

Monmouth Battlefield State Park: Combs Hill Walking Tour #1 – Hedgerow & Parsonage Trail (approximately 1.57 miles round trip)

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Start: Start on the hill directly in front of the Visitor Center. The farmscape you see in front of you was where the majority of the afternoon portion of the Battle of Monmouth occurred. The house you see in the distance is the Sutfin Farmhouse, which was in the center of the largest field artillery duel of the American Revolution. On the ridgeline to the left of the house was where George Washington and the main portion of the Continental Army was, and at approximately your 2:00 position (visible seasonally) is the fence known as the Hedgerow which was the main British position.

Walk to your right to where you see the 2 interpretive waysides in the grass (Approx. 320 feet).



Stop #1: “Combs Hill Cannonade” & “Locating the Continental Artillery on Combs Hill”

This position is where, about halfway through the artillery duel Major General Nathaniel Greene positioned 4 Continental cannons under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Chevalier du Plessis-Mauduit. This location put the British in a crossfire between the 10 or more cannon with Washington and these four. This forced Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Clinton and the British Army to withdraw.



General Greene was led to this position by a young Lieutenant Colonel named David Rhae who had grown up on these farms (in fact the British position was half on his father’s property). This position was easily defensible since not only would the British have to cross open farmland, but they would have to cross a swampy area at the base of this hill and then fight their way up the hill. The trees you see in front of you now would not have been here at the time of the battle, and this hill would have been farmland as well.

Down the hill, slightly to your right, you will see a bridge (at the time of the battle there was no bridge across the swamp and creek). Cross the bridge and go straight, then veer right and follow along the edge of the farm field until you get to grass path on your right. Turn right and walk to the fence (Approx. 1650 feet).

Stop #2:

This fence has been recreated with the help of boy scouts. It is called a worm fence and would have been the type of fence that would have divided the property of the two farms that were here at the time of the battle. The side you are on was known as the Parsonage Farm and the opposite side was one of the Rhae Farms. This fence is part of the fence line that was referred to during the battle as “The Hedgerow.”

Walk along the fence until you come to an interpretive wayside (approx. 985 feet).



Stop #3: “Hold the Hedgerow”

You are now entering the portion of the battlefield that was where some of the heaviest fighting of the battle occurred. This portion changed hands approximately seven times during the course of the day (five of which were during the heavy fighting of the afternoon portion of the battle between around 12:45 and 5:30).



When Washington took command of the battle, this position is near the southern end of the line established by Major General Charles Lee (who led the Continental Advance Guard that attacked the British in what is now Freehold and were forced to retreat back to here) as the last line of defense. Lee’s orders from Washington when he took this position were to hold as long as humanly possible, to allow Washington and the rest of the Continental Army to establish their position on Perrine Ridge.

Continue straight along the dirt road until you see the next small section of fence with two interpretive waysides (approx. 770 feet)

Stop #4: “The British Rush the Hedgerow” & “The British Grenadiers”

This was roughly the midpoint of the Continental defensive position. General Lee had approximately 800 men along the fence line with two cannons on the small knoll in front of you. The British charged this position suffering heavy casualties, as one Continental doctor (Dr. William Read) described the scene, “...the field was red with British wounded...”

From this position walk across the grass to the top of the knoll (approx. 310 feet).

Stop #5:

The staff refer to this spot as Oswald’s Knoll. During the defense of the Hedgerow, Lieutenant Colonel Eleazer Oswald positioned two cannon covering General Lee and the Continental soldiers along the fence. From this position, Oswald’s cannon fired solid shot at the approaching British Army, and at one point he moved a cannon to an opening in the fence and deadly fired grape as well.

This position is one of three pieces of ‘high ground’ on the battlefield; at the time of this battle there most of this land would have been open farmland with some wooded sections and small orchards. From here, if you look back from where you just came, you can see the Hedgerow and would have been able to see the British pursuing General Lee and his army as they retreated from Freehold. Beyond the fence you can see a powerline running along what is now called Wemrock Road; somewhere in that area is where Washington met Lee and took command of the battle. If you look to your left, the raised straight line of ground is a railroad that was built in the mid-1800s through the battlefield. Just beyond that is County Route 522 (Englishtown-Freehold Rd), that is the historic road that both armies used, it has been slightly modified over the years but it still close to the old road.

You cannot see the Sutfin House from here today due to the trees, but it is to at about 11:00 position as you face the railroad and road. If you turn slightly, to the 10:00 position (seasonally) you will be able to make out the ridgeline known as Perrine Ridge (Hill) where the main Continental Army was positioned waiting for the British. If you turn completely around you will be able to see the Visitor Center. Perrine Ridge, Combs Hill (Visitor Center), and this location represent the three pieces of ‘high ground’ on the battlefield. The British took this position after Lee withdrew, while Washington held the Perrine position, and halfway through the battle General Greene took position on Combs Hill.



From here continue the way you came from the previous position (parallel to the road) until you encounter a dirt road (approx. 630 feet).

Stop #6:

This dirt road is the old road to the Parsonage Farmhouse. If you look to your right you can see an under path that is the railroad above and the road just beyond. Turn left and continue along the road until you see the next interpretive wayside (approx. 485 feet).

Stop #7: “Battle of the Parsonage”

This the site where the Parsonage Farmhouse would have been at the time of the battle. The depression you can see in front of you is the remains of a cellar hole from the building. This small farm was for the parson of the Tennent Meeting House (which was near where Washington and the Continentals were).

The last skirmish of the battle was as the British were withdrawing, Washington gave Brigadier General Anthony Wayne permission to attack the rear guard of the British troops. Wayne charged the 1st Battalion of Grenadiers, initially pushing back pass the Hedgerow. The Grenadiers regrouped and were reinforced by elements of the 33rd of Foot, and pushed Wayne’s forces back to the Parsonage Farm. As the British formed along the Hedgerow to attack, the Continental artillery on Combs Hill opened fire, causing the British to fall back. Wayne charged the retreating British and pushed them off the field.

After the battle, the Parsonage Farmhouse, along with the Sutfin Farmhouse were used as forward field hospitals to treat the wounded. The Tennent Church (Meeting House) served as the main Continental Field Hospital.

From here turn around and follow along the path until you see a brown trail marker (with the NJ Parks logo and the #10) on a small hill (approx. 445 feet).

Stop #8:

This hill would have had a small orchard that was part of the Parsonage Farm. During the fighting between Wayne’s men and the Grenadiers, this site was held by the 3rd Pennsylvania Regiment, battlefield archaeology has found over 70 musket balls on this hill.

From here, follow along the edge of the row of trees to your right until you see a path that divides the farm field on your left. Follow the path through the fields, then follow the grass trail straight and to your right until you see a turn to your left that crosses a bridge. Cross the bridge and go up the hill and you will be back at the Visitor Center (approx. 2685 feet).

