



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail



A progress report on the status of the Trail

Vol. 7, No. 1

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## On the Path

Hello, and welcome to one of the most historic trails in the United States. This past year has been busy all along the Trail, and 2011 promises to bring even more exciting activity.

The big news is that the Environmental Assessment and Feasibility Study for a New Headquarters & Visitor Contact Station will be completed in early 2011. The preferred alternative, Rocky Ford in Morganton, NC, is close to the exact center of the Trail. After the study is finalized, planning for design and construction will begin with local leaders. A new Long Range Interpretive Plan will be completed in June 2011. This document has received much partner input and will guide interpretive development for many years to come. We are also deeply involved in planning new permanent interpretive exhibits for the Abingdon Muster Grounds Visitor Center, as well as other projects all along the Trail.

And, we are looking forward to a big celebration this May at the northern trailhead in Abingdon, VA. OVTA, with the participation of the NPS, will host the 13<sup>th</sup> National Scenic and Historic Trails Conference. People from all over the country will gather for a full week at the Muster Grounds, honing various trail skills, exchanging ideas, and learning more about the OVNHT and its unique stories.

I hope that the stories within this Progress Report will provide even more insight into all that is going on along the Trail's route. Enjoy your visit and come back often.

- Paul Carson, Superintendent

## The First OVNHT Interpretive Center *Town of Abingdon dedicates new Trail visitor center at The Muster Grounds on Wolf Creek*

On September 23, the Town of Abingdon, Virginia officially opened its new W. Blair Keller Visitor Center at the Muster Grounds. This is the first trail visitor center on the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail fully dedicated to telling that story.



The Watauga Fife & Drum Corps and the OVTA militia reenactors marched in to begin the dedication ceremony.



Mayor Ed Morgan (r) read a proclamation naming the new center for longtime Muster Grounds champion, Blair Keller (l).

“Partnership and collaboration are the key words in

building the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail,” said Paul Carson, OVNHT Superintendent. “This new interpretive center, established by a local community, is an excellent example of the kinds of efforts and initiatives communities all along the Trail can do to help support the OVNHT.”

The exhibits to be installed in the center are being designed in conjunction with various local partners.

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## Landmark Recognized

*New wayside display installed for Tory Oak in Wilkesboro*

On Saturday, December 11, citizens gathered at the Wilkes Heritage Museum for the recertification of the Tory Oak site and for the dedication of a new wayside exhibit. “The Tory Oak evokes the memory of a people torn apart by the tragedy of war,” said Paul Carson, Superintendent of the OVNHT. “It

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Wilkes Heritage Museum staff and OVTA reenactors gather at the site of the Tory Oak in Wilkesboro, NC, re-certified by NPS.

## Searching for the Past

*Archaeology at two Trail sites adds to understanding*

**K**en Robinson, with the Wake Forest University Public Archaeology Program, undertook two archaeological investigations along the OVNHT in 2010. One looked for evidence of earlier occupation around the Joseph McDowell House in Marion. The other assessed the history of the Muster Grounds in Abingdon.



Wake Forest University students and volunteers assess the material from a test unit (1m x 2m) behind the Joseph McDowell house in Marion, North Carolina.

“The full reports will give the particulars,” said Robinson, “but our test units [test holes] in both sites revealed interesting discoveries.” At the McDowell House, Robinson’s team tested a site behind the house where they thought a kitchen might have been. “We found artifacts (glass and ceramics) consistent with a kitchen,” he said. “Most of the settlement items could be dated from 1800 and later, but we did find artifacts showing the site was also occupied by Native American cultures before European contact.”

The Town of Abingdon wanted to assess the occupational history of the Muster Ground. Robinson examined six areas closely, including the “Retirement” home site, the muster ground field, and sites of three outbuildings and a prehistoric Native American site. “We did not expect to



Archaeologist Ken Robinson (l), NPS intern Grant Hamilton (r), and volunteer Joel Rosen conduct a ground penetrating radar study at the Muster Grounds property.

find any artifacts from the 1780 muster and we did not,” he said, “but, we now have the first glimpse of what could become a much richer understanding of how that property was used over time.” Of particular interest to many was the historical research done to determine the ownership of the muster ground. “It appears that Captain Andrew Colvill (e) was the likely owner of the field at the time of the 1780 muster,” said Robinson. “He went on the march and fought valiantly at Kings Mountain.” [See Draper, p.247-8] ●

## Paddy Creek—A Change in A(I)ttitude

*New Trail segment is certified at Lake James State Park*

**O**n September 30, the National Park Service certified a near-mile-long section of new trail in Lake James State Park.



NC State Park Ranger Sean McElhone leads marchers across Paddy Creek bridge to the new trail segment.

