

A Volunteer Effort

– the Unrelenting Pursuit of the
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail
1974-1980

*“The trail you have just covered is now in the national consciousness
of Americans. I salute your hearty witness to history.”*

– Cecil Andrus, Secretary of the Interior,
at Kings Mountain National Military Park addressing marchers of the
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail,
1980 Bicentenary Ceremony

Special

Silver Anniversary

Report

1980-2005

Researched and written
by Randell Jones,
past president,
Overmountain Victory Trail Association, Inc.



March 2005

Resources

Interviews:

Senator James T. Broyhill - October 14, 2004
Harry J. Smith—October 20, 2004
Borden Mace - December 14, 2004
Gary Everhardt— January 20, 2005

Newspapers:

Winston-Salem Journal
Charlotte Observer
The Shelby Daily Star
Johnson City Press-Chronicle
Watauga Democrat
United Press International
The News Herald (Morganton)

Photograph quality:

All photographs were copied from microfilm, the only source available. Some pictures are poor quality; still, most serve adequately to illustrate the activity and persons originally photographed.—RJ

Permissions:

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Acknowledgments:

I wish to thank the National Park Service and in particular Paul Carson, Superintendent, Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail for championing this project to document the early history of the OVNHT on the occasion of the Trail's 25th anniversary in 2005. I thank each of the persons interviewed for his enthusiastic participation. I thank the individual newspapers for their willingness to permit reproduction of these old photographs; and, I thank the libraries who have archived these newspapers on microfilm for their assistance during my research. Most of all, I thank the modern patriots who thought the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780 was worth telling and worked tirelessly in the unrelenting pursuit of Congressional designation for the Trail.

I remain your most humble and obedient servant,



— Randell Jones, past president, OVTA

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OVER MOUNTAIN VICTORY TRAIL

Executive Summary

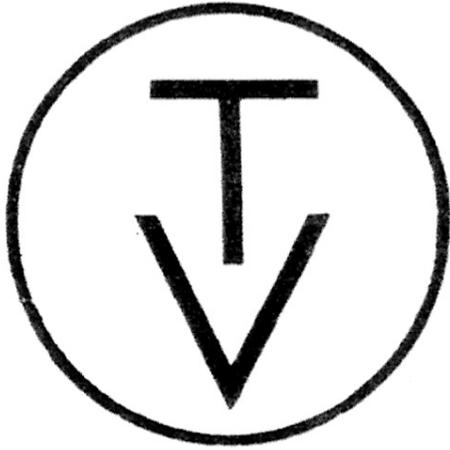
The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail was created from the efforts of thousands of people across five states. From 1974 into 1980, they organized commemorative marches and pursued Congressional designation for the Trail. The effort began in Boone, NC at the Appalachian Consortium in 1974 as executive director Borden Mace collaborated with local writer and history buff, Rip Collins. After they enthused others about the commemorative march, a group of volunteers set off on September 26, 1975 from Sycamore Shoals in Elizabethton, TN. They were committed to walking the historic route of the Overmountain Men of 1780 all the way to Kings Mountain National Military Park in Cherokee and York counties, SC, some 130 miles away. Along with others who joined them on the way, the marchers arrived as planned on October 7. On the final day of this successful, first-year walk, the marchers were greeted in Kings Mountain, NC by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller.

Organizers continued with succeeding annual marches of the Overmountain Victory Trail. In 1976, citizens petitioned North Carolina US Representative James T. Broyhill to pursue Congressional designation of the trail as a National Historic Trail. Marches in 1977, 1978 and 1979 kept the dream alive and became an expected part of the annual celebrations at Kings Mountain National Military Park. In the late 1970s, citizens formed the Overmountain Victory Trail Association (chartered January 1979) and elected Rip Collins its first president.

In September 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed into law Congressman Broyhill's bill thus securing for the historic route the long-sought designation as the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. Marches have continued annually for 30 years. ●

Background map from 1976 OVT brochure.
Maps by Dan Stilwell, faculty, Appalachian State University.
Copy courtesy of Harry Keiner, Ph.D., C.A., University Archivist, ASU





"V for Victory. T for Trail."
 Symbol drawn by Warren Dennis.
 from 1976 OVT brochure

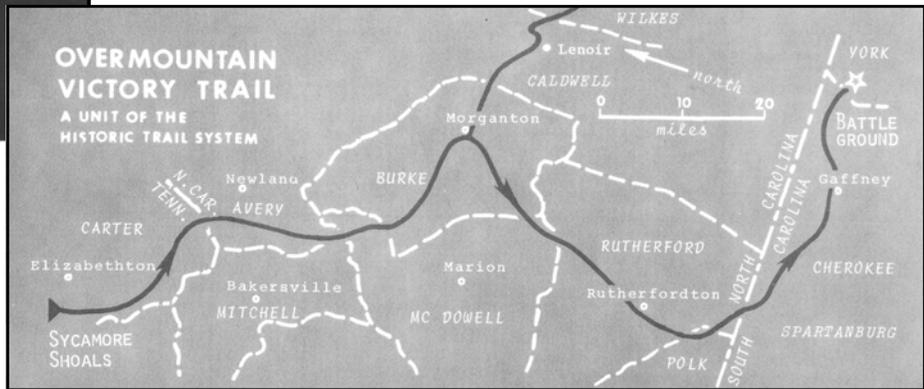


Bright's Trace in Avery County, NC
 from 1976 OVT brochure

**overmountain
 victory
 trail**



**REVOLUTIONARY WAR
 1775 - 1781
 BI-CENTENNIAL**



Cover and map from 1976 OVT brochure
 Courtesy of Harry Keiner, Ph.D., C.A., University Archivist
 Appalachian State University



Frank Norville, resident of Rutherford Co., NC,
 points toward Cane Creek for deputy trail marshal
 Fred Burgin from Samuel Andrew's homesite.



Preface

The Battle of Kings Mountain was a pivotal event in America's War for Independence. For many historians, its importance cannot be overestimated. Years after the battle, no less than President Thomas Jefferson called it the "turning of the tide" in the country's fight for freedom. Senator James T. Broyhill, a longtime Trail champion and student of the American Revolution, says this: "If it had not been for the Battle of Kings Mountain, there would have been no Battle of Cowpens. Without the Battle of Cowpens, there would have been no Battle of Guilford Courthouse, and without the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, there would have been no Battle of Yorktown at which Cornwallis surrendered to Washington." The senator's words clearly reveal the chain of critical events that led from the victory at Kings Mountain to the establishment of the United States of America as a free and independent nation. (Notably, Senator Broyhill, then a Congressman from North Carolina, is also the person who introduced the bill to Congress in 1977 to acquire designation for the Overmountain Victory Trail as a National Historic Trail in 1980.)

The Battle of Kings Mountain, of course, would not have occurred had not the "backwater" militiamen of Virginia, North Carolina (including today's Tennessee), Georgia and South Carolina mustered to the call to defend their homeland against an army threatening to invade. "If you do not desist your opposition to the British Arms," declared Major Patrick Ferguson, "I shall march this army over the mountains, hang your leaders and lay your country waste with fire and sword." The citizens rallied; men and women prepared for battle, but for a battle on their own terms. These were ordinary citizens making their lives on the

frontier where land was affordable and they could imagine and work for a future free of the impositions of an unreasonable and unhelpful government. So, when the call came to defend their homes, the women helped prepare and the men mounted their horses and rode over the mountains, along valleys, up and down creeks, across hundreds of miles of forest which could have secreted their enemy at every turn. These volunteer militiamen without a Regular American officer or soldier among them doggedly pursued Ferguson and his army of American Loyalists. At the last, this Patriot militia, by then numbering about 2,000, sent 900 of its force forward on a midnight ride through a cold October rain for some 35 miles. They encircled the would-be conqueror on a promontory known then as Little Kings Mountain. The battle lasted but one hour, yet the effects of that encounter have been felt for 225 years.

The battle itself has been commemorated and honored over the years. The site has been made a National Military Park and deservedly so. But, as America's Bicentennial celebration approached, a group of ordinary citizens, without any state, local, or federal government support set out to commemorate another part of the Kings Mountain story—the heroic campaign to that battle, the gathering of militia from across the Piedmont and mountain regions and their two week trek and unrelenting pursuit of Major Patrick Ferguson and his army. It is this part of the story which inspired these modern-day American Patriots to mark the route and annually reenact the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain. Today that route is known as the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. ●



Introduction

The first march of the Overmountain Victory Trail was held in 1975. Since that time, the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain has been commemorated annually for 30 years by citizens volunteering to walk along the historic route, striving to keep alive the memory of these American Patriot heroes. Today that route is known as the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail; but, that honorable designation was not always assured, though from the beginning that was clearly the desire of the organizers.

This is the story of the six-year effort to create a living memorial to the Patriot militiamen of 1780 and to secure Congressional designation of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

Whereas and Therefore

The idea for a commemorative march rose up just like that army of militiamen did in 1780; and, once it was mustered, it took on a life of its own. In a 2004 interview, Borden Mace, executive director of the Appalachian Consortium from 1972 to 1978, recalled how the commemorative march of the Overmountain Victory Trail began.

