Saratoga

National Park Service
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Detail from *The Surrender of Gen. Burgoyne*, by John Trumbull

"I have always thought Hudson's River the most proper part of the whole continent for opening vigorous operations. Because the course of the river . . . is precisely the route that an army ought to take for the great purposes of cutting the communications between the Southern and Northern Provinces, giving confidence to the Indians, and securing a junction with the Canadian forces."

—Gen. John Burgoyne, 1775

General John Burgoyne, by Sir Joshua Reynolds

The Campaign of 1777

British Gen. John Burgoyne believed in the Hudson River as a strategic highway through the northeast from the moment he arrived in America in 1775. His northern campaign plan of 1777 was to move his army south from Canada via the Lake Champlain-Hudson River route to Albany. A smaller force under Col. Barry St. Leger was expected to support this by marching east from Lake Ontario into the upper Mohawk Valley. Burgoyne and St. Leger would meet at Albany and join forces with Sir William Howe's sizable army in New York City. Together they would destroy the rebellion.

But Howe had other ideas. Leaving only a small force under Sir Henry Clinton in New York, he planned to move against the patriot capital at Philadelphia via Chesapeake Bay. Colonial Secretary Lord George Germain approved this, believing that Howe would return to New York in time to cooperate with Burgoyne. Howe was then already at sea and committed to the Philadelphia campaign when Germain's approval reached him. This meant that if Burgoyne needed help from New York City during his invasion from Canada, few troops would be on hand to help him. Burgoyne left St. Johns (now St. Jean), Canada, on June 17, 1777. His total force included 4,000 British regulars, 3,200 German auxiliaries from Braunschweig and Hessen-Hanau, 250 Canadian and loyalist soldiers, 400 Iroquois and Algonquian warriors, and about 1,000 noncombatants and camp followers. His first major objective, Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain, fell on July 6 after a four-day siege. Moving south through Skenesboro and Fort Edward, the British were impeded by rough terrain and Gen. Philip Schuyler's delaying tactics. As commander of American troops in the Northern Department, Schuyler was charged with halting Burgoyne's invasion.

Time and the tide of events now began to run against Burgoyne. St. Leger halted his advance down the Mohawk Valley to besiege Fort Stanwix. In the Battle of Oriskany on August 6 he stopped American militia marching to aid the fort. But learning that a strong force under Gen. Benedict Arnold was on its way, St. Leger raised the siege and retreated to Canada. More serious was the fate of a detachment Burgoyne sent to Bennington. On August 16, Gen. John Stark's and Col. Seth Warner's New England troops shattered this force, inflicting 900 casualties.

Major General Horatio Gates by Charles Willson Peale

Despite the setbacks, Burgoyne severed communications with Canada and risked all on a push to Albany. His army crossed to the Hudson's west bank at Saratoga (now Schuylerville) in mid-September and continued advancing south. Four miles north of Stillwater, he came upon the 8,000 Americans commanded by Gen. Horatio Gates, who had replaced Schuyler. The Americans were dug in on Bemis Heights, a strong position where the road to Albany squeezed through a defile between the hills and the river, as U.S. 4 does today.

American artillery on the heights and in redoubts along the Hudson commanded both river and road. Col. Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a Polish military engineer serving with the Americans, had chosen and fortified the site. Burgoyne's heavily burdened army had to go between the hills and the river, risking destruction, or drive the Americans from the fortified heights. The British general chose to attack.

The Battles of Saratoga

On September 19 the British advanced on the **American camp** in three columns. Two headed through heavy forests covering the region; the third, made up of mostly German troops, marched down the river road. Seeing Burgoyne's army in motion, American scouts notified Gates, who ordered Col. Daniel Morgan's corps of Virginia and Pennsylvania riflemen to track the British march. About 12:30 pm, some of Morgan's men brushed with the advance guard of Burgoyne's center column in a clearing—**Freeman Farm**—about a mile north of the American camp.

