



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail



A progress report on the status of the Trail

Vol. 8, No. 1

fall 2011

## On the Path

To all our visitors: welcome. Each year we produce this publication you are reading to let the public know all that is happening along the four-state route of the OVNHT. Although the Trail has been around since 1980, it is still being developed and arranged so visitors who use its pathway segments and visit its associated sites have fulfilling and satisfying experiences.

A National Trail experience is different from a National Park experience. The parks generally are tracts of federally owned land that preserve important national historic and natural areas. Trails, however, are a patchwork of land ownership—some federal, some state, some local, and some private. These trails depend on good working partnerships. Both parks and trails have their own unique values and experiences and we hope that your visit to the OVNHT will be memorable and satisfying.

Come back and visit often. As you will see in the report, we offer much to see and do.

- Paul Carson, Superintendent

## 13<sup>th</sup> National Scenic and Historic Trails Conference

*OVTA and Town of Abingdon welcome the nation*

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail took center stage in 2011 as the Partnership for the National Trail System held its biennial meeting in Abingdon, Virginia. The meeting, May 14-19, was jointly hosted by the Overmountain Victory Trail Association and the Town of Abingdon.

“Abingdon is a trails town,” said Garrett Jackson, Director of Planning for Abingdon, and an avid reenactor and student of the American Revolution. “The town owns the Muster Grounds, the northernmost trailhead for the OVNHT. We have the Virginia

Creeper Trail, and passing nearby is the Appalachian Trail. Having the PNTS meeting here has been a great opportunity to show off all these trails, but especially the OVNHT.”



The Watauga Fife & Drum Corps joined with OVTA militia re-enactors in leading PNTS attendees along the OVNHT along Wolf Creek.



Two rows of reenactors greeted PNTS attendees arriving at The Muster Grounds for a program.

“We had the conference participants walk a new trail segment along Wolf Creek to reach the Mus-

*(Continued on page 7)*

## New Waysides at Bluff City

*A bridge to the past*

The route of the Virginia Militiamen on their way to Sycamore Shoals passes through the heart of Bluff City. In fact, the middle school sits on top of the historic route which rises from the crossing of the Holston River at Womack’s Ford. And now visitors have the opportunity to discover this interesting fact and much more through

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New wayside displays at Choate’s Ford tell the story of the militiamen’s crossing.

## Rose Creek Trail at Hefner Gap

*Closing a gap in the trail*

A 1.3 mile segment of the Rose Creek Trail approaching Hefner Gap from the north was certified this year. This is a special place to tell a special part of the story. When the Overmountain men separated their forces to descend the face of the Blue Ridge Mountains, half went through this gap while the others descended through Gillespie

Gap.

Rusty Painter of the Conservation Trust of North Carolina and Kip Hollifield of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission helped make this certification possible. Those organizations joined



**OVNHT militia reenactors fire a commemorative volley along the Rose Creek Trail to celebrate its dedication.**



**Flanked by OVNHT reenactors, Paul Carson, Superintendent, OVNHT (right), dedicates the Rose Creek Trail. Continuing from right, Alan Bowen, OVNHT president; Bill Carson, Orchard at Altapass; Tina White, Blue Ridge Parkway, NPS; and Richard Broadwell, Conservation Trust of North Carolina, celebrate the designation.**

with adjoining neighbors, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Orchard at Altapass, in helping protect portions of the Trail to help us all better tell the story.

“This is a part of the Trail that approaches the Gap,” said Bill Carson, Orchard at Altapass Foundation and longtime champion of the OVNHT. “As the trail continues south from here, it is within the view of the Orchard at Altapass. The certification of this trail segment is exciting for all of us in the mountain community.” ●

## More to Tell

*New wayside exhibits share additional parts of the story*

New wayside exhibits in Abingdon help tell more of the story. The W. Blair Keller Interpretive Center, opened last year (See Trail Update 2010) and sits behind a historic home, *Retirement*, standing next to The Muster Grounds. A new interpretive wayside in the lawn of *Retirement* tells its story and connects its history to the story of the OVNHT.



