



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail



A progress report on the status of the Trail

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*On the Path*

**W**elcome to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

2014 has been a landmark year for the trail, as you will find in the stories in this year's report. Many certifications, partner initiatives, and new pathway bode well for visitors looking for more to see and do.

Additionally the trail is now part of a larger group of parks in the Carolinas that focus on the American Revolution. The trail is now combined with Kings Mountain National Military Park, Cowpens National Battlefield, and Ninety-Six National Historic Site. All of these are under the supervision of John Slaughter, the Group Superintendent.

In Mr. Slaughter's words he states that the primary friends organization of the trail, the Overmountain Victory Trail Association serves "as a strong foundation and the backbone partner to support the overall Southern Campaign of the American Revolutionary War Park Groups endeavor."

We are excited about all this and hope you join us along the pathway.

Sincerely,

**Paul Carson, Superintendent**

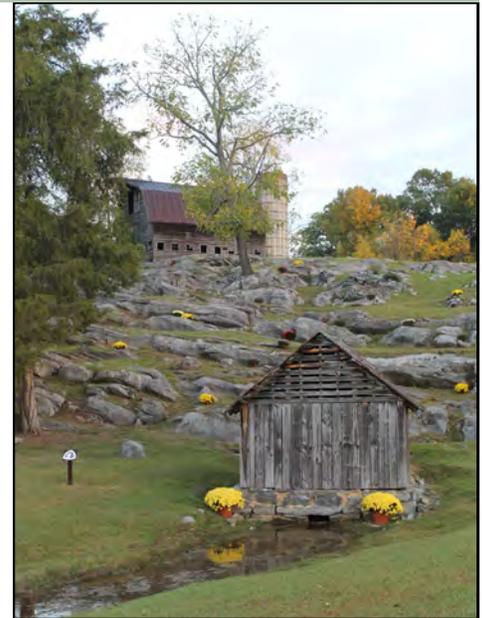
## Fort Womack

*A beautiful place along the way*

A new piece of the Trail—and a truly beautiful part, at that—was certified on September 25 in Sullivan County along Silver Grove Road. After long consideration and planning, landowners John and June Childress offered public access to the site of Womack's Fort along the OVNHT. That site is recognized as near the spot where 400 Virginia militiamen camped on the night of September 24, 1780 after leaving the mustering grounds along Wolf Creek in Abingdon. June Childress is a descendant of Jacob Womack, who joined the Patriot militiamen on their campaign to pursue Ferguson.

Ambre Torbett, Sullivan County Director of Planning and Codes,

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**Fort Womack was certified on Sept. 25 along the OVNHT in Sullivan County, TN.**

## Going to School on the Past

*Fort Crider and Lenoir welcome back two pioneers*

A wonderful occasion in Lenoir welcomed back two men who helped create and encourage the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail: Senator James T. Broyhill and former NPS Director Gary Everhardt. Both men spoke during the ceremonies to certify the historic site of Fort Crider (also Grider) as an official site along the OVNHT. Fort Crider had been a refuge for settlers against Indian attacks during the 1760s. On September 29, 1780, it was the camp site of 350 militiamen mustered in the Yadkin River valley and marching to Quaker Meadows to join up with other militiamen who had

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**Jim Broyhill and Gary Everhardt return to the "birthplace" of the Overmountain Victory Trail.**

## A New Path for an Old Trail

*Good news for “Patriots” in Sullivan County*

A new segment of the OVNHT called the Patriot’s Trail was certified in Bluff City on September 24. The segment is only a quarter-mile long, but it enables safe access along the shoulder of Silver Grove Road from the suspension footbridge and wayside exhibit to near Choate’s Ford on the east bank. “Many hands make light work,” declared Ambre Torbett, project manager and Sullivan County’s Director of Planning and Codes. The Sullivan County Highway Department laid crushed stone for the path and installed a series of large boulders to prevent vehicles from parking on the trail. Adding what Torbett called a “colonial era feel” to the project, a split-rail fence was built by Sam Compton of Troop 48, Kingsport, TN, as his Eagle Scout

community service project. And, OVTA

member Tom Vaughan installed the OVNHT trail logo sign. Cooperation of adjacent landowners was graciously and generously offered.