“The idea bubbled up in a conversation I was having with Rip Collins. He had written an article about Bright’s Trace for the Consortium’s newsletter. He was quite interested in the work our group was doing to help promote Appalachia including its heritage and its natural attractions. We were in my office on the Appalachian State campus in Boone talking about his recent piece of writing when he said, ‘You know, there’s more to the story about that stretch of trail than we’ve said here.’ Then Rip began to talk

about the Overmountain Men of 1780 and their heroic crossing of Roan Mountain through Yellow Mountain Gap in pursuit of Major Patrick Ferguson. I was already familiar with parts of the story as were many people from this area, but one thing led to another and before we knew it, we were sitting there talking about conducting a commemorative march from Sycamore Shoals to Kings Mountain, the whole 150 miles.

“I had a little discretionary money in the Consortium’s budget, so I thought it would be interesting to print some broadsides on parchment-like paper. Broad­sides were an important means of official communication to the public in the 1700’s, so I thought it would be interesting to use them here. The idea was to post them throughout communities along the historic route to make people aware of our plans to hold this commemorative march. The message started off with a series of some dozen ‘whereas-es’ and some facts from Draper’s book. It included a reference to Thomas Jefferson’s statement that the Battle of Kings Mountain was the ‘turning of the tide’ in America’s fight for independence. Then it finished with a big ‘therefore, let it be known.’ It sounded official and historic. Anyway, they were posted mostly on bulletin boards in libraries and courthouses, though in the spirit of things, I’m sure a few, like the ones nailed to trees 200 years ago, were tacked to a telephone pole or two.”

Let’er Rip

Robert L. Collins was known to most

everyone as “Rip.” He had an ear for history and an eye for places he thought ought to be preserved. Rip was an experienced outdoorsman and a former scout executive; he operated an outfitter store between Boone and Blowing Rock. He sold maps, backpacks, canoes, and all the goods an avid explorer would need to venture confidently into the highland wilderness of Tennessee and North Carolina. At his store is where he first met Harry J. Smith.

“I was a salesman at the time,” recalled Smith, “calling on the staff of school cafeterias and selling them equipment. One of my customers was Margaret Collins. In passing one day she told me a little about her husband’s plans for some sort of long distance hike. I went to see him at his store. It sounded interesting.”

Harry J. Smith hails from Laurel Bloomery, Tennessee which, he is quick to point out, is the eastern-most post office in Tennessee. “And a bloomery, as I have found hardly anyone knows,” Smith added, “is an old, British term for an iron forge. It has nothing to do with blooming laurels. I fool a lot of people on that one.” Smith was the Grand Marshal of the commemorative march in 1976, during America’s Bicentennial celebration. He is the only surviving grand marshal from the years before the Trail was so designated by Congress.

“When I first met Rip,” recalled Smith, “I listened to him describe his plans for this commemorative march and what he had already put together. At the time, I had a group of about 20 kids who were part of a mountain rescue team. These were Explorer Scouts that I’d led as scout master since they had been younger; but,

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Yellow Mountain Gap Road is recognized for its history.



when they got to be 15 and 16, I told them they were going to have to get tougher. We did cross-country orienteering and some off-road rescue. These kids were good. When Rip heard me talk about them, he looked me straight in the eye and said, 'Well, Harry, you're now the safety marshal,' and that was that."

Rip Collins started researching the detailed history of the Overmountain Men and their 1780 campaign in pursuit of the Loyalists under Major Patrick Ferguson. Using the published records and accounts, in particular Lyman C. Draper's *Kings Mountain and Its Heroes*, Collins located all the campsites and set up a schedule for a commemorative march that would put the walkers in the historic spots on the historic dates. It would start at Sycamore Shoals on September 26 and end at Kings Mountain National Military Park on October 7, twelve days and about 150 miles later.

"He was a master at organization," recalled Smith. "He had everything worked out on paper in great detail. He organized a network of marshals all along the way. Each was appointed by the local Bicentennial commission and each was responsible for the march in his respective county. Rip had groups lined up, such as DAR chapters and volunteer fire departments, to feed us along the way; he had a radio station ready to meet us on the trail. He even located hot showers for the women who might be walking. He had a job for everyone, too, even an Entertainment Marshal. That was Bob Harman, an accomplished dulcimer player. Rip's level of planning was impressive."

"Rip knew that this couldn't just be a North Carolina effort," continued Smith. "He needed someone involved from Tennessee. That's when he sent me to meet with Tom Gray. Tom was another champion of the story of the Overmountain Men and he had a reputation for it. He'd been working for years to get some sort of

recognition for this history on the Tennessee side, but he had not had much luck. After I explained to him what we were doing, he said, 'It's been in my head all along.' Tom and his wife, Alma, joined in the effort. They wanted this march to be a success as much as anyone."

Hail to the Chief

"In our conversations," Mace continued in his reflections, "we realized we needed to have something extra to get the media attention that would help create a successful march and help drive our effort to get the trail recognized by Congress. I made a call to the White House and explained what we were doing. I then sent a letter inviting President Gerald Ford to come greet the marchers."

Unknown to Mace, US

Representative James T. Broyhill had already invited Gerald Ford to come greet the marchers in Kings Mountain, North Carolina as part of that community's celebration of its centennial anniversary. Broyhill and Ford had served together in Congress and were friends. "Gerald had just been made vice president in 1974 when I presented him a letter of invitation from John Henry Moss, mayor of Kings Mountain," recalled Broyhill. "When he became President, I called and asked if he still planned to join us. He said he would come."

With the President invited, the march organizers decided to create

something really special to call attention to the historic event and their desire to have it commemorated as an official trail. As in 1780, when the need arose, the volunteers appeared.

Audie Rogers of Candler, North Carolina donated a 200-year-old South Appalachian hunting horn to the effort. (Some accounts say 100-year-old; others, 150-years-old.) Bob Harman of Blowing Rock donated a 150-year-old Bible which Collins later described as "old as the story of the battle." (Again, some accounts say the Bible was 200-years-old.) These two antiques were carried along the entire route and passed from county marshal to county marshal. They were to be presented to President Ford at Kings



Collins wrote an article for *The State* in June 1975 promoting the planned commemorative march.

Mountain. The hunting horn, expertly sounded by Bob Harman, signaled the start of the march at Sycamore Shoals and was used every day during the march to muster the marchers to action. Along with these items a scroll was carried along the route. Mace, Collins, and Smith prepared the scroll in Mace's office at Appalachian State University. Every county marshal signed it in succession with the expectation of adding the President's signature at Kings Mountain.

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Mustering the Marchers

To help promote the commemorative march, Collins wrote an article about Bright's Trace, Yellow Mountain Gap, and the historic event for *The State* magazine published in North Carolina. That article appeared in the June 1975 issue. At the end of the article, Collins announced plans for the march:

“For years a number of individuals such as Judge Ben Allen of Elizabethton, Tenn., Dr. Emmett White of Burke County, N.C. and Prof. Bobby Moss of Limestone College in Gaffney, S.C. have walked, mapped and talked of properly marking and commemorating the route followed by the 18th Century backwoodsmen.

“Individually each segment and each state involved in the 130 mile trail was isolated. There seemed to be no cohesive factor. With the coming of the Bicentennial and a group headquartered in Boone, known as the Appalachian Consortium, the possibility of an interstate coordination was recognized.

“A framework committee of ‘trail marshals’ has been appointed by Bicentennial commissions along the route of the march. A reenactment of this significant event will take place in September and October of this year with Rip Collins, of Boone, acting as the Grand Marshal.

“Originating on the Watauga River on September 25th in Tennessee’s Carter County, each succeeding county will provide leadership and participants for the reenactment on successive anniversary days of the original march until it terminates at Kings Mountain in York and Cherokee counties, South Carolina on October 7, 1975.

“Local Marshals in Avery, Mitchell, McDowell, Burke, Rutherford and Polk counties, North Carolina are authenticating, mapping and marking the route and campgrounds. The Consortium is printing a map brochure which details the dates and locations. A trail marker and a woven design have been created and are being prepared.

“The eventual goal of the hundreds now working on the preservation and recognition of the trail is that by the 200th anniversary date of the actual march and victory this route will be declared to be a National Historic Trail.

“Bright’s Trace which crosses the spectacular Yellow Mountain Gap

1975 – The First Step

at an elevation of almost a mile above sea level, along with Yellow Mountain Road and all the other



“Bob Harman of Blowing Rock, N.C., sounds the horn at Sycamore Shoals this morning signaling the beginning of a march along the historic Overmountain Victory Trail from Sycamore Shoals to Yellow Mountain Gap in North Carolina. With Harman, left to right are Tom Gray and Rip Collins, who is holding a Bible which, along with the 150-year-old horn, will be presented to President Ford at the conclusion of the hike.” Photo by Herchel Ornduff, Johnson City Press-Chronicle, Sept. 1975.

segments of the route now stands a good chance of being preserved, as a part of what the local historians have agreed to designate . . . the ‘Overmountain Victory Trail.’”

Early on Friday morning, September 26, 1975, the marchers gathered on the grounds of the Franklin Club in Elizabethton, Tennessee in sight of Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River. Playing the roll of a pioneer clergyman, Frank Donoho, a student at Washington College Academy, delivered for the modern marchers the historic prayer offered in 1780 by Reverend Samuel Doak for the benefit of the mustered militiamen. Both the historic and the contemporary blessings ended with the spirited phrase that became a battle cry in 1780: “The Sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.”

The Elizabethton High School Band played for the occasion and color guards were provided by Veterans of Foreign Wars, Army National Guard, Johnson City Marine Corps Reserves, and Junior ROTC. One estimate suggests perhaps 400 people attended the send-off ceremony.

