

MOUNT INDEPENDENCE VERMONT

<http://www.revolutionaryday.com/usroute7/independence/default.htm>



Mount Independence In 1776, General Philip Schuyler identified this peninsula together with the old French fort across the narrows as the critical choke point for preventing the British from invading from the north. From July 1776 to July 1777, thousands of Americans garrisoned this site and Fort Ticonderoga. Just as construction of new artillery batteries was beginning here, news arrived that the continental congress declared independence. On July 28, 1776, Colonel Arthur St. Clair, the American brigade commander, read the Declaration of Independence to the assembled soldiers. After that day, East Point or Rattlesnake Hill, as this strategic height of land had been called, became known as Mount Independence. In July 1777, Burgoyne's British army forced the American troops to abandon this position. After the American evacuation, the British Army garrisoned the mount and continued work on the buildings and fortifications until November 1777 following the defeat of Burgoyne's army at Saratoga. The British rearguard burned all of the structures, abandoned the site and retreated to Canada.

Mount Independence is designated a National Historic Landmark. The site is covered by several miles of hiking trails that wind past the remnants of batteries, blockhouses, hospital, barracks, and other archaeological remnants of this once-bustling fort complex. In the Visitor Center Museum, the story of military life atop the Mount is told in exhibits featuring many of the artifacts recovered during archaeological digs.

The four trails pass through nearly four hundred acres of pasture and woodlands with vistas overlooking Lake Champlain and the surrounding countryside. Each of the trails is color-coded, but if you don't pay careful attention, you can easily miss a turn and head-off in the wrong direction.



Exploring Mount Independence

As you explore the site, try to imagine a very different landscape during the fateful years 1776-1777. Today, Mount Independence is covered with trees and empty of structures of human habitation. During the American Revolution, the mount was a bare promontory on which all the trees had been cut. For sixteen months, it was alive with activity. Thousands of soldiers constructed fortifications and buildings with desperate haste. They lived in tents, huts and barracks, coped with miserable weather and disease, and prepared to meet the enemy. During the Revolutionary War, hundreds of soldiers from America, Britain and Germany died here from combat wounds, disease, poor diet and exposure. These dead lie in unmarked graves. Please remember their sacrifice by respecting the site. Do not search for artifacts or degrade the site. Enjoy the historical and natural beauty of this place. Leave it in the same condition for future visitors. Four marked trails lead you to the primary sites. A brochure is available to help you learn about the history of the site.

The Fort on Mount Independence – In the summer of 1776, atop this rugged hill along the shore of Lake Champlain, American troops began building this fort complex to guard against a British attack from Canada. The troops named it Mount Independence in honor of the Declaration of Independence.

Unlike Fort Ticonderoga across the lake, the fort mainly consisted of huts and houses. A large shore battery and a horseshoe-shaped battery were completed. A picket fort was under construction.



As expected, the British did lead a counterattack in 1776. But thanks to delays caused by a fleet of naval ships under the command of Benedict Arnold and the combined impressive sight of Mount Independence and Fort Ticonderoga, British General Guy Carleton retreated to Canada, abandoning an attempted invasion that year. The very next year, 1777, the opposite would occur.

Many American troops went home the winter of 1776-1777, reducing the force from 12,000 to just 2,500. Those remaining spent a horrible winter at Mount Independence. Many were sickly and a number froze to death.

In the spring of 1777, a few troops returned but not enough to properly garrison the forts. On July 5th, they evacuated the site when British General John Burgoyne's forces numbering about 8,000 began a penetration of the area. The evacuation was triggered by the astonishing placement of cannon on Mount Defiance. Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence were supposedly easy targets from the top of Mount Defiance.



As the Americans retreated, the British pursued them down the old military road, but were halted at Hubbard ton.

The Red Trail — Several trails at Mount Independence connect well-preserved remains of the Revolutionary War fortification. The trails pass through nearly four hundred acres of pasture and woodlands with vistas overlooking Lake Champlain and the surrounding countryside. Each of the trails are color-coded, but if you don't pay careful attention, you can easily get off on the wrong colored trail. For a short visit, the red trail, which is just a little over a half-mile, is recommended.



