



Foundation Document Overview

Valley Forge National Historical Park

Pennsylvania



Contact Information

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Purpose



VALLEY FORGE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK conserves and interprets the land and resources associated with the storied 1777–78 winter encampment of General George Washington and the Continental Army. The park commemorates the sacrifices and achievements of the Valley Forge experience, and it provides opportunities for enhanced understanding of the encampment’s legacy for the inspiration and benefit of the people.



Significance

Significance statements express why Valley Forge National Historical Park 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.

- The legendary six-month 1777–78 winter encampment of the Continental Army took place at Valley Forge. Here, under General George Washington’s leadership, the army was transformed into a cohesive and disciplined fighting force that went on to win the Revolutionary War and secure independence for America. The historic landscapes, structures, objects, archeology, and natural resources at Valley Forge are tangible links to a defining event in our nation’s history.
- The history and mythology of Valley Forge evoke the spirit of patriotism and independence and represent the resolve and perseverance of the Continental Army. Valley Forge truly is a citizen’s park—created by citizens to preserve a significant and meaningful place that had inspired the Continental Army a century earlier. The park’s inspirational quality continues to move us a century later. Since the park’s founding, citizens have come together many times to advocate for it and to protect its important resources from threats. The tradition of citizen stewardship continues today.
- As the world around Valley Forge is more densely developed, the park is increasingly significant as open space—a beautiful and valued place for relaxation, personal renewal, and pleasure and as a natural area that supports a healthy ecosystem for animals and plants.



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.

- **Encampment Landscape**
- **Encampment-Era Historic Structures**
- **Encampment-Era Archeological Resources**
- **Commemorative Landscape**
- **Revolutionary War Militaria Collection**
- **Encampment Archival Collections**
- **The Valley Forge Story and Myth**
- **A Tradition of Stewardship**
- **Valley Creek**
- **Meadows**
- **Personal Renewal**

Valley Forge National Historical Park 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.

- **Pre- and Post-Encampment Archeological Resources**
- **Library Collection and Archival Records**
- **Post-Encampment Cultural Landscapes and Historic Structures**
- **Suite of Interrelated Biological Resources**
- **Recreational Activities**



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 American Revolution and Valley Forge**
- **Natural Resources Stewardship**



Description

Valley Forge National Historical Park encompasses the site of the 1777–78 winter encampment of General George Washington’s Continental Army. Often called the “most celebrated encampment,” the story of Valley Forge was first told in the early 19th century when what might have been a dreary recounting of suffering was transformed into an inspiring saga of triumph through sacrifice. The story has appealed to successive generations of Americans ever since, and 2.1 million visitors were attracted to the park in 2018.

When citizens first joined together in the 1870s to protect Valley Forge, their common vision was the preservation of a significant and meaningful place that had inspired the Continental Army in 1778—a place that continued to inspire Americans a century later. Valley Forge was established as Pennsylvania’s first state park in 1893. The commonwealth later authorized transfer of the park to the National Park Service and on July 4, 1976, President Gerald Ford established Valley Forge National Historical Park with a mandate to “preserve and commemorate . . . the heroic suffering, hardship, and determination and resolve of . . . Washington’s Continental Army.”

The region has changed markedly since the Continental Army departed in 1778. It now is fully developed and one of the most traffic-choked areas in the state. The 3,452-acre park is one of the region’s few large natural areas, heightening its value as open space for the Philadelphia region while protecting significant cultural resources including cultural landscapes, historic structures, monuments, archeological sites, and museum collections. As suburban sprawl increasingly covers the land around Valley Forge, the park also increases in value as a refuge for plants and animals, providing habitat for more than 1,000 species.



In addition to its important cultural and natural resources, the park offers visitors interpretive programming, self-guided walking and driving tours, and exhibits at the Visitor Center, Washington’s Headquarters, Varnum’s Quarters, and the Muhlenberg Brigade. Many regional visitors appreciate the park as a place of recreation and renewal, and approximately 80% of visitors enjoy the park while walking, biking, boating, fishing, horseback riding, and picnicking.

Since the park’s founding, citizens have come together numerous times to advocate for it and to protect its important resources. The tradition of citizen stewardship continues every day as park volunteers and partners participate in the ongoing work of preservation and interpretation. Each of these stewards shares the vision of the park as a meaningful place of inspiration, refuge, commemoration, and pleasure.

