

Begin this hike at the North Redoubt Trailhead

41.38566° N, 73.93045° W, Garrison, NY
There is a wooden sign and a small gravel parking area on Snake Hill Road. Located opposite of and between Avery & Walter Hoving Roads.

STOP 1: Entrance

Welcome to Putnam History Museum's Redoubt History Hike. Today we will take you on a journey back through history to the American Revolution.

In a time when ships were often the fastest method of transportation, the Hudson River was a highway to the most important points of colonial New York. As tensions grew between the colonists and the British over who would govern the Thirteen Colonies, both eyed this valuable landscape. It served not only as a gateway to the rest of New York, but also to most of New England. It was therefore vital for the American forces to maintain control of this thoroughfare during the American Revolutionary War, from 1775-1783.

In 1777, the British attacked and captured Fort Montgomery and Fort Clinton, near where the modern Bear Mountain Bridge stands. They blazed a trail of destruction up the Hudson River, culminating in the burning of Kingston to the ground, which was then the state's capital. It was only thanks to the American victory at the Battle of Saratoga that the British forces retreated to their headquarters in New York City. George Washington knew that this was his only chance to re-take control. Forts along the Hudson would allow Washington to provide his troops with supplies faster than over land. To keep this position, they needed to build up defenses on either side of the river. The eastern defensive structures are the redoubts you will see today.

At the rear of the parking area, head into the woods, following a red blazed trail. You will follow this up two switchbacks (after about 10-15 minutes of walking up a gradual hillside). Take a small break at your first bend to read Stop 2.

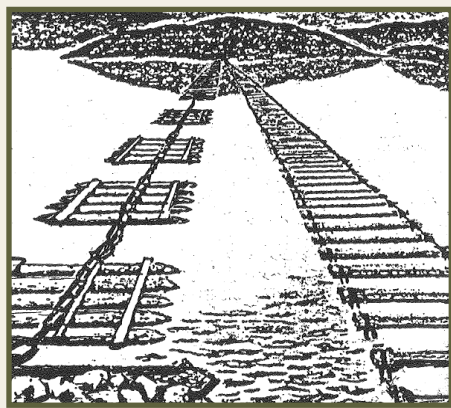


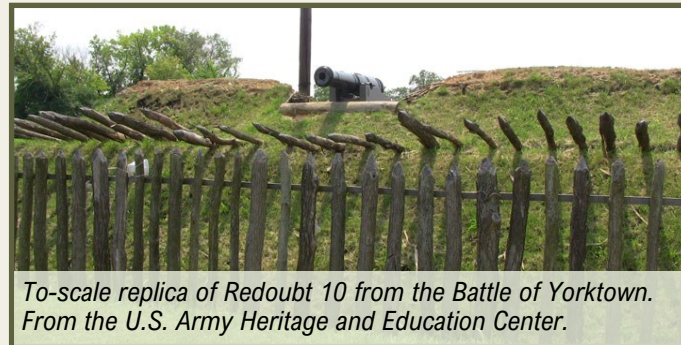
Illustration of the Great Chain, PHM Collections.

Broken bayonet found at West Point. From the U.S. Army Garrison West Point Cultural Resources Management Program.

STOP 2: Hill Rest

The area today known as West Point began as a series of fortifications on both sides of the Hudson. Near your current location, the rocky mountains of the Hudson Highlands pinch together, making the Hudson narrow and deep. There, Constitution Island divides the Hudson River into a narrow river passageway and Constitution Marsh. Ships would be unable to cross the marsh and had to navigate the difficult angles of the river.

The Constitution Island redoubts, only known by numbers 5, 6 and 7, began in 1775 under the direction of Bernard Romans. However, the Continental government was unhappy with both Romans' plans and with the location. They realized with the rocky outcropping of West Point not yet secured, the British could easily fire upon the redoubts. Romans left the project soon after the redoubts' completion.



To-scale replica of Redoubt 10 from the Battle of Yorktown. From the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

As the American forces evaluated the terrain around West Point, it became obvious that it was most vulnerable from the high ground to the west. Their new plan for defending West Point consisted of collections of artillery weapons at the Hudson River, called batteries. Supporting fortifications would dot the surrounding hills to protect them.