The ensuing battle ranged back and forth over the farm for over three hours. Then, as outnumbered British lines wavered under deadly American fire, German reinforcements arrived from the river road. Hurling them at the American right, Burgoyne steadied his breaking line, gradually forcing the Americans to withdraw. Burgoyne held the field but was stopped a mile north of the American lines,

his army badly bloodied. Shaken by his victory, he ordered his troops to dig in near Freeman Farm and await support from Clinton, who promised to send troops north to aid Burgoyne. He waited nearly three weeks, but received no further word from Clinton.

Burgoyne's plight was now critical. He faced a growing American army, with no hope of help from the south. His supplies were running out, and his army weakened daily. He chose to risk a second battle. On October 7 he ordered a reconnaissance-in-force to test the American left flank. Ably led, and supported by eight cannon, 1,700 men moved out of the **British camp**.

Marching 1,300 yards to the southwest, the troops deployed in a clearing on **Barber Farm**. Most of the British front was posted in open fields, but the topography made both flanks vulnerable to surprise attack. The Americans now knew Burgoyne's army was moving. About 3 pm they attacked in three columns under Colonel Morgan, Gen. Ebenezer Learned, and Gen. Enoch Poor. Repeatedly the British line was broken, then rallied, and both flanks were hit hard and driven back. Gen. Simon Fraser was mortally wounded as he rode among his men to encourage them to make a stand and cover the developing withdrawal.

Before the enemy's flanks could be rallied, Gen. Benedict Arnold—effectively relieved of command after a quarrel with Gates—led Learned's brigade against the German troops holding the British center. Under fierce pressure from all sides, the Germans joined the withdrawal into fortifications on Freeman Farm. In the hour of fighting, Burgoyne lost eight cannon and over 400 officers and men.

Flushed with success, the Americans thought victory was near. Arnold led one column in a series of savage attacks on the **Balcarres Redoubt**, a powerful British fort built on Freeman's Farm. Failing repeatedly to carry this position, Arnold wheeled his horse and, dashing through both armies' crossfire, spurred northwest to the **Breymann Redoubt**. Arriving as American troops began to assault the fortification, he joined the final surge overwhelming the German soldiers defending it. Entering the redoubt he was wounded in the leg. Had he died there, posterity would have known few brighter names than Benedict Arnold.

Darkness ended the fighting, saving the British from immediate disaster. That night Burgoyne left his campfires burning and withdrew his troops behind the **Great Redoubt** protecting the high ground and river flats at the battlefield's northeast corner. The next night, October 8, after burying Fraser in the redoubt, the British began retreating north. They had suffered over 1,200 casualties in three weeks; American losses were fewer than 500.

After a miserable rainy, muddy march, Burgoyne's troops took refuge in a fortified camp on the heights of Saratoga. There an American force, grown to nearly 17,000 men, surrounded the exhausted British army. Faced with such overwhelming numbers, Burgoyne surrendered on October 17, 1777. Under the terms of the Convention of Saratoga, Burgoyne's depleted 6,000-man army marched out of its camp "with the Honors of War" and surrendered its arms along the Hudson River's west bank.

One of the most decisive victories in American and world history had now been won.

Touring Saratoga Battlefield

The British fortification on this hilltop above the Hudson River was called The Great Redoubt (tour stop 9).

Use this guide, along with the maps and exhibits in the visitor center and interpretive markers on the battlefield, to better understand the battles of Saratoga. The auto tour starts near the visitor center at the parking area's south end. It covers 10 miles and has 10 tour stops. If your time is limited, be sure to see Neilson Farm, Barber Wheatfield, and Balcarres Redoubt.

1 Freeman Farm Overlook In 1777 the ground east of this open field was leased and farmed by John Freeman, a loyalist who went north and joined the British invasion force. The major fighting on September 19 took place on his farm. There, Morgan's riflemen opened the battle around noon by firing on the advance guard of Burgoyne's center column from their posts near the Freeman House.

2 Neilson Farm (the Summit) Before and after the battles John Neilson farmed these heights. He joined the American troops to oppose Burgoyne's advance. Today his restored home looks much as it did when Generals Arnold and Poor used it for quarters in 1777. Posts outline the fortified American lines. Sites of General Gates' headquarters and the American field hospital are about a half mile to the south.