At about 10 o’clock, Bob Harman blew on the hunting horn and the first-ever commemorative march of the Overmountain Victory Trail began. Not far from the starting point, the marchers proceeded along Gap Creek Road to the local school where a new monument was dedicated.

Getting in the Spirit

Tom Gray was the marshal for Carter County, Tennessee. While he was talking up the local history of Fort Watauga and the Overmountain Men at Gap Creek Elementary School one day, he got the students excited about the commemorative march. As reported in the Johnson-City Press Chronicle by Kay Wilkins, a long-time and avid supporter of the OVT, they

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decided to build a monument because their school was on the historic route; but, they didn't have much time. "The easy part was getting a couple of bags of mortar mix," said Robert Clark, a fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, "but the hard part was gathering the rocks." Students carried rocks from a dry creek bed behind the school to the roadside where custodian Bill



"Gap Creek students view monument after ceremony." Staff photo, Johnson City Press-Chronicle,

Lyons volunteered his masonry skills. Without time to engrave a plaque, a poster greeted the first group of marchers in 1975. They stopped to dedicate the monument and to praise the patriotic spirit of the students. The children joined in the march for a mile before returning to their school. The following year, the first Gap Creek School monument was dismantled and reconstructed to accommodate a sizable plaque donated by the Tennessee Society, Sons of the Revolution. This time Lyons laid the foundation for the new monument and Larry Honeycutt laid the stones. It was completed just in time for the 1976 Bicentennial commemorative march.

Rising to the Occasion

Today, the annual commemorative march of the Overmountain Victory National

Historic Trail is a combination of walking and riding in vehicles for a number of reasons, including arriving in time to participate in scheduled dedication ceremonies in various communities. But in 1975 (and ignoring the fact that the historic militiamen were mounted and covering this route on horseback), the organizers planned for participants to walk the entire way. As a consequence, safety was a priority.

"For the most part, we were walking down the road," continued Smith. "I had these young men, the Watauga Mountain Rescue Squad, in uniforms with white helmets on. We put some in front with flags to watch for cars and we put some in back in an old '53 Dodge Power Wagon to help keep the traffic off our group of marchers. The truck also served as a 'sag wagon' for those who got tired of walking."

The marchers camped that first night in a field just past Shelving Rock along the



This map showed the daily progress of Bonds and the marchers in 1775.

Doe River. The Roan Mountain Ruritans provided barbecue and entertained the marchers with bluegrass music, some of which the marchers provided themselves. The next day they walked up Sugar Hollow and climbed through the woods on a steep path to Yellow Mountain Gap where they crossed the Appalachian Trail. By then, the ranks of marchers had thinned some to only a hardy few.

At the top of the mountain, at historic Yellow Mountain Gap, the Carter County marchers met the county marshal for Avery County, North Carolina and his group of marchers.



"Lou Bonds talks with R. Ivey Moore, an old-timer who is traveling with the Overmountain Men." Staff photo by Charlie Buchanan, *Winston-Salem Journal*, Sept. 29, 1975

They had lunch together and passed the horn, the Bible and the scroll along to the new contingent of marchers. Some of the Carter County group returned home, but some, those planning to go all the way to Kings Mountain, continued on.



This caricature of Lou Bonds accompanied each story he wrote from the first march,

Fort Defiance

While some of the marchers were making their way over the mountains, another group mustered at Fort Defiance in Wilkes County, North Carolina. The 1780

battle was fought by a militia contingent combined, in part, from those mustered at Sycamore Shoals and those mustered from the Carolina Piedmont. The 1975 commemorative march included citizens from both areas as well.

On Sunday, September 28, Fort Defiance hosted a gathering to honor their pioneer ancestors. Attending that event were a handful of hikers who planned to walk the historic route through Lenoir and onto

(Continued on page 10)



Morganton. There they would meet the marchers coming over the mountains at historic Quaker Meadows. One of the Wilkes County marchers was R. Ivey Moore, fourth-grand nephew of Daniel Boone and a man proud to say he was the oldest Eagle Scout at age 73. Moore, a longtime “mountain man” from North Wilkesboro planned to make it all the way to Kings Mountain, but he expected to ride much of the way.

Another walker originating at Fort Defiance was Lou Bonds, a staff reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal*. His assignment was to join in the hike to Kings Mountain and to send back daily reports from the trail. His series of journal entries appeared daily from September 29 through October 8, each recounting the events of the previous day. As he wrote on that first day, the other walkers planning to hike the whole way were Boy Scouts, ages 13 and 14, about a dozen years his junior. The “through hikers” were a young crowd, but as he reported later others joined them along the way.

The Wilkes-Caldwell marchers (sometimes called the Wilkes-Surry marchers) left Fort Defiance at 10 a.m. and arrived in Lenoir for a parade that afternoon. Lenoir was the site of Fort Crider where the historic militiamen camped. In the 20th Century, the site of Fort Crider became the site of Lenoir High School. The celebrants feasted on a 156-pound cake created by Ruth



“Bob Benner marking Victory Trail route.” *News Herald*, Sept. 26, 1975

Havnaer (or Haigler) of Hudson. It was formed like the Bennington Flag with 13 red and white stripes, 13 stars and a prominent “76” centered in the blue field. [Note: Flag historians believe this flag design dates from the War of 1812, and included the “76” to arouse the American people against the British once again.]

Quaker Meadows

The next day, the marchers on the eastern leg made their way south toward Morganton. Meanwhile, Burke County trail marshal Bob Benner had been busy marking the overland trail from the McDowell-Burke county line at NC 105 to Morganton. On September 30, the two groups of marchers arrived at the Burke County Fairgrounds which lay on part of the site of the McDowell plantation at Quaker Meadows. All totaled, the commemorative marchers numbered 13, six from Tennessee and seven from North Carolina.

Grand Marshal Collins addressed the crowd of 2,000 who gathered to greet

the marchers. The folklore class of East Burke High School wrote an original composition for the occasion, and the Freedom High School Chorus sang an original ballad. (See Appendix.) Other festivities included muzzle-loader firing demonstrations, square-dancing and clogging, and a blue grass concert.

Burke County trail marshal Bob Benner, dressed in buckskin, invited members of the community to join them on the march south. On the following morning as they left Morganton at 8:15, they were joined by a group of 300 elementary school children and their teachers.

“I remember as we were leaving Morganton,” recalled Harry Smith, “we were heading down Highway 64. It was not a safe place to be walking, what with big trucks flying by us all the time, and we had a pretty big crowd out there. Somebody pulled up in a pick-up with a load of cold drinks in the back and stopped right in the middle of the road. We had people swarming all over it. It was enough to give a safety marshal fits.”

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“Overmountain Men approach the crest of a hill on N.C. 18 near Morganton.” Staff Photo by Hobart Jones, *Winston-Salem Journal*, Oct. 2, 1975



“Marshall Bachelor, one of the younger Overmountain Men, rides on the shoulders of W.B. Stronach.”

Over the following days, the official marchers hiked, walked, shuffled, and eventually stumbled their way toward Kings Mountain as their legs and bodies began to tire from the relentless plodding along hard pavement. The weather was generally cooperative, according to Bonds, but on the days when the historic militia men had rain, so did the commemorative marchers.



"Resting at Quaker Meadows Near Morganton . . . Randall Horney, Dennis Kline, Ricky Thomas" Photo by Harold Warren, *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 6, 1975

Rocky for Ford

To complement their aching bodies, the marchers' fragile psyches were beset by a string of disappointments. In Morganton, Senator Sam Irvin had been expected for a celebration at the fairgrounds, but he was unable to attend. The radio station that was lined up didn't follow through, because "we didn't know if you'd really be there," they said. And the rumors began to circulate that



"Harry Smith, a Tennessee Overmountain man pauses for a midday rest." Staff photo by Hobart Jones, *Winston-Salem Journal*, Oct. 5, 1975.

President Ford's attendance at Kings Mountain was in question. He had, after all, in September suffered the indignation of two assassination attempts. His handlers were not letting him out of Washington. He offered in his stead a visit by Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller.

One Step at a Time

Though tired and sometimes disappointed during the walk, the marchers made their own fun along the way. Bonds recounted that on the day

they remained in camp to match the history, he sat around with Ivey Moore and Immo Vourinen, a Finnish exchange student who had joined the group in Lenoir. They talked about moonshine and revenuers, about curing hams the old way, about eating liver mush and where to find the world's best apple butter. In the evening, the musicians in the group played their hearts out. But the fall nights were not always cooperative and one cold night, the guitar players could only get through two songs before their fingers lost their feeling.

The next day the marchers were joined by another band of school children, sixth graders, who delighted in the cross-country hike their teachers had not been expecting. Following the historic route off road, the marchers helped the students jump, wade, and splash across two creeks and stumble through thick underbrush they joked must not have been trod through since the Overmountain Men rode there 195 years before. Their reward upon emerging from the woods was a bag of apples that had

been left for them. Unfortunately some bees had been first to find this fruit, but the children dove into the apples anyway. As Bonds described it, "The next half mile was covered in a matter of seconds." Eventually, the marchers reached the Rutherford County line and the students returned to school.

That night at the community center near Andrews Plantation, the marchers got out the dulcimers, the banjos, and the guitars again. The community treated them to a meal and a square dance, though many of the marchers were too tired to high step much; but, on request, R. Ivey Moore danced his famous jig and some in the group competed in a turkey shoot. Those attending got a lesson in firearms and learned about the differences between muskets and rifles and why each was preferred by those who used them. Meanwhile back at the campsite, some Girl Scouts had arrived and built a campfire for the marchers. Soon enough, according to Bonds, those crafty girls had his young Boy Scout walking companions busily hunting and hauling in firewood to keep that fire going.

