

Cane-Brakes as Key to Cowpens

By A. L. PICKENS

Do botany and psychology offer a solution to the mystery that has hovered over the field of Cowpens for the better part of 2 centuries? This mystery has continued to puzzle military men through the generations: Why did the Americans select such an area for the fight? It seems to most critics a very badly chosen spot for such a contest? Daniel Morgan was sensitive to the point during his life and has been severely censured for what have been designated the insulting remarks he made about the Georgia-Carolina militia in an effort to save himself. His remark was parroted by Higginson at the Cowpens centennial, and in the hearing of those whose forebears had fought with these militiamen, but he inconsistently admitted in the same paragraph, "It was to a great extent a victory of militiamen over regulars." Morgan's enthusiastic messages of 1781 regarding these fighters, utterly contradicts the utterance of his later years. Draper, author of a monumental work on King's Mountain, probably studied these battles more seriously than any other scholar. He planned a similar volume on Cowpens, and startlingly enough, the title selected shows that he regarded the militia and their commander as the real heroes of the battle. Howard, the commander from Maryland, and McJunkin, in his Memoirs, support such a view.

Thomas Young, one of the most enthusiastic veterans of Cowpens, gives a new view of the contest.

Visitors to Cowpens are disappointed in the lack of hill and vale some writers describe, and Young remembers the field as a "plane" with a "ravine" on each side. But the flanking "ravines" are almost as much a puzzle to us today, though Buck Creek, Suck Creek, and Island Creek all have small prongs right at the edge of the battle-field, and these were of old cane-grown, probably even to the appearance of being ravines.

Among the living, memory still survives of the cane-brakes on the waters of Suck Creek at the edge of the grounds. Tradition tells of terrible neighboring bogs or "sucks," found in the neighborhood. Lawn-and park-trained European officers would have found formidable opposition in such. Even a sunken road undid the French cavalry at Waterloo. But in cane fighting areas the militiamen had been trained, and there they were as much at home as was

Brer Rabbit in his briar-patch. If repulsed they could find refuge in canes and swamp growth that would baffle the best of Tarleton's bayonets and sabers, for in such lay Tarleton's strength. In actual shooting the Americans were the superiors.

The Island Creek and the Suck Creek brakes were probably little more than a doubled stone's throw apart. Far from a military risk, the field between was a narrow land-bridge that might have delighted the heart of Macaulay's doughty Horatius. Had Tarleton driven them into cane-brakes on either side, the Whigs could still have turned the roadway into a corridor of death.

But such tactics were unnecessary; the battle was over in a matter of minutes, admittedly the most brilliant tactical victory of the war. And the knowledge that their colonel was a master of cane-brake maneuvering, as he had already proved in such battles as Kettle Creek, Ogeechee Ferry, Tomasee, and other places, may well have given them assurance to play the most brilliant part in the most brilliant victory. To him was due the decision to fight at this spot. He did not wish to cross the stateline nor the river.

Gov. Benjamin Perry and others have told us of a plot to throw the Carolinas and Georgia to the British as a bribe for the independence of the other colonies. It had been deadly propaganda; and the militia colonel, finding Morgan meditating retreat, demanded a fight before crossing the state-boundary, largely for the psychological effect on the people of South Carolina. "I will fight with my command alone to show the people that we do not give up the state," were words that might well halt the retreating regulars and align them with the fighting militia. The latter were not the raw recruits some have let prejudice picture. Some were new, mere boys! Others had been at First Ninety-Six, or Savage's Farm, in November 1775, when the first blood shed south of New England for independence was spilt. Even William Washington's cavalry was heavily recruited by volunteers from their ranks before attacking at Cowpens.

The fact is, Cowpens has never been adequately written up. Draper would have done so had he lived and been adequately encouraged, but without him, historical opinion has too largely settled on its lees and crystallized along lines directed by a snobbery and priggishness that arose among the Continental officers and persists today in certain cliques. This snobbishness led the canny Scotch-American historian to observe that after all some of the Continentals could well remember that quite a number of their recruits were in the army because of hard alternatives imposed by northern judges!

We have:

John Cornwall	Richard Treasure
William Hargans	Thomas Walker
Charles Kinsolving	Samuel Watson
James Scott	James Wilson
Aaron Smith	Henry Zeller

Do you have others?

