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VALLEY FORGE NATIONAL
HISTORICAL PARKKEY AT-A-GLANCE
INFORMATION**LENGTH:** 7.1 miles**CONFIGURATION:** Balloon**DIFFICULTY:** Hard because of
length, not terrain**SCENERY:** Revolutionary War head-
quarters, historic mud huts**EXPOSURE:** Sun and some shade**TRAIL TRAFFIC:** Moderate**TRAIL SURFACE:** Mostly paved;
Historic Trace Road is grass and dirt**HIKING TIME:** 3 hours**DRIVING DISTANCE FROM CENTER
CITY:** 25 miles**ACCESS:** Year-round, daily, 6 a.m.–
10 p.m.; Welcome Center, 9 a.m.–
5 p.m.**MAPS:** USGS Valley Forge. Maps
available at [www.nps.gov/vafo/
planyourvisit/upload/vafo_trails_
2007.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/vafo/planyourvisit/upload/vafo_trails_2007.pdf)**WHEELCHAIR TRAVERSABLE:** Yes, by
staying on the bike path instead of
Historic Trace Road**FACILITIES:** Restrooms in Welcome
Center**SPECIAL COMMENTS:** Carry water
and sunscreen, especially in the
summer; see www.nps.gov/vafo or
call (610) 783-1099 for additional
park information.

IN BRIEF

This hike is a step back in time to a preserved historic encampment that turned a hungry, ragtag bunch of young enlisted men into a mature militia that would march forth from this valley to ultimately win independence for the American colonies.

DESCRIPTION

Just a year ago, in 1776, you were on top of the world. General Washington had led your division, torn and tattered, across the Delaware River to a surprise attack and victory against the British-hired Hessian troops in Trenton. After this, you defeated a British brigade in Princeton. The tide of the war was changing; freedom and independence seemed within reach.

But today, you are plagued with insecurity. Although news traveled south regarding General John Burgoyne's surrender to Major General Horatio Gates at Saratoga, you have since fought two failed battles and have lost friends and hopes. Your ancestors fled their homeland to find freedom, and England has come across the ocean to take it all away.

You have been relocated to a camp northwest of the besieged Philadelphia, in

Directions

From Philadelphia, take US 76 west. After 16 miles, take Exit 328B-A to merge onto County Line Expressway/US 422 west toward Swedesford Road/Pottstown. After 3 miles, exit onto PA 23 West/West Valley Forge Road toward Valley Forge. Continue to follow West Valley Forge Road. After 0.25 miles, turn right on Outer Line Drive, where you will see the Welcome Center just 100 feet ahead. 1400 North Outer Line Drive, King of Prussia, PA 19406.

