

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Minute Man National Historical Park



Setting the Standard for Safety and Authenticity: *The Center for 18th Century Life at Minute Man NHP Presents Battle Road 2011*





Battle Road 2011

The Center for 18th Century Life at Minute Man NHP, a partnership between the park and several volunteer living history organizations, presented the annual Battle Road event on April 16, 2011.

Overview

The Center for 18th Century Life, a creative partnership between Minute Man NHP and several volunteer living history organizations, is the park's living history volunteer recruitment, training, and retention program. Minute Man NHP, with its many historic structures and landscapes, and interpretive expertise, serves as the forum for the sharing of knowledge and information relative to 18th Century New England, and an evocative venue for living history events. Together with our partners, our goal is to raise the standards of safety, authenticity and interpretive value in living history programming here at the park and elsewhere in New England.

Battle Road 2011

Battle Road is Minute Man NHP's most intense living history event of the year. The event involves three separate tactical weapons demonstrations at North Bridge, Bloody Angle, and Parker's Revenge. The event also features many family friendly interpretive activities and demonstrations at the Hartwell Tavern and Captain William Smith House which include cooking, spinning and other domestic arts demonstrations, family drill programs, artillery demonstrations, artifact displays, first person character portrayals and more. These are performed by hundreds of living history volunteers who help us bring the story of

the American Revolution's opening battle to life for thousands of visitors.

Event Preparation

Battle Road Committee

The first part in the planning process was meeting with the Battle Road Committee. The Battle Road Committee, a planning cadre made up of park staff and representatives from local reenactment units, is a coalition partner in The Center for 18th Century Life at Minute Man NHP. The BRC met nearly once per month, starting in October, 2010 to plan this year's Battle Road event. During the meetings, the BRC established the interpretive goals of the event, developed the tactical scenarios, and helped the park resolve logistical issues such as parking and transportation, access to water, crowd control, participant registration, ammunition, event schedules etc.

This year, the 10th Massachusetts Regiment served as the committee's "Host Unit." The Host Unit serves as the principle liaison between the NPS and the larger reenactor community. They play a leading role at BRC meetings, garner participant support for the event, and provide the Provincial command structure during the tactical demonstrations.

The Hive

Another key element in event preparation was The Hive. The Hive, also a coalition partner in The Center for 18th Century

Opposite: Provincial drummer and fifer on Battle Road.

Life, is a group of living history volunteers with expertise in historical costuming and 18th century material culture. They provide a broad offering of instructional workshops and free lectures to living history volunteers in preparation for the spring events. This year, The Hive met once per month, January through March, at the Noah Brooks Tavern, a historic structure within the park. Over 100 volunteers participated in these workshops and lectures, which ranged in topics from period-appropriate eyewear and women's hair styles, to musket tuning and drill. The activities of The Hive, created by "The Ladies of Refined Taste" have raised the quality of the Battle Road event considerably over the past few years.

The members of The Hive also planned and coordinated civilian living history roles during the Battle Road event. These activities took place at Hartwell Tavern and the Captain William Smith House and included

reconstituting dried, pressed, preserved food that they prepared at Hartwell Tavern last fall, into a delicious, period-appropriate early spring meal for event participants (which the Historic Weapons Supervisor is very sorry to have missed, on account of his being so busy!).

Cartridge Committee

The Cartridge Committee was a solution to a serious safety and logistical issue. Because the event involves so many reenactors, we had, in the past, allowed participants to bring their own ammunition which was then inspected and secured by the NPS and re-issued at the time of the tactical demonstration. This was a cumbersome process at best and fell far short of ensuring event safety. Then, in 2009, we started the Cartridge Committee. Under the supervision of the park's Historic Weapons Supervisor, Jim Hollister, a group of volunteers got to



A VIP training session at "The Hive" held at the Noah Brooks Tavern, a historic structure of Minute Man NHP



Provincial militia march off in good order following the Bloody Angle Tactical Demonstration

gether over the winter at the park to make ammunition for the event. The park supplied the powder, and volunteers donated most of the paper tubes. This allowed the NPS to supply all the cartridges for the event; all properly made according to NPS standards.

This year, the cartridge committee met three times. By the day of the event, we had made 6,500 cartridges. Those we did not use will be used for other events, education and interpretive programs at the park.

Battle Road Guide Training

The Battle Road Guides, led by VIP Nick Zallas, played a vital interpretive role during the tactical demonstrations by answering questions and explaining the action for visitors. They also assisted park staff with crowd control. On March 12th, the Guides (44 of them) spent a day at the park for in-

terpretive training with sessions on content, interpretive techniques and principles, and kit inspection. Training sessions were presented by Minute Man NHP Interpretive Rangers and living history volunteers.

Unit drill and inspections

During the winter, Minute Man NHP provided indoor space for participating units to use for drill and training purposes. Approximately 75 volunteers took advantage of this opportunity. From the park's perspective, a well-drilled unit is a safe unit. Also, in order to ensure that event authenticity standards were being met, the Battle Road Committee set up an inspection team, made up of experienced living history volunteers and park staff. This team then visited the participating units at the places where they held their meetings and drills during the winter, and inspected them for authenticity and proficiency with drill.

This proved to be a very effective way of communicating with participating units about the event and answer any questions they may have. The inspection team was courteously received by all participating units who regarded a “passing grade” with great pride. It should be noted that no units “failed” their inspection, but many received helpful instruction in reaching easily attainable goals.

Approximately 265 VIPs donated at total of 2677 hours preparing for the event.

The Big Day

On April 16, 2011 (Battle Road Day), Park staff and volunteers worked seamlessly together to make sure the event was brought to a safe, effective, and happy conclusion. This year, several thousand visitors attended the event, and some claimed it was the best yet. We are currently planning a wrap-up meeting with the reenactors to

discuss what worked well, and what could be improved for next year. The season is off to a great start!

On April 16, 2011, approximately 521 VIPs donated 4168 volunteer hours in a single day!



Mounted participants added to the excitement and spectacle of the event, and also helped with communication and coordination during the tactical scenarios.



British reenactors are “living the moment” during the Bloody Angle Tactical Demonstration.

Conclusion

At Minute Man NHP, Battle Road is the “kick off” event for the season. It requires a huge effort on the part of park staff and our volunteers to execute effectively. However, all of that effort is not simply expended on a single-day event. Our preparations each year set new standards of safety, authenticity, and interpretive value for living history programming throughout the year, and strengthen the park’s relationship with our partnering organizations. These improved

standards even extend beyond the borders of the park. “Battle Road Standards” have been applied to other living history events in New England and are becoming a benchmark for quality among the living history community.

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Battle Road drew several thousand visitors to Minute Man NHP on April 16, 2011.

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