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Rediscovering Camden: The Preservation of a Revolutionary War Battlefield

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Rediscovering Camden: The Preservation of a Revolutionary War Battlefield

by

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Bachelor of Arts

University of Kent, 2010

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This entire project started with a trip to Camden battlefield I undertook in January 2014. It was a cold, wintry day but even in the grim weather, I felt the importance of the site; a site that only exists today due to the dedication of a relatively small number of people. I am indebted to Charles Baxley, Joanna Craig, James Legg, and George Fields for kindly finding the time to answer my many inquiries about a project so dear to their hearts. This thesis is also dedicated to the thousands of other individuals who played a role in the preservation of Camden Battlefield, throughout its history. For your many sacrifices, the people of South Carolina owe you all a debt of gratitude.

Abstract

The Battle of Camden was the largest pitched battle fought in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War, yet until the late twentieth century the battlefield itself was largely forgotten. For over two hundred years, the ground on which so many men fought and died was used for timber, only visited by relic hunters wishing to collect a piece of its relatively hidden history. Then, beginning in 1996, local organizations around South Carolina began to recognize the value of the site. Using federal funds, but without the close assistance of national bodies, this group of local preservationists bought the site, saving Camden battlefield from possible destruction, and reinterpreted the history of the site using modern archaeological evidence. Looking at the archaeology, politics, organizations and people that were involved in the process, this thesis shows the successes and limitations of the grassroots preservation movement that rediscovered Camden battlefield for future generations.

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Introduction

The Battle of Camden was fought by accident. On a moonlit night in the rolling sandhills of South Carolina's midlands, two tired armies slogged through the oppressive humidity of a southern summer. Both armies, a large American force and a smaller British one had been marching for three hours. By a quirk of fate, they both happened to be on the same road. At 2am in the morning of August 16, 1780, the two armies blundered into each other in a patch of pine forest with absolutely no strategic value. The resulting battle would be the worst American defeat in a field battle in the southern campaign of the Revolutionary War.

The Revolutionary War battlefields in South Carolina are among the best preserved in the nation.¹ The National Park Service operates four Revolutionary War sites in South Carolina; Cowpens, Kings Mountain, Fort Moultrie and Ninety Six. Of these, three were the site of Patriot victories in the Revolutionary War. Despite the sheer scale of the Battle of Camden, which featured more soldiers than the battles of Kings Mountain and Cowpens combined, the site of the action was largely neglected by a nation happier to reflect a whiggish narrative of the war than focus on a costly setback which cost the lives

¹ For the purpose of this paper, preservation in this context will include both the act of preserving the site of a battlefield in its original form and the restoration of the site, including interpretation for visitors.

of hundreds of Americans.² This victory-laden view of American history, as portrayed at South Carolina's Revolutionary War sites, are evidence of a "Heritage Syndrome" identified by Michael Kammen. He suggests this approach to US history is "an impulse to remember what is attractive and flattering and to ignore all the rest."³ From a US perspective there is nothing attractive about the Battle of Camden. Nonetheless, despite a national antipathy towards the battlefield, grassroots organizations in Camden and Kershaw County, in which the town is situated, have long tried to preserve the battlefield. Beginning at the turn of the 20th century, there has been a concerted movement to protect the battlefield and interpret the action that took place upon it more than two centuries ago. These efforts have experienced the ebbs and flows that effect most grassroots preservation movements, but the progress made through these efforts have ensured that the land on which the battle was fought has largely been protected. The battlefield is therefore a very useful lens through which to view and analyse grassroots attempts to protect and interpret such a property.

This study asks the question of why Camden was not preserved like many of the other battlefields of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina. It finds that the greatest obstacle to the earliest preservation movement at Camden was the fact that the battlefield was the site of an American defeat, with few wanting to take ownership of

² The participant numbers (2100 British, 3700 American) for the Battle of Camden, as well as those of Cowpens and Kings Mountain are widely available. So too are the casualty figures of all of these engagements. For this study, the source consulted was: John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York: Wiley, 1997).

³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 626.

such a site of national embarrassment. As a secondary question, this study asks how modern interpretive techniques were applied to the battlefield preservation effort at Camden, and why these efforts were conducted in the first place.