Sean McElhone and other North Carolina park rangers participated in the ceremony.

The new trail follows along Paddy Creek in

the new Paddy Creek Peninsula section of the park.

“Every ceremony for the adding of trail on the ground, whether large or small, has meaning and importance,” said Paul Carson. “This segment of the trail along which Sevier’s men and Shelby’s men walked 230 years ago on this date, represents a change in the attitude of the men who came over the mountains. Along this section, they experienced a shift in their thinking from just traveling over the mountains to preparing to fight.”

Speaking about the new trail segment, Carson continued, “The woods are heavy and deep and the trail follows an old stone wall. Walkers get the

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OVTA member Steve Ricker leads the marchers along the new Paddy Creek trail segment.

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

*OVTA and Abingdon will host the May 2011 event*

The nation is coming to see the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

During May 14-19, 2011, the Town of Abingdon and the Overmountain Victory Trail Association will co-host the 13<sup>th</sup> National Scenic & Historic Trails Conference. The Partnership for the National Trails System has selected Abingdon, Virginia for its next biennial meeting.

“This year’s theme,” said Alan Bowen, president of the OVTA, “is ‘Healthy Trails—Healthy Communities. Uniting trail communities through fun, fitness, education, conservation and tourism.’ The co-hosts have been working toward this since 2002 through our annual, multi-day educational event for school groups. And, in 2010, OVTA designated

Abingdon, Virginia as a “model trail community,” the first community on the 330-mile OVNHT to receive that designation.

This Trails Conference will be a first because it will showcase a Scenic

terminus of the Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail. The town also serves as a launch site for hikers on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. “We are excited to share our rich history and Appalachian Mountain culture with our trail

community partners from around the country,” said Garrett Jackson, director of planning for the Town of Abingdon. “We look forward to seeing everyone in May. Come join us in Abingdon!”

After a scouting trip to Abingdon, Julia Glad, Communications and Outreach Coordinator for the Partnership for the National Trails System, said,

“OVNHT is one of 30 NATIONAL trails—scenic and historic—designated by Congress. It is special because it has such an important story to tell. I am tremendously impressed and inspired by what I saw Abingdon and the OVTA doing there in terms of partnership and innovation—with education and community development. We are excited to bring people from all over the country to see what they are accomplishing together.”

The conference is of interest to many people and is open to registrants from the public. Activities include open discussions, topic sessions, panels, field trips, featured speakers, a reenactment showcase by the OVTA, performances at the Historic Barter Theater, and local heritage music. Events overlap with the nearby Damascus Trail Days celebration. The Trails Conference will be held at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center on the campus of Virginia Highlands Community College. Interested parties can visit [www.pnts.org](http://www.pnts.org) to learn more. ●



Trail, Historic Trail and a National Recreation Trail. Abingdon is not only the northern trailhead for the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail but is also the western

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sense of its antiquity. It is easy to imagine the feeling the militiamen had of the impending conflict that was then just a week away.”

Some interpret the stone pattern as a wall perhaps marking a boundary line or perhaps simply being a rubble pile of stones cast from the roadbed during its construction in the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**The rock “wall” along an old road bed next to the Trail is covered with leaves and lichen.**

Archaeologists and historians remain inconclusive in their assessment.

Before leading the OVTA reenactors and marchers in firing a commemorative volley, Alan Bowen, OVTA president, said, “Putting pieces of the trail together is important. This new trail is a great addition to the segments that have already been added.” Those attending the ceremony then followed the OVTA reenactors on a walk along the new segment.

