



# Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail



A progress report on the status of the Trail

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## On the Path

Welcome to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. As you will read in the pages of this year's Progress Report, the trail is continuing to grow in many ways, with more pathway on the ground, with extensive museum exhibits that tell our story, with historians delving further into the past to reveal more about what happened in 1780.

Although no year is a typical year along the route, the report of more being added to the OVNHT and to its story has become the norm for our trail. The National Park Service, along with its many partners, is always striving to add more so that the visitor experience becomes richer and deeper with each passing year.

If this is your first visit to the OVNHT, we hope you enjoy all there is to see and do. If you are returning, then welcome back and please enjoy all that has been added. Either way we hope your time is memorable and rewarding.

- Paul Carson, Superintendent

## On Display

### New Exhibits Dedicated at the Muster Grounds

The W. Blair Keller, Jr. Interpretive Center at the Muster Grounds in Abingdon, Virginia now has permanent exhibits. After years of work by a select committee of citizens and the labors of professional exhibit designers and fabricators, the new interpretive displays were greeted with great enthusiasm by those who gathered in Abingdon on September 22 for the dedication ceremony.



The interpretive center's permanent exhibits were dedicated in two ceremonies on Sept. 22. Several artifact display cases were funded by the Virginia DAR as the State Regent's Project.

"This is outstanding," "Simply beautiful," and "I am so impressed," were typical reactions of the large crowd which came to officially open and view the new exhibits. One important part of the new displays were the museum-quality exhibit cases donated by the Virginia Society, NSDAR. These cases were the State Regent's Project of the Virginia Society. State Regent Patricia Hatfield and the Virginia Daughters conducted a separate DAR ceremony in the morning celebrating the work of their organization in supporting this museum. The Virginia Society donated \$30,000 toward the purchase of the artifact display cases and other costs. Many of the Daughters also attended the afternoon ceremony.

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## Another Muster at Mulberry Fields

### Yadkin River Greenway adds 1.2 miles to OVNHT

The crowd gathered at Smoot Park on October 2 for the dedication of new segment of the OVNHT did not outnumber Colonel Benjamin Cleveland's Wilkes County militiamen who gathered at Mulberry Fields 232 years earlier, but it was close. The day of the ceremony offered a dreary, rainy morning,



A host of people involved in the trail project along the Yadkin River Greenway gathered around R.G. Absher (behind certificate) to celebrate its addition to the OVNHT. (Sen. Brohyll with tie.)

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# Alexander's Ford

## Changing the course of history

"Nothing is truly dead until it is forgotten." Another part of the story of the campaign to Kings Mountain will be remembered forever and celebrated because one more part of the Trail has been preserved. Thanks to the unrelenting efforts of Ambrose Mills in Polk County, the ford at



A series of speakers addressed those who gathered for the dedication of Alexander's Ford at Bradley Nature Preserve.

Ambrose Mills worked tirelessly for several years in coordinating the efforts of private and public interests to secure the property and to preserve Alexander's Ford. The Majorie M. and Lawrence R. Bradley Fund of Polk County and the County of Polk cooperated in securing the property through grant sources and protecting it for future generations. Today Alexander's Ford at Bradley Nature Preserve is a principal point along the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. Through those resources, more citizens and school children will have an enhanced opportunity to learn about the

Green River, now called Alexander's Ford, has been protected.

Revolutionary War history that took place here in Polk County.



OVTA Marchers fired a volley to help open the new trail to Alexander's Ford at the Bradley Nature Preserve.

"I now declare Alexander's Ford at the Bradley Nature Preserve open to the public," announced Ray Gasperson, Chair, Polk County Commission. A "ribbon" fashioned of grapevine was cut and the marchers of the

Overmountain Victory Trail Association filed down the trail and fired a commemorative volley. With that, some Polk County citizens strolled

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"The OVNHT now has on the Trail the first interpretive center and display dedicated to telling the story of the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain," said Paul Carson, Superintendent of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. "The Town of Abingdon and the citizens of Washington County can be proud of their efforts over many years to make this dream a reality."

"Our committee worked long and hard to decide what we wanted to exhibit in these displays," said Rick Humphreys, town councilman and committee chair. "This is a great day for the Town of Abingdon,"

added Mayor Ed Morgan. "We are a trails town." Town Manager Greg Kelly added, "We have been a longtime champion of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, and Abingdon hosted the national trails conference here last year. This interpretive center

with its impressive and informative displays will attract even more people to our community to learn about this important Revolutionary War heritage."



Virginia DAR State Regent Pat Hatfield supported the new museum exhibits.

On hand for the opening were the co-designers of the displays from The Design Minds, Inc. of Fairfax, Virginia. Samantha Scott was the graphic designer; Kimberly Nelson was the content developer. Exhibitology of Paterson, NJ, fabricated and installed the exhibits.

Adding to the ceremony of the opening, three fife and drum corps participated. Guilford Courthouse Fife and Drum Corps and Watauga Fife and Drum Corps marched in with color guard and performed. The audience welcomed as well



John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps

special guests for the occasion, the John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps from John Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia. Sons of the American Revolution served as color guard and the OVTA reenactors fired a volley to celebrate the opening. OVTA members and others had been at the Muster Grounds for four days of educational programming with over 1,500 students rotating through educational stations during their visit to learn about life on the Virginia frontier during the 1700s. ●



Graphic designer Sam Scott with a panel illustrated by Richard Luce.

## OVNHT History Symposium

*The first in a series held at Abingdon, VA*

One of the recommendations adopted in the Long Range Interpretive Plan for the OVNHT, which was completed last year was the conducting of a history symposium every second year. The first OVNHT History Symposium was conducted in Abingdon on September 21 at the Higher Education Center at Virginia Highlands Community College. Leigh Anne Hunter, Superintendent, Abingdon Muster Grounds, was the coordinator for the event. Funding was provided by Overmountain Victory Trail Association and the Town of Abingdon.