**Two new waysides along Wolf Creek interpret the history of the Abingdon area at the time of the muster and after the American Revolution was completed.**

A few hundred yards downstream along Wolf Creek and along that certified section of the OVNHT are two other new wayside exhibits. One is for Craig’s Stone Mill. This mill was built in 1782, serving the area as a textile mill and much later as a grist mill. It stood for almost 200 years. The other new wayside catches the eyes of the public and introduces them to the OVNHT and its trail head nearby. ●



**Retirement was built in 1813. Its history carries the site’s connections forward from the time of the American Revolution to that of the Civil War.**

# Alexander's Ford and Bradley Nature Preserve

*A turning point in the OVNHT*

Perseverance pays. Continuing to pursue an effort begun in 2007, Polk County has now conserved the 164-acre Bradley Nature Preserve and in it the site known as Alexander's Ford. At this ford on the evening of October 5, 1780, the Overmountain Men changed their direction and the course of history. Learning from Colonel Edward Lacey of the South Carolina militia, these men agreed to join his force the next evening at the Cowpens, a hard day's ride away.



**Ambrose Mills, project champion, is a descendant of Loyalist Colonel Ambrose Mills, whom the Patriots hanged after the battle. He had other ancestors on the patriot side.**

of the Polk County economic Development Commission and the stalwart champion of the effort to preserve this site. Those present the dedication ceremony on October 5 during the annual OVTA march agreed heartily with those sentiments.

The purchase was made possible through grants from three North Carolina trust funds and a contribution from the Polk County Community Foundation. Polk County will administer the preserve. A grant was also received to begin work on developing the site at its entrance near Grays Chapel. An archaeological investigation will precede any other work and is limited to the entrance area for now.

This is a significant addition to the OVNHT," said Paul Carson, Superintendent. "No development has occurred at this ford from the time when the Overmountain Men arrived in 1780. It is truly a place where we can step back in time." ●



**Flanked by the American Legion Color Guard and Alan Bowen, OVTA president (left foreground), Paul Carson, Superintendent of the OVNHT, (at lectern) presented certificates for Alexander's Ford and the OVNHT at Bradley Nature Preserve to Ambrose Mills, Martha Love, Polk County Community Foundation, and Ray Gasperson, Polk County, Board of Commissioners.**



**OVTA marchers fired a commemorative volley at the ceremony to honor the Patriot militiamen of 1780 who passed along this route.**

## A Legacy of Service

*Alan Bowen Receives NPS Award*

On October 7, 1780, Rees Bowen, an experienced woodsman and militia scout for the Virginia militia from Washington County, Virginia, died in the service of his country on the slopes of Kings Mountain. On October 7, 2011, one of his descendants garnered for the family additional recognition. The Annual Service Award bestowed by the NPS on behalf of the OVNHT was presented to Alan Bowen, President, Overmountain Victory Trail Association.

The presentation acknowledged in part, "You have worked tirelessly to ensure that the story of the Overmountain men and their campaign to victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain is passed on to future generations so that it will never be forgotten. As a volunteer interpreter in period dress, you have retold the story of the men and the campaign

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**Serving as president of OVTA since 2003, Alan Bowen has moved the volunteer group forward and organized its service as period interpreters and educators. He has participated in several "March to the Hill" events to meet with elected officials in Washington, DC and has told "the story" to tens of**



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

This is the story of the overmountain men of 1780 and how they helped win America's independence.

## Late September 1780

September 12, Burke County (NC) militiamen under the command of Charles McDowell skirmished with a part of Ferguson's Loyalist army at Cane Creek, then retreat over the Appalachian Mountains to Sycamore Shoals.