Slain at Cowpens

Oddly enough, of all the states involved in that battle, only little Delaware has adequately preserved the names of natives and inhabitants who fell at Cowpens.

Twelve Americans so perished. Who were they?

Three are said to have been Georgians. Research demonstrates that the Georgia-Carolina militia were responsible for this, "the most brilliant tactical victory of the Revolution," and that far from being a foolishly selected ground as some have held, formidable cane-brakes to the right and left protected the American flanks with little more than enough space between for properly arranging Howard's lines of regulars, a veritable Horatius' bridge. If possible, it is desired to engrave the names of the men who fell, on some suitable memorial at the battleground. Any authentic information will be greatly appreciated.

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Cowpens' battlefield site is national park.

Route for leisurely day's trip

This is the route for an afternoon's drive which will carry you to Cowpens Battle Field and other points of interest:

From Rock Hill take S. C. 5 via York to the junction of S. C. 55 (Alt. 29). Turn left and follow 29 to Gaffney. In Gaffney turn right on S. C. 11. The Cowpens Battle Field is about 10 miles from Gaffney. After leaving the battle field there are two possible routes to follow.

The longer route back takes you through Spartanburg and back to Rock Hill via Pacolet Mills, Asbury, Hickory Grove, and York. If you choose this one, continue on S. C. 11 to Chesnee, Turn left in Chesnee on U. S. 221 to Spartanburg. In Spartanburg follow U. S. 585 through the city to S. C. 9. Follow 9 to Pacolet. From Pacolet follow S. C. 150 to junction of 211. Turn left on 211 to Sharon via Hickory Grove. From Sharon take 49

back to York and Rock Hill. By following this route you cover approximately 160 miles, but you pass such points as Wofford College, Croft Swimming Pool and White Ston Lookout tower, (visitors welcome); and many of the larger industries in Spartanburg.

The shorter of the two

routes takes you back through the upper Piedmont farming area. From the battlefield, take route 110 to Cowpens. From Cowpens follow U. S. 29 back to Gaffney. In Gaffney turn right on S. C. 105 to junction of S. C. 211. Turn left to Hickory Grove. From Hickory Grove follow S. C. 97 to junction of 322. Turn left on S. C. 322 to return to Rock

Hill via McConnells.

All roads are in excellent condition being either S. C. or U. S. roads.

Cowpens was a turning point

(Editor's note: This is another in a series of articles on places to go and things to see in the area. The route is one which can be covered in a leisurely afternoon's drive.)

By BRONSON PARKER

For the person who has a wide range of tastes, this week's tour is made to order. It covers a dozen small towns, some of the Piedmont Carolina's best agricultural areas, revolutionary battle fields, modern industries, a State Park, a State Forestry lookout tower, and miles of clear open highway.

The highlight of the route is Cowpens National Battle Grounds. It was morning, Jan. 17, 1781, and bitter cold. General Morgan and his American patriots were deployed along the crest of an open ridge in Spartanburg County. To the south some 400 yards was a woods. Suddenly the British forces began pouring out of the woods toward the American lines. The first line of patriots

withdrew, then the second. Sensing a rout, the British charged across the open field after the fleeting Americans. Suddenly the Americans stopped, dropped, and began firing at the unprotected British. Surprised and confused, the British were soon cut to shreds and soundly beaten.

The Americans had won the battle of Cowpens, the second important victory in the southern campaign.

General Washington called it a "signal victory." It was to become "America's most imitated battle."

The battle field is marked today with a large monument, and maps showing the tactics used in the battle. An interesting feature is a recorded program giving the background and general conditions surrounding the battle. Visitors may push a button and the program is broadcast over speakers as you stand viewing the hillside.

A rather unusual side attraction is the Whitestone Lookout Tower, about five miles from Spartanburg on the road to Croft State Park. Visitors are allowed to climb the tower, and the climb is worth it. From the tower you get a birds-eye view of Spartanburg, and the surrounding area.

This week's tour also contains mystery — Croft State Park. On S. C. 9 about five miles from Spartanburg highway signs are plainly marked "Croft State Park — 3 miles." The sign is pointing right on a small winding road through Whitestone. About four miles later at the end of the winding road, signs pointing in the opposite direction read "Croft State Park — 3 miles."

All there was to be found between these two points was Croft swimming pool, but according to all authorities there is a state park there. Happy hunting!

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