The access to the trailhead is at the bridge over Paddy Creek along the entrance road from NC 126 to Paddy Creek Peninsula in Lake James State Park. ●



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

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

## Late September 1780

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



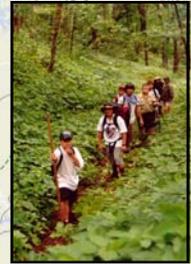
The Muster Ground, Abingdon, VA



Campbell's Seven Mile



Sycamore Shoals State Historic Site, Elizabethton, TN



Yellow Mountain Gap Road, Roan Mountain, TN



Museum of NC Minerals at Gillespie Gap, Spruce Pine, NC



Pisgah National Forest near Lake James, Marion, NC



Brittain Church Cemetery, Rutherford Co., NC

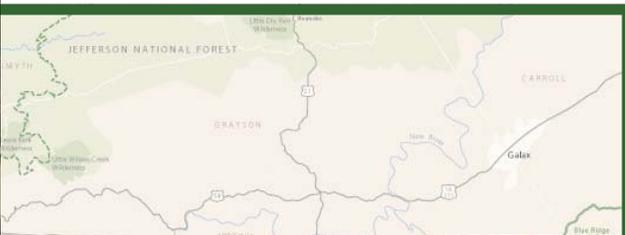


The Cowpens, Cherokee Co., SC





Grave Site, Ford, VA



OVNHT along Yadkin River, Elkin, NC



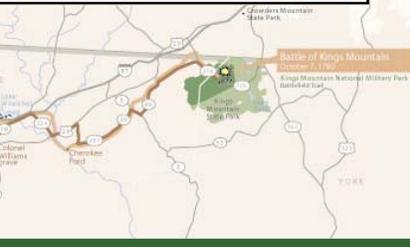
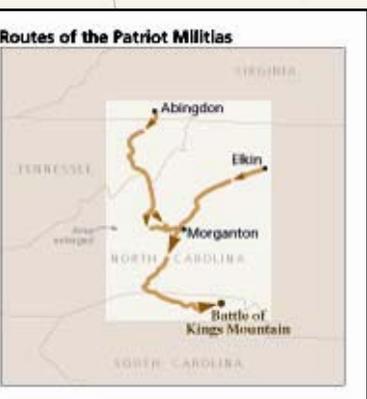
Yadkin River Greenway, North Wilkesboro, NC



W. Kerr Scott Dam & Reservoir, Wilkes Co., NC



Catawba River Greenway Morganton, NC



Kings Mountain National Military Park, York Co., SC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

## National Trails Day in Elkin

*Eastern trailhead dedicates wayside exhibits*

At the trailhead of the Eastern leg of the OVNHT, the community of Elkin gathered on National Trails Day, June 5, to celebrate and tend to “their Trail.” Troops of local Boy Scouts spent the morning cleaning up the Trail which begins at Elkin City Park at the Mustering Ground and continues down Elkin Creek and then upstream along the Yadkin River for a mile. They also gathered to dedicate the wayside exhibits at the trailhead, including the recently paved turnoff onto land donated by Duke Energy Company. “The paved turnoff has made our wayside exhibits much more inviting and accessible,” said Teresa Howell, manager of the city’s Main Street Program



In Elkin, the color guard marches across the newly paved turnoff to open the dedication and unveiling ceremony for the two wayside exhibits at the Mustering Ground.

and an ardent champion of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.●

## Trail Support is “the Real Thing”

*Coca-Cola Company and National Park Foundation receive Annual Service Award for 2009 Active Trails Grant*

The National Park Service presented its annual OVNHT Service Award to the National Park Foundation and the Coca-Cola Company for their collaboration to help support the OVNHT.

The award was presented by David Vela, Southeast Regional Director, NPS. Recognizing the achievements of the recipients, Vela said, “The OVNHT received an active trails grant for \$50,000 from the National Park Foundation to expand programming to bring the public out to the trail. This grant was underwritten by the Coca-Cola Company. The NPS collaborated with the OVTA to use these funds to educate children and adults about the story of this trail. As a result, in 2009, during the annual OVTA march, 51 educational pro-

grams were conducted over two weeks and reaching over 11,000 people. The students learned about life in colonial America and about the Patriots at Kings Mountain, and they walked an astounding 6,000 miles along the Trail during the programming.”

Representing Quentin Martin of the Coca-Cola Foundation and the Coca-Cola Company, Fred Smith said “It has always been an important part of the Coca-Cola Company to support

local communities, education, youth, and activities that promote a healthy lifestyle. We are very proud to support the National Park Foundation and through that organization the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.”

Ivan Levin of the National Park



OVNHT Superintendent Paul Carson with Fred Smith (c) and Ivan Levin (r).

Foundation said, “The active trails program is one we have done with the Coca-Cola Company and communities through their national parks. A way of connecting those

communities is through recreation. Whether it is recreational land and water trails, or recreation through historical interpretation, this grant strives to connect people like you with the parks that are right in your own backyard.”