As a prisoner of war released by British Major Patrick Ferguson, patriot militiaman Samuel Phillips delivers Ferguson's threatening message to Isaac Shelby in the overmountain regions of NC. Isaac Shelby rides 40 miles to the home of John Sevier to talk about the threat. The men agree to send messengers to call for a muster of militia at Sycamore Shoals (today's Elizabethton, TN).

**September 24** – Colonel William Campbell leaves The Mustering Grounds (today's Abingdon, VA) for Sycamore Shoals. His 200 Virginia militiamen follow along the Watauga Road. Colonel Arthur Campbell leads another group of 200.

**September 25** – Four-hundred eighty militiamen from the overmountain regions of North Carolina (today's Tennessee) muster at Sycamore Shoals with the militiamen from Virginia and 160 militiamen from Burke Co., NC.

**September 26** – The overmountain men ride toward the mountains driving a herd of cattle to feed their army; they camp at Shelving Rock, storing their powder beneath the rock ledge to keep it dry.

**September 27** – Overmountain men "Cross the Roan" through the Yellow Mountain Gap after slaughtering beeves and preparing the meat. At the top of the mountain saddle, they parade in "snow shoe-mouth deep" and take roll. Two men with Tory leanings are discovered missing. The overmountain men camp along Roaring Creek. Meanwhile, in the northern piedmont of North Carolina, 350 Wilkes-Surry patriot militia under the command of Major Joseph Winston and Colonel Benjamin Cleaveland ride upstream along the Yadkin River toward Quaker Meadows.

**September 28** – Overmountain men move south along the North Toe River and camp where it joins Grassy Creek (near today's Spruce Pine).

**September 29** – Patriots divide into two groups near Gillespie Gap and descend the Blue Ridge Mountains following separate routes; they camp at Turkey Cove and North Cove.

**September 30** – The two groups of overmountain men ride along separate routes near the Catawba River and reunite along the way. They camp at Quaker Meadows where they are joined by the Wilkes-Surry militia and others. The spirit of the men is lifted as the band of patriots grows in number.



