Welcome to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

2014 has been a landmark year for the trail, as you will find in the stories in this year's report. Many certifications, partner initiatives, and new pathway bode well for visitors looking for more to see and do.

Additionally the trail is now part of a larger group of parks in the Carolinas that focus on the American Revolution. The trail is now combined with Kings Mountain National Military Park, Cowpens National Battlefield, and Ninety-Six National Historic Site. All of these are under the supervision of John Slaughter, the Group Superintendent.

In Mr. Slaughter's words he states that the primary friends organization of the trail, the Overmountain Victory Trail Association serves "as a strong foundation and the backbone partner to support the overall Southern Campaign of the American Revolutionary War Park Groups endeavor."

We are excited about all this and hope you join us along the pathway.

Sincerely,

Paul Carson, Superintendent
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail
- 2014 Progress Report

A new segment of the OVNHT called the Patriot’s Trail was certified in Bluff City on September 24. The segment is only a quarter-mile long, but it enables safe access along the shoulder of Silver Grove Road from the suspension footbridge and wayside exhibit to near Choate’s Ford on the east bank. “Many hands make light work,” declared Ambre Torbett, project manager and Sullivan County’s Director of Planning and Codes. The Sullivan County Highway Department laid crushed stone for the path and installed a series of large boulders to prevent vehicles from parking on the trail. Adding what Torbett called a “colonial era feel” to the project, a split-rail fence was built by Sam Compton of Troop 48, Kingsport, TN, as his Eagle Scout community service project. And, OVTA member Tom Vaughan installed the OVNHT trail logo sign. Cooperation of adjacent landowners was graciously and generously offered.

Choate’s Ford was the shallow spot over the South Fork Holston River crossed by about 400 mounted Virginia militiamen on October 25, 1780 as they rode to join the muster at Sycamore Shoals. A parking lot and informational kiosk for the OVNHT were previously dedicated on the west side of the ford. Torbett became involved with the OVNHT in 2006 and recognizes a potential for 22 miles of certified trail in the county. Choate’s Ford is an ancient crossing, one approached by an old Indian trail along today’s Pleasant Grove Rd. with remnants of that route still visible in the area. Torbett shared that future plans include development of a walking trail from Choate’s Ford along the route of that ancient pathway some four or five miles to Sullivan East High School where they are the “Patriots.”

Rocky Mount Makes a Smooth Connection
New wayside exhibit provides online links for more information

A new wayside exhibit helps visitors connect with more of the story in new ways. “This is one of five new wayside exhibits installed along the OVNHT this year,” said Paul Carson, OVNHT Superintendent, “and it adds something new to what we provide visitors: online links. People can learn volumes from online links to more information, well beyond what we can put on one panel.”

During the wayside dedication, John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS addressed the crowd gathered at Rocky Mount for the evening’s dramatic telling of “The Story,” as the OVTA reenactors call it. “Sites can become irrelevant,” he said, “unless you keep doing what you are doing here tonight, coming out to learn and to engage with a story that can be told best by being here in this spot. And we need the OVTA to continue what it is doing, too, bringing the story to people and bringing people to the story.”

Gary Walrath, Executive Director, Rocky Mount Museum Historic Site, was quite pleased with the new wayside exhibit about William Cobb. Rocky Mount was Cobb’s home in 1780 when he and five sons joined with the militia at Sycamore Shoals for the campaign in pursuit of Patrick Ferguson. Cobb’s story is just one of the many stories interpreted at this State of Tennessee living history site and museum in Piney Flats.
Biggerstaff’s Old Fields
Revealing the passions which drove the Revolution

The history recognized by the dedication ceremony on October 11 was not the noblest of acts by our forefathers, but the crowd of more than 100 citizens who gathered in Rutherford County to celebrate the dedication of Biggerstaff’s Old Fields understood the significance of that history and tendered the appropriate reverence for what happened there 234 years before.

Danny Searcy, Director of Public Works and Planning for Rutherford County, welcomed the audience and emceed the ceremonies which included the presentation of colors, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the National Anthem. Chivous Bradley, Rutherford County Historian, pointed to the reasons for the trail and hangings which occurred on this site a week after the Battle of Kings Mountain: taxation, property, religion, and retribution. He added that people in this part of North Carolina had ancestors on both sides of what was effectively a civil war, but that the hangings served as a turning point in the war for the loyalist cause, which began to diminish. Marc Bowen, Executive Director, OVTA, shared that this certification was the “great culmination of much planning” and that the site was “in service to the telling of a story we refuse to let slip into obscurity.”

Ambrose Mills, a direct descendant of the loyalist Colonel Ambrose Mills, one of the nine hanged at the site in 1780, addressed the gathering, saying, “I am pleased to be here today; my ancestor probably was not.” He shared some history of the era, noting that he is also descended from patriot Colonel Andrew Hampton. His ancestor Ambrose Mills, he shared, was “a brave and noble man, uttering at the last ‘God Save the King.’” Dan Dorsch, a descendant of another hanged loyalist, Capt. James Chitwood, drove from

Fort Womack - continued from page 1)
welcomed the large gathering. “This is a wonderful example of what citizens can do when they band together,” she said. Among those attending the dedication ceremony were several elected officials or representatives of their offices: County Mayor Richard Venable, Congressman Phil Roe’s office, and Bluff City Mayor Irene Wells. They shared their encouragements and appreciation, noting, “Our kids need this ‘will not fail’ attitude,” and “the deeds that we do will live on after us.” All expressed sincere appreciation to the Childress Family for embracing the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail in Sullivan County, Tennessee.

