. The morning of October 7th, he refused to stop and rest when the men tired after spending 36 hours on the march, vowing to follow Ferguson into Cornwallis' lines, if necessary.

John Sevier

Later Tennessee's first governor, John Sevier was the best known man west of the

mountains and gave his personal guarantee to fund supplies for the militia army.

Mary Patton

This little-known Tennessee woman manufactured 500 pounds of powder purchased by William Cobb for the Overmountain men.

Benjamin Cleveland

The voice for independence in Wilkes and Surry counties, Tories attempted to ambush Cleveland on his way to Quaker Meadows, wounding his brother instead.

Edward Lacey

Commanding South Carolina troops, Lacey rode through the stormy night of October 5th to intercept the Overmountain men at Green River and head them towards Kings Mountain

British and Loyalists

Major Patrick Ferguson

Intelligent, brave, charming, inventive, headstrong, he fruitlessly advocated use of Patriot "Indian-style" warfare, yet he relied on the bayonet charge at Kings Mountain, allowing his army to be surrounded.

Abraham de Peyster

From New York, he served as Ferguson's second in command. He lived in New Brunswick, Canada, after the Revolution.

Ambrose Mills

Born in England, he was jailed by North Carolina in 1778 for recruiting Loyalists. Freed, he joined Ferguson and was hanged at Biggerstaffs.

Dr. Uzal Johnson

He won praise for treating Patriot and Loyalist wounded alike. After the war, he returned to his native New Jersey.

You can learn more about the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail at these locations:

Location	Rest Rooms	Picnicking	Camping	Self-guided Hiking Trails	Audio-Visual Presentations	Historical Exhibits	Historical Talks	Historical Demonstrations	Books/Crafts/Sales	Information
Blue Ridge Parkway 400 BB&T Bldg, One Pack Sq Asheville, NC 28801 (828) 298-0398 Museum of North Carolina Minerals	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Cowpens National Battlefield PO Box 308 Chesnee, SC 29323 (864) 461-2828	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Crowders Mountain State Park Rte 1 Box 159 Kings Mountain, NC 28086 (704) 853-5375	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Fort Defiance PO Box 686 Lenoir, NC 28645 (828) 754-7095	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Historic Burke Old Burke County Courthouse PO Box 195 Morganton, NC 28655 (828) 437-4104	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Kings Mountain National Military Park PO Box 40 Kings Mountain, NC 28086 (864) 936-7921	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Kings Mountain State Park Rte 3 Box 532 Blacksburg, SC 29702 (803) 222-3209	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Lake James State Park PO Box 340 Nebo, NC 28761 (828) 652-5047	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
National Park Service Southeast Region 100 Alabama St SW Atlanta, GA 30303 (404) 562-3124	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Observation Knob Sullivan County Park Rte 44 553 Knob Creek Rd Bristol, TN 37620 (423) 878-5561	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Old Wilkes 203 N Bridge St Courthouse Sq Wilkesboro, NC 28697 (336) 921-3390	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Road Mountain State Park Rte 1 Box 236 Road Mountain, TN 37687 (423) 772-3303	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Rocky Mount State Historic Site US 11E Rte 2 Box 70 Piney Flats, TN 37686 (423) 538-7396	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area 1673 W Elk Ave Elizabethton, TN 37643 (423) 543-5808	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
US Forest Service Toccoa Station PO Box 128 Burnsville, NC 28714 (828) 682-6146 North Cove	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
W. Kerr Scott Reservoir PO Box 182 Wilkesboro, NC 28697 (336) 921-3390	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Wilkes Community College Gardens PO Box 120 Collegiate Dr Wilkesboro, NC 28697 (336) 667-7136	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

Commemorative Motor Route

Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail begins on Colonial Road in Abingdon, Virginia. March reenactors assemble here each September 23rd.

Days of the March

September 12, 1780, Charles McDowell ambushed part of Ferguson's army at Cane Creek but was driven off and fled to Sycamore Shoals (Elizabethton, TN) to await reinforcement by the Overmountain men.

