

## **DIGGING HISTORY NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXHIBIT AT VALLEY FORGE PARK BURROWS INTO REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY**

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### **Contacts**

Mike Caldwell, Superintendent, 610-783-1037

John Golden, Valley Forge Visitors Bureau, 610-834-7985

Valley Forge, PA - Two-hundred-year-old axes, utensils, pots, pans, bottle glass, weapon parts and other relics left behind by Washington's soldiers are some of the historical artifacts visitors to Valley Forge National Historical Park can see at the new archaeological lab at the park's Welcome Center.

On display now through April, visitors can see items left behind by soldiers in the Continental Army encamped here in 1777-1778 that have been unearthed during recent archaeological digs at the park. The exhibit includes a timeline with enlarged photographs showing where in the park the artifacts were found.

Visitors will also have an opportunity to talk to the archaeologists about the dig and the artifacts. The exhibit is staffed by archaeologists, curators, and/or park rangers, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 10 am- 4pm and Sunday 11 am- 4 pm.

"The public can stand just inches away from artifacts and engage the archeologists," said David Orr, who heads up the exhibit and has been a National Park Service Archaeologist for the past 29 years. "It's very important that people see the value and the results of the dig," he said.

National Park Service archaeologists and a team of students and volunteers went below the grassy meadows and leaf-littered forest floor of Valley Forge National Historical Park to find what remained of the legendary winter camp where George Washington's army -more- page two

became a well-disciplined force. Now their hard work and tenacity has paid off with the discovery of multiple relics left behind by Washington's soldiers.

"It's so important that the artifacts and the objects used in the past be brought to the people," Orr said. "This isn't a book about the past or someone writing about the past; this is the past. That's the exciting thing, and it's our duty to preserve it," he said.

But it's not just tools and artifacts that the archaeological team discovered. According to Orr, hooves and even skulls of many different types of animals have been found. He said that the bones were boiled to make stews so the greatest number of soldiers could be fed. "We were

able to find out what the men were eating. We discovered that they actually ate poor cuts of meat, not the porterhouse steaks that we're used to eating today," said Orr.

In addition to the expected items like rifle balls, uniform buttons, and eyeglasses, the team is also uncovering the very structure of the camp. "For the first time we're able to see a cross section through an entire brigade, meaning fortifications, enlisted men and officer's huts, kitchen, latrines. We've never been able to do that before," Orr explained. "Amazingly after 200 years, we can find the remains of charcoal and coal fires of George Washington's army left behind by the cooking fires and blacksmithing activities, added Julie Steele, an archaeologist for the National Park Service's Northeast Regional Office.

Those with a zest for historical artifacts can get involved with the exhibit by becoming a volunteer for cataloging the artifacts or taking part in future digs. "At any given time we have about eight volunteers ranging in age from their 20s to retirement age," Orr said.

"I can't tell you what a change in pace it is for me, getting away from a suit and tie and an office setting," said 46-year-old attorney Denis Cook of Warminster, Bucks County. "The chance to meet new people, the conversation and the small talk at the site about the history of the park, the Revolutionary War, and the science of archaeology are just great. It's all a chance to learn something new. Also, you meet people from all around the world while you're working at the park; a lot of tourists stop by and want to chat. Sometimes you don't have to spend thousands of dollars to see the world; the park is one of those places where the world comes to you," said Cooke.

Valley Forge National Historical Park is located at North Gulph Road and Route 23 west in Valley Forge. For more information about the park visit [www.nps.gov/vafo](http://www.nps.gov/vafo). To volunteer, call Jeff Bransford, Volunteer Coordinator at Valley Forge National Historical Park at 610-783-1097.