The symposium included presentations by three invited

scholars and a catered meal, with a lengthy question and answer period for engaging participants in exploring some of the issues of the history surrounding the campaign to the Battle of Kings Mountain.

Joe Eply, author of *A Passel of Hate*, a historical novel set in the events surrounding the Battle of Kings Mountain, spoke on “The Role of the Virginians.” Eply has a career of Army Special Force’s experience and has researched the battle history extensively. His book received a Silver Medal from the Military Writers Society of America.

Randell Jones, author of the award-winning book *Before They Were Heroes at Kings Mountain*, spoke on “William Campbell—Virginia Patriot, American Hero.” He also wrote *A Guide to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail*. Jones was the keynote speaker at Kings Mountain National

Military Park in 2011 at the annual commemorative ceremonies.

Archeologist Ken Robinson completed an archeological survey and investigation of the Muster Grounds



**Ken Robinson shared the detailed results of his archeological investigation of the Muster Grounds in Abingdon, VA.**

property in Abingdon in 2010. He shared his findings which included evidence of some previous structures on the site during the 1800s. He also shared that the current nine acres at the Muster Ground is really only a small surviving remnant of the larger area along Wolf Creek where the men would have camped during the muster on September 22-24, 1780. The other area which likely served as the mustering ground has been developed. Robinson is formerly the Director of Public Archeology at Wake Forest University. He is now involved with university development. ●



**The new painting, “Call to Arms” by Richard Luce, was used by one speaker to illustrate the Virginians crossing the Watauga River at Sycamore Shoals.**

## NPS Service Awards

*Effort of two groups in Polk County recognized for preserving Alexander’s Ford*

This year’s NPS Service Award went to two organizations so instrumental in securing the land and preserving the legacy of this important part of the story. As CEO, Elizabeth Nager received the award on behalf of the Marjorie M. and Lawrence R. Bradley Foundation, which provided the funding and helped orchestrate the purchase. Ray Gasperson, Chair, Polk County Commission, received the award on behalf of Polk County. “We are delighted to own this property and to offer it as a low maintenance, low impact opportunity for visitors to experience the beauty and tranquility of our part of the Broad River valley. The history of the Overmountain men really comes alive on this property.” Nager added, “The Bradley Board valued the concept of a nature preserve and we worked to assure it would survive in perpetuity.” ●



**Elizabeth Nager and Ray Gasperson received awards given to their respective organizations as Ambrose Mills (r) celebrated the success of the project he has championed for several years. OVNHT Superintendent Paul Carson presented the framed certificates on October 7 at Kings Mountain NMP.**

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down the graveled path toward the ford a mile and more downhill.

It was at the ford of Green River on October 5, 1780 where the Patriot militiamen had lost Patrick Ferguson's trail. When South Carolina patriot Colonel Edward Lacey rode through the night from Flint Hill to find them and bring them word of Ferguson's flight toward Charlotte, the leaders changed their direction and the intensity of their pursuit. "It was on the night of October 5 at this ford," said OVNHT Superintendent Paul

Carson, "that the course of history changed. Without the events that happened here, there would have been no battle at Kings Mountain."

"Ambrose Mills has been the Edward Lacy of this effort to save and preserve Alexander's Ford," said Gasperson. "The citizens of Polk County are privileged to own this remarkable piece of land with both rich history and pristine natural beauty. We welcome everyone to come enjoy the historical and natural heritage of the Bradley Nature Preserve."

Elizabeth Nager, CEO of both the Polk Community Foundation and the Marjorie M. and Lawrence R. Bradley Fund of Polk County recounted the intricate negotiations that ensued across several years that secured this property at no cost to the public and yet provided for protections in perpetuity for the amenities the public could enjoy. "With the able assistance of Tom Fanslow at Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, we formulated a vision for the property," she said. She led a cheer for the community spirit that made this project possible. ●

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much like the one the Patriot militia faced on that day in 1780, but the spirits of the celebrants was high and by the end of the ceremony, the sun

was shining. About 150 people turned out to dedicate a 1.2-mile section of the Yadkin River Greenway from Smoot Park to Memorial Park as the newest section of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. R.G. Absher, Executive Director of the Yadkin River Greenway, presided over the ceremony, which began with SAR color guard and a rousing solo of the National Anthem sung by Duncan Trawick, a junior at Wilkes Central High School.

"Wilkes County has now created and the National Park Service has certified fully half of the OVNHT in the county available for certification," said Paul Carson, Superintendent, OVNHT. "I have no doubt the citizens in this community will be tackling the rest of that trail in the next few years and adding greatly to the walkable segments lying along the eastern leg of the OVNHT running from Elkin to Morganton."

US Congresswoman Virginia Foxx offered her congratulations. North Wilkesboro Mayor Robert Johnson and Wilkes County Commission Chairman Gary Blevins welcomed the celebrants and applauded the hard work of the Yadkin River Greenway organization.

Senator James T. Broyhill shared the story of his involvement with the founding of the Trail, beginning in 1977. He helped make the OVNHT one of the first



The ceremony concluded with a ribbon-cutting and the firing of a volley by the OVTA reenactors.

national historic trails to be designated by Congress.

Before the ceremony, those gathered enjoyed a catered barbeque lunch while they heard some interesting history about Colonel Benjamin Cleveland from Winston-Salem author Randell Jones. He urged everyone to see the new Don Troiani painting of Col. Cleveland recently donated to the Wilkes Heritage Museum. ●



For more information about being a Trail Partner, contact:

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Picture credits: All photography by Randell Jones.