The Red Trail passes a line of remains that indicate the foundation site of a hospital. Begun in April 1777, the hospital had a capacity of about 600. It was a two-floor, frame building of sawed planks,

rather than blocks or logs. All of the hospital patients were evacuated during the American retreat on July 5 and 6, 1777, with the exception of four who were too sick to be moved.

The trail also passes a well-preserved, three-sided stone foundation, possibly an officer's quarters. Near the middle of the trail, there is a strategic lookout from a ledge that towers over Lake Champlain. The lookout is almost directly

across from Mount Defiance. The LaChute River from Lake George and Fort Ticonderoga are clearly visible in the distance.

At the base of Mount Defiance is Route 22 and train tracks that are used by Amtrak trains from New York City to Montreal. The area is very quiet, except for the [whistle of an occasional passing train](#).



On the return from the lookout, you will pass a gravestone that is somewhat curious. The date on the stone is 1760, but historians believe it was placed in the 1800's.

Enroute to Fort Ticonderoga, NY



Norton's Farm. Behind the farm, you can see the area where the old military road once crossed Lake Champlain. Fort Ticonderoga is on the right; Mount Defiance is in the distance; to the left is Mount Independence.

Carillon Battlefield. The battlefield is where the French and the British battled for control of Fort Ticonderoga during the French and Indian War. Most of the markers and memorials in the battlefield pertain to the French and Indian War but some pertain to the Revolutionary War.



Through this place passed General Henry Knox in the Winter of 1775 -1776 to deliver to General George Washington at Cambridge the train of artillery from Fort Ticonderoga used to force the British Army to evacuate Boston.

Erected by the State of New York during the sesquientennial of the American Revolution.

This marker has a map on it that shows the route taken by General Knox when he carried artillery from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. The route includes Fort George, Fort Edward, Saratoga, Halfmoon, Albany, Kinderhook, Claverack, Nobletown and finally Cambridge.

<http://www.historiclakes.org/Ticonderoga/independence.htm>

Ticonderoga, Mt. Independence, the mouth of the La Chute River and the foot of Mt. Defiance



Photo courtesy of Doug Harwood
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MOUNT INDEPENDENCE

Orwell, Vermont

[\(click here for map\)](#)

[By James P. Millard](#)

NOTE: This material is provided as a public service. America's Historic Lakes is not affiliated with the Mt. Independence State Historic Site. Contact the site for additional information.

Just across a narrow strait from Ticonderoga lies another promontory that juts into the lake from the eastern shore. Here in June of 1776, American troops under the command of General Philip Schuyler built a massive fortress to prevent invasion from Canada. Named by the troops themselves Mount Independence in honor of the newly signed document they were fighting for, this complex of batteries, blockhouses and parapets was deemed necessary due to Ticonderoga's southerly posture and poor condition at the time.



The Lake Champlain/Lake George corridor had always been the key to the south for invading armies, and the American rebels knew that soon the King would send his troops south down the lake. Sure enough, a fleet under Sir Guy Carleton, fresh from his defeat of Benedict Arnold's gallant navy at Valcour approached the fortresses in October 1776. By then, some three brigades had been stationed upon the mount, and it fairly bristled with cannon. Carleton was faced with a large shore battery, a well-designed parapet, or horseshoe shaped battery, and a star-shaped picket fort garrisoned by some 12,000 troops.

The season was late, Carleton was intimidated by the impressive sight of the combined fortresses- he turned his fleet around and sailed back to Canada. This bought the rebels precious time to prepare for a future invasion they knew would come.

The Americans reduced dramatically the size of the forces occupying the Mount. By winter of 1776-1777, some 2,500 troops remained. Those who stayed behind suffered terribly. Decimated by illness and the cold, hundreds succumbed to smallpox or froze to death. In the spring, the garrison was reinforced slightly but the huge complex was not sent nearly enough troops to prepare an adequate defense. In July another mighty British force, this time commanded by General John Burgoyne appeared north of the forts. Intelligence reports showed that a huge army had embarked

from the ships and was approaching the forts on each side of the lake- British regulars on the New York side, and German Hessian (Braunschweig) troops under Baron Riedesel on the side we now know as Vermont.

