

Guide to the Battle Walk

Print this guide and bring it with you for background on the historic events along this walk. We suggest, as well, that you [download](#) and install a GeoPDF version of this map in your smartphone, to help with navigation, as many trails are poorly blazed.

Choosing the Route



The Cornfield Trail into the Insitute Woods, near Marker 2 on the guide map. This trail closely tracks the route of the Continental Army's right wing as they approached Princeton.

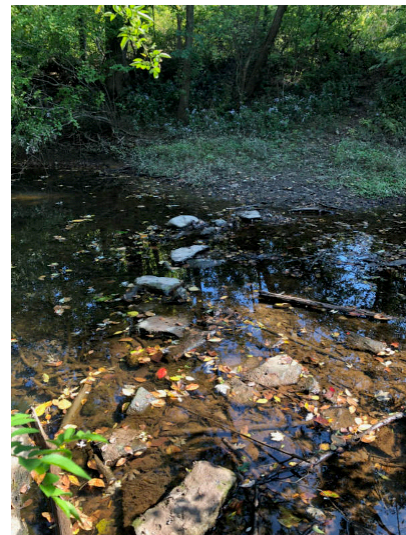
This guide offers you a choice of three routes:

1. The base route, (Markers 1 to 5 to 1) is approximately 3.7 miles long and has you walking on the jogging path along Quaker Rd, to and from parking spot just below the Quaker bridge.
2. A shorter version, less than 2 miles if you park below the Quaker bridge, check it out, then walk back to the car and park off Quaker Rd close to Marker 2. Parking is limited but appears legal in a couple of places.
3. A longer route, 4.6 miles long, (Markers 1 to 5a to 6) where you return in a loop through the heart of the Institute Woods and along the D&R Canal tow path. This is recommended if you'd like to explore the area on the same walk. However, in order to reach the tow path, you must cross a drainage ditch on stepping stones that are poorly maintained. The worst part, on the day I walked it, was the 2 foot descent into the ditch, which was steep, muddy and very slippery. For this reason, we've

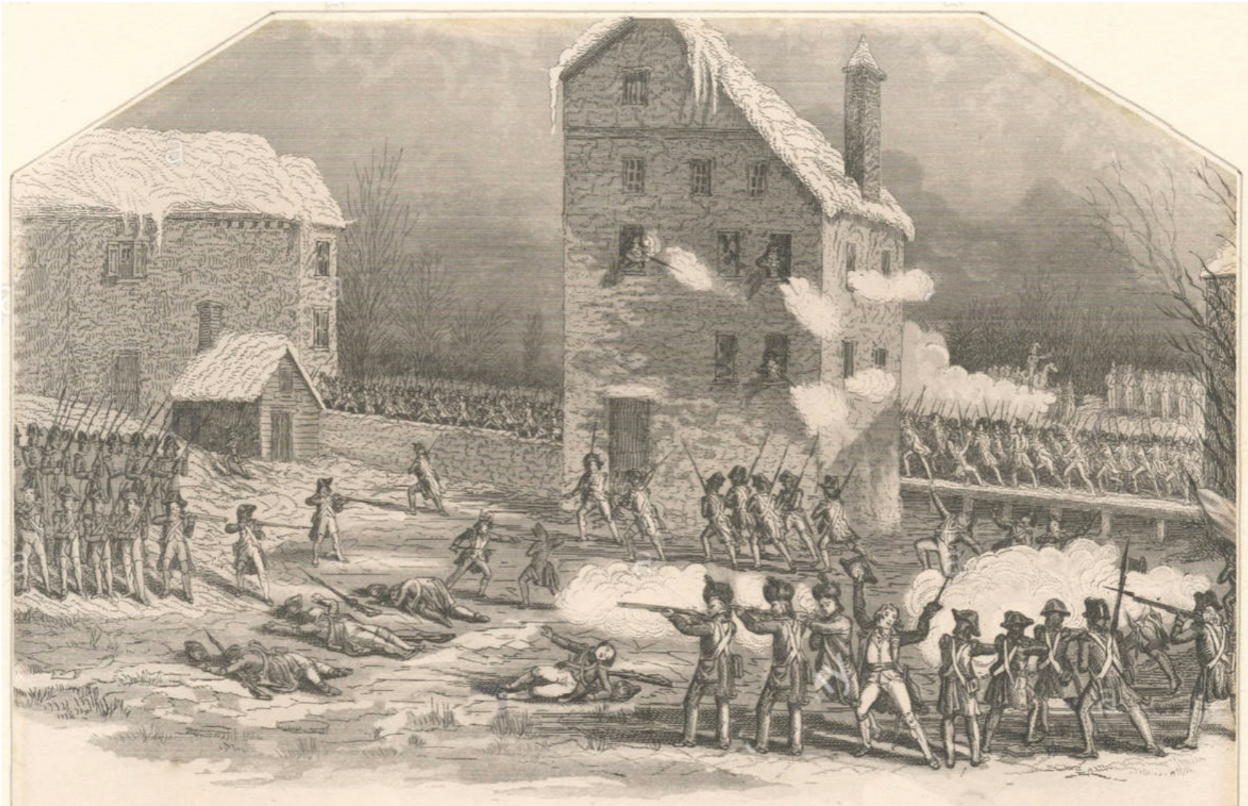
rated it Intermediate Challenge, while the other walks are rated for Beginners.