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reminds us that not all Americans during the Revolution were united in their desire for independence. The tree is gone since 1992, lost to disease and weather, but the legacy of its presence remains to connect us to a part of our history. This new wayside exhibit will explain this history to visitors and encourage them to learn

more at other sites along the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, which are all tangible reminders of what happened here long, long ago.”

Jennifer Furr, Executive Director of the Wilkes Heritage Museum said, “This new wayside adds another

dimension to our telling of the story to our visitors who may not be aware of our rich Revolutionary War heritage. We have an entire exhibit room in the museum dedicated to telling the story of the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain. Now we have this exhibit on the exterior to remind people of important history in

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“The outcome of this effort,” said Paul Carson, “will be the foremost museum in Southwest Virginia on the American Revolution.”

From the lectern, Rick Humphreys, Town Councilman and chair of the Muster Ground Steering Committee, led the recognition of a long list of deserving people and organizations who have worked and continue to work to make the visitor center and the educational programming for the annual event a success. “You can see how involved the community is,” he noted, “and how much effort it takes to make this program that we all love and champion and cherish a reality. It is not easy, but neither were the acts of courage, commitment, and sacrifice of our ancestors we gladly labor to honor. It is a privilege and honor for Abingdon to support and promote America’s revolutionary heritage in this way.”



**Town Councilman Rick Humphreys served on the interpretive center committee and recognized scores of people in the community who helped make this center possible.**

Mayor Ed Morgan read a proclamation from the Town of Abingdon recognizing Blair Keller for his lifelong service to the community and in particular his commitment to promoting recognition of the Virginia patriots who participated in the Battle of Kings Mountain. He is a descendant of five veterans of that battle and has joined in OVTA’s commemorative march nearly every year beginning in 1978, completing the trek many times, and notably in 1980, the 200th anniversary, on horseback. ●

## Long Range Interpretive Plan

*Creating a long range vision with action items for now*

**D**uring the summer and fall, work continued on developing the Long Range Interpretive Plan for the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. This is an official, working document for steering future interpretation of historic resources and is developed under the auspices of the National Park Service offices at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, the NPS’s national site for interpretation planning and development.

The contractor to NPS, Pond |Ecos in Atlanta, Georgia, organized three separate workshops along the Trail corridor to gather input from citizens. On July 26, 27, and 28, listening workshops were held in Elizabethton, Tennessee, in Morganton, North Carolina, and in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. A two-day review session was held November 4 & 5 in Asheville, where members of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association, the Overmountain Victory Trail Committee (South Carolina), and NPS staff from the Blue Ridge Parkway,

Cowpens National Military Park, and other NPS staff also attended. The NPS Chief of Interpretation for the Southeast Region attended one of the two days.

Shannon Kettering, manager of the planning project for Pond |Ecos, said, “We are delighted with the



**Stakeholders in the interests of the OVNHT met to share their ideas about the long range plans for interpreting the Trail’s story.**

interest and earnestness expressed by the participants in our several meetings. Input from those who know the history best

and are familiar with the communities along the Trail corridor is essential to help us do our job. This blueprint for future development of resources will help the National Park Service most effectively interpret the story of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail through a continually widening range of possible methods and for an expanding and diverse group of site visitors and off-site audiences.”

The Long Range Interpretive Plan will be completed in summer 2011. ●

## Closer to a Home

*NPS releases study for OVNHT headquarters site*

**I**n November, the National Park Service released its “Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment for a New Headquarters and Visitor Contact Station” for the OVNHT. The planning division worked on the assessment for many months, evaluating several potential sites. The complete report is available for downloading as a PDF and viewing at [www.parkplanning.nps.gov/ovni](http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/ovni).



The environmental assessment identified one site as the “preferred alternative”: Rocky Ford site in Morganton, North Carolina. ●

# Patriots for Partners

Trail partners are taking big steps together

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

## Virginia

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



## Tennessee

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



## North Carolina

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



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

## South Carolina

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



## All States

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



For more information about being a Trail Partner, contact:

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

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



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

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our country's founding that took place right here in Wilkes County.”

“The Tory Oak is part of the legacy of Wilkesboro and Wilkes County,” said Wilkesboro Mayor Mike Inscore. “It is hallowed ground. And, we owe a debt of gratitude to the civic-minded folks who have worked so hard to develop this history museum to help tell our story. This wayside exhibit is another step in the preservation of our heritage.” ●

Picture credits: All photography by Randell Jones except “Searching for the Past.” Those two photos provided by Ken Robinson.