The protection of Revolutionary War battlefields was considerably different than that of their Civil War counterparts. The “golden age” of battlefield preservation, occurring in the 1890s, refers to the preservation of Civil War sites, such as Gettysburg and Vicksburg.⁴ This “golden era” left behind most of the Revolutionary War battlefields, in fact the first five National Battlefield Parks were all Civil War sites. The main reason for this was the presence of Civil War veterans who demanded that endangered battlefields on which they had fought and bled be preserved as sites of memory and, later, as sites of national reconciliation.⁵ Of course, as the first National Battlefields were being created, there were no veterans of the Revolutionary War to make the case for the preservation of sites from that conflict. Indeed, nearly every Revolutionary War battlefield that is preserved was the product of grassroots activism on a local level. The Revolutionary War battlefields that then received federal recognition were grandfathered into the National Park system at the same time as a second tier of Civil War battlefield sites. Occurring in the opulent pre-Depression era years when patriotic nationalism was high in the US, the golden age of Revolutionary War preservation was the 1920’s.⁶

⁴ Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America’s First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 1.

⁵ Jennifer M. Murray, *On a Great Battlefield: The Making Management and Memory of Gettysburg National Military Park, 1933-2013* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 13.

⁶ Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation*, 211-212.

It was during this period of Revolutionary War preservation that Camden battlefield garnered local attention for the first time, but it was an oddity. The Revolutionary War sites to become National Parks in 1902 were Valley Forge and Yorktown, both national symbols of triumph over adversity during the war.⁷ Camden never fit easily into the national progress narrative that the National Park Service vigorously supported in the early twentieth century. The federal government for the next seventy years largely neglected it.

While many scholars have looked at the preservation of Civil War battlefields in the US, there is a dearth of scholarship on the subject of Revolutionary War battlefield preservation. The battlefield at Camden has largely been ignored by scholars, with no work on the preservation of the site looking beyond 1980. As an extension of R. Bryan Whitfield's work, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield* (1980), the first study to look at preservation at the site, this study brings the scholarship on the preservation of Camden battlefield up to date.⁸ It also inserts Camden into a larger commemorative field that, although often neglecting Revolutionary War battlefield preservation, certainly contains many works on the memory of the conflict in the American consciousness.

⁷ Ibid, 44.

⁸ In 1980, R Bryan Whitfield wrote his MA Thesis on the preservation of Camden Battlefield, looking at all preservation efforts at the site up until that year. His work provides the foundation on which this study sits and should be the first place anybody looking towards the early years of preservation efforts at Camden turns. Due to this excellent study, I have specifically chosen to look at the years beyond 1980, after Whitfield's study concludes. See; R. Bryan Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield* (MA thesis, Wake Forest University, 1980).

The Battle of Camden

In the early morning hours of August 16 1780, the Patriot American army of Horatio Gates blundered into the advancing British army of Charles Cornwallis on an old wagon road, some six miles north of the frontier town of Camden, South Carolina.⁹ The fortunes of war played out that at exactly the time that Gates was striking south to move his forces closer to Camden, Cornwallis was himself setting out in order to launch a surprise attack on Gate's camp at Rugeley's Mill, about twelve miles north of Camden. It was at about two o'clock in the morning of August 16 that the two armies marched into one another in the pine forest north of the town. After a short skirmish, both sides withdrew into the darkness. Neither general wished to fight at night, and so both commanders placed their armies into lines of battle and waited until the morning to attack.

Camden, a small outpost town on the South Carolina frontier had been thrust into the Revolutionary War by actions that occurred almost 100 miles away, on the coast, two months earlier. On May 12 1780, Charlestown, the greatest city in the Southern colonies of British North America fell, with the triumphant British entering the city to gain the

⁹ The time of the march south to Camden, as well as Cornwallis's march north is found in numerous sources. For more information on the movements of both armies see; Horatio Gates to Samuel Huntington, August 20th 1780; Otho Williams "A Narrative of the Campaign of 1780." In *Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathaniel Greene*, William Johnson, Ed (Charleston, SC: A.E Miller, 1822), 485-510. Banastre Tarleton, *Campaigns A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America* (London: T Cadell, 1787), 104.