Note that all of the routes start below Quaker Bridge and continue onto the Cornfield Trail into the woods, recreating as closely as possible the route of Washington's Army march in 1777.

Poorly maintained stepping stones across a drainage ditch are an unavoidable "feature" of Route 3



Why was Washington's Army Here?



Washington's Army marched all night to arrive at this spot (Marker 1 on the map, on the southern bank of Stony Brook) in the early morning hours of January 3, 1777.

The day before, nearly the entire British Expeditionary Force under the command of Lord Cornwallis attacked them in Trenton at the bridge over the Assunpink River. The Continentals held on bravely until nightfall: the British arrived in Trenton nearly at dusk, so had to cut short their attacks due to darkness.

Cornwallis fully expected to destroy Washington's Army the next day in a pitched battle on the Assunpink. Except, instead, Washington took advantage of his Army's superior local knowledge to follow this route to Princeton, which the British didn't even know existed.

Cornwallis' main force remained in Trenton, and Princeton was defended only by a stripped-down garrison (most troops

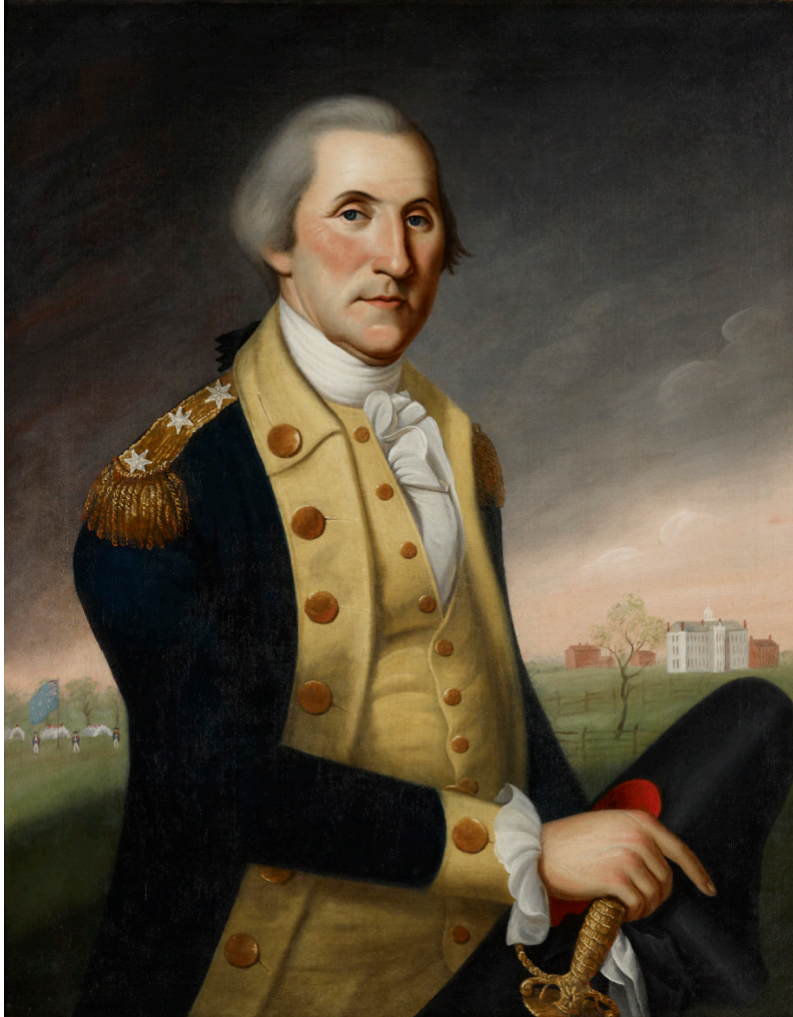
having been sent to Trenton).