In late September, 1780, William and cousin Arthur Campbell assembled Washington County, Virginia, militia.

September 25th, 1780, Shelby, Sevier, and Campbell mustered the militia of the Watauga and Holston Valleys at Sycamore Shoals of the Watauga River (Elizabethton) to join Burke County militia under Charles McDowell. Fort Watauga is today reconstructed at the Tennessee Historic Area. In 1780, this was North Carolina, later Franklin (or Frankland), later Southwest Territory.

September 26, 1780, the army spent its first night at Shelving Rock, storing their powder out of the rain.

September 27, 1780, snow fell on Roan Mountain as the army crossed. Yellow Mountain Gap, at 4,682 feet, is the highest point on the trail. Here two men deserted to warn Ferguson of the Patriot army.

October 1 and 2, 1780, the army stopped to dry out and prepare for

battle expected soon. Unpopular Charles McDowell was persuaded to step aside as commander. William Campbell, not from North Carolina, was chosen as a compromise replacement. McDowell rode to ask for a Continental officer to command.

October 3, 1780, the army camped beneath Marlin's Knob beside Cane Creek. South Carolina Patriots under William Hill and Edward Lacey were camped nearby at Flint Hill (Cherry Mountain).

October 4, 1780, entering Gilbert Town, they found Ferguson had left, possibly headed towards Ninety Six in South Carolina.

October 5, 1780, reassured they were following Ferguson, the army proceeded to the Green River, away from Kings Mountain. Small parties of Georgians under William Candler and North Carolinians under William Chronicle joined the Overmountain men. Early the next morning, Edward Lacey rode in with news they were headed away from Ferguson.

October 6, 1780, finally convinced Ferguson headed east toward Charlotte, the men with the best horses raced off to meet with Lacey and Hill's South Carolinians.

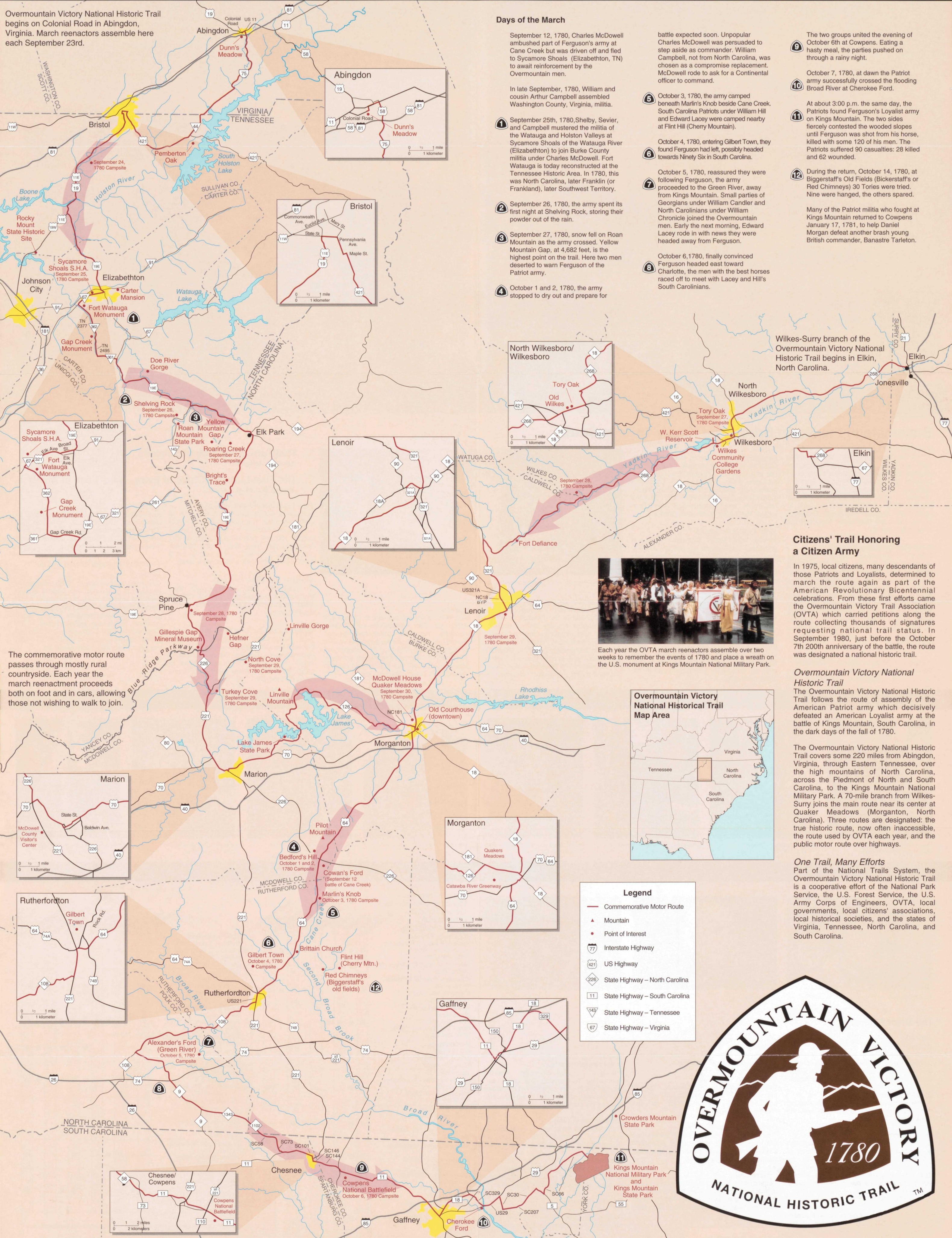
The two groups united the evening of October 6th at Cowpens. Eating a hasty meal, the parties pushed on through a rainy night.