To achieve this, Continental engineers designed a fortification above the river batteries, named Fort Arnold in honor of Major General Benedict Arnold. A single hill overlooked Fort Arnold, and a large redoubt called Fort Putnam secured this ground. It was named after General Israel Putnam, also the namesake of Putnam County. Fort Arnold and Fort Putnam both possessed considerable strength and the British would need to enact a formal siege to overpower them.

To control the ascending ground above and around Fort Putnam on the west of the river, Continental engineers built a series of four redoubts. These redoubts were less impressive than the forts, but they could withstand an infantry attack. On the west side, they would supply perimeter security for Fort Putnam in particular.

To secure the more likely avenue of approach from the south, an artillery battery furthest south known as Battery Meigs was the first work. After that, to the north, Redoubt Wyllis and Redoubt Webb secured the ridge line. A British approach using this ridge would have to capture these outer works before any siege could progress against Fort Putnam.

Spanning the river between West Point and Constitution Island was the Great Chain. Its links measured two feet in length and weighed over 110 pounds. The total length spanned 600 yards of river and weighed 65 tons. The



Map of West Point, 1780. Library of Congress.

Chain was secured across the top of a series of log 'rafts' that linked together and stretched across the river. Any ships approaching the chain would have to slow down to make the sharp turn as the river curved. At a slower speed, the chain would easily stop a ship from progressing, and the batteries at the river's edge would destroy it. The Redoubts you will see today served as the protection for the east side of the river.

Continue along the path. When you reach a junction, marked by signs for the North Redoubt and the South Redoubt, this is your next stop.

STOP 3: Trail Junction

The North and South Redoubts on this side of the river served as a guard position for the land as well as the water. These redoubts have panoramic views of the Hudson River, but also guarded the nearby Old Albany Post Road and Beverley Robinson House.

The Old Albany Post Road followed much of modern Route 9. This was a major thoroughfare to and from British-controlled New York City up to Patriot-controlled Albany. It carried many people through its days: suppliers, spies, and both Continental and British soldiers. It also served as a road for civilians with local residents, travelers, and mail couriers using it too. By monitoring this critical pathway, the Continental forces were able to exert control over many facets of life.

Near here stood the Fishkill Supply Depot, a major storage and distribution center for the Continental Army's supplies. Also nearby was the Beverley Robinson House in Garrison, which the Continental Army used as a headquarters. This was also where Benedict Arnold was staying when his plot to hand West Point to the British was discovered. It also served as a military hospital where soldiers were inoculated against smallpox.

In order to make the most out of this vital corridor, Washington appointed Thaddeus Kościuszko to improve the defenses. Kościuszko was a Polish general and military engineer who came to America after his relationship with a Polish noblewoman was forbidden by

"The short bend of the river at this place was much in favor of the chain's proving effectual; for a vessel coming up the river with the fairest wind and strongest way must lose them of changing her course to turn the point; and before she could get under and considerable way again, even if the wind was fair, she would be on the chain, and at the same time under a heavy shower of shot and shells."

— William Heath

her father. He quickly proved his skills in using the landscape to his advantage at the Battle of Saratoga. Kościuszko arrived at West Point in March 1778. His goal was to build and strengthen the forts, as well as the section of the Hudson River that it overlooked.

The very rocky nature that made the Hudson Highlands the ideal spot for defensive positions also made it very difficult to build upon. Combined with the inability to keep adequate manpower, and disagreements with other engineers, progress was slow. Yet, Continental leaders including Washington praised Kościuszko's dedication, intelligence, and tact. He addressed manpower issues by requiring the regiments stationed there to come to him before approving any soldier's leave, and organized supply lines to make sure they had adequate materials.

