

Valley Forge: The Peoples' Park

This is National Park Week across the country, a good time to think about the meaning and state of parks. If Continental Army soldiers could visit today, we think they would be amazed to find the 3,500-acre Valley Forge National Historical Park that preserves the site of their encampment and commemorates their stunning accomplishment for 1.3 million visitors each year. More important, we think they would be moved by the fact that the park was founded by citizens, and that there is an ongoing 150-year tradition of stewardship of Valley Forge as advocates, volunteers, and partners participate in the work of preservation and education.

The National Park Service is entrusted to preserve and manage the park, and we are always conscious of the need to conserve the many investments Americans have made here.

Visitors this year will see and experience major improvements, with more in the works. The area around Washington's Headquarters has been completely revitalized, with new exhibits and visitor services and restoration of the historic landscape soon to open. Historic Inner Line Drive was restored. Many sections of the main loop trail have been rebuilt and more will come each year. There are more programs and tours for visitors, especially families, and more story-telling benches, cell phone tours and podcasts available to delight and inspire our visitors.

Visitation grew again last year, and participation in our formal educational programs grew 28%. In addition to programs for school children, there are changing museum exhibits, book signings, a new guidebook to the Revolution, adult classes with Montco Community College, historical symposia, and an annual teachers' institute. The park has initiated a research fellowship with the University of Pennsylvania's McNeil Center for the American Revolution. And the best bookstore anywhere for Revolutionary books is located in our Welcome Center.

Worried about the cost of gas? Come by bike and use miles of trails. Or you can take a guided tour on a trolley or use the new free shuttle around the park.

To protect natural resources, the plan for managing the size of the deer herd will be completed and implemented this year. An agreement on remediating asbestos will soon be completed. Hundreds of trees continue to be planted each year. Community projects to manage traffic congestion, protect Valley Creek, and restore forest and meadow vegetation are underway.

Citizens continue to play a major role in these improvements. Last year over 2,000 volunteers and 60 organizations completed projects and provided visitor services, a 15% increase over the previous year. Membership in the Friends of Valley Forge Park grew

again, and the Friends were essential partners in many initiatives. And individual citizens, as always, continue to provide solid support and advocacy as challenges arise.

230 years have passed since those cold, hungry soldiers marched into Valley Forge and committed to staying the course. We honor their commitment and that of generations since by dedicating ourselves to stewardship of the park. We invite you to visit www.nps.gov/vafo to find out how to participate.

Mike Caldwell
Superintendent