The following day, the march

(Continued on page 12)



ONE LAST TIME—Overmountain Victory Trail "minstrel" Bob Harman of Blowing Rock, right sounds the 200-year-old South-Appalachian hunting horn donated by Audie Rogers of Candler one last time before presenting it to Vice President Rockefeller, left, yesterday as Kings Mountain mayor John Moss, center, looks on."

Photo by George Doggett, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 8, 1975





“Jimmy Mayberry and Robert L. (Rip) Collins, Overmountain Men, greet Rockefeller”

Staff photo by Charlie Buchanan,



“A Gift for Rocky . . . mountaineer horn.”

Photo by Jim Wilson, *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 8, 1975

continued, this time joined by a crowd of 75, mostly Boy Scouts. The marchers covered 12 miles, but the reality of the march began to close in. The following day would require 21 miles to reach Cowpens and then they'd have a single day to reach Kings Mountain by 3 p.m. across a distance made in 1780 by mounted militiamen riding all night. Some compromise would be necessary; but, getting to Cowpens was the immediate challenge and Bill Stronach called the marchers to task. Bill was the Director of Parks and Recreation in Lenoir and had hiked with both groups before they joined at Morganton. Leaving at 8 a.m., the group followed Stronach's pace of 130 steps a minute, but eventually they slowed in part because of the day-hikers who had joined in. Arriving at the South Carolina line, the marchers passed the Bible, horn and scroll to the next group, but most pushed on, knowing they were getting too close to their destination to turn back.

Getting to Kings Mountain

To this point in the march, it had been unnecessary to distinguish between Kings Mountain, the battlefield, and Kings Mountain, the

town. But as the date of the celebration neared and more trail was behind the marchers than before them, the distinction was important. The marchers were headed for Kings Mountain National Military Park in York County, South Carolina, but Vice President Rockefeller was going to greet them in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. The town was celebrating that day with a parade and holding mayoral elections to boot.

Rip Collins and the march leaders held a “war council” at Cowpens just as the militiamen of 1780 had done. They decided to hike as far as they could by 10 a.m. and then proceed by bus to the town of Kings Mountain for the parade and to meet the Vice President.

Much to their delight, their anxiety about abandoning their march to the battlefield was relieved when a group from South Carolina arrived to carry on the procession to that historic destination. The Cherokee County contingent included seven riders on horseback, two mules and a

covered wagon. As a result, the marchers from Sycamore Shoals and Fort Defiance would get their handshake from the Vice President and honor the Patriot militiamen both.

Parades and Presentations

On October 7, 1975, the commemorative marchers walked through Kings Mountain, North Carolina to the cheers of some 20-25 thousand spectators. Then they made their way into John Gamble Stadium where 6,000 were admitted to witness the proceedings. Governor Jim Holshouser was there along with Mayor John Henry Moss. US Representatives James T. Broyhill and Jim Martin had flown by helicopter with the Vice President from Charlotte Douglas Airport. The presiding speaker acknowledged the marchers who had spent 12 days walking from Sycamore Shoals and Fort Defiance. When called upon, they in turn presented the Bible, the horn and the scroll to Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller. Signaling the

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“TIRED BUT HAPPY Overmountain Victory Trail marchers finally arrive at the Kings Mountain Battleground 195 years after the original mountain men dealt an overwhelming blow to the British forces in a battle destined to be a turning point of the Revolutionary War. These men arrived yesterday afternoon after 12 days on the 150-mile trail beginning in Sycamore Shoals, Tenn. Two kilt-clad Cherokee County men lead the procession through the park.” Photo by Susan McBrayer, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 8, 1975.



end of one part of the march, Bob Harman blew the hunting horn one last time before handing it to the Vice President. Rip Collins presented the scroll and invited the Vice President to add his signature, declaring that this scroll would “remain in Carolina.” Rockefeller said he was “honored and delighted” to sign the scroll. [That scroll is on display today at the Kings Mountain National Military Park Visitor Center.]

Rockefeller praised the marchers and thanked them for the mementos saying, “This is one of the luckiest days of my life. Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, this is America at its best.” The Vice President said that he would show the horn to his children, sons ages 8 and 11. As recounted in *The Shelby Daily Star*, he would tell them “about the historical details surrounding it” knowing “it would be an ‘inspiration to them’ on the ‘future of the country.’”

Honoring the Patriots

Later that Tuesday afternoon at 4:00 p.m., the marchers led by grand marshal Rip Collins walked into Kings Mountain National Military Park. The contingent from South Carolina who had continued the march arrived around 6 p.m.

As reported by *The Shelby Daily Star* in an October 8, 1975 article by Susan McBrayer:

“The ruddy, weather-beaten, bearded faces showed obvious signs of weariness as the tired, dusty marchers came forward to accept the commemoration medals presented by Collins at the battleground. . . . Six of the men receiving medals had come all the way from Tennessee, six from Wilkes and Surry counties and several from their home counties who continued the remainder of the journey. . . .

“I don’t really think we could have hoped to do anything that turned out

any better,” said Collins. “This thing stretched out over three states and 14 counties and there were a lot of loose ends and not everybody fully understood what was going on. There was no federal or state financial help.”

“‘Volunteer effort’ was the term used most frequently to describe the journey by Collins and Appalachian Consortium Executive Director Borden Mace.

“‘That’s what it’s all about,’ said Mace. ‘The grassroots effort along the way was overwhelming.’ . . . ‘This was a good idea whose time had come.’

“The marchers will long remember the strumming of the dulcimer, the sore blistered feet and the comradeship formed from the hours of contact along the trail and around the campfire.

“‘It’s going to be hard to split up,’ said Collins. . . . ‘I’m sort of exhilarated, but I’ll be happy to get home.’

“‘It was worth every step of the way,’ said Bob Harman. ‘I’d do it again

1976 – America’s Bicentennial Celebration

tomorrow.”

The second Overmountain Victory Trail march got underway in the wake of America’s Bicentennial Celebration. Many of the same people participated in the second commemorative hike as did in the first, at least from around Sycamore Shoals and among those planning to hike the entire way. The schedule was much the same, but some things were different.

“It was wet,” recalled Harry Smith,

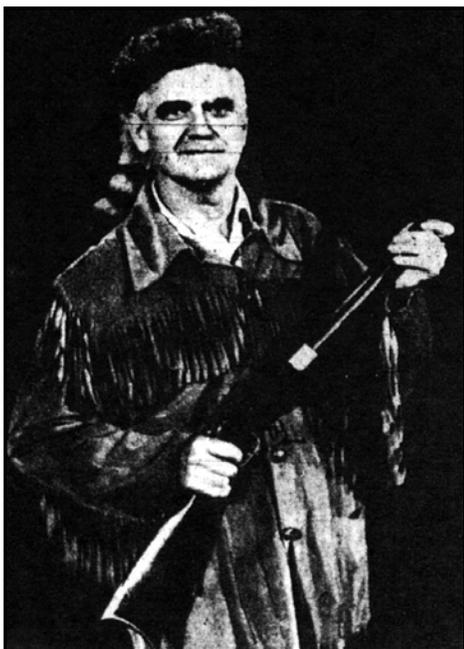
grand marshal for the second OVT march. “It rained 11 of the 12 days we were out.” The rain did curtail somewhat the crowds of spectators, but those determined to walk did their part. “When we started off from Sycamore Shoals on September 26, 1976,” Smith continued, “I figure we had 5,000 people there. We had nearly every politician from around there attending. The TV stations from Johnson City, Asheville, Bristol were there, too. We had a lot of publicity, but the sound system went out and nobody could hear the politicians. That may have been a blessing actually. Anyway, we started walking. We were heading up Gap Creek from Sycamore Shoals. About a mile out, we had a host of hikers, maybe a thousand people with us. At two miles out, most everyone had started drifting away.”

Seventeen marchers made the whole walk from Tennessee and five began at Fort Defiance. Others joined along the way for parts of the commemorative trek. Inspired by the 1975 march, one family of five from Morganton drove to Sycamore Shoals to begin the hike. They walked the entire way. That family included three generations: Hugh Bennett and his wife, both in their sixties, their daughter Andrea Kiser and her two children, Robin 16 and Pat 9. Ms. Kiser said they were marching to honor her fourth-great grandfather, John Duckworth of Burke County, who had fought at Kings Mountain.

The second march had its own celebrity participant—Four-star General William Westmoreland, former field commander of US troops in Viet Nam. He joined the marchers in Morganton where, outfitted as a frontiersman, he was photographed by noted North Carolina photographer Hugh Morton. The photograph showed the general wearing a fringed buckskin jacket and coon-skin cap and holding a longrifle.

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“Pioneer Patriot—Four-star Gen William Westmoreland, former American Vietnam War field commander, wore the uniform of a pioneer patriot of 200 years ago as he joined the Overmountain Victory Trail marchers at their encampment at Quaker Meadows near Morganton . . .”

Photo by Hugh Morton
published by *Watauga Democrat*, Oct. 4, 1976.