GPS Trailhead

Coordinates

UTM Zone (WGS84) 18T

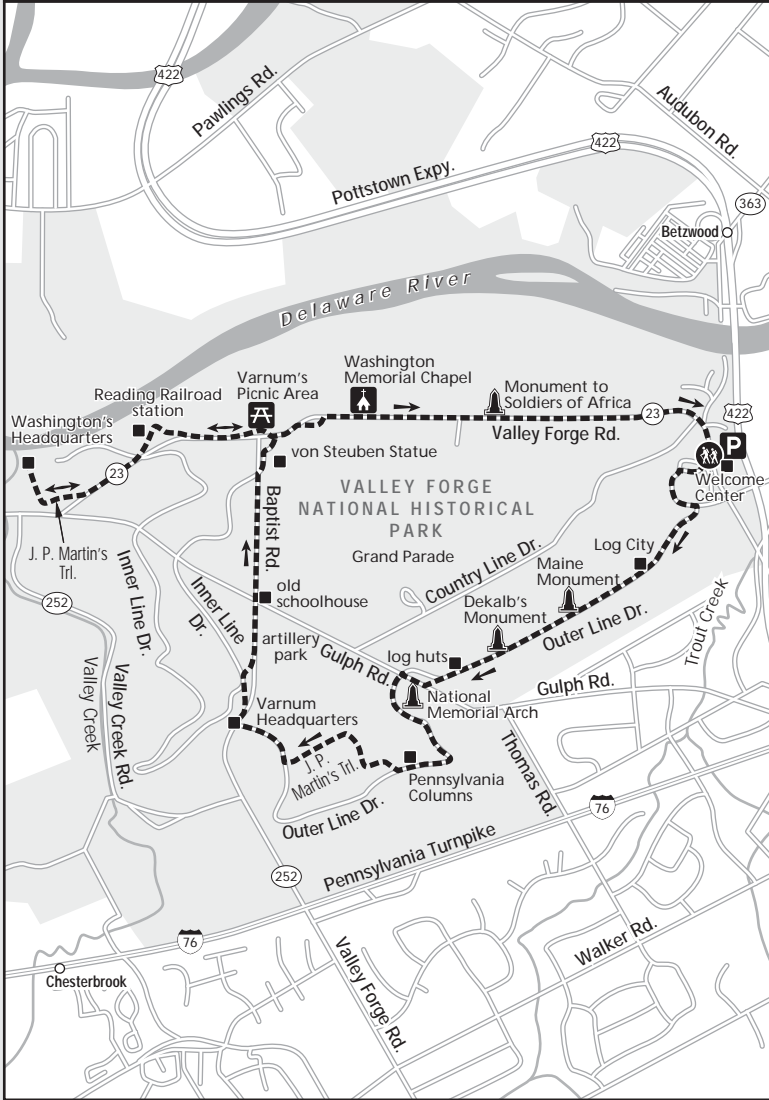
Easting 0464000

Northing 4439090

Latitude N 40° 6' 5.1"

Longitude W 75° 25' 20.3"

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rural Valley Forge. Your log hut offers some shelter, but there hasn't been a surplus delivery in almost a week. You're hungry, cold, and you miss your family. Many of your comrades are sick with pneumonia and dysentery. Some of the new recruits have already deserted, and the rest of them don't look like they will hold up in battle.

Nonetheless there is work to be done. So grab your backpack to start military exercises about the encampment. To the northeast, at the Welcome Center, comrades await with maps and information. Once you have secured your map, leave the building, and make two lefts: you are now marching uphill, directly toward General Muhlenberg's Brigade, which anchor the outer line of defense. Here you will see the beginnings of a log city. Orders from the general have set specifications for these huts at 16 feet long by 14 feet wide by 6.5 feet high, with a door near the street and a fireplace at the rear. The men ordered to build these were given one dull ax to cut the wood and perform their labor.

After you pass the fields and inspect the huts, you will eventually arrive at a monumental arch honoring your service—you have now entered the 21st century, and you learn that the Continental Army was victorious, years after that wicked winter. In February 1778 a French alliance was formed. Inspector General Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben came to camp to train soldiers in the essentials of military drill and discipline. The sad soldiers you left back at the log city were transformed into a well-trained militia worthy of the "land of the free." The stay at Valley Forge matured the Continental Army, and although it would be another five years of battles—some successful, some less so—you and your remaining comrades eventually saw victory. The Treaty of Paris ended the war, released all war prisoners, and proclaimed the colonies as free states.

Look proudly upon this majestic arch, dedicated in 1917, which exalts "the incomparable patience and fidelity of the soldiery." A centennial in 1877, with reenactments and fanfare, featured a speech by the lawyer and renowned orator Henry Armitt Brown:

"And here in this place of sacrifice, in this vale of humiliation, in this valley of the shadow of that dead out of which the life of America rose regenerate and free, let us believe with an abiding faith that to them union will seem as dear and liberty as sweet and progress as glorious as they were to our fathers and are to you and me and that the institutions which have made us happy preserved by the virtue of our children shall bless the remotest generation of the time to come."

Before marching out of this fort in June of 1778, you watched 2,000 soldiers die—not from the winter's bitter cold or starvation, for the supply flow had improved with the appointment of Nathanael Greene as quartermaster general—but from disease that plagued the camp during the spring thaw. Influenza, typhus, typhoid, and dysentery took many men, but you were spared because of capable nurses and surgeons, as well as a smallpox inoculation program and camp-sanitation regulations. The huts were aired out daily, kitchen waste and bedding straw were burned, and drinking water was disinfected with whiskey



A monumental arch honors Revolutionary War heroes.

and vinegar. A captain was appointed daily to visit the sick within his brigade to see that they had proper care.

Fill your canteen with water at the fountain before the arch and continue your march, turning left in front of the arch and picking up a paved walkway at the south section of Outer Line Drive. If the spirits of fallen soldiers have returned to the park, surely they ride on the backs of the countless deer that dominate the fields. These deer stare boldly at visitors, enjoying the protection of the National Park Service, while they meander from meadow to mud hut. The abundance of deer has led some locals to lobby for controlled hunting, but this has not yet been approved.