**Eagle Scout Sam Compton with Ambre Torbett and Paul Carson on the Patriot Trail with new slit-rail fence in the background.**

Choate’s Ford was the shallow spot over the South Fork Holston River crossed by about 400 mounted Virginia militiamen on October 25, 1780 as they rode to join the muster at Sycamore Shoals. A parking lot and informational kiosk for the OVNHT were previously dedicated on the west side of the ford. Torbett became involved with the OVNHT in 2006 and recognizes a potential for 22 miles of certified trail in the county. Choate’s Ford is an ancient crossing, one approached by an old Indian trail along today’s Pleasant Grove Rd. with remnants of that route still visible in the area. Torbett shared that future plans include development of a walking trail from Choate’s Ford along the route of that ancient pathway some four or five miles to Sullivan East High School where they are the “Patriots.”●

## Rocky Mount Makes a Smooth Connection

*New wayside exhibit provides online links for more information*

A new wayside exhibit helps visitors connect with more of the story in new ways. “This is one of five new wayside exhibits installed along the OVNHT this year,” said Paul Carson, OVNHT Superintendent, “and it adds something new to what we provide visitors: online links. People can learn

volumes from online links to more information, well beyond what we can put on one panel.”

During the wayside dedication, John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS addressed the crowd gathered at Rocky Mount for the evening’s dramatic telling of “The Story,” as the OVTA reenactors call it. “Sites can become irrelevant,” he said, “unless you keep doing what you are doing here tonight, coming out to learn and to engage with a story that can be told best by being here in this spot. And we need the OVTA to continue what it is doing, too, bringing the story to people and bringing people to the story.”



**Rev. George Cobb, portraying Rev. Samuel Doak, performs in the evening’s telling of “The Story” at Rocky Mount Museum Historic Site during the OVTA march.**



**Gary Walrath (r) and Paul Carson unveil the new wayside as John Slaughter joins in the dedication.**

Gary Walrath, Executive Director, Rocky Mount Museum Historic Site, was quite

pleased with the new wayside exhibit about William Cobb. Rocky Mount was Cobb’s home in 1780 when he and five sons joined with the militia at Sycamore Shoals for the campaign in pursuit of Patrick Ferguson. Cobb’s story is just one of the many stories interpreted at this State of Tennessee living history site and museum in Piney Flats. ●

## Biggerstaff's Old Fields

*Revealing the passions which drove the Revolution*

The history recognized by the dedication ceremony on October 11 was not the noblest of acts by our forefathers, but the crowd of more than 100 citizens who gathered in Rutherford County to celebrate the dedication of Biggerstaff's Old Fields understood the significance of that history and tendered the appropriate reverence for what happened there 234 years before.

Danny Searcy, Director of Public Works and Planning for Rutherford County, welcomed the audience and emceed the ceremonies which



**Chivous Bradley addresses the audience of 115 gathered for the site certification ceremony.**

included the presentation of colors, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the National Anthem. Chivous Bradley, Rutherford County Historian, pointed to the reasons for the trail and hangings which occurred on this

site a week after the Battle of Kings Mountain: taxation, property, religion, and retribution. He added that people in this part of North

Carolina had ancestors on both sides of what was effectively a civil war, but that the hangings served as a turning point in the war for the loyalist cause, which began to diminish. Marc Bowen, Executive Director, OVTA, shared that this certification was the "great culmination of much planning" and that the site was "in service to the telling of a story we refuse to let slip into obscurity."

Ambrose Mills, a direct descendant of the loyalist Colonel Ambrose Mills, one of the nine hanged at the site in 1780, addressed the gathering, saying, "I am pleased to be here today; my ancestor



**Dan Dorsch (l) and Ambrose Mills at the site where their ancestors were hanged in 1780.**

probably was not." He shared some history of the era, noting that he is also descended from patriot Colonel Andrew Hampton. His ancestor Ambrose Mills, he shared, was "a brave and noble man, uttering at the last 'God Save the King.'" Dan Dorsch, a descendant of another hanged loyalist, Capt. James Chitwood, drove from

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**Along with the large audience, (l to r) Marc Bowen, John Slaughter, William Eckler, Chivous Bradley, Paul Carson, and Eddie Holland celebrated the certification of Biggerstaff's Old Fields along the OVNHT.**

*(Fort Womack - continued from page 1)*

welcomed the large gathering. "This is a wonderful example of what citizens can do when they band together," she said. Among those attending the dedication ceremony were several elected officials or representatives of their offices: County Mayor Richard Venable, Congressman Phil Roe's office, and Bluff City Mayor Irene Wells. They shared their encouragements and appreciation, noting, "Our kids need this 'will not fail' attitude," and "the deeds that we do will live on after us." All expressed sincere appreciation to the Childress Family for embracing the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail in Sullivan County, Tennessee.