The Mustering Grounds, Abingdon, VA



Campbell Grave



Sycamore Shoals State Historic Site,



Yellow Mountain Gap Road,



Museum of NC Minerals at Gillespie Gap,



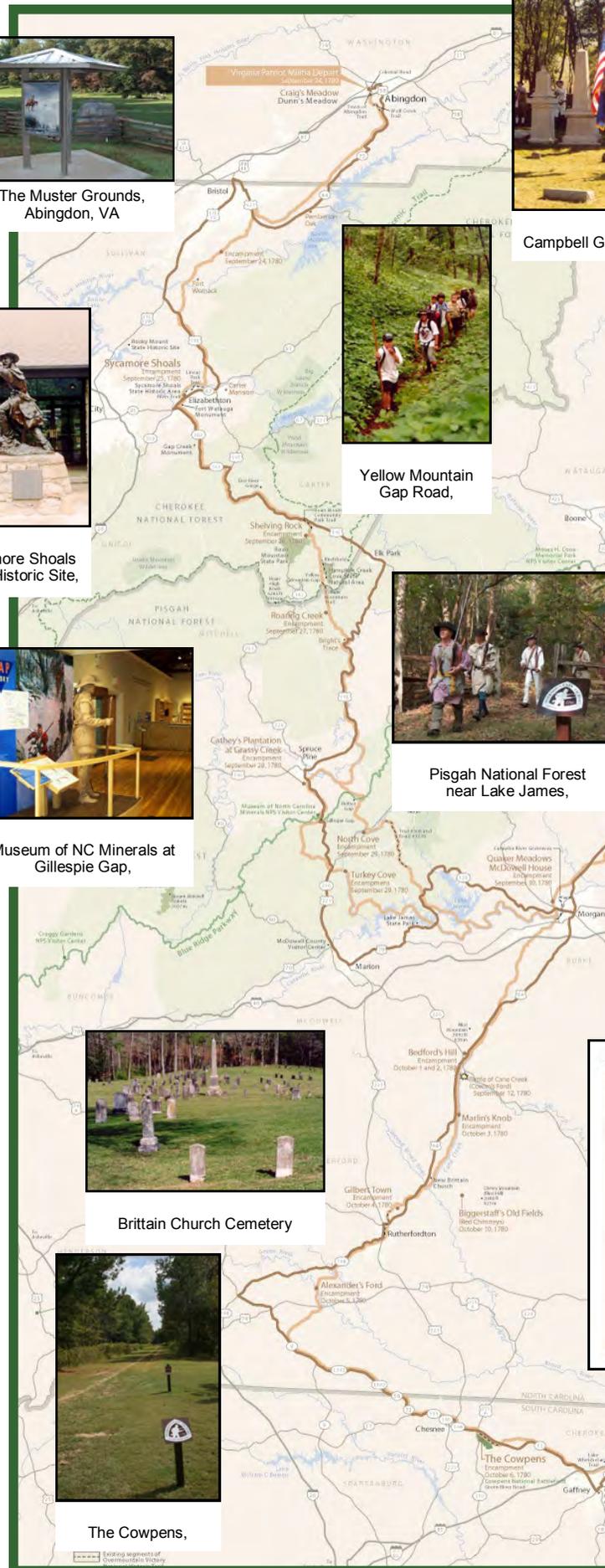
Pisgah National Forest near Lake James,



Brittain Church Cemetery

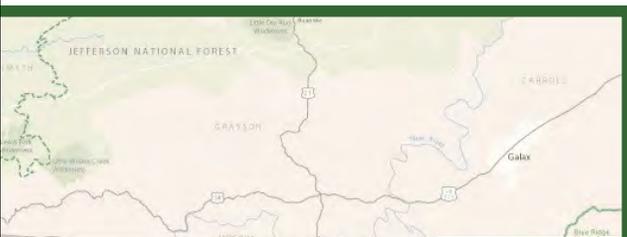


The Cowpens,





Grave Site,



OVNHT along Yadkin River, Elkin, NC



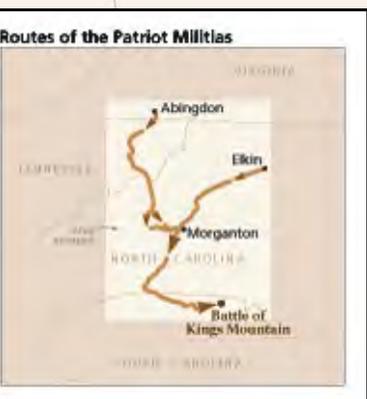
Wilkes Heritage Museum,



W. Kerr Scott Dam & Reservoir,



Catawba River Greenway



Kings Mountain National Military Park, York Co., SC

**October 1** – The combined army of over 1400 militiamen head south toward Gilbert Town (near today’s Rutherfordton) where they expect to find Ferguson’s army. Because of heavy rain, the patriots stop in the late afternoon at Bedford Hill in South Mountain Gap.

**October 2** – Continuing rain keeps the men in camp this day. The patriot leaders meet and elect William Campbell as their commander.

**October 3** – The patriot militiamen prepare for battle and move toward Gilbert Town along Cane Creek. They do not pitch camp; the men sleep on their arms.

**October 4** – The patriots arrive in Gilbert Town to find that Ferguson is already gone. The militia leaders send out scouts and continue south to learn if Ferguson is heading for the fort at Ninety Six (SC) or for Charlotte (NC).

**October 5** – The patriots head southwest and camp at Alexander’s Ford on the Green River. They learn from scouts that Ferguson is marching toward Charlotte and the protection of Cornwallis’s army.

**October 6** – The patriots ride southeast toward Cowpens where they are joined by militiamen from South Carolina, Georgia and Lincoln Co., NC. They learn that Ferguson is only 35 miles away, camped at Kings Mountain. The leaders pick the 900 best marksmen and the 900 fittest horses. At 9:00 p.m. these patriot militiamen ride into the night as a cold rain continues to fall.