Washington planned to attack Princeton at dawn, in two divisions. The smaller, left wing commanded by Nathaniel Greene, would follow Stony Brook until it came to the Post Road (today's 206), turn right towards Princeton, and make a noisy frontal attack on the town. The right wing, with most of the army, would follow a back road through what is today the Institute Woods, and attack British forces engaged with Greene's division from the flank.

At least, that was the plan.

This guide will describe critical moments in the battle, keyed to the numbers you'll find on the cover-page map. Please start the walk at the parking area at 764 Quaker Rd, near the D&R Canal. Please walk from the parking area to the bridge you see a few dozen yards north of parking area, using the jogging/cycling track.

Stop 1: Quaker Bridge



Portrait of Washington by Charles Willson Peale, completed shortly after the War of Independence. Peale was a veteran of the Battle of Princeton. The white building to the right is Nassau Hall, clearly visible from the Princeton battlefield.

The absence of trees, and the long sight lines, become critical during the battle, something that is difficult to visualize in today's Princeton which is so heavily wooded.

Washington's plan ran into a problem right here. In 1777, what is today Quaker Road was little more than a muddy track, providing access for Quakers worshipping at the Meeting House (Marker 4). They had built a small bridge here, but it was designed to handle people on foot or individual horses. It was NOT strong enough to support the weight of army's artillery.

So the entire army waited here while the field engineers located and chopped down trees, dragged them to this spot, and built a bridge strong enough to support the artillery. It took several hours. In the meantime, the sun rose. And still the army waited.

By the time Army was able to cross, the fields, covered in snow, were in bright sunshine.

It was an achingly clear, cold January day, featuring deep blue skies.

Please cross the bridge and continue walking along the jogging/cycling path. Or, if you're taking the "short route", return to your car park near Marker 2. Either way, pass the private home,, the first leg of the Cornfield Trail, and the Updike Farm. You'll then come to a small turn-off with a gate opening on the second leg of the Cornfield Trail, and a stone marker in the shape of an obelisk.

Stop 2: The Divisions Split, then Spotted



Left: Portrait of Nathaniel Greene by Charles Willson Peale, completed shortly after the War of Independence. Greene commanded the left wing of the American Army. His men continued up the narrow lane, roughly tracking today's Quaker Road, paralleling Stony Brook. They continued north past Mercer Street (which did not exist in those days) until they reached the Post Road (today's 206) just east of the bridge. The last stretch of this route passed through a deep, brushy ravine.

Below: A panoramic view of the Cornfield with the Institute Woods in the near distance. The stone marker is one of a dozen placed by the Sons of the American Revolution in 1914 to mark the route of Washington's march from Trenton to Princeton.