October 7, 1780, at dawn the Patriot army successfully crossed the flooding Broad River at Cherokee Ford.

At about 3:00 p.m. the same day, the Patriots found Ferguson's Loyalist army on Kings Mountain. The two sides fiercely contested the wooded slopes until Ferguson was shot from his horse, killed with some 120 of his men. The Patriots suffered 90 casualties: 28 killed and 62 wounded.

During the return, October 14, 1780, at Biggerstaff's Old Fields (Bickerstaff's or Red Chimneys) 30 Tories were tried. Nine were hanged, the others spared.

Many of the Patriot militia who fought at Kings Mountain returned to Cowpens January 17, 1781, to help Daniel Morgan defeat another brash young British commander, Banastre Tarleton.



Wilkes-Surry branch of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail begins in Elkin, North Carolina.



Each year the OVTA march reenactors assemble over two weeks to remember the events of 1780 and place a wreath on the U.S. monument at Kings Mountain National Military Park.

Citizens' Trail Honoring a Citizen Army

In 1975, local citizens, many descendants of those Patriots and Loyalists, determined to march the route again as part of the American Revolutionary Bicentennial celebrations. From these first efforts came the Overmountain Victory Trail Association (OVTA) which carried petitions along the route collecting thousands of signatures requesting national trail status. In September 1980, just before the October 7th 200th anniversary of the battle, the route was designated a national historic trail.

Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail follows the route of assembly of the American Patriot army which decisively defeated an American Loyalist army at the battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina, in the dark days of the fall of 1780.

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail covers some 220 miles from Abingdon, Virginia, through Eastern Tennessee, over the high mountains of North Carolina, across the Piedmont of North and South Carolina, to the Kings Mountain National Military Park. A 70-mile branch from Wilkes-Surry joins the main route near its center at Quakers Meadows (Morganton, North Carolina). Three routes are designated: the true historic route, now often inaccessible, the route used by OVTA each year, and the public motor route over highways.

One Trail, Many Efforts

Part of the National Trails System, the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail is a cooperative effort of the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, OVTA, local governments, local citizens' associations, local historical societies, and the states of Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina.



Legend	
	Commemorative Motor Route
	Mountain
	Point of Interest
	Interstate Highway
	US Highway
	State Highway - North Carolina
	State Highway - South Carolina
	State Highway - Tennessee
	State Highway - Virginia