In addition the British had wisely performed what imprudent American generals had deemed "impossible"- hauled cannon to the summit of Mt. Defiance. Their position was now untenable, American commander Arthur St. Clair did the only thing possible in light of this hopeless position- retreat, and save the forces to fight again. Some forces retreated down the lake in what few ships were available, the bulk of the army fled south along the crude roads towards Skenesborough.

They were pursued to Hubbardton, where a heroic rear guard action was fought. Another decisive battle was fought at Bennington. Burgoyne inexplicably chose to continue south in pursuit through the "drowned lands" of Wood Creek rather than travel the proven route south down Lake George. Finally, several months later, British and American troops met at Saratoga. Here the American forces proved victorious over the exhausted and woefully over-extended British army. Some British and Hessian troops remained at the fort until November, when they burned the complex upon hearing of Burgoyne's surrender.

Photographs of historic Mount Independence

Unless otherwise noted, all photos by the author
(click on the thumbnails below for a larger view)



Left to Right: Foundation, used as a base for a huge crane that lifted cannon and other heavy supplies from the shore below. Ships would anchor below here at Catfish Bay for unloading to this hoist. *Center photos:* Horseshoe battery or parapet, commanded the north face of the mount. The Polish patriot Thaddeus Kosciusko is believed to have helped to engineer this work. *Right:* Catfish Bay, where vessels would have anchored and the bateaux would have been kept.



Far left: view up the old road to the top of the Mount from the shore and the famous bridge across the lake to Ticonderoga. It is up this road that fleeing soldiers from Ticonderoga would have taken as they hurried to evacuate the forts before the British attack. Next: view of shoreline below the parapet- here is where the bridge to across the lake to Ticonderoga began. Four photos, left to right: views of the Masting Point- believed to be the spot where masts for ships in Benedict Arnold's fleet were stepped. The center photo is the view straight down the cliff to the water.



Left to right: Memorial erected at the site of the horseshoe battery where the Revolutionary War flagpole once stood. Center photos: views across the narrow strait to Ticonderoga. Right: memorial obelisk at Mount Independence.



Left to right: another view of the crane site, the well at Mount Independence, historic marker along the route of the retreat to Hubbardton, site of the star-shaped picket fort, and another view across the lake to Ticonderoga.

Wording on the Mount Independence Monument:

MOUNT INDEPENDENCE

BASTION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR+

FORTIFICATION WAS BEGUN IN JUNE OF 1776, AND THE NAME MOUNT INDEPENDENCE WAS BESTOWED FOLLOWING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. LIEUT. COL. JEDUTHAN BALDWIN WAS THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER. HERE THE EXHAUSTED AMERICAN ARMY, NORTHERN DEPARTMENT, WAS STATIONED AFTER WITHDRAWING FROM ITS DISASTROUS CANADIAN CAMPAIGN. BUILT ON A ROCKY PLATEAU AND STOUTLY FORTIFIED, THE POST WAS A NATURAL STRONGHOLD FACING ANY APPROACHING FOE FROM THE NORTH. WITHIN ITS RUGGED CONFINES THOUSANDS OF NEW ENGLANDERS, MANY SUCCUMBING TO ILLNESS AND LACK OF SUPPLIES, WERE QUARTERED. BECAUSE OF ITS COMMANDING POSITION AND FORMIDABLE BATTLE WORKS, WHICH MADE IT MORE POWERFUL AT THE MOMENT THAN IMPAIRED TICONDEROGA, IT CHECKED FOR A YEAR A BRITISH THRUST SOUTHWARD, UNTIL AT THE FALL OF ITS COMPANION FORTRESS ACROSS THE CHANNEL IT WAS EVACUATED IN THE EARLY MORNING DARKNESS OF JULY 6, 1777. THIS CRITICAL YEAR OF REPRIEVE GAVE THE AMERICAN FORCES TIME TO ORGANIZE FARTHER SOUTH, MEET AND DESTROY GENERAL BURGOYNE AT SARATOGA, WIN FRENCH SUPPORT, AND EVENTUALLY SUBDUE GENERAL CORNWALLIS AT YORKTOWN, FULFILLING THE PROPHECY OF THE MOUNTAIN'S NAME.

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