At roughly this point, the two American divisions split apart. The smaller left wing, with about 350 troops, intending to mount a diversionary attack, continued north. The majority of the army, several thousand men, accompanied by Washington, turned right through the fields, heading for a small wooded area that was probably smaller than today's Institute Woods.

Unknown to the Continentals, a company of British infantry was marching on the Post Road under the command of Colonel Joseph Mawhood. They were escorting several artillery pieces to Trenton to reinforce Cornwallis for the supposed destruction of the Continental Army there.

As the American right wing was crossing the open field, they spotted two mounted English officers approach to within a few

hundred yards, then quickly turn around, and gallop towards the Post Road.

About the same time, the left wing of Greene's forces emerged from the Stony Brook ravine and blundered into the vanguard of Mawhood's forces on the Post Road heading to Trenton. Most of Greene's 350 or so men were still strung out in the ravine.

Mawhood reacted quickly forming his company into a line of battle, and marching south towards Washington's army over what was then open fields.

Pass through the gate onto the Cornfield Trail use your map to navigate to Stop 3, the Clarke House. If the trail isn't mowed, you can follow the jogging trail into the woods instead.

Stop 3: The Clarke House



Above: *Battle of Princeton*, by William Mercer after James Peale. Moulder's battery is seen firing in the foreground. Coming up with Washington are Hitchcock's New Englanders, part of right division. The buildings and fences of William Clarke's farm, which no longer survive, are depicted accurately.

If you follow the recommended route to the Clarke house, note the final stone marker on the right of the Trolley Track.

The Clarke House is now a museum, and the battlefield itself is just beyond. There is interpretive signage which is worth reading. As you visualize what happened here consider that Mercer Street didn't exist, and virtually the entire area was cleared, snow-covered farmland (see engraving, bottom of next page). Fields were crossed with wooden fences that limited movement of formations.

You can think of the battle as having three phases.

1. A confused opening as Greene's men climbed out of the Stony Brook Ravine and scrambled, a few men at a time, onto the high ground to oppose Mawhood's company which was already organized into a line of battle. This gave a huge advantage to the British, who

were armed with bayonets. Greene's men took heavy casualties as they were pushed back past the current line of Mercer St.

2. A middle period, in the balance. Capt. Joseph Moulder's Philadelphia Militia artillery set up in front of the Clarke House, firing grape shot into the massed, British troops. This checked their advance.
3. Washington bringing to bear his troops from the right wing, which greatly outnumbered Mawhood's company, eventually routing them.

After the action here, Washington's army continued east, defeating what was left of the Princeton garrison at Frog Hollow, a small stream, which now feeds the water hazard at Springdale Golf course.

Mawhood escaped towards Princeton then fleeing with the artillery pieces back to the

main British camp in Brunswick. Washington's Army, having fought two pitched battles and an all night march, camped off the main road in Rocky Hill.

Cornwallis, shocked by the news that Washington was in his rear, force-marched the entire British force from Trenton directly to Brunswick, his main logistics base. His line of march came within a couple of miles of Washington's Army. However, he made no effort to engage in another battle, terrified that Washington might reach undefended Brunswick before him.

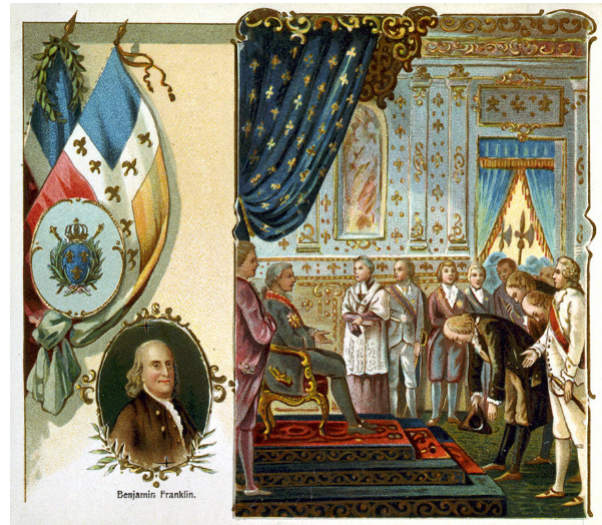
Washington's Army had no intention of continuing the fight that season. From Rocky Hill, they marched north to Morristown, following the route of today's 206, to a winter camp in Jockey Hollow.

Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton had a huge impact on the war's outcome, allowing Washington to remain in command of the Army, while his best troops, whose enlistments were expiring, mostly re-enlisted.

Critically, the news of the battles were one

of the triggers for France to enter the war on the side of Independence. The French provided arms, troops, naval support, and military advisors to improve the training of American troops.

Without this support, most historians believe the United States might never have defeated England, certainly not in the timeframe it achieved, and not without even greater hardship.



Above: Benjamin Franklin at the French court seeking support for the War for Independence. Below: An 1851 engraving of the Princeton battlefield. The Thomas Clarke house is in the foreground. In the distance you can see the fields cut by fences, similar to their arrangement during the battle, buildings from the William Clarke farm, and even a suggestion of Nassau Hall in the distance.



Stop 4: The Quaker Meeting House



The "spy map", thought to have been drafted by an anonymous Princeton student, which informed Washington's army of the alternate route they followed to the town. The top E-W road is the Post Road, the lower one is the route the army took, inscribed, "This Road leads to the back part of Prince Town which may be entered any where on this side..."

From the rear of the Clarke House, there's a short trail that takes you due west to the Quaker Meeting House. In a recent visit, this was passable but poorly maintained, you can also reach the Pipeline Trail, then heading north briefly on the western most trail.

The Clarke family were Quakers and had donated the land on which the meeting house was built.

There's an irony that a trail built by the devoutly pacifist-Quakers to their meeting house indirectly resulted in a bloody battle on its doorstep. The meeting house still stands, and is worth seeing if you have the time.

The Meeting House is steps off the trail, and set off behind the school, so it's OK to stop there even on a school day.