**October 7** – Having ridden all night and forded the rain-swollen Broad River, the patriot army encircles Kings Mountain at 3:00 p.m. and in “one heroic hour” captures or kills—including the despised Patrick Ferguson—the entire loyalist army. The patriot losses are small: 28 killed and 62 wounded. The loyalists suffer more: 150 killed, 150 wounded, some 800 captured. Cornwallis’s left flank is destroyed.

**Epilogue** – With this Patriot victory at Kings Mountain, the British found it harder to muster loyalists. After subsequent battles at Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse, Cornwallis decided he could not subdue North Carolina. He moved into Virginia; just 12 months and 12 days after the Battle of Kings Mountain, Cornwallis surrendered the British forces to the army of patriot and French soldiers under General George Washington, on Oct. 19, 1781 at Yorktown, VA. ●



*“This trail is like traveling back in time.”*

## Lessons Learned

### *Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program at the Abingdon Muster Grounds*

Since 2007, National Park Service has offered another special program as an effective way to help use national parks as additional teaching opportunities. As part of the Teacher to Ranger to Teacher Program, two teachers from nearby Virginia school systems were engaged in the work of The Muster Grounds in Abingdon, Virginia during summer 2011. These teachers were selected for the opportunity because of their interest in helping create a link into their classroom curricula for material and experiences they found in working at the site.

“We had two teachers with us for the summer,” said Leigh Anne Hunter, superintendent of the Abingdon Muster Grounds and the W. Blair Keller Interpretive Center. “Katie Jessee is a high school art teacher in Wise County; Patty Barrett is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade history teacher in Washington County. During the summer they served as interpreters in the center and led guided walks as Rangers along the OVNHT. They helped out with programs for bus tours and assisted with some of our events such as the Highland Festival and A Call



Area teachers Katie Jessee (left) and Patty Barrett participated in the NPS's Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program at the Abingdon Muster Grounds during the summer of 2011.

to Arms. They did some planning, too, helping develop the programming for a week-long day camp we'll be offering that focuses on life in the backcountry during the late 1700s as well as the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain. We know that from their experience in the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program they will take information back to their classrooms during the school year. The Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program really has benefited the OVNHT, and I know the teachers got a lot out of it as well.” ●

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visiting the new wayside exhibits on both sides of the river.

“We were delighted when the opportunity came up to develop this small piece of land next to the river from which we could tell our part of “The Story,” said Ambre Torbett, Director of Planning for Sullivan County. A paved parking area enables visitors to access a short trail leading to a suspension bridge across the Holston River. From the bridge and from a second wayside on the north side of the bridge, visitors can see the historic ford and imagine the militiamen crossing in 1780 on their way to the muster along the Watauga River. ●



Participants in the PNTS conference in May stopped at the new wayside exhibit to experience the story as told at Bluff City. Elected officials greeted the visitors.

hundreds of times to groups of private citizens and schoolchildren of all ages.

Since 2003 you have also served as the President of the OVTA. You helped lead this organization through its transition from being a small group of dedicated members and trail supporters to a nationally and regionally recognized organization that serves as a leader in trail preservation and interpretation.

You have proven to be a determined champion of preserving places, and pathway segments, that are original to the Kings Mountain campaign. These sites would not have been saved without your taking the time to contact key organizations and individuals, as well as persistently pursuing preservation objectives despite sometimes daunting obstacles and limited time.”

“I am honored to receive this award,” said Alan. “I am one of a large community of supporters of this story and this Trail. I am glad to have made a contribution to the cause and appreciate the support and help that I have

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ter Grounds,” said Alan Bowen, president of OVTA. “They were led by the Watauga Fife and Drum Corps and after crossing the new footbridge, were greeted by our gathering of professional, costumed interpreters. The series of programs the participants witnessed that afternoon was a great showcase of the educational programming provided at venues all along the OVNHT.” President Bowen is a descendant of Rees Bowen, one of several Virginia militiamen killed at the Battle of Kings Mountain. Rees Bowen and the Virginia militiamen mustered at this site, now the OVNHT Trailhead in Virginia in 1780.