John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS reminded the gathering, "I get to wear the uniform and the cool hat, but what really matters is what you do. This is your story, and you have now become a little closer to your own heritage." The invited guests was treated to a telling of "The Story" by OVTA reenactors and to a catered brunch. ●



**(l to r) Ambre Torbett, Paul Carson, Jean and John Childress and John Slaughter celebrated the NPS certification of Fort Womack.**

## Lynn Gap Trail

*New trail in the woods along the Blue Ridge Parkway*

Two miles of trail paralleling the Blue Ridge Parkway is now open from Gillespie Gap to Lynn Gap. This commemorates part of the route taken by Colonel William Campbell and the Virginians when the Overmountain force was divided on September 29. Campbell's men descended from Lynn Gap and camped at Turkey Cove.

About three-fourths of that trail was completed during the summer by students working with the American Conservation Experience for the Blue Ridge Parkway. The National Park Service funded the work done by them to complete this segment of the



**International and American students with the American Conservation Experience worked hard to build the Lynn Gap Trail.**

OVNHT started last year. Some of the students were international, coming from The UK, Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, South Korea, Japan, France, and Spain. Some of the American students were from outside the region, hailing from Virginia, Ohio, Connecticut, Georgia, California and Michigan. "This was hard work," said Josh Burt, project manager for ACE, "so it was perfect for young people. They worked well together and we accomplished a lot in pretty good time." The ACE participants worked from June 1 to July 11 on this trail, and then continued on other projects for the Blue Ridge Parkway.

After the trail was completed, NPS Rangers Jonathan Bennett and Conrad Shirk blazed the two-mile trail with OVNHT markers. ●

## Ticket to Ride

*Disney Company supports OVNHT for a third year*

This year's Certificate of Appreciation given from the National Park Service on behalf of the OVNHT was presented to the Disney Company. For three years running since 2012, the National Park Foundation's Ticket to Ride grant program, underwritten by the Disney Company, has been awarded to the OVNHT.

"As a result, in the past three years programming during the annual OVTA Commemorative March has educated close to 25,000 schoolchildren from communities along the routes, plus the programs supported by this grant have proven to be sustainable. Communities recognize the value of teaching new generations



**With Kim Sams in the center, (l to r) Stan Austin, Paul Carson, R.G. Absher, and John Slaughter recognize the Disney Company for its continued support of the OVNHT.**



**The OVTA Commemorative March reaches out to school children to share with them the story of the Revolutionary War heroes of the Battle of Kings Mountain. This was OVTA's 40th annual march.**

An excerpt from the letter signed by NPS Regional Director Stan Austin read:

about our nation's heritage and have contributed funds and personnel to ensure that they continue to occur. Without these grants many of these young people would not have the opportunity to visit this historic trail and learn the inspiring stories with which it is associated."

The award was presented during the 2014 commemorative ceremonies at Kings Mountain National Military Park by Paul Carson, Superintendent, OVNHT. The award was received by Kim Sams of the Disney Company. ●

## Fort Defiance Certified

*The home and hospitality of William Lenoir*

“You can feel the history in Caldwell County today,” announced Mayor John Gibbons at Fort Defiance, the home of General William Lenoir along the Yadkin River. The occasion to certify

the hospitality of executive director Becky Phillips and her staff. Senator James T. Broyhill reminded the audience that the Battle of Kings Mountain changed the course of the Revolutionary War which in turned changed the course of Western Civilization. And, in the decades following the American Revolution, the heroes of this battle “were showered with praise.” The names Sevier, Shelby, Cleveland, Winston, McDowell, and, of course, Lenoir, he said, were proudly bestowed on counties and communities across the country to honor these men.



**Celebrating the certification of Fort Defiance. (l to r) front row: Ike Forrester, Becky Phillips, Paul Carson; back row: John Gibbons, John Slaughter, Gary Everhardt, Jim Broyhill, and R.G. Absher.**

officially this important site along the OVNHT, a status everyone involved believed had been achieved years before. It was, nonetheless, a great occasion, and the guests and visitors were warmly welcomed and treated to

After Ike Forrester, a Fort Defiance board member and descendant of William Lenoir, read from the general’s original draft of his pension application of 1832, Gary Everhardt, former NPS Director declared that is was “worth the trip down off the mountain (his home near Asheville) just to hear the words of William Lenoir. If we can instill those sentiments in our children and each new generation, we will pass along an important legacy.”