Ascend the trail until you see the towering Pennsylvania Columns on your left, with winged Eagles silhouetted against the sky. Continue the path along J. P. Martin's Trail. After serving in the war, Joseph Plumb Martin wrote a book called *Private Yankee Doodle*, which details "Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier." Ahead are a parking lot and restroom—sanitary facilities and transportation have come a long way since the 18th century. Picnic benches to your right provide a fine lunch spot.

Snake fencing lines the trail until you reach a roadway; stay right where the fence angles left. The pastoral meadow and rolling hills look untouched and undeveloped, like a memory preserved in time. Follow the trail to a sign for Varnum's Headquarters, right. Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum served in the Continental Army from 1777 until 1779. Varnum campaigned to allow



Spirits of fallen soldiers ride on the backs of the abundant deer population.

African Americans to enlist in the Continental Army, which resulted in the formation of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment as an all-black unit.

Before reaching Varnum's headquarters and a picnic area, look for the Knox Artillery Park on the right; cross the grassy patch to see the cannons standing at attention. Under orders from Brigadier General Henry Knox, the artillery was stored and repaired here, and gun crews trained and drilled, so that in the event of attack, the cannons could be dispatched from this central location to wherever they were most needed.

Once you have inspected the artillery, march due north on a grassy path called Historic Trace Road. The only unpaved portion of this hike, it offers open views of rolling meadows and a historic one-room stone schoolhouse. This structure, built approximately 35 years after the encampment, resulted from the industrial expansion of the Valley Forge area. Later, a newer schoolhouse would be erected across Gulph Road, and this building would fall into disrepair, serving as a storage shed and stable for local farmers.

Continue straight, admiring the fortifications within the valley. Your grassy path intersects the paved bike path at the top of the hill. Here, bear right; admire the von Steuben Statue, and picture the awe and respect of the Continental soldiers as this seasoned Prussian military professional taught them the proper use of the bayonet.

Cross the park road and bear left along J. P. Martin's Trail for an out-and-back to Washington's Headquarters, following the trail until it starts to dip and

signs point you to a humble stone home. Here the most famous man in U.S. history took shelter with his wife and family during the encampment. Inside, a small dining area has been recreated; you can imagine the dinner conversations during this crucial period in America's history.

Upstairs is a room with a canopy bed; George Washington slept here—really. Tour the other rooms; a knowledgeable park ranger can answer your questions regarding the history of this house. Washington's guard huts sit in front of the house, a testimony to the threat of British attack. Return to the trail, and notice a Reading Railroad stationhouse, under renovation as of this writing, that sits to the left. The Reading once brought Philadelphians up to visit this site that eventually became Pennsylvania's first national historic park.

The trail arrives at a parking lot; cross it and return to Varnum's Headquarters and picnic area. Nearby is the Grand Parade, where military exercises occurred.

You are now on the last leg of your long march. You may want to stop at the Washington Memorial Chapel, built to commemorate George Washington's service to our country. Every Sunday afternoon from June to September, glorious carillon music echoes through the fields from this towering Gothic Revival building.

Continue on the trail to the next monument, which pays tribute to patriots of African descent, who, enticed by freedom, joined the fight. Some sources document that at least 500 African Americans served in the Continental Army at Valley Forge. You are now less than a mile from the end of this historic march.

On the half hour, a theater beside the park's Welcome Center shows an 18-minute film describing life at the Valley Forge encampment. Seasonal trolley tours and bike rentals offer alternative vehicles to view the park. A store in the Welcome Center sells historical literature and cold drinks.

You leave this park with a sense that you are a small part of something special—that the events that occurred here, preserved so well, live in the hearts and minds of all Americans, and that the concept of freedom, for which these soldiers fought with bravery and fierce determination, is an ideal to be cherished and appreciated by all who are fortunate to live within its protected embrace.

NEARBY ACTIVITIES

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON CENTER AT
MILL GROVE (*see page 180*)
1201 Pawlings Road, Audubon
(610) 666-5593
pa.audubon.org/centers_mill_grove.html

VALLEY FORGE CONVENTION CENTER
1160 First Avenue, King of Prussia
(610) 337-4000
www.vfconventioncenter.com
(*See Web site for calendar.*)

LOWER PERKIOMEN VALLEY PARK
101 New Mill Road, Oaks
(610) 666-5371