spoils of a great victory. It had taken less than two months for the British General Henry Clinton to force the Patriot commander, General Benjamin Lincoln, and the entire Patriot Southern Army to capitulate. The surrender was a gut-blow for the entire American independence movement. Indeed, the surrender of Lincoln's army of 5,500 men would be the greatest capitulation of American forces in the entire war.¹⁰

Cornwallis, Clinton's successor in South Carolina, quickly moved to establish a line of forts throughout the South Carolina frontier to quell the rebellion in the backcountry – Camden became one of these British bastions. In the meantime, the Continental Congress hastily assembled an army in Virginia under the command of Horatio Gates and sent it south to stop Cornwallis's conquest of South Carolina.¹¹ Gates marched his army through the heat of summer; lacking food and equipment, including tents, his men were exhausted by the time that they reached Rugeley's Mill, near Camden, in mid-August. Giving them only a day's rest, and believing the British forces to be much smaller than they really were, Gates set off on the night of August 15 to force an engagement with the British, setting in motion the events which would lead to his army's demise.

Dawn on August 16 found the two armies spread out on either side of the wagon road in a pine forest. The men of the patriot Virginia militia made up the extreme left

¹⁰ In fact there would not be as big a surrender of US troops again until 1862, when 'Stonewall' Jackson captured some 10,000 at Harpers Ferry during the Antietam campaign.

¹¹ Horatio Gates to Thomas Jefferson, August 3rd 1780. John Robertson, ed. "Documentary History of the Battle of Camden, 16th August 1780." *Battleofcamden.org*. Web. Accessed: 03/27/2014. Gates was particularly worried that illness or desertions would thin the ranks of his men and so wrote to Jefferson out of desperation pleading for supplies. The tents and flour first promised by Jefferson and then asked for by Gates would not reach the militia before the battle.

flank of Gates' army. The Virginians were in no fit state to fight a battle as they stood awaiting the first rays of morning light. Not only were they fatigued from the night march and their previous exhaustions but now, a new problem, an issue caused directly by the inept actions of the commanders, further hindered their physical strength. It was the policy of armies in the eighteenth century to be given alcoholic sprits, normally rum, prior to battle. Due to ongoing supply problems in Gates' army, which had been present in the American camp throughout the campaign, there was no rum available for the men to consume on the evening of August 15. Fearful of the effects on morale of sending his troops into battle without their liquor ration, Gates made a disastrous decision of ordering molasses to be substituted for rum. The inappropriate use of molasses, in addition to a meal of poor quality meat and green corn, meant that the Patriot troops about to fight were weakened by an avoidable ailment, diarrhoea. This new affliction was noticed by Otho Williams who was serving as Gates's adjutant general, "a desert of molasses, mixed with mush, or dumplings, operated so cathartically, as to disorder many of the men, who were breaking ranks all night."¹² Adding to the fatigue the men from Virginia were already

¹² Otho Williams in: Johnson, *Sketches of Nathaniel Greene*. 494. The evidence of the poor meal and molasses can be found in many primary account of the battle, as can its disastrous effects on the troops. The fact that Continental troops as well as the militia complained of the meal proves that it was not only reserved for the Virginians. See: Sgt. William Seymour (Delaware Continentals); in his diary. Quoted in; Jim Piecuch, Ed., *The Battle of Camden: A Documentary History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2006), 71; William Gipson (NC Militia); in his pension record; Quoted in: John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 194-95; and in the case of the Virginia militia, in their petition to the Virginia Legislature, November 9th 1780, in Piecuch, *Battle of Camden*, 91.

suffering, the intestinal distress caused by the previous night's meal meant that on the morning of the battle the men were on the verge of total physical and mental collapse.¹³

As the sun rose on a hot and humid morning that would soon become a sweltering August day, the entire British line advanced towards the Patriots. The artillery of both sides began to sound and soon thick smoke, trapped by the pines that stood in their own ranks across the battlefield, obscured the lines. Hoping to meet the British while they advanced, Gates ordered the untried Virginia militia to advance on the experienced British regulars opposing them. The effects of the attack were predictable. As the militia halted to fire they observed the British regulars, bayonets fixed, steadily advancing towards them. From out of the smoke, the red coats of the British emerged, their shouts and cries of "Huzzah!" chilling the hearts of the Virginians, many of whom had never seen battle before. Before a shot was fired, the Virginians turned and fled the field. They suffered only three casualties during the entire action. The North Carolinian militia aligned next to the Virginians were also suffering from fatigue and seeing their comrades' retreat was too much for their resolve. As the British advance continued, the North Carolinians broke before them.¹⁴ The result was the collapse of the entire American left

