



Foundation Document Overview

Ninety Six National Historic Site

South Carolina



Contact Information

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Purpose



NINETY SIX NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves and commemorates for educational benefit and enjoyment the settlement and development of the English Colonies in the backcountry of America and the role of Ninety Six in the Southern Campaign of the American Revolutionary War. Toward that end, the site preserves unique and original resources, including the Star Fort earthworks and Kosciuszko's Mine, associated with the 28-day siege in May and June of 1781.

Significance

Significance statements express why Ninety Six National Historic Site 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.

- Ninety Six National Historic Site embodies a unique and intact combination of three distinct historic periods, as a trading and meeting place on the Carolina backcountry from 1715–1760s, a thriving colonial village and seat of government (1768–early 1800s), and a Revolutionary War stronghold.
- Recognized by both sides for its political and strategic importance in controlling the backcountry during the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War, Ninety Six was the site of the first land battle south of New England (1775) and the longest field siege (1781) of the war.
- The Star Fort is the only Revolutionary War eight-pointed star-shaped redoubt (defensive earthwork) in existence. Kosciuszko's mine is the only military mine (tunnel) constructed during the Revolutionary War in existence. Together the fort and mine exemplify the engineering accomplishments of both sides and are among the best-preserved examples of siege warfare.
- Ninety Six was a crossroads of four historic roads that were essential in the Colonial trade, settlement, and development of the backcountry. Portions of these roads and their intersections are well preserved within the park.
- Ninety Six National Historic Site contains well-preserved archeological resources related to the settlement, Colonial, and Revolutionary War periods. The potential for research and educational opportunities is outstanding.

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.

- Gouedy's Trading Post Complex (trading post, agricultural outbuildings, Fort Ninety Six [Cherokee War])
- Colonial Village of Ninety Six (jail site, courthouse site)
- Star Fort and Related Features (i.e., well, traverse)
- Stockade Fort / Williamson Fort Site
- Kosciuszko's Mine
- Siege Works (north of Star Fort)
- Communication Trenches
- Colonial Spring and Spring Branch
- Four Historic Roads (Cherokee Path, Island Ford Road, Keowee-Whitehall Road [Hard Labor Road], Charleston Road)
- Archeological Resources Pertaining to the Settlement, Colonial, and Revolutionary War Periods
- Museum Collections

Ninety Six National Historic Site 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.

- Augusta-Greenville Road
- Archeological Resources Pertaining to the Cambridge site and 19th Century Settlements
- Archeological Resources Pertaining to the Prehistoric Period
- Henley Creek Cemetery
- John Hamilton Survey Line
- Logan Log House
- Star Fort Pond
- Monuments and Markers

Site Map



Description

The Ninety Six settlement grew at the junction of the Cherokee Path and an unnamed trail early in the 18th century. Thought to be named for the estimated distance, in miles, from the area to the Cherokee town of Keowee, the well-worn Cherokee Path allowed traders to travel from settlement to settlement and helped Ninety Six become a hub of trading activity between American Indians, settlers, and colonists. By the mid-18th century, Ninety Six had evolved into an important post for English colonial forces. In 1751, Robert Gouedy purchased 250 acres of land near Ninety Six and became one of the area's most influential residents, opening a trading post and eventually owning more than 1,500 acres of land.

The most accepted story of how Ninety Six was named is that it denotes the estimated distance, in miles, from the area to the important Cherokee town of Keowee.

Under the direction of South Carolina Governor William Lyttleton, Fort Ninety Six was constructed at the Gouedy Trading Post Complex using Gouedy's barn as the fort's magazine. Fort Ninety Six served as a significant backcountry stronghold to protect colonists from mounting tensions with the Cherokee. Fort Ninety Six was designed to be a supply station, garrisoned magazine, and refuge center. Fort Ninety Six was the scene of several conflicts between the British and Cherokee during the Cherokee War (1760–1762). After the cessation of hostilities, use of the Gouedy Trading Post Complex reverted to its original domestic and economic purposes. The first village of Ninety Six began to grow and a courthouse and jail were built in 1772, as Ninety Six became the seat of a newly established judicial district.

By October 1775, tensions were rising between the loyalists and patriots. The Council of Safety, a provisional government in Charleston that supported independence, sent a shipment of gunpowder and lead to the Cherokee seeking allegiance or neutrality. The loyalists captured and confiscated the shipment. Not long after, patriot Major Andrew Williamson assembled his militiamen. This sparked the first major land battle of the Revolutionary War south of New England.

The battle took place in November 1775, when more than 1,900 Loyalist forces led by Captain Patrick Cunningham and Major Joseph Robinson attacked militia commander Major Andrew Williamson and approximately 560 men barricaded inside a hastily built fort, later known as Williamson's Fort. The fighting continued for three days until a cease-fire was arranged. In the aftermath, the Council of Safety effectively ended loyalist resistance in the backcountry.

The town remained under Patriot control until the arrival of British forces in June 1780. The British fortified the village by expanding the town palisade, adding several earthworks, and by building the outlying Stockade Fort and Star Fort. The newly fortified outpost soon came under fire from Patriot forces under General Nathanael Greene.

Greene's forces totaled 1,074 Continentals. The Patriots faced a heavily fortified Loyalist compound manned with approximately 1,274 Provincial soldiers and Loyalist Militia, under Lieutenant Colonel John Harris Cruger. The siege began on May 21, 1781, and lasted for 28 days; the longest field siege of the American Revolution. Seeing the Star Fort as the key to taking the entire village stronghold, Greene's troops began digging approach trenches toward the fort with the ultimate goal of breaching its earthworks.

Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee's Continental Legion and Andrew Pickens' South Carolina Militia arrived on June 8 and concentrated on taking the Stockade Fort with an additional 550 men to aid Greene. On June 18, attacks were simultaneously launched against the Stockade Fort and Star Fort. Lee successfully took the Stockade Fort, but Greene's attempt to capture the Star Fort failed, leading to the Patriots' retreat. The British had successfully defended Ninety Six, but the Continentals had succeeded in exhausting the town's supplies and proving its vulnerability to future attacks. Soon thereafter, the British destroyed and abandoned the village of Ninety Six and its defense works so that the Patriots could not use them. Though Greene did not succeed in taking Ninety Six, he had won a strategic victory, and by forcing the British out of this backcountry stronghold, was able to limit British control of South Carolina to areas near the coast.

Following the siege, some residents of Ninety Six began to rebuild near the site of the destroyed village and the new town of Ninety Six was established in 1783. The name of the town changed from Ninety Six to Cambridge in 1787. However, it suffered several setbacks over the next few decades and by the 1860s the area was all but abandoned.

Interest in the old Ninety Six site was rekindled in 1878 and continued through the 1960s. In 1976, Congress established Ninety Six National Historic Site. Today the 1,022-acre park protects and interprets significant historic cultural resources in a vibrant natural setting. The park offers numerous opportunities for visitors to explore and learn more about the events that took place there. Recreational opportunities include a 1-mile walking loop trail, approximately 10 miles of hiking and equestrian trails, and bird-watching. The park's 27-acre Star Fort Pond offers recreational fishing.