**Commemorative Motor Route signs were installed in NC during 2014, this one near Fort Defiance.**

John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS, said that a majority of NPS’s 401 sites are not large parks, but are cultural sites that help us all remember our heritage. He challenged the audience to embrace the theme of the coming 2016 centennial anniversary of the National Park Service, “Find Your Park.” He said, the communities along the OVNHT are actually doing more. They are “building their park.” He thanked all the communities for their partnership and participation, especially praising the work of OVNHT Superintendent Paul Carson over the last 12 years to build the community of partners for the Trail.●

*(Fort Crider - continued from page 1)*

crossed the mountains in pursuit of Major Patrick Ferguson.

Another connection made the day special as well. Both men grew up in Lenoir and graduated from Lenoir High School which occupied the location of Fort Crider during their school days of the 1940s and 50s. The former school building has since been converted into residential units.

“Being here today brings back a lot of personal memories,” said Everhardt. “I was in Washington, DC in 1976, and was asked to speak at Kings Mountain National Military Park the year after Vice President Nelson Rockefeller spoke during the first OVT march in ’75. The best thing we then did was to get Jim

Broyhill involved. He introduced the legislation in 1977 for Congress to create the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.” Senator Broyhill returned the compliment, reminding the audience that Everhardt had championed the project from the beginning and created the study commission to pursue congressional designation. R.G. Absher, president of the OVTA presented both men with commemorative coins celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> annual march of the OVT.

Mayor Joseph Gibbons and City Manager Lane Bailey each commented on what a special day it was for the citizens of Lenoir and especially to have these two pioneers of the OVNHT back for this special occasion. The mayor noted that a third important early trail champion, Harry J. Smith, also a graduate of Lenoir High School in the same era, was there in spirit. Smith served as safety marshal on the 1975 march and as grand marshal in ’76. ●

# Cane Creek Investigation

## Looking for the site of the 1780 skirmish

**I**nvestigation to discover the site of the skirmish known as the “battle of Cane Creek” got underway in 2014. The Foothills Conservancy secured a grant from the Battlefield Protection Program. Additional funding came from OVTA and from Albert Dale, a land owner and longtime OVTA member.

Ken Robinson was selected as the project archeologist. He has investigated numerous sites along the OVNHT in recent years. “This one is particularly challenging,” Robinson said. “We have conflicting first person accounts that suggest three or four sites are possible based on descriptions. But, we have a traditional site as well. A few generations of people have pointed to one area, saying with all the confidence we tend to put in the stories passed down from our great grandfathers that the battle took place there. But what we need is some evidence, and that had put us in the field looking for musket balls and rifle balls that might indicate where the skirmish took place. But a lot of things have happened to this area in the last 234 years. Farming, road construction, timbering, and development have transformed the area from what it was two centuries ago. But we have old maps, as well. We are making progress and are investigating the candidate sites hoping to find something that will either rule out one or offer some additional evidence to consider it. We’ll have to see.”

Robinson conducted field studies with volunteers from the OVTA and the Foothills Conservancy during the fall of 2014. He shared his preliminary findings during the 2014 OVNHT History Symposium held in Gaffney, SC, in late November. A final report will be presented in 2015. ●



**Curious cows along Cane Creek stood watch as investigators combed the pasture. They offered their company and help but also left some hazards behind during one weekend’s investigation.**



**A possible clue: one account says the patriots “pulled up on an eminence.”**

*(Biggerstaff - continued from page 3)*  
Ohio to attend the ceremony.

John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS, told the gathering, “Today, we share the same mission of those backcountry patriots. They were spurring up support for their cause in the area. All the partner groups working to support the OVNHT are doing the same today. Find your park; build your park. You own this story.”

OVNHT Superintendent Paul Carson presented the certificate noting that Chivous Bradley worked for years to secure this site and is the key person behind making this certification possible. “This history is not a shining moment for the Patriot cause, but it points out so vividly the passions which drove the actions of those on both sides of the fighting.”

County Commissioner William Eckler received the certification on behalf of the county declaring, “This is an honor for the county. Everyone needs to know the history of how we got our freedoms. By remembering, we can keep them.”

After the certification ceremony, officials conducted a ribbon-cutting for the new trails on the property. ●



**For more information about being a Trail Partner, contact:**

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