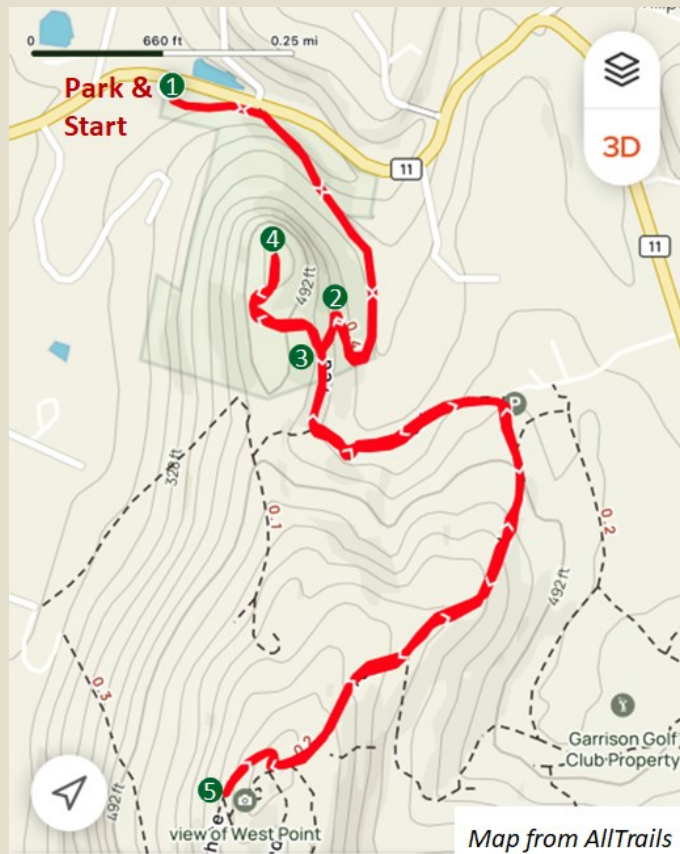
The winter of 1779 to 1780 was a cold and difficult period. There was a persistent four feet of snow on the ground for almost 40 days. Constant upkeep was needed to keep open communication with the various forts and redoubts. The North Redoubt, which you are visiting today, caught fire twice this winter and barely escaped total destruction. During one of these, it burned for three days before the soldiers could extinguish it.

It was during Kościuszko's time building West Point that he met Agrippa Hull, a free Black revolutionary serving in the army. Hull accompanied Kościuszko for the rest of the war as his orderly and companion. Kosciuszko's service with Hull and other African American soldiers committed him to the abolition of slavery.

Follow signs for the North Redoubt to the right, & continue to climb. After reaching the crest of the rise, the trail descends a little, then levels off for a few minutes. Follow the trail until it once again makes a gradual ascent. Continue for a few more minutes until the trail ends at earthen mounds (remnants of the North Redoubt). This is your next stop.



Steel cut engraving of Thaddeus Kościuszko, Polona.



Map from AllTrails

Key terms

Redoubt — a defensive fortification enclosed on all sides and made of earth and stone.

Parapet — a wall of earth surrounding the post that covers the soldiers and artillery.

Banquette — the platform to elevate the soldiers so they can fire over the parapet.

Ditch — at the base of the parapet to make it harder for enemy soldiers to climb over the wall.

Embrasures — openings in the parapet for soldiers to fire artillery

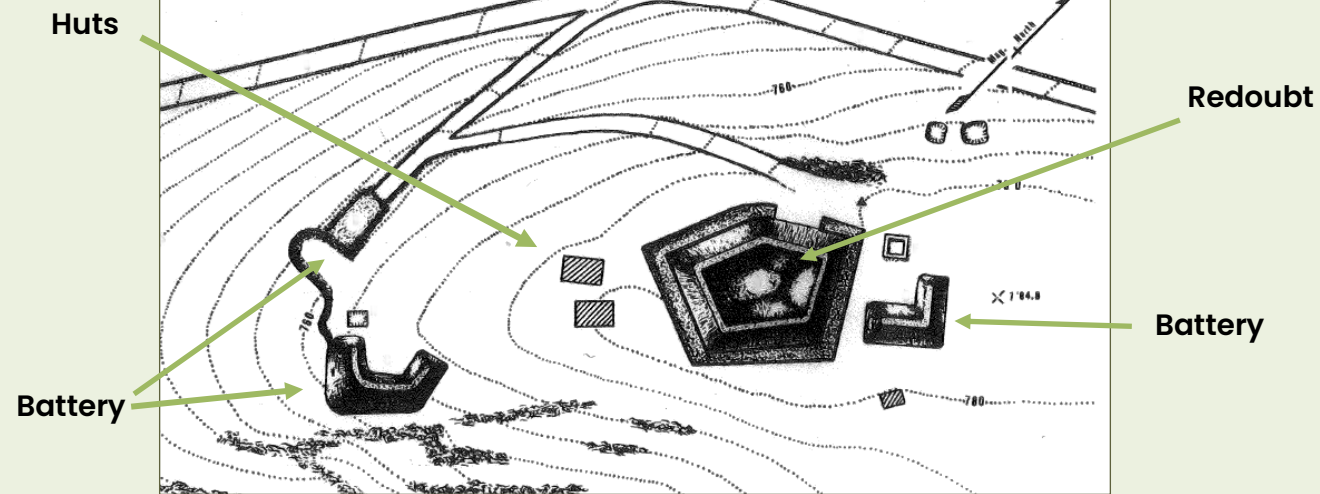
Palisades — Palisades are wooden vertical poles with pointed ends lined up like a fence, used as additional defense for the ditches. When palisades are fixed in the parapet, they are called fraises. These are stuck in the ground of the parapet and angled towards the ditch.