Though great for photographs and for satisfying popular misconceptions of period dress, the frontier militiamen who fought in 1780 wore broad-brimmed hats and hunting shirts and frocks made of linsey-woolsey and wool. As re-enacting the Revolutionary Period became more popular, correct and authentic clothing became more prominent among supporters of the Trail; but, in the early years, marchers who dressed up wore a lot of inaccurate attire.

“The General walked in with us to Morganton,” recalled Harry Smith. We covered 27 miles. When we got there, he walked over to shake my hand and said, ‘Harry, I don’t think I’ve ever made 27 miles in a day.’ We just laughed, him being an old soldier and all. And Hugh Bennett was an old soldier too. He was an ‘old horse marine’ who’d fought in Nicaragua in 1928. Then he re-upped and went off to WWII. I’ll tell you, I met some really interesting people on these walks. Everybody had a story, and

usually a pretty good one.”

The marchers had been entertained on their way again in 1976 by Bob Harman on his dulcimer. Added to that were the ballads offered by Glenn Bolick of Blackberry, North Carolina. Smith called him “the official troubadour” of the march.

In Morganton, the marchers were greeted by 400 spectators. A surprise guest, General Westmoreland addressed the crowd. According to the *News Herald*, “the general praised the fortitude of the mountain people, saying that it was a quality still evident in the make-up of this area. . .

.Termining these people ‘patriots,’ he said that their strength is represented by the marchers of 1976.” Westmoreland then signed the petition to have the Overmountain Victory Trail designated a National Historic Trail.

At Kings Mountain, that petition was delivered to Tenth District Representative James T. Broyhill. In accepting the petition and acknowledging the call for him to help get the designation, Congressman Broyhill praised the marchers, saying “You have helped us remember some of our history and the heritage of our great country.” He called on those assembled to remember that a great nation may fall when it forgets from where it came. Then he reminded the audience that the Battle of Kings Mountain was “fought by unusual men— independent men who believed in freedom and liberty and were prepared to do something about it.” This was surely a lesson from which we could learn, he said.

A New Visitor Center

The reward for marchers in 1976 also included participation in ceremonies dedicating the new visitor center at Kings Mountain National Military Park. Jack Ford, 24-year-old son of the President and a former employee

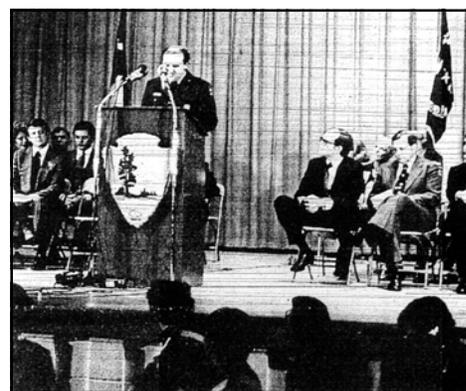
of the National Park Service was scheduled to participate, but the rain delayed his flight and he did not come to Cleveland County. Because of rain, the ceremonies had been moved indoors from the Park to the high school auditorium in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. Gary Everhardt, Director of the National Park Service, spoke at the dedication.

“My association with the Overmountain Victory Trail began in Washington, DC after 1975,” recalled Gary Everhardt in 2005. “That’s when I became director of the National Park Service. I was invited down to the town of Kings Mountain and then we went to the park for the ceremonies there. And here came Harry Smith, trudging through the rain and the mud with all the marchers; it was a terrible day. Seems like it always rained on the OVT marches.”

Damp Toast

Before the ceremony began in Kings Mountain, two of the ceremony’s participants also fought the rain. The two governors of the Carolinas gathered at the state line of North Carolina and South Carolina near

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DEDICATION—The new visitor center at Kings Mountain National Military Park, focus of a \$1.5 million Bicentennial improvement project at the park, was officially dedicated this morning at B. N. Barnes Auditorium in Kings Mountain. The ceremonies were moved because of a heavy rainfall. . . . Pictured speaking is Gary Everhardt, National Park Service director.

Photo by George Doggett, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 8, 1976





“Gov. James Holshouser and Gov. James Edwards exchange greetings at the border between North Carolina and South Carolina, offering a toast with mountaineer wooden tankards.”
 UPI Telephoto, *Winston-Salem Journal*, Oct. 9, 1976

cameras, note pads, and the umbrellas of the lucky. A real gully washer.

“The beauty queens, Miss North Carolina, Susie Proffitt, and Miss South Carolina, Lavinia Cox, stood with their governors under gentleman-held umbrellas and smiled as radiantly as if they were at the Miss American Pageant.

Overmountain Victory Trail just keep on marching. . . Cheering crowds or no cheering crowds, the people involved in the Victory Trail march have vowed to continue the re-enactment annually until the 200th anniversary in 1980. . . The group, which includes old men and children, will walk as far as 27 miles in a day before reaching their destination. You’ve got to admire their dedication.”
 The 1977 marchers were greeted in Morganton by 60 spectators. Even

Kings Mountain for a special ceremony. *Charlotte Observer* staff writer Harold Warren reported on the proceedings:

“It rained and rained and rained Friday on the governors and beauty queens of the Carolinas and everyone else.

“It washed out a scheduled appearance by President Ford’s son, Jack, at the dedication of the 7,000-square-foot visitors center at Kings Mountain National Military Park. . . .

“The first big event was supposed to be a 10:30 a.m. handshake between Gov. Jim Holshouser and SC Gov. Jim Edwards across the state line on NC-SC 216.

“The huddled masses waited, N.C. and S.C. state troopers in slickers, National Park Service folks with walkie-talkies, a few local bicentennial buffs and a gaggle of soggy reporters.

“After half an hour, an older man under an umbrella reflected, “Gonna get too wet to plow here’n a minute.”

“Then the Republican governors arrived . . . By then the rain was splattering harder on bare heads,

“Plucky colonial-costumed Jane Laughlin, a 20-year-old Rock Hill volunteer at the park, poured pure spring water from a flask into wooden mugs for the governors.

“Holshouser, President Ford’s Southern campaign coordinator, toasted Ford. Edwards toasted the spirit of the rugged mountain men who whipped the British at Kings Mountain 196 years ago.

“Everybody scurried into the nearby town of Kings Mountain, where several hundred people had waited nearly an hour for the park dedication ceremonies to begin in the high school auditorium.

“They included about two dozen weary marchers who had traced the original Kings Mountain victors’ 150-mile, 12-day trek on the Overmountain Victory Trail from Sycamore Shoals, Tenn. . . .”

In a piece on the October 3rd editorial page of Morganton’s *News*

1977 – Third Annual March

Herald, columnist Ted Hall wrote, “Grassroots enthusiasm may be rapidly dwindling away, but those dedicated to preserving the



“COMMEMORATION OF LIBERTY—Third annual Overmountain Victory Trail Grand Marshal Bill Stronach of Lenoir discusses the reenactment of the OVT march which ended yesterday with a ceremony at the Kings Mountain National Military Park’s amphitheater with U.S. Rep. James T. Broyhill following yesterday’s ceremonies.” Staff Photo by Susan McBrayer, *The Shelby Daily Star*, October 9,

with a small crowd, Dr. Emmett White of Rutherford College spoke about the history of Quaker Meadows and the events of 1780. The marchers and spectators were treated to music, folk dancing, fire-arms demonstrations, and folk songs of original composition. A letter from NC Congressman James Broyhill conveyed to the marchers news of his introduction of a second bill to designate the Trail as a national historic trail, this one including 13 co-sponsoring congressmen.

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"Ivey Moore, 72, Still on the March"

Photo by Harold Warren, *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 6, 1975

"More marchers, more spectators, more states and more involvement marked the third annual Overmountain Victory Trail march . . ."

reported Susan McBrayer in *The Shelby Daily Star* on

October 8, 1977. Under the leadership of Bill Stronach, grand marshal, the marchers arrived with a group of 25 to 30 who had walked the entire way. And some of the marchers had begun in Abingdon, Virginia thanks to the first-time involvement of marshal Blair Keller from Washington County, Virginia. Representatives from Georgia came up to Kings Mountain in '77 and expected to be represented on the march in '78 by the Sons of the Revolution, Atlanta. That would bring into representation all the states who had militiamen fighting in 1780.

"We are beginning to get some continuity," said Bill Stronach at Kings Mountain National Military Park. "We're now able to help create a permanent base. There are a total of 14 counties with permanent OVT chapters which have pledged to assist in memorializing this trail and making it permanent, a part of the national trails system." In 1977 the association of persons interested in the trail may have remained an informal alliance though some recall the Overmountain Victory Trail Association was begun that year.

Getting the Act Together

"As we looked toward the fourth march," said Harry Smith,

1978—Commitment

"we faced an opportunity. Some of us went to a meeting in Boone that summer to present to a North Carolina trails committee our case for getting state recognition. Some other trails were presenting their cases as well. One of them was the Daniel Boone Heritage Trail; R. Ivey Moore had been working on that for years. Another was the North Carolina segment of the Virginia Creeper Trail. The committee turned them both down and then we presented. They didn't want ours either. We were discouraged. That's when a group of us who were there, went into a room and I said, 'Fellows, if we don't do something, start some sort of association to push this thing, all the work we've done is going to be lost. That's when either Gary Everhardt or Rip, I don't remember which, pulled out a piece of paper and we started writing some sort of charter creating an organization responsible for keeping this trail and this march alive. We all pledged ourselves to do the things listed on the paper and then we signed it right there. That was how the Overmountain Victory Trail Association was born. Later we got it incorporated in Tennessee and that was that."