3 American River Fortifications (Bemis Heights) Col. Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a Polish military engineer and volunteer in the patriot cause, directed construction of this powerful position. It proved key to American strategy against Burgoyne in 1777. Patriot infantry and cannon posted here, supported by batteries along the near riverbank, closed off the Hudson Valley route to Albany and forced the British to attempt to attack the American line at the summit on September 19.

4 Chatfield Farm An American outpost on this ridge, the site of Jesse Chatfield's farm in 1777, spotted the British movement toward the Barber Farm on October 7. Middle Ravine lies beyond the ridge in front of you. American and British pickets exchanged musket and rifle shots across the ravine just before the second battle began.

5 Barber Wheatfield Here and in the field farther west (beyond the first row of trees) on October 7 the Americans intercepted the 1,500 British and German soldiers advancing southwest in an attempt to reconnoiter the American left. After an hour of fierce fighting, Burgoyne's troops retreated to fortifications on Freeman Farm. British Gen. Simon Fraser was mortally wounded while trying to rally his men northeast of here.

6 Balcarres Redoubt (Freeman Farm) was a log-and-earthen work stretching about 375 yards long. Named for Lord Balcarres, commander of British light infantry, this was the strongest fort built by the British following the September 19 battle. On October 7 the British flanking column withdrew here after being driven from the Barber Farm. The redoubt is outlined by posts.

7 Breymann Redoubt, outlined by posts, was a single line of breastworks about 100 yards long and seven to eight feet high. It guarded the British right flank as well as the road to Quaker Springs. It was named for Lt. Col. Heinrich Breymann, whose German troops were stationed here. Nearby Boot Monument commemorates Benedict Arnold's leg wound, received here just as Americans captured the position.

8 Burgoyne's Headquarters The path here leads to the site of Burgoyne's headquarters. At the time of the battles it consisted of large marquees or tents. Set up after the action of September 19, it was the center of British command and camp life between the two battles. Burgoyne chose the location because of a nearby spring.

9 The Great Redoubt was strongest of three hilltop forts built by the British along bluffs overlooking the river. It guarded their hospital, artillery park, Indian and American loyalist camps, food stocks, boats, refugees, and floating bridge. Burgoyne withdrew his army to this vicinity during the night of October 7.

10 Fraser Burial Site and Trail A one-mile loop trail passes the traditional site of the grave of General Fraser, who was mortally wounded during the second battle of Saratoga. Beyond the gravesite, the trail continues to the sites of the British hospital, artillery park, baggage area, and Tayler House, where Fraser died. (Parts of the Old Champlain Canal may also be seen along the trail.) Note: The loop trail is fairly steep. Persons with physical limitations should take this into consideration before using it.

This ends your tour of the Battlefield Unit. To reach the Old Saratoga Unit (Schuyler House and Saratoga Monument), travel eight miles north on U.S. 4.

For Your Safety Please be careful as you tour the park. Watch out for stinging insects, especially near the exhibits. Unpaved trails are rough, and poison ivy is common. **Always check for ticks after walking.** Winter visitors: please be alert to occasional severe weather conditions.

Schuyler House This estate was the country home of Gen. Philip Schuyler both before and after the battles. The British burned the original house and its outbuildings to keep Americans from using them for cover during an attack. The present house, erected in 1777 shortly after Burgoyne's surrender, was the center of Schuyler's extensive farming and milling operations.

Saratoga Monument commemorates Burgoyne's surrender to Gates on October 17, 1777. The 155-foot memorial, completed in 1883, stands within what was Burgoyne's entrenched camp for the final days of the campaign.

Directions and Open Times and Hours
The park entrances are 30 miles north of Albany, N.Y., on U.S. 4 and N.Y. 32. The visitor center is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Schuyler House, Saratoga Monument, and Neilson House are open seasonally. Call the visitor center for times of operation. The park tour road is open from early April to November 30, weather permitting.

Schuyler House

Accessibility The park welcomes service animals and is fully accessible with the following exceptions: The Wilkinson Trail, the walkway to the lower area of Stop 10, the second floor of the Schuyler House, and the upper levels of the Saratoga Monument (an electric lift provides access to the monument's interior base level). Note that accessible walkways at Stop 2 and 7 are somewhat steep.