Representatives from all across the country gathered for four days to unite in the pursuit of improving the country’s recreational, scenic, and historic trails which are part of the National Trail System. Keynote speakers and breakout sessions covered a range of topics of interest. The OVNHT was promoted in a couple of the sessions, including one emphasizing the use of storytelling in engaging the public’s interest.

“We also organized a bus tour of a portion of the OVNHT,” said Paul Carson, Superintendent of the OVNHT. “Thirty people got a chance to visit several of the sites along the Trail and to hear from landowners, town officials, state agency representatives, museum directors, and trail advocates about how they have benefited from the OVNHT in their areas.

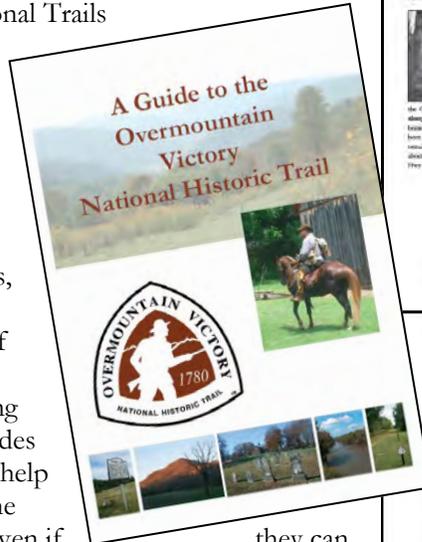
The 2011 National Trails Conference in Abingdon was a great success. Julia Glad of PNTS is commended for helping organize the event from her offices in Minnesota. “The enthusiasm, creativity, and cooperation of the OVTA and the Town of Abingdon helped make this one of the best trails conferences ever,” said Glad. “I look forward to being coming back. The Trail, the town, and everyone involved were so helpful.” ●

## A Guide to the OVNHT

### Finding a place in history

The OVNHT also now has its first guidebook. “A Guide to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail” was released at the National Trails

Conference. It leads the reader along the trail to the spots where they can see markers, monuments, interpretive waysides, museums and walk certified segments of the Trail. It includes detailed maps, driving directions, and includes 150 photographs to help readers appreciate the Trail and the story even if



they can only visit some of the places. The book was written by Randell Jones. Copies are available at Eastern National bookstores along the Trail, from OVTA, or from the author online at [www.danielboonefootsteps.com](http://www.danielboonefootsteps.com). The trail guide and *Before They Were Heroes at King’s Mountain* each received 2011 Willie Parker Peace History Book Awards from the North Carolina Society of Historians. Randell Jones is a past president of the OVTA and creator of *Footsteps for Freedom* as well as the *Curricula-based Education Program for the OVNHT*, both available free as teaching



resources at [www.nps.gov/ovvi](http://www.nps.gov/ovvi). ●

## Long Range Interpretive Plan

### Finding better ways to tell the story

During 2010, meetings were held with interested groups around the region to gather input for the Long Range Interpretive Plan, a working document required for the OVNHT. (See *Trail Update 2010*.) In early 2011, the final 50-page report was presented and now serves as a guide for directing the investment of time and energy of the National Park Service as well as all Trail partners in improving the telling of “The Story” all along the Trail.