"I remember being at Appalachian State University in Boone," recalled Everhardt. "I had been in Asheville since October '77 when I became superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway. By that time, I had met a number of people in the High Country who were involved with this trail. We were meeting in the Broyhill Center, in a room downstairs. We had a consensus among the 10 or 12 of us there that we needed to formalize what had been to this point an informal group. We wanted to charter ourselves as a nonprofit and that cost some money, so we all chipped in five or ten dollars to be listed as charter

members. I believe that was the beginning of the OVTA." The State of Tennessee officially chartered the Overmountain Victory Trail Association in January 1979.

"Rip took that idea and ran with it," Smith continued. "He traveled around and got more people and communities signed up. He had people starting OVTA chapters all along the trail's route. Collins was the first president and he kept that position through the 1980 march.

"Rip was one of the most far-sighted people I'd ever seen," said Smith. "Most of us don't think past tomorrow, but Rip thought this trail could be salvaged. It had been lost since Draper wrote his book and I think that Rip just decided that this was something worth doing and that he was the person to do it. But he got discouraged too, but he started listening to other people. Hugh Bennett helped get Rip through the low times, and Tom Gray and his wife helped get Rip through, too. Rip was a quiet, unassuming man who made the worst speeches in the world, but he was really enthused about this stuff. I guess he had the ability to get people like me excited and Borden Mace and whoever else could help him do this trail.

"I remember driving one night to some meeting with Rip. I don't know exactly when it was, but he had already suffered some disappointments as well as some highs with this trail idea. He turned to me and said, 'Harry, we may never do another thing in our lives that means anything, but this—this is important.' Rip Collins was committed to the trail, that was for sure."

Fourth Annual March

"I think 23 made it all the way," said Tom Gray of Elizabethton,

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“Overmountain Men

The fourth annual march of the Overmountain Men arrived at Kings Mountain Battleground Saturday for the 198th anniversary of the Revolutionary War victory there. Among the 23 who completed the full march were Grand Marshal Thomas Gray, left, of Elizabethton, Tenn. and Ivey Moore of North Wilkesboro, who at age 75, was the oldest of

Tennessee, grand marshal for the fourth march of the Overmountain Victory Trail. “We’ve probably got a few bruises and blisters, but the weather was perfect.”

Once again the marchers, including four-year walker Ivey Moore then nearing 76, had made their way from Abingdon, Sycamore Shoals and Fort Defiance all the way to Kings Mountain Military Park. Along with a crowd of 600, Wilma Dykeman, author of *The French Broad*, was there to welcome them. She was there also to sign copies of her book, *With Fire and Sword*, the newly released National Park Service pamphlet about the Battle of Kings Mountain. And again, the marchers were treated to an address by Congressman James Broyhill, the featured speaker, who continued his unrelenting legislative efforts to have the trail designated as a National Historic Trail. Others present included Reverend Earl Campbell, a direct descendant of

Colonel William Campbell, the commander at the battle, Dr. J.N. Lipscomb, South Carolina marshal, and Bob Morrison, Tennessee marshal.

On October 9, 1978, Michael Goforth, staff writer, wrote in *The Shelby Daily Star*:

“On Saturday afternoon, a wreath was laid at the monument in the park. Visitors looked at the monument and realized that at that place something significant happened. But, there is a greater monument to the battle. That monument is the memory of the battle and the men who fought and died there. The Overmountain Victory Marchers remember. Annually they put that memory back into focus.”

The history that these marchers commemorated also got a lift in 1978, as Dr. Bobby Moss of Limestone College in Gaffney, SC discovered the oldest original version of the song *Barney Linn*. Near sunrise on October 7, 1780, as Draper recounts in his history of the battle, Patriot scout Enoch Gilmer had crossed the Broad River at Cherokee Ford to see if Ferguson’s men were lying in wait. Draper says, “After some little time, Gilmer’s well-known voice was heard in the hollow near by, singing *Barney Linn*, a favorite jolly song of the times, which was sufficient notice that the way was clear.”

Dr. Moss, completing research in Scotland and with the help of Dr. Cratis Williams, Eric Olson at Appalachian State, and the curator of folk music at the Library of Congress, determined that the song had other names including “Bryan

O’Lynn” and “Tom Bolynn.” The Scottish ballad, *Tom Bolynn*, was carried to Ireland and became *Bryan O’Lynn*. The song subsequently made its way to America with the Scots-Irish settlers of the Appalachian Mountains.

Probably similar in spirit to the words of *Barney Linn*, verses of *Tom Bolynn* include:

Tom Bolynn had no boots to wear;
He got him a goat skin to make him a pair.
The wooly side out, the fleecy side in,
Cool in the summer says Tom Bolynn.

Chorus:
Tom Bolynn was a Scotch-man born,
His shoes worn out, his stockings torn.
The calf of his leg come down to his shin,
A bull dog and panthers*, said Tom Bolynn.

Tom Bolynn bought him an old gray mare,
Her sides was worn, her feet was bare.

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“March participants admire old musket.”
L to R : Dr. Emmett R. White of Rutherford College; Hugh Bennett of Morganton; Tom Gray, grand marshal for the march; Charles Goble of Lenoir; Grant Harding of Tennessee; Bill Stronach of Lenoir; and Ivey Moore of North Wilkesboro.
News Herald, Morganton, Oct. 2, 1978





“Dr. Moss Examines Roadmarker”

Staff Photo by Joe DePriest, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 4, 1980

Away he went through thick and thin,
I’m going a-courting, says Tom Bolynn.

Come in, come in my welcome guest.
Take which of my daughters you love the best.
I’ll take one for love, the other for kin.
I’ll marry them both, says Tom Bolynn.

And after the wedding they must have a dinner;
Have nothing to eat that was fit for a sinner,
Neither flesh, fish, food, nor no such thing.
It’s a hell of a dinner, says Tom Bolynn.

[* Note: The *Watauga Democrat* article of September 28, 1978 reported “panthers” in one place and “spanter” in another. Neither word appears in any dictionaries consulted.]

On the occasion of the 199th anniversary of the Battle, a crowd of 1,700 applauded as the Overmountain Victory Trail marchers under the leadership of Grand

1979 – Fifth Annual March

Marshall Hugh Bennett of Burke County walked in formation into the amphitheater at Kings Mountain National Military Park. During the ceremony, flags from each of the five states whose militiamen had fought at the battle were brought forward to the cheers of the audience members from those respective states. Paul Butler, Polk County marshal, introduced the descendants of patriots and asked other descendants attending to stand. Many rose to honor their ancestors by name.

In a fitting tribute, the Atlanta Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution presented their Good



“Marchers Arrive

Overmountain Victory Trail marchers arrive at the Kings Mountain National Military Park yesterday afternoon for ceremonies commemorating the 199th anniversary of the battle.” Staff Photo by Joe DePriest, *The Shelby Daily Star*, October 9, 1979

Citizenship Award posthumously to Tom Gray, the previous year’s grand marshal. Gray’s wife accepted the award. Georgia was represented for the first time in the 1978 march.

For years the organizers and volunteers who had become the fabric of the annual reenactment march, had looked forward eagerly to the 200th anniversary celebration in 1980. Their collective dream had been

1980 – Bicentenary Celebration

that by the bicentennial celebration of the Battle of Kings Mountain, they would have secured Congressional recognition for their trail. As planning for the 1980 march continued, the prospects for that timely designation dimmed.

A National Historic Trail

“James Broyhill and his wife, and my wife and I,” recalled Harry Smith, “met at Fort Defiance about an hour before the parade in Lenoir that first year in ’75. James was in Congress then and had been since ’62. He asked me what we were doing. He could see people walking around in costume, and everybody was telling him something different. I told him about the march and how this should be a teaching experience for youngsters. Then I said, it should also be a national historic trail.”

“Harry Smith was the first one to approach me about helping get this trail recognized by Congress,” recalled Senator James Broyhill in 2004. “We were fortunate in a lot of ways to get it done. First, Congress had already established the Historic Trails program. Until then, the trails were recreational and scenic. That new category included the Lewis & Clark Trail and the Oregon Trail, and some others. But they were all in the West; not a one was in the East. So, I introduced a bill that would add the Overmountain Victory Trail as a part of that existing designation. But even that wasn’t easy.

“I’d like to tell you that the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail was so designated by Congress during an up-swelling of Patriotic pride among our nation’s elected representatives, but that’s not

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“Taking Aim

Grant Hardin of Elizabethton, Tenn., takes aim with his musket yesterday in a demonstration of how Overmountain men used their weapons in the Battle of Kings Mountain. The marchers arrived in Rutherford County yesterday, and on Sunday will push

how it happened. At that time, Democrats had a majority in Congress and it was not often that a Republican member was given the privilege of getting his bill considered. It’s just politics and it works both ways. But, it just so happened that I had a couple of friends who were in a position to help. One was Senator Mo Udall of Arizona, chairman of the Senate Interior Committee at that time. The other was Phil Burton, a Representative from California; he was chair of the House Interior Committee.

“I did not trade votes, but Phil Burton, was interested in some of the same issues I was. I got involved on some of his legislation. Because of my working relationships with these two men, I think we were able to get my bill through. Anyway, Burton told me later that he attached my trail designation bill to an omnibus budget bill and it got passed. It really was a stroke of luck especially coming when it did.”