More Information
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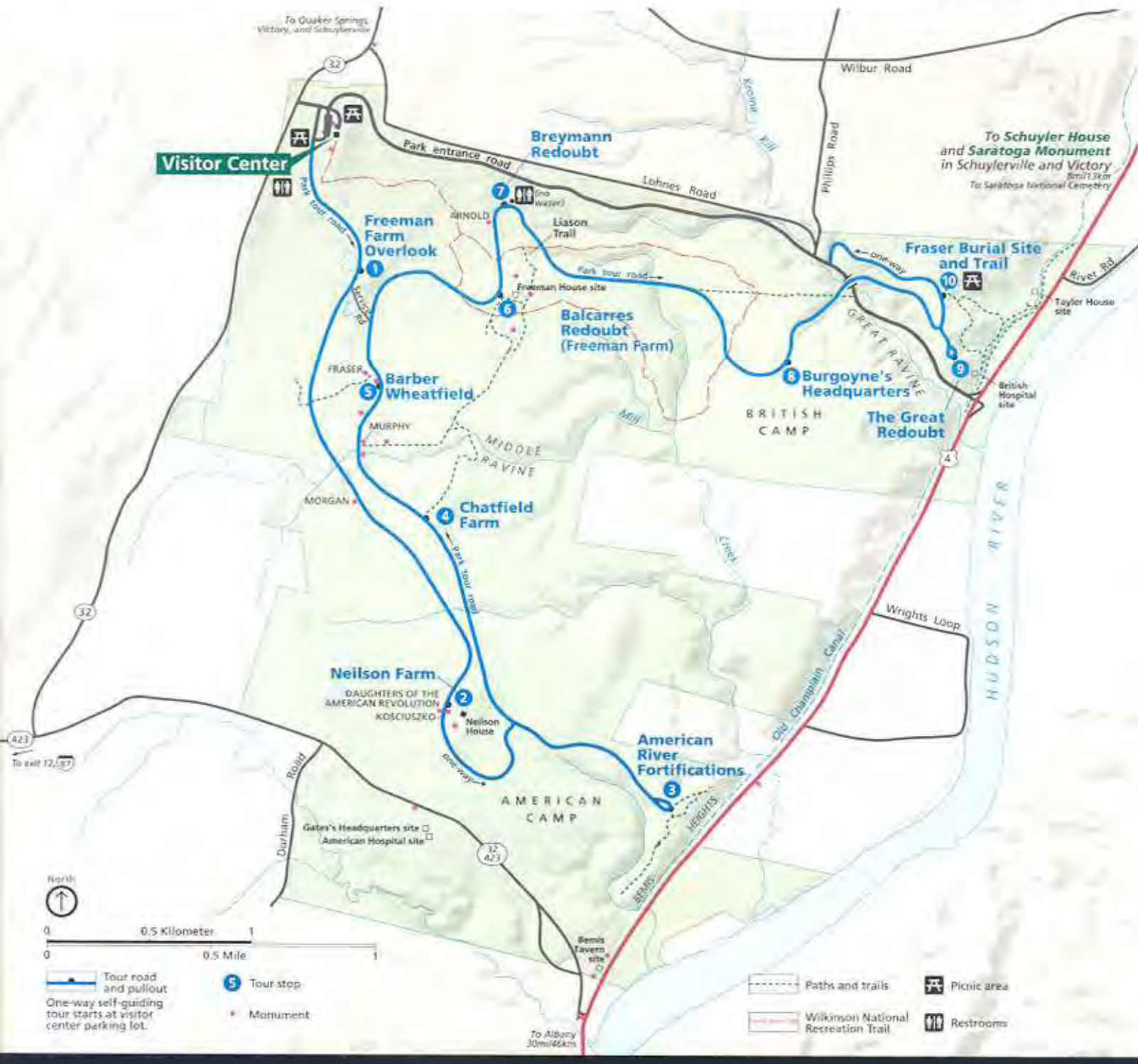
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