¹³ Jim Piecuch's 2006 edited volume *The Battle of Camden*, is the first single volume to collect nearly every useful primary account of the battle. It is from these primary accounts that I have based my narrative version of events. As well as this, the first scholarly account of the battle by Lt. Col. H. L. Landers of the Army War College has also proved useful. See; H. L. Landers, *The Battle of Camden South Carolina August 16, 1780* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1929). Finally, an excellent, and recent, summation of the battle, taken from both Piecuch's sources, Lander's narrative, and modern archaeological evidence is found in; Steven D. Smith, James B. Legg, & Tamara S. Wilson, *The Archaeology of Camden Battlefield: History, Private Collections, and Field Investigations* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009).

¹⁴ Buchanan, *Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 166. The quick flight of the regiment can be seen in the fact that of the almost 2000 American casualties on the day, only three of them came from the Virginians. The reasons for the differentiation in time between the Virginian and North Carolinian retreat are debatable.

flank. While Dixon's regiment of North Carolinians, a mixture of militia and continentals, withstood the initial British advance, they also fled after firing three volleys at the British.¹⁵ Gates himself fled the field at this stage, retreating as far as Charlotte, North Carolina before stopping.

On the other side of the road, on the American right flank, Baron Johann De Kalb's Continental troops fought well despite the failure of the rest of Gate's army. In addition, Gates' reserve force of Continental troops under General William Smallwood tried to plug the huge gap left by the retreating militia but soon found themselves pushed back until they were at a right angle to De Kalb's, the American line forming an L-shape and assailed unrelentingly by the British.¹⁶ Eventually the weight of British numbers overwhelmed Smallwood and De Kalb, who was himself mortally wounded during the battle. The remaining Continentals fought on bravely before retreating themselves. The battle had lasted less than one hour. With their victory, the British were left in control of the battlefield, and South Carolina. Four days after the battle, General Stevens of the Virginia militia wrote to Governor Thomas Jefferson "a more compleat Defeat could not possibly have taken place...in short picture it as bad as you possibly can and it will not be as bad as it really is."¹⁷

Both units suffered from fatigue at Camden and yet it was the Virginians that broke first. The most likely reason for this is because they were the first unit engaged on the Patriot side although the different effects of fatigue on individuals may also have played a role in this. See also, Smith et al., *The Archaeology of the Camden Battlefield*, 23.

¹⁵ Smith et al., *The Archaeology of the Camden Battlefield*, 23.

¹⁶ Ibid, 25.

¹⁷ General Edward Stevens to Thomas Jefferson, August 20th 1780, in: Piecuch, *Battle of Camden*, 49.

When the battle ended, both sides vacated the pine forest and the rest of the war saw that barren section of land totally forgotten. Whilst the Battle of Hobkirk's Hill would rage around Camden in 1781, the pine forest survived the encounter in serenity. After the war, the area was not heavily planted as the cotton boom hit South Carolina, with many of the battle scarred trees surviving well into the next century.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the local population, who had never forgotten the carnage of that summer's day in 1780, became relic hunters.¹⁹ Yet while treasure seekers sought a piece of history, the land on which the battle raged was turned first into privately owned farmland and then corporately owned land for timber companies. By the turn of the twentieth century, it had been over a century since the fighting of the Battle of Camden but the struggle to save the battlefield was only just beginning.

¹⁸ Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield*, 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 56-57.