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This program had been made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Sustaining Humanities through the American Rescue Plan in partnership with the American Historical Association. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the American Historical Association or the National Endowment for the Humanities.



STOP 4: North Redoubt

Welcome to the North Redoubt. Although a redoubt could be constructed of masonry, in North America they were frequently constructed of earth. Continental soldiers often created fortifications in remote locations, so they used the materials that were available to them. First, the soldiers would build a framework of wood. The wood could consist of interlocked hewn trees, like a log cabin, or fascines, which are tightly bound bundles of six-foot sticks staked into position.

Once the framework of wood was in place, they would fill it with earth and other available rubble, which they pounded into position. Sometimes, instead of a wood frame, earth was covered with cut squares of sod spiked into place to hold the dirt. In extreme cases where wood was completely unavailable, the dirt was simply piled up and tamped down.

One of the most important aspects of a redoubt is that they could be adapted to the terrain that they were defending. A redoubt has no specific shape, but may be a square, a pentagon, a circle, or any other form. The form is generally determined by the spot of ground on which it stands, and its purpose. Redoubts could be combined with each other and with other types of field works, such as batteries.

The North and South Redoubts on the east side of the Hudson River had batteries which offered them artillery support. At the North Redoubt they had three 18-pounders and three 12-pounders. For the South Redoubt there was one 12-pounder and four 6-pounders. These are classified by the weight of the cannonballs they shot, so an 18-pounder was a cannon that fired ammunition that weight 18 pounds. The cannon itself would have been much heavier.



Horseshoes excavated near the redoubts, at Connecticut Village. New-York Historical Society.

Return back the way you came, along the ridge and back down the hill to the fork in the trail. Here you may turn left back to the parking lot, or head right toward the South Redoubt. Please note, at times this trail is overgrown. Follow the trail until you reach a meadow. There is a small deteriorating wooden shed at the eastern edge. From the shed, follow the woody road east to a grassy parking area, where the trail bears right. You will walk through a gap in a stone wall and pass a sign for the Garrison School Forest on the right and a kiosk on the left. The trail continues along an old woods road, climbing gradually. In about half a mile, you'll arrive at the South Redoubt, marked by a kiosk. The redoubt is located less than 50 feet south from the kiosk.

STOP 5: South Redoubt

So what was life like for the soldiers stationed at the redoubts? Monday through Saturday, troops had one of three duties: manual labor in the camps, manual labor building military fortifications, or guard duty. They also spent time drilling daily.

They prepared and ate their main meal of the day in the mid-afternoon. But, they often had issues with the quality and quantity of food. The Continental Army struggled with getting supplies. Many of the soldiers wore tattered clothing and were paid infrequently. Near here, at the South Redoubt, there has been evidence of soldier's huts. The tents or crude wooden huts they stayed in were often damp and cold. Living in these conditions made disease common at Revolutionary War camps. Similar to other 18th and 19th century wars, more soldiers died of disease than in battle.

The strategic defenses of West Point, including the North and South Redoubts, defended the Hudson Highlands from the British for the rest of the war. Thaddeus Kosciuszko's engineering used the natural terrain to the Patriots' advantage in the battlefield and beyond. Though the Revolutionary War was centuries ago, its marks are still on our landscape today.

Return to the parking lot by following the same trail you took in reverse. We hope you enjoyed your History Hike!

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Self-Guided
History Hike
presented by the
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North & South Redoubts

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