



Foundation Document Overview

Cowpens National Battlefield

South Carolina



Contact Information

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Purpose



COWPENS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD protects and commemorates for inspiration and education the history and landscape where on January 17, 1781, the American victory at the Battle of Cowpens during the Southern Campaign was crucial to the successful outcome of the American Revolutionary War.

Significance

Significance statements express why Cowpens National Battlefield resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Gen. Daniel Morgan's Continental and militia soldiers defeated Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton's fearsome, well-trained British troops, thereby "spiriting up" the Patriot cause. Tarleton's defeat directly impacted the British will and ability to carry on the American Revolutionary War, ultimately leading to the British surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781.
- Cowpens National Battlefield contains traces of Colonial-period roads associated with the routes marched by the troops in the Battles of Cowpens and Kings Mountain.
- The Battle of Cowpens is studied as one of the most brilliant displays of American military tactics in the Revolutionary War. Leading his men to best exploit their abilities, General Morgan routed the British in less than an hour by accomplishing a double envelopment, a classic military maneuver where the enemy's flanks are surrounded and their only recourse is to surrender.
- Cowpens National Battlefield preserves the 1856 Washington Light Infantry Monument and the 1932 U.S. Monument. Local efforts, including those by battle veterans, established these monuments, serving as a catalyst for later redesignation to national battlefield status marked by a major boundary expansion for the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Battlefield landscape.**
- **Green River Road.**
- **1932 U.S. Monument.**
- **1856 Washington Light Infantry Monument.**
- **Artifacts pertaining to the Battle of Cowpens and the Revolutionary War.**
- **Archival material and documents related to the commemorations of the Battle of Cowpens.**
- **Archeological resources.**



Cowpens National Battlefield contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **1828 Robert Scruggs House**
- **Portion of Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail contained within the boundary**
- **1811 Richard Scruggs Chimney**
- **Byars-Ezell Cemetery**
- ***Hexastylis naniflora* (dwarf-flowered heartleaf)**
- **Portion of the Carolina Thread Trail**
- **Portion of the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway**

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The Battle of Cowpens, one of more than 200 battles fought in South Carolina during the Revolution, was a critical setback for the Southern strategy of the British Army and an important milestone on the road to the British surrender at Yorktown.
- Geography played an important role in General Morgan's decision to fight the British at the cow pens.
- Although the Battle of Cowpens lasted only about an hour, it demonstrated how militia could be deployed effectively in concert with units of veteran regular army and dragoons. Morgan's decision to put militia in front of the regulars during the battle was a new tactic.

- Cowpens is one of several battles during the American Revolutionary War in which cavalry played a decisive role.

- Efforts to commemorate the battle and preserve the battlefield began soon after the American Revolution and continue through the present.

- The pre- and post-battle history of the cow pens area provides insight into life in the backcountry.



Description

Cowpens National Battlefield is located in Cherokee County, South Carolina, between the towns of Gaffney and Chesnee in the northwestern section of the state at the intersection of U. S. Highway 221-A and South Carolina Highways 11 and 110. The park encompasses approximately 842 acres of gently rolling Piedmont woodland and open fields, which contain the core battleground. Features and facilities include a visitor center, battlefield trail, nature trail, historic log cabin, auto loop road around the perimeter of the battlefield, and a picnic area with a covered shelter.

The park was established by an act of Congress on March 4, 1929, to commemorate Gen. Daniel Morgan's significant victory over Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton's command during the early morning of January 17, 1781. The Southern Campaign, especially in the backcountry, was essentially a civil war as the colonial population split between Patriot and Loyalist. Conflict came, often pitting neighbor against neighbor and reigniting old feuds and animosities. Those of both sides organized militia, often engaging each other. The countryside was devastated, and raids and reprisals were the order of the day.

The Battle of Cowpens took place in the latter part of the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution. It became known as the turning point of the war in the South, part of a chain of events leading to Patriot victory at Yorktown. The Cowpens victory was won over crack British troops and brought together strong armies and leaders who made their mark on history. Here, with the flood-swollen Broad River six miles to his back, Morgan decided to make a stand at the Cowpens, a well-known crossroads and frontier pasturing ground.

The term "cow pens," endemic to such South Carolina pastureland and associated with the early cattle industry, would be etched in history. The field itself was some 500 yards long and just as wide, a park-like setting dotted with trees, but devoid of undergrowth, having been kept clear by cattle grazing at the springs, feeding on native grasses and peavine. Annual visitation at Cowpens since 2000 has remained consistently between 200,000 and 235,000, with the exception of 2006 when the recorded visitation dropped to 143,664 due to the addition of the Trailhead parking area, which split access to the park. In 2007 the park added a traffic counter at the Trailhead parking area and the recorded visitation began to reflect the consistent numbers experienced earlier and since.