Chapter One: The Re-Creation of a Battlefield: 1900-1995

The battlefield at Camden is very different today than it was when two great armies fought there in 1780. The long-leaf pine trees, their tall branches creating a canopy of firs that had both shielded the exhausted soldiers from the sun, but also enclosed the smoke of the day's battle, have long since been removed. In 1995, a visitor to the site would find rows of planted short-leaf pine, some small enough to place in your house and decorate at Christmas time while others stretched skyward, never able to attain the height of their long-leaf brethren. On the ground, a dense underbrush of nettles, briars, and weeds, made the battlefield almost impassable. The wagon road, which had been vital in the peopling of this part of South Carolina, had long since been swallowed up by nature, with only a few isolated stretches still discernible to those intrepid enough to be looking. A new road, from the age of the automobile, paralleled the old one, splitting the battlefield in two.

The forest that had reclaimed the battlefield was not that much different from many of the forests that had grown out of the sandy soil of the South Carolina midlands. Timber companies, after exhausting the old growth long-leaf pine, had planted the land with faster growing species to turn a profit from a soil that was unforgiving to all but the most maverick farmer. Just off the main road, which used to be the major highway between Camden and Charlotte, in the middle of the battlefield, a piece of granite that

had no earthly business being in this part of South Carolina could be found. Those travellers who observed it, or the iron wayside marker nearby, would know that they were on a very special piece of ground. However, a driver who was changing the station on his radio or simply looking the other way for a split moment would never have realised that the largest Revolutionary War battle in South Carolina had been fought in the woodland through which they drove.

Any travellers that wished to stretch their legs could walk through the small cleared area surrounding the granite block. Unlike the rest of the forest that had engulfed the battlefield, a lumber company did not own this little piece of tranquillity. Instead, it was owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), an organization that cared more for the heritage of the Camden battlefield than simply the price of timber. The granite block was the first actual attempt to interpret Camden battlefield, and before 1995 it was the only one.

The DAR and the memory of Baron De Kalb

Baron Johann De Kalb was the quintessential American hero of the Battle of Camden, even though he was actually German. Despite this, De Kalb represented the Revolutionary Atlantic World in the Eighteenth century and the kind of volunteerism that American Patriots prized so highly. A Bavarian by birth, De Kalb earned his title of Baron after years of loyal service in the German army. In 1777, he sailed with the Marquis de LaFayette to America in order to ensure the liberty of the American colonies. At Camden, despite being wounded on numerous occasions, De Kalb fought on, even as his

commander Horatio Gates ignominiously fled the field. The admiring British carried De Kalb to Camden, where he succumbed to his wounds. He was laid to rest under the sandy soil of South Carolina, a foreign nation he had given his last breath to defend.

With such a heroic backstory, it was no surprise that De Kalb became the symbolic hero of the American defeat at Camden. For a people trying to salvage something from the Camden debacle, De Kalb seemed the right figure around which to build their memorialization of the battle. The first monument to him was constructed in 1825, a large obelisk under which he was reinterred.²⁰ On a sunny March day in that year, a large group of dignitaries were on hand, as De Kalb's body was carried over the dirt roads of the town to a site more befitting an American hero. His elderly friend, the Marquis De LaFayette, who had come to the Americas to fight with his old friend back in 1777, read his eulogy.²¹ With De Kalb buried in the center of Camden, the heroic status of the fallen hero was appealing to the DAR who decided to resurrect his memory almost a century after his original memorial was dedicated.

While his gravesite was being adequately upgraded, the site of his demise was a patchwork of farmland and woods that was largely neglected by all except those who lived nearby. To these farmers, the odd musket ball or bone dug up when the spring ploughing was conducted provided the only tangible connection between them and the history of the site. In the early twentieth century, a new organization named the

²⁰ Anon, *The Southern Chronicle, and Camden Literary and Political Register*, March 19, 1825.

²¹ Whitfield discusses the De Kalb monument in great detail in his thesis on Camden, and it is on his findings that have helped to guide my discussion of it. See, Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield*, 52.

Daughters of the American Revolution created a chapter in Camden. These women decided that the neglect of the battlefield was not befitting the honor of the men who died there, and that some form of memorialization was necessary.