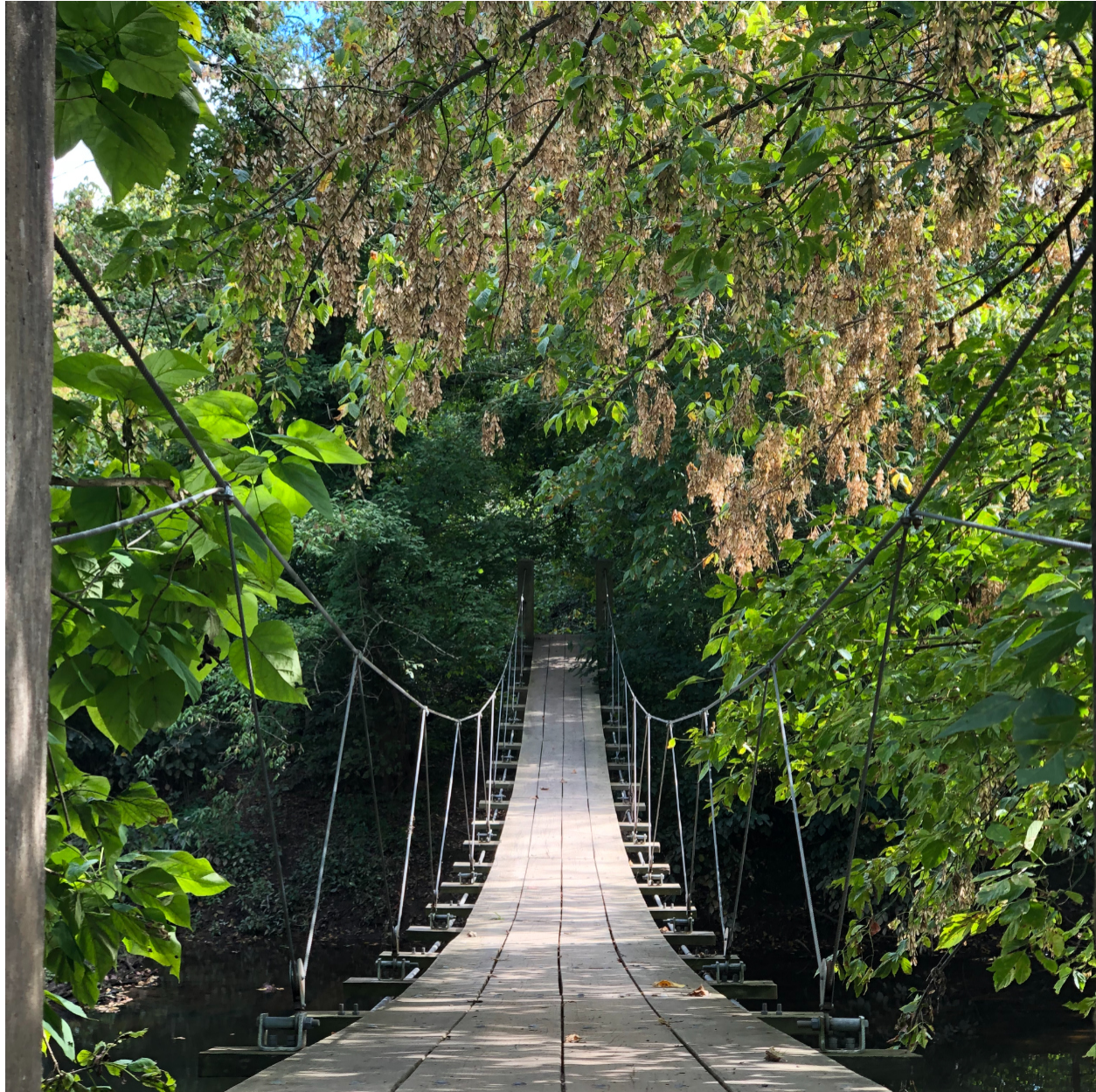
Head south from the school. If you're following the base route, turn right on the Pipeline Trail towards Marker 5. It will take

you back to Quaker Rd which you follow south to your car.

If you're taking the long route, turn left and navigate to Marker 5a on your map. The suggested route via the Pipeline and Middle Trails is perhaps the most direct, but feel free to explore the woods, the IAS Campus, or the Rogers Preserve (or whatever else catches your fancy).



Stops 5a & 6: Extended Route to Car



The Extended Route via Marker 5a on the map back to the car is sheltered from traffic, wind, and sun. It's also fun, as it takes you via a suspension bridge over Stony Brook, connecting to the D&R Canal tow path.

Just before you cross the bridge, you're at the Marsh Loop of the Roger's Wildlife Preserve. If you have the energy, it makes

an interesting diversion along fairly short, narrow, well-marked trails, especially for birders.

You'll hit the "stepping stones" across the drainage ditch just before you reach the canal and its tow path.

There's a steep, little descent (only 2-3 feet) into the ditch which is probably the

toughest part, and then a quick crossing. The water is usually shallow (if you find it deep, don't cross here, and return via the Cornfield Trail). If you're not experienced crossing on stepping stones, I find it's best to plan your steps (left foot here, right foot there), then cross quickly and commit fully. If you get wet, keep going as best you can. A quick step in the water is better than a slow one.

Once on the other side, you need to scramble up the bank and down onto the tow path. Be careful as that little "trail" was partially eroded when I used it.

This canal was built in the 1830s, so didn't exist during the battle. When you've nearly reached Quaker Road, the tow path inclines up slightly (it's been perfectly flat until now), and you'll see an obvious path down to the parking area from where you started.

Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton made him a national hero, and contributed to his election as the nation's first president.

Riding on horseback from his home in Virginia to the nation's capital in New York, he passed through Trenton. The bridge where his Army had beaten off the British Grenadiers was festooned with flowers.