“This thing went on for five years,” recalled Smith, “this idea of getting the trail designated. We had tried to get some recognition and got nowhere. James [Broyhill] had been submitting a bill for its designation for

a couple of years, maybe three. Still nothing happened. Then one evening in the late summer of 1980 I was in Sparta, North Carolina having dinner with Gary Everhardt, the superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway. I said, ‘Gary we aren’t going to get this thing done in time for the 1980 bicentennial of Kings Mountain if something doesn’t happen. James has been proposing it; he and Jimmy Quillen [congressman from Tennessee] and [Congressman] Wampler from Virginia are all Republicans and the House is Democratically controlled.’ As I recall it, Gary said, ‘I’ll see what I can do. I know Burton, too; he and Jim work well together; maybe we can make something happen.’ Well, I think Gary called Phil Burton’s office, but he can’t say for sure that he did. It was a long time ago and Gary was involved in lot of things. Anyway, Burton was in charge of the Department of the Interior committee in the House. I suppose with Udall’s blessing Burton tacked Broyhill’s legislation onto a budget bill the next day and in a flash we were officially a national historic trail. That’s how it happened. James, Gary and all the people who’d marched to give this trail a name had made a difference. It couldn’t have happened without all of them doing their parts.”

“James Broyhill was the key and significant player in getting Congressional designation,” declared Everhardt. “The Overmountain Victory Trail became a great interest to me because I was from Caldwell County and Lenoir originally. Some of my ancestors fought at Kings Mountain, too. My mother was a Powell from Caldwell. There were two Powell boys at Kings Mountain. Unfortunately they were on the side with Ferguson. You can’t imagine the ribbing I took about that from the other members of the trail association.

“I was happy the Trail had the

support of the administration,” Everhardt continued. “Creating the OVNHT was significant because it didn’t have the national presence that other trails did and its existence relied on the cooperation of citizens and landowners. The Trail relied on “private partnerships,” which at the time was a new concept for managing parks. The trail is better known today than it was at the beginning, so the partnering has worked. And the story it commemorates is amazing to me, that back then they were able to do what they did, mustering troops from the “backwater” areas, and then travel like they did as far as they did and fight like they did. Without the Trail to help tell the story, it sounds unbelievable.”

In its September 11, 1980 issue, the *Watauga Democrat* reported:

“President Carter Signs OVT Bill

“On Monday afternoon Jimmy Carter signed a bill. Rip Collins, local naturalist, canoeist, realtor and writer got a call from Cong. James T. Broyhill’s office to inform him of the news.

“The bill Carter signed made the Overmountain Victory Trail a national historic trail, a feat that Collins and other mountain men like him have been working toward.

“We worked long enough,” Collins said. ‘Congressman Broyhill deserves a lot of credit, and both the state’s senators were involved—Helms and Morgan. It was a great bipartisan effort.’

“Prospects are good, Collins says, that the president will show up at Kings Mountain when the marchers reach their final destination Oct. 7.

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“Already, he says, three governors will participate and former senator Sam Ervin, Jr. will speak when the group camps in Morganton.”

Hearty Witness to History

On September 25, 1980 beneath threatening skies, celebrants of the bicentenary of the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain marched in procession through Elizabethton with a horse-drawn wagon to Sycamore Shoals State Historic Site. There visitors saw living history demonstrations, and at the museum they saw artifacts of the battle, including Ferguson’s dinner plate and telescope. After the marchers left on the 26th, the park re-enacted a Cherokee Indian raid on Fort Watauga at the replica stockade.

“Dennis ‘Stumper’ Kline was the grand marshal in 1980,” recalled Harry Smith, “but he got sick and was not able to participate. Some of the rest of us who had done it before took over parts of the march, and, of course, some went for the whole time.”

“We had a pound of mud on each foot,” reported Shelby resident Barbara Dover in *The Shelby Daily Star*. She was hiking with her 10-year old son, Robert. It had rained for five days. She said at North Cove the hikers struck their wet tents before dawn and began the march at 7 a.m. “in really good spirits.” The two dozen marchers had been at Gillespie Gap the day before for a dedication there of a permanent monument to the Overmountain Men.

In Morganton, the marchers were to have camped at the fairgrounds as they had in previous years, but the county fair was in process that year.

They stayed instead at Freedom High School and avoided “a pretty hard rain storm.”

In an editorial on October 3, 1980,



“Bill Stronach Fires His Muzzle-Loader During Hike.”
AP Laserphoto, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 1, 1980.

The Shelby Star offered this about the community’s attitude toward the 200th anniversary: “It’s a shame President Carter and Vice President Mondale declined the invitation to attend the celebration. But that won’t keep Cleveland County from pulling out all stops in honoring the Battle with all the energy the community can muster. . . . A 200-unit parade begins at 1 p.m. Tuesday, and the Overmountain Victory Trail hikers are slated to arrive at the national park at 3.”

On October 5, the marchers camped at Bethlehem Campground in Rutherford County and arrived at Cowpens National Battlefield on the 6th, *The Shelby Daily Star* reported.

On October 7, through downtown Kings Mountain, NC, “50 exhilarated marchers” walked in a 45-minute parade before “hundreds of onlookers, the crowd swelled by students out of school for the day,” reported the *Charlotte Observer*



“Overmountain Marchers are Greeted by Crowd at Kings Mountain Park.” Staff Photo by Sam Jones, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 8, 1980

on October 8, 1980.

The article continued, “I think we are in remarkably good spirits after all the rain and mud we marched through,” said Rip Collins, . . . president of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association, the 300-member group which organizes the annual march.”

After a succession of speakers declined invitations, North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt accepted the invitation to speak at ceremonies held at the stadium in Kings Mountain, NC. Later a crowd of 3,000 gathered at the Kings Mountain National Military

Park in the final ceremony of five days of celebration organized by the citizens of Kings Mountain. Others attending the ceremony were retired General William Westmoreland, honorary chairman of the celebration, Tenth District Congressman James Broyhill, the governors of North Carolina and South Carolina, former US Senator Sam Ervin, Jr., and Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus, who was the principal speaker at the national park.

Secretary Andrus congratulated the Overmountain Victory Trial marchers on their unrelenting pursuit of Congressional designation of the historic route as a National Historic



Trail. “The trail you have just covered,” he said, “is now in the national consciousness of Americans. I salute your hearty witness to history.”

Governor Hunt said he was proud that the Overmountain Victory Trail had been designated a National Historic Trail. “This is the first National Historic Trail in the east,” he said, as reported by *The Shelby Daily Star*, “and the first in the nation that is connected to a specific military endeavor.” Hunt remarked that history is valuable. “Americans must be able to say to their children and grandchildren that we worthily inherit the kind of bravery, the kind of heritage of the people who came over the mountain.”

An Official Stamp of Approval

Ceremonies for the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain included release by the US Postal Service of a first day issue of a Kings Mountain postcard. It was the fifth released in an official series commemorating events and people of the American Revolution. The 10-cent card included an image of an Overmountain Man with other fighters in the background advancing through a forest. Executive Assistant to the postmaster general, Gerald Merna, said that artist David Blossom, who provided images for all the commemorative postcards, drew them to make the viewer feel as if he was there. “Mr. Blossom has accomplished just that.” He added that the cards in the series have “great educational value.”

“I have been a stamp collector for decades,” said Borden Mace. “With the help of Representative James Broyhill, I worked to get this commemorative postcard released. By the time it was, I was no longer connected with the Appalachian

Consortium, but I remained interested always in the effort others were championing to keep alive the story of the Overmountain Men. I was in the audience the day the postcard was released. I think I’d heard the subject of the illustration referred to in



Postage image from commemorative postcard, first-day issue, October 7,

general as “Nolichucky John.” In any case, the image was a representative frontiersman of the Appalachian region. I was delighted that the card turned out so well and added to the celebration of the Trail.”

Finally Here, Finally Done

In the October 8, 1980 issue of *The Shelby Daily Star*, staff writer Susan McBryer described the marchers as they celebrated the 200th anniversary and the Congressional designation of their trail. She captured well the spirit of those who for six years had worked and walked to create the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

“Overmountain Hikers Recall Battleground

“They stood close together on a trail deep in the woods. Voices were silent. Heads were bowed. A few tears fell.

“The time they had been waiting for was upon them.

“But they paused—paused for a moment of meditation to remember, as they had for the past 13 days, the men who fought for freedom exactly 200 years ago on a clearing just a few yards away.

“United in spirit by a common goal and nearly two weeks of company during their 219-mile trek from Virginia to South Carolina, the Overmountain Victory Trail hikers had arrived outside the Kings Mountain Battleground yesterday. They were preparing to march the final leg of the trip.

“Wearing ankle-length, cotton skirts, dusty boots, knee britches, wide-collar fringed coats, coonskin caps and carrying muskets and knives, they looked as though they could have been resurrected from that famous day in 1780.

“Several hikers took turns addressing the group of about two dozen who walked the entire way, and the 100 others who joined them for the last leg. They shared pride in their heritage, expressed thankfulness that there had been no injuries or discord on the trip, and challenged all to continue efforts to keep the newly designated national historic trail alive.

“Singling out the youngest hiker to make the entire trip, acting Grand Marshal Conrad Schliske of Tryon praised the heartiness of 10-year-old Robert Dover of Shelby who “hiked the trail like a real trooper.” . . .

“For young Robert, the best part of the trip was “meeting all these nice people.” The worst part was the rain.

Photo: *Watauga Democrat*, Oct 9, 1975

(Continued on page 22)



“Why would someone leave his job and family to walk 219 miles in the rain and the cold and heat?”