The DAR decided to erect a monument to De Kalb on the spot where legend suggested that he had fallen during the Battle of Camden. The monument was to serve two major purposes; to glorify the site and to provide a tangible link to the town itself. As the number of tourists visiting Camden increased, the De Kalb story could be traced from the site of his wounding on the battlefield to the eventual place of his burial in the town itself. As well as this, the monument was built with private funds and so the DAR needed to present an engaging narrative to donors, and the De Kalb story was one that many would be familiar with.²² After receiving permission from the owner of the land, the DAR set to creating the monument. The monument was dedicated on May 28, 1909, and is still the spiritual heart of the battlefield today. The recalibration of the battlefield to a site of heroic defeat was successful, the *Camden Chronicle* praised the DAR monument: "All praise the gallant women of the DAR! The monument will not only mark the spot where fell the gallant De Kalb, but will also bear testimony to the untiring efforts and loyal patriotism of these women."²³

While the building of the monument was a positive first step towards interpreting the battlefield, the DAR's reinterpretation was not without problems. The location at

²² The DAR actually raised the funds for the monument by having a fund raising tea party in Camden in January 1909. See; Anon, *The Camden Chronicle*, January 15, 1909.

²³ Anon, *Camden Chronicle*. June 4, 1909.

which De Kalb fell has been highly disputed over the years. The DAR interpretation is based on oral accounts that had suggested De Kalb was seen sitting against a tree near the location of the present day monument after his wounding.²⁴ The problem is that most of the Revolutionary era trees had already been lost due to turpentine extraction on the battlefield, and so no such tree existed on which the DAR could base their interpretation. This problem was compounded by the text the organization decided to place on the monument that insisted that De Kalb was “mortally wounded on this spot.”²⁵

Modern scholars of the battle, and those that played a prominent role in the second phase of its interpretation, are dubious as to whether the monument was sited correctly. Steve Smith, one of the chief archaeologists in the second phase of the interpretation, has done extensive work on the land around the monument. While not specifically looking for the site of De Kalb’s wounding, Smith did not find any evidence of that specific event occurring there.²⁶ The archaeology of the site does show it to be at the heart of the American battle line, however, with many battle artefacts from Smallwood’s stand found around the monument. More central to Smith’s dubiousness is the fact that De Kalb’s troops fought several hundred yards from the position of the modern monument, making the American right flank a more likely spot for his wounding.

²⁴ A Diagram showing the location of the pine against which De Kalb was reportedly found, was printed in an early 20th century account of the battle and seems to be the one on which the DAR based the placement of their monument. See; Thomas J. Kirkland & Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden, Part One: Colonial and Revolutionary* (Columbia, SC: The State Co., 1905), 160.

²⁵ Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield*, 60.

²⁶ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015. See also; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of Camden Battlefield*, 3.

Simply, the monument was placed without any historical evidence being taken into account. Indeed, rather than historical accuracy, Charles Baxley, a leader in the current preservation efforts, suggested a more practical reason for the placement of the monument: “I know when the monument was out there, there was probably not much readily available heavy-moving equipment.”²⁷ As well as this, the position of the monument near to the main highway between Charlotte and Camden also made it accessible to the increasing number of tourists that they expected would visit the site (see fig 1.1). Whether the placement of the monument was historically correct or not is largely irrelevant, however. The DAR had wanted to memorialize the battlefield and with the placement of the De Kalb monument at the site, they became the first group to do so.²⁸

²⁷ Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. 08/27/2015. Whilst Baxley’s simplistic explanation does make a good deal of sense, it is important to remember that folklore sited the pine De Kalb was found against next to the road, as indicated in Kirkland and Kennedy’s book, only four years before the monument was laid, see; Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 160.

²⁸ Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield*, 58.



Figure 1.1) Photograph of De Kalb monument on Camden Battlefield. Constructed in 1909 by the local chapter of the DAR, it was the first attempt to interpret the site. Photo courtesy of SCIAA.

Chapter Two: The Second Phase of preservation (1996-2015)

In the years after the dedication of the monument, the DAR was able to secure an option to purchase 425 acres of battlefield, but unfortunately the Great Depression took hold before the group could act upon it. In 1942, however, the group were able to secure a 6-acre tract of land surrounding the granite memorial that became the first part of the battlefield to be preserved.²⁹ The area, known to the group as De Kalb Park, was a small lot that the women cleared of the large, shadowy pines and underbrush that plagued the rest of the battlefield. Further to this, the group also managed to have the South Carolina Department of Transportation erect a roadside marker by the entrance to the park in 1954, giving the first interpretation of any detail at the site.³⁰ While original plans for the park included an interpretive kiosk and picnic tables, a lack of interest in commemorating the battle by higher authorities meant that none of these ideas came to fruition. Instead, the De Kalb Park site remained a relatively pristine but badly interpreted area of the core battlefield area at Camden.