John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS reminded the gathering, “I get to wear the uniform and the cool hat, but what really matters is what you do. This is your story, and you have now become a little closer to your own heritage.” The invited guests was treated to a telling of “The Story” by OVTA reenactors and to a catered brunch. ●
Lynn Gap Trail
New trail in the woods along the Blue Ridge Parkway

Two miles of trail paralleling the Blue Ridge Parkway is now open from Gillespie Gap to Lynn Gap. This commemorates part of the route taken by Colonel William Campbell and the Virginians when the Overmountain force was divided on September 29. Campbell's men descended from Lynn Gap and camped at Turkey Cove.

About three-fourths of that trail was completed during the summer by students working with the American Conservation Experience for the Blue Ridge Parkway. The National Park Service funded the work done by them to complete this segment of the trail.

Ticket to Ride
Disney Company supports OVNHT for a third year

This year’s Certificate of Appreciation given from the National Park Service on behalf of the OVNHT was presented to the Disney Company. For three years running since 2012, the National Park Foundation’s Ticket to Ride grant program, underwritten by the Disney Company, has been awarded to the OVNHT.

“As a result, in the past three years programming during the annual OVTA Commemorative March has educated close to 25,000 schoolchildren from communities along the routes, plus the programs supported by this grant have proven to be sustainable. Communities recognize the value of teaching new generations about our nation’s heritage and have contributed funds and personnel to ensure that they continue to occur. Without these grants many of these young people would not have the opportunity to visit this historic trail and learn the inspiring stories with which it is associated.”

The award was presented during the 2014 commemorative ceremonies at Kings Mountain National Military Park by Paul Carson, Superintendent, OVNHT. The award was received by Kim Sams of the Disney Company.
You can feel the history in Caldwell County today,” announced Mayor John Gibbons at Fort Defiance, the home of General William Lenoir along the Yadkin River. The occasion to certify officially this important site along the OVNHT, a status everyone involved believed had been achieved years before. It was, nonetheless, a great occasion, and the guests and visitors were warmly welcomed and treated to the hospitality of executive director Becky Phillips and her staff.

Senator James T. Broyhill reminded the audience that the Battle of Kings Mountain changed the course of the Revolutionary War which in turn changed the course of Western Civilization. And, in the decades following the American Revolution, the heroes of this battle “were showered with praise.” The names Sevier, Shelby, Cleveland, Winston, McDowell, and, of course, Lenoir, he said, were proudly bestowed on counties and communities across the country to honor these men.

After Ike Forrester, a Fort Defiance board member and descendant of William Lenoir, read from the general’s original draft of his pension application of 1832, Gary Everhardt, former NPS Director declared that it was “worth the trip down off the mountain (his home near Asheville) just to hear the words of William Lenoir. If we can instill those sentiments in our children and each new generation, we will pass along an important legacy.”

John Slaughter, Group Superintendent, NPS, said that a majority of NPS’s 401 sites are not large parks, but are cultural sites that help us all remember our heritage. He challenged the audience to embrace the theme of the coming 2016 centennial anniversary of the National Park Service, “Find Your Park.” He said, the communities along the OVNHT are actually doing more. They are “building their park.” He thanked all the communities for their partnership and participation, especially praising the work of OVNHT Superintendent Paul Carson over the last 12 years to build the community of partners for the Trail.

Mayor Joseph Gibbons and City Manager Lane Bailey each commented on what a special day it was for the citizens of Lenoir and especially to have these two pioneers of the OVNHT back for this special occasion. The mayor noted that a third important early trail champion, Harry J. Smith, also a graduate of Lenoir High School in the same era, was there in spirit. Smith served as safety marshal on the 1975 march and as grand marshal in ’76.
Investigation to discover the site of the skirmish known as the “battle of Cane Creek” got underway in 2014. The Foothills Conservancy secured a grant from the Battlefield Protection Program. Additional funding came from OVTA and from Albert Dale, a land owner and longtime OVTA member.

Ken Robinson was selected as the project archeologist. He has investigated numerous sites along the OVNHT in recent years. “This one is particularly challenging,” Robinson said. “We have conflicting first person accounts that suggest three or four sites are possible based on descriptions. But, we have a traditional site as well. A few generations of people have pointed to one area, saying with all the confidence we tend to put in the stories passed down from our great grandfathers that the battle took place there. But what we need is some evidence, and that had put us in the field looking for musket balls and rifle balls that might indicate where the skirmish took place. But a lot of things have happened to this area in the last 234 years. Farming, road construction, timbering, and development have transformed the area from what it was two centuries ago. But we have old maps, as well. We are making progress and are investigating the candidate sites hoping to find something that will either rule out one or offer some additional evidence to consider it. We’ll have to see.”

Robinson conducted field studies with volunteers from the OVTA and the Foothills Conservancy during the fall of 2014. He shared his preliminary findings during the 2014 OVNHT History Symposium held in Gaffney, SC, in late November. A final report will be presented in 2015.