“You’ll find as many motives as there are people who have gone the distance,” said Rip Collins, OVT Association president.

“For some, ‘it’s a way to prove to themselves they can do it. For others, its helping to commemorate an important, Revolutionary War battle. Others do it for the companionship.

“‘It’s contagious,’ Collins said. Once people march a segment of the way, they usually want to walk more the next year.

“‘They feel like a family now,’ he said. ‘When you endure long times together, become tired, wet, and disgruntled together, you create bonds you don’t get otherwise.’

“Andrea Kiser of Morganton is part of the three-generation family which has traveled the entire distance each year since the march began in 1975. She compared this trip with the first.

“‘This year we’ve had as many new people as old people with us,’ she said. ‘People who had fed and entertained us other years joined us this year.’

“Bill Stronach of Lenoir also made the entire trip all six years.

“Stronach said this year was the first year* all five states (North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia) participated.

“‘This year,’ he said, ‘we completed the link.’”

[* Note: Reportedly all five states were represented for the first time in

the 1978 march.]

The celebration of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail did not end after 1980. Annual marches continued uninterrupted with the 30th annual march completed in 2004. The citizen support that created the trail continues and suggests that annual marches will continue for another 30 years and longer. As from the beginning, it remains a “volunteer effort.”

Looking Down the Path

The men who rode across the mountains and up the Yadkin River to Quaker Meadows in 1780 and those who joined along the way as the militiamen continued to Kings Mountain sought no recognition for the heroic deed they performed. As quickly as the militiamen mustered, after the battle was won, they disbanded and returned to their separate lives on their separate farms scattered throughout Appalachia and the Piedmont. At least one writer called them a “ghost legion,” and they



“Marchers
The Overmountain marchers . . . walk alongside Highway 64 north of Rutherfordton in the Cane Creek section.”
Staff Photo by Sam Jones, *The Shelby Daily Star*, Oct. 4, 1980

were just that, arising seemingly from nowhere and disappearing after the job was done.

Neither have the men and women who have worked so hard for so long to honor these Patriots of the past sought recognition for themselves. Among the current supporters and champions of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, the names, stories, and history recounted here may be little known in their entirety, though most everyone knows a piece or two of the tale. This brief and admittedly incomplete history humbly hopes to correct part of that deficit.

Some of those most active in the founding of the trail have passed away in the 25 years since its designation as a National Historic Trail. Rip Collins, Tom Gray, Bill Stronach, Conrad Schliske, R. Ivey Moore, and Hugh Bennett are now deceased as well as many others who participated for years but may not be named here. Their service was no less important for lack of being mentioned.

A few of the early participants continue telling the story. Harry Smith lives in Tennessee. Borden Mace lives in Connecticut. Senator Broyhill lives in North Carolina. Bob Harman and Blair Keller both live in Virginia.

They all played a part, and all their contributions have been important to the cause of honoring the Overmountain Men of 1780.

Preserving the story is like a growing tree. It takes deep roots, a strong trunk, and branches continually reaching out to create an ever-larger, self-sustaining entity. The history recounted here and the tradition of annual marches are the roots that support the trunk, the Overmountain Victory Trail itself. The branches are each community and each individual who adds even a little effort to make the whole stronger. The story lives on and the Trail continues with the support from volunteers.





Council Oak at Quaker Meadows where the two militia groups mustered. (Note the horse and buggy beneath the tree for scale.)

Creating the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail was a volunteer effort, and like the militiamen these early supporters honored, these modern patriots also, were and are, unrelenting in their pursuit.

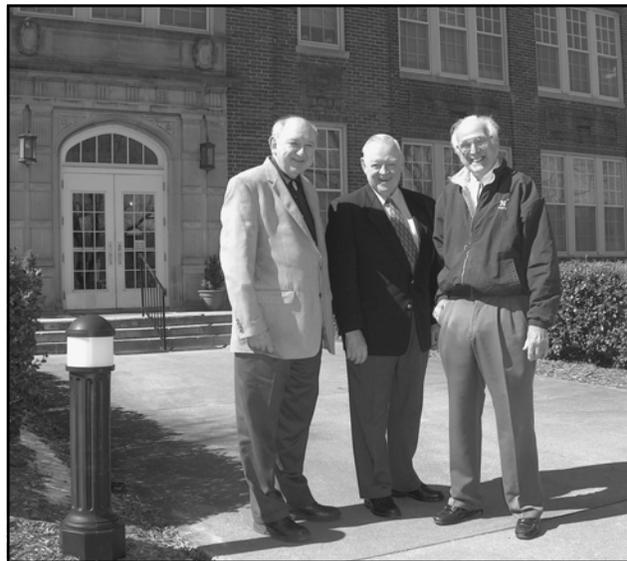
For them all, and for the volunteers yet to muster for the sake of the Trail, three cheers: Hip, hip, huzzza! ●

Epilogue

The modern Patriots who have championed the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780 have come from many parts of the country and from many walks of life. Some are descendants of men who mustered for the campaign or actually fought in the battle. Others are simply proud of their Revolutionary War heritage as Americans. Some were doctors and professors of history. Some were pipe fitters, merchants. Others were scout leaders, farmers, salesmen, business people, government employees; they came from everywhere and with a common interest in celebrating and honoring America's Patriot heroes. They all made a contribution and their collective contributions have made a difference in the creation of the Trail.

But a remarkable story of a common bond emerged during the process of compiling this history of the creation of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. Three people instrumental in the creation of the Trail had roots in the same community.

Harry Smith, today from Laurel Bloomery, Tennessee, was the Safety Marshal during the original commemorative march in 1975 and the grand marshal in the second march in 1976. Gary Everhardt was Director, National Park Service under President Gerald Ford and later the Superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway. He was one of the original signers of the charter forming the Over-



(l to r) Gary Everhardt, James Broyhill, and Harry Smith

mountain Victory Trail Association. James T. Broyhill was longtime US Representative from North Carolina, joining in the 88th Congress after his election in 1962, and served as US Senator from his appointment through 1986. He submitted bills to Congress beginning in 1977 to secure the designation of the Overmountain Victory Trail as a National Historic Trail.

Coming to the concept of a Trail from three different approaches, it is notable that all three men graduated from Lenoir High School. They all knew each other from the community and Harry Smith's school career overlapped with that of the other two. Senator Broyhill graduated in '46, Smith in '47 and Everhardt in '52.

In March 2005, these three modern Patriots revisited their old school. Senator Broyhill reminded those gathered that Lenoir High School sits on the site of Fort Crider, a camping site of the Wilkes-Surry militiamen mustered under Major Joseph Winston and Col. Benjamin Cleaveland and riding toward Quaker Meadows, where they convened with others in the unrelenting pursuit for freedom. ●



Appendix

In 1975, Morganton hosted a grand celebration to commemorate the

Overmountain Men of 1780 and to welcome the marchers walking the Overmountain Victory Trail. Two thousands people attended. For the occasion students at East Burke High School and Freedom High School composed and performed original ballads.

The Humanities II class of Freedom High School composed a ballad called “The Battle of Kings

Mountain.” Music for the ballad was created by Jerry Burleson and Gary Kirby. The class was taught by Linda Van Huss and Carolyn Sakowski. Jayne Wilkins worked with the students so they could sing the song as a chorus in a manner consistent with the historic period.

Students of the folklore class at East Burke composed a ballad as well. The ballad created by that class was performed by students Clark Fletcher and Henry Darden. The teachers were Candy Young and Shirley White.

This is the ballad composed by the students of Freedom High School:

Nine hundred untrained mountain men
Pack up in Sycamore Shoals;
They answered a call of destiny
To save their rebel souls.
Their path was coarse and rocky,
But they kept a pressin’ on
Until we see the last red fall
Our battle won’t be won.

O, the mountain men came ridin’
From Eastern Tennessee.
They clumb up hill and mountains
Then met at Council Tree.
McDowell gave ‘em orders (Fight had for liberty)!
So they went up to Kings Mountain
To prove their bravery.

The Reds with all their spit and shine
Were something else to see.
Our rough and rugged mountain men
Were hidin’ behind the trees—
Yellin’, whoopin’, screamin’ hard
They fought them old Tories;
And before too long the
Reds were gone and they won the victory.

Nine hundred untrained mountain men
Pack up in Sycamore Shoals;
They answered a call of destiny
To save their rebel souls.
Our path was coarse and rocky,
But we kept a pressin’ on
Until we saw the last Coat fall
Our battle we had won. ●

The folklore class of East Burke High School composed this ballad:

From Sycamore Shoals near Old Elizabeth
Came the backwater men.
Came down out of Appalachia
To meet General Ferguson.

Chorus:
Far from over the mountains
Came the mountain men.
They came to fight a battle
They came prepared to win.

They carried rifles, tomahawks, skinnin’ knives
To kill that Tory band.
They all said they’d fight to the death
To bring freedom to this land.

They met McDowell at the Council Oak
They stayed there for the night
Then they started don their pursuit
Of Ferguson in his flight.

The men from Burke, they all went along
To fight for freedom’s name.
They knew that some would not return
But they went just the same.

They rode and rode for many a day
To King Mount they came.
The British they were all there waiting
Prepared to fight in vain.

Scarcely an hour had passed them by,
The end was drawing near.
Ferguson lay there dead on the ground
The rest surrendered in fear.

In 1780 the tide was turned
To favor the rebel band.
A few more years of war would pass
Then freedom would rule the land. ●

