Morristown

About Your Visit
Washington's Headquarters and the adjacent museums are open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. A small admission fee is charged for persons over 16. The Jockey Hollow visitor center and nearby Wick House are also open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Park roads are open 9 a.m. to sunset. All park buildings are closed Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1.

Administration
Morristown National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Morristown, NJ 07960, is in immediate charge of the park.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
is the story of an army struggling to survive. During two critical winters, the town sheltered the main encampment of the Continental Army. In 1777 George Washington overcame desertion and waning morale to turn his army into a fighting force. The hills north of Morristown mines and furnaces yielded pig iron, which was cast into tools, farm implements and cannon at the forges of Hibernia and Mt. Hope. At a secluded spot along the banks of the Whippanny River, a small mill made gunpowder from saltpeter, sulphur, and charcoal.

The 5,000 men who arrived from Princeton sought shelter from the cold in public buildings, private homes, even stables, barns, sheds, and tents. Some Delaware troops were fortunate enough to find quarters in Col. Jacob Ford's fine home near the town green.

Maintaining the size and efficiency of the army was a continuing problem. The force so recently victorious at Trenton and Princeton began to dwindle as enlistments expired and many of them deserted. Their replacements were local militia and raw recruits. Resistant to military discipline, they often damaged their cause by harassing the farmers of the countryside.

Disease added yet another burden. Smallpox, “the greatest of all calamities,” struck the small army, and Washington had to resort to desperate measures to avert disaster. At a time when the deadly disease was not understood, men often died from it. One of the leading Continental officers, John Stark, had raised and commanded the New Hampshire regiment. Anthony Wayne led the midnight assault upon the fortifications at Stony Point. And James Clinton had defended his position along the Hudson River, only narrowly escaping capture by the British.

1777-1780: A Starving Time

On the 14th reached this wilderness, about three miles from Morristown, where we are to build lod huts for winter quarters. Our baggage is left in the rear in wagons to transport it. The snow on the ground is about two feet deep, and the weather extremely cold.”

Dr. James Thacher, Continental Army Surgeon, 1780

As 1779 drew to a close, Washington turned his attention to the coming winter encampment of the Continental Army. The large British force in New York City had to be watched from a place where the American army could be preserved through the always difficult winter months.

Morristown’s strategic location once again satisfied these requirements. At the end of November, Washington’s army marched south from West Point to join the troops from the middle and southern colonies already gathering at the encampment. The troops marching along the narrow dirt roads to Morristown were veterans of the 1776 invasion of Canada, and the battles of Long Island, White Plains, Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, and Monmouth. They were led by severely experienced officers. John Stark had raised and commanded the army which defeated the Hessians at Ben­nington. Anthony Wayne led the midnight assault upon the fortifications at Stony Point. And James Clinton had defended his position along the Hudson River, only narrowly escaping capture by the British.

George Washington arrived in Morristown amidst a severe hail and snow storm on December 1, 1779, and made his headquarters at the house of Jacob Ford, Jr. Other senior officers found quarters in private homes in and around Morris­town. Junior officers lived with their men in Jockey Hollow, a few miles south of Morristown.

As each brigade arrived, it was assigned a campsite. The men lived in tents as work began on the log cabins that would serve as their bunks. Six hundred acres of oak, walnut, and chestnut were converted into lines of soldier huts which rose on the hillsides.

December introduced the worst winter of the century to Morristown. Twenty-eight blizzards blasted the hills and slopes with unremitting violence, blocking vital supply roads with 6-foot snowdrifts. Bread and beef, the staples of a soldier’s diet, were generally adequate, but the weather sometimes made it difficult to prepare and serve them. Food supplies dwindled, starvation confronted the beleaguered army. “Nothing to eat from morning to night again,” was a common entry in soldiers’ diaries.
To add to the suffering, the quartermaster could not clothe the army. An officer wrote to his brother of "men naked as Lazarus, begging for clothing." Another reported only 50 men of his regiment fit for duty, many of whom were covered by only a blanket. The huts offered only the barest protection against the wind, which penetrated to the bone and froze hands and feet.

While the struggle for survival in the camps and outposts exhausted both soldier and officer, at headquarters the commander in chief faced perplexing and crucial problems. The Continental Congress did not provide for the army, and the ruinous inflation made the purchase of badly needed food and clothing almost impossible. In desperation, Washington turned to the governors of the neighboring states and the magistrates of the New Jersey counties, pleading for supplies to keep the army alive. The response from New Jersey was immediate and generous; said Washington, it "saved the army from dissolution, or starving," the ruinous inflation made the purchase of badly needed food and clothing almost impossible. In desperation, Washington turned to the governors of the neighboring states and the magistrates of the New Jersey counties, pleading for supplies to keep the army alive. The response from New Jersey was immediate and generous; said Washington, it "saved the army from dissolution, or starving." said Washington.

Sickness and cold made each day at Jockey Hollow an ordeal for the soldiers. At sunrise the army assembled on the parade ground for assignment of daily work details. Brigades marched to towns near the enemy for duty on the front lines, while Continental troops at New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Rahway, Westfield, Springfield, and Paramus helped to confine the British to the vicinity of New York. Only in January 1780 this routine changed. Contrary to the general practice of not fighting in winter, 3,000 Continentals crossed the frozen sound on sieges and raided Staten Island, but without success. The British retaliated with raids on Newark and Elizabethtown. Except for such skirmishes, the days were a seemingly endless succession of cold, snow, and hunger.

Many visitors came to Washington's headquarters on business. Representatives of the Continental Congress met with him to discuss the state of the army and the prospects for victory. The French Minister Luzerne and the Spanish representative Mirabeau came to review the small army. And in May 1780 the young Marquis de Lafayette arrived in Morristown with momentous news: France had six warships and 6,000 French soldiers on the high seas bound for Rhode Island to aid the American cause.

Spring brought both this welcome news and some relief to the suffering soldiers, even though shortages of food and clothing continued to be a fact of life. But the hard winter had almost destroyed the morale of both officer and enlisted man. Indicative of the suffering was the brief mutiny in May 1780 of the 1st Connecticut Brigade, veterans of Germantown, Monmouth, and the Valley Forge encampment. The quick response of their officers, supported by the troops of the Pennsylvania Line, forestalled a major rebellion. Realizing that conditions had to be improved to prevent further mutinies, Washington continued to plead with Congress for desperately needed food, supplies, and money. But it would take another mutiny in January 1781, when troops marched on the capital at Philadelphia and demanded supplies and back pay, before Congress would fully realize the gravity of the situation.

More bad news reached Washington in the spring of 1780. British and German troops had left Staten Island and were advancing into New Jersey. The majority of Washington's army was already moving north, but to meet the threat he ordered troops from Morristown toward Springfield. Then on June 21, 1780, he sent the few remaining troops in Morristown to join the main army, ending the 1779-80 encampment at Morristown. While small numbers of troops camped at the town during the winters of 1780-81 and 1781-82, the major role of Morristown in the American Revolution was over.

The encampment at Morristown in 1779-80 was one of the Continental Army's severest trials. Held together by Washington's leadership and ability, the army survived a time of discouragement and despair. A soldier named Stanton perhaps best summed up the significance of Morristown. On February 10, 1780, he wrote a friend: "I am in hopes the army will be kept together till we have gained the point we have so long been contending for... I could wish I had two lives to lose in defense of so glorious a cause."