

## **Battlefield Overview for Rail Overlooking the Battlefield**

Welcome to Cowpens National Battlefield. The historic battlefield is located approximately 500 yards in front of you, and the walking tour begins as you step through the back doors of the visitor center to the left. There are seventeen wayside exhibits that will help you understand the significance of what happened at each location.

As you walk through a stand of pines and young hardwoods, you emerge onto the historic Green River Road. Turn right and you're looking due east toward Thicketty Mountain.

Morgan's men camped the night before battle without tents and protection from the cold in the general vicinity to your left. Lt. Col. John Eager Howard of Maryland, who commanded the Continentals, stated that he slept on the cold ground the night before the battle.

Morgan chose this ground for its tactical advantages: a river to the rear to discourage the ranks from breaking, rising ground which to post his regulars, an open forest, and marsh to thwart flanking maneuvers. The patriot soldiers came from across the two Carolinas, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland and Virginia. They were joined by local militia, some of whom had fought the British at Kings Mountain a few months earlier. William Washington, a distant cousin of George Washington, had command of the cavalry.

Morgan positioned his men in three lines with sharpshooters out front. Along the second line were the militia and on the third line he positioned the Continentals. Washington's cavalry were posted in a swale in the rear.

Today you're looking through a stand of hardwoods of oak and hickory with a few tall pines interspersed. At the time of the battle, there were mature hardwoods filling the landscape, as well as the mighty chestnut now missing.

The sharpshooters were in tall grasses, and some may have been hidden by young scrub pine trees. Tarleton could not foresee what lay in store for him. The gentle rise of the landscape appeared not to afford any protection but was misleading and an advantage to Morgan.

Further down the slope of the road toward the British lines and you would see on your left and right marshy areas which became crucial in the battle. On your right the swampy or marshy area thwarted the late arriving Highlanders who had to march around it. On your left the area constricted both armies' battle lines. Further up the slope to your right and to the southwest was Maple Swamp. Today there is little evidence remaining of Maple Swamp.

In the cold gray mist of an early Wednesday morning January 17, 1781 Morgan and the men under his command broke the spirit of the British Army in a decisive victory. They took over 500 prisoners, left the task of burying the dead to the locals and marched the prisoners across the Broad River into North Carolina, and ultimately crossed the Dan River in Virginia.

In tribute to the men who fought victoriously here, the Washington Light Infantry erected a monument on the field where the fiercest fighting occurred in 1856. The second monument dedicated to the battle was erected on the battlefield in 1932 and now stands proudly on the entrance walk to the visitor center.

Today the fields are quiet except for the sounds of nature. They stand as a testament to the valor of the men and the Battle of Cowpens.