“So many good ideas came out of this process,” said Paul Carson, Superintendent, OVNHT. “Just as important was the chance for Trail partners to recognize the opportunities they have to advance the proper and correct telling of the history that we interpret by undertaking projects and efforts that the NPS would just not be able to do so soon. It really is a guide for all of us to use to help improve what we are all trying to do together—tell a better story.” ●



# Patriots for Partners

*Trail partners are taking big steps together*

Business consultants tell us that an organization is formed when a task is more than one person can do alone. That is certainly true when it comes to building the OVNHT. Today, dozens of organizations are working together across four states to build the commemorative Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT). In fact, today the Trail has well over 100 partners and more are joining every month! Here are some of them:

## Virginia

Numerous Private Landowners  
Virginia DOT  
Virginia Department of Tourism  
Virginia Department of Historical Resources  
Smyth County  
Town of Abingdon  
Washington County  
Historical Society of Washington County



## Tennessee

Numerous Private Landowners  
Tennessee DOT  
Town of Elizabethton  
Town of Bluff City  
Carter County  
Sullivan County  
Southern Appalachian Greenway Alliance  
Tennessee Department of Tourism  
Roan Mountain State Park  
Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area  
Rocky Mount State Historic Site  
Hampton Creek Cove State Natural Area  
Cherokee National Forest – U.S.F.S  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy  
Appalachian National Scenic Trail—NPS  
Appalachian Trail Club  
Back Country Horsemen of East Tennessee



## North Carolina

Numerous Private Landowners  
NCDOT  
NC Dept. of Cultural Resources  
NC Dept. of Tourism  
Pisgah National Forest – U.S. Forest Service  
Blue Ridge Parkway – NPS  
The Altapass Foundation  
McDowell County  
Wilkes County  
Brittain Church  
McDowell County Historical Society  
Historic Burke Foundation, Inc.  
Wilkes County Historical Society  
Surry County Historical Society  
Rutherford County Historical Society  
Lake James State Park  
Fort Defiance Historic Site  
Yadkin River Greenway—Wilkes  
Yadkin River Greenway—Caldwell  
Catawba River Greenway  
Duke Energy Company  
Crescent Land Corp.  
Wilkes County Heritage Museum  
Unimin Corporation  
Catawba-Wataree Relicensing Coalition  
Rutherford County  
Polk County  
City of Morganton  
City of Kings Mountain  
Town of Elkin  
Town of Rutherfordton  
Town of Ruth  
County of Burke  
Wake Forest University  
Piedmont Land Conservancy  
Foothills Land Conservancy  
Mountain to the Sea Trail  
Kings Mountain Gateway Committee  
Betchler Development Corporation



Brushy Mountain Cyclists Club  
W. Kerr Scott Reservoir – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor  
Foothills Nature Science Society  
Blue Ridge National Heritage Area  
NC State University  
White Oak Development  
Overmountain Vineyards  
The Bradley Fund, LLC  
Conservation Trust for NC  
Avery County  
Mitchell County  
High Country Council of Governments  
Caldwell County  
Surry County  
North Carolina Horse Council

## South Carolina

Numerous Private Landowners  
SCDOT  
SC Department of Tourism  
Cowpens National Battlefield – NPS  
Kings Mountain NMP – NPS  
Kings Mountain State Park  
SC Department of Parks  
Overmountain Victory Trail Committee  
Cherokee County  
Spartanburg County  
Town of Gaffney  
Carolina Backcountry Alliance  
The Palmetto Conservation Foundation  
Colonial Pipeline Company  
Cherokee County Historical Society



## All States

Overmountain Victory Trail Association, Inc.  
Federal Highway Administration  
Daughters of the American Revolution  
Sons of the American Revolution  
American Hiking Society  
American Battlefield Protection Program  
Eastern National Monument Association  
National Park Foundation  
Student Conservation Association



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

Paul Carson, Superintendent  
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail  
2635 Park Road  
Blacksburg, SC 29702

(864) 936-3477  
[www.nps.gov/ovvi](http://www.nps.gov/ovvi)



With so many interested parties working together on the OVNHT, we should not be surprised to see major elements of the Trail becoming a reality every year. It is indeed an exciting time to be involved with building the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. ●

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received over the seven years I have been president. We have accomplished a lot, and there is more to do. I invite everyone to join in and to continue working together to help tell the story of what these patriots did here.” ●

**Picture credits:** All photography by Randell Jones except “Lessons Learned.” Those two photos provided by Leigh Anne Hunter.