At the same time that the local movement to preserve the battlefield, led by the DAR, was in the midst of its ebb and flow, the Federal government also began to

²⁹ Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield*, 66.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 70.

tentatively focus on Camden battlefield. The national movement began with the publication of Lt. Col. H.L Landers report of the battle in 1929, which had been commissioned by the Army War College and became the first scholarly account of the Camden debacle.³¹ After the Second World War, the site was looked upon with renewed interest and, supported by local efforts, the battlefield was granted National Historic Landmark Status in 1961.³² In the 1970s, the first attempts to turn the site into a National Park failed and the battlefield remained in private hands as the twentieth century came to a close.

By the year 2000, two large timber corporations, Bowater Inc. and Duke Energy, owned the tangle of trees and underbrush that dominated the majority of the battlefield. For visitors who stopped at De Kalb Park, which was not in itself an easy feat, the felling of trees and the rumbling of machinery often shattered the calm of the site. This left the DAR land as an island of preserved battlefield in a sea of industrial activity.³³ However, a much greater problem faced the battlefield preservation movement. While there had been a steady supply of battle narratives arising out of the Revolution, which led in part to the placing of the De Kalb monument, no one had actually documented where the

³¹ Landers, *The Battle of Camden*, iii.

³² Whitfield, *The Preservation of Camden Battlefield*, 71; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of Camden Battlefield*, 2.

³³ Everyone interviewed by the author recollected the ownership status of the battlefield. However, the man who had the most interaction with the group was George Fields, whose interview is cited below; Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. Private Interview. Spartanburg, SC, 10/19/2015. See also; James B. Legg, "The Camden Battlefield, 1996-2010: A Short History of a Long Project." *Legacy*, 14 (2) (August 2010), 8.

actual battle was fought. As a result, the exact location of the battlefield itself remained a mystery to most of the people involved in the project in 2000.³⁴

The battlefield was not a mystery to everyone, however. Even as bulldozers levelled eighty-foot pines on one side of the battlefield, amateur relic hunters could be found scurrying amongst the newly cleared areas looking for Revolutionary War artefacts. Among rows of twisted roots and briars, these amateurs trespassed with their metal detectors trying to discover any object that they could link to the battle. Relic hunting at Camden was not a new idea in the twentieth century. Ever since the battle took place in 1780, souvenir collectors and relic hunters had been combing the battlefield for artefacts. In 1849, less than a century after the battle, historian Benson J. Lossing visited the battlefield and noted, "I was informed that many musket balls have been cut out of the trees; and I saw quite a number of trunks which had been recently hewn with axes for the purpose."³⁵ While the instrumentation that accompanied relic hunting had changed considerably in the years since Lossing's observation in the nineteenth century, the numbers of treasure seekers that descended on Camden battlefield annually had not. This group would be a vital source for researchers to utilise in the new phase of preservation at the site.

³⁴ While the Camden Battlefield had been granted the status of National Historic Landmark in 1961, the boundaries for the landmark were based on speculation and thus were massively larger than the historical record of the battlefield actually was (See Fig. 2). Within this site, the actual narrative interpretation of the battle itself was non-existent.

³⁵ Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution: Volume 2* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1860), 460.

There are many similarities between the early preservation efforts at Camden battlefield and the ones of the twenty-first century. Both relied heavily on the sense of “place”, a central need in the battlefield preservation movement since the late 19th century. Both were also grassroots movements, based around the tireless work of individuals from the Kershaw County area who fought against the odds to preserve a battlefield for a gain more spiritual than financial. Again, the larger national preservation organizations would fill the role of the villains of this piece, seemingly ignoring the work done on the ground and doing little to enhance the work of the local community. However, there is one key difference between the early and later preservation narratives; the role of national funding bodies, groups that the DAR could not access in their earlier movements. These national bodies would eventually give much in order to allow the battlefield preservation movement at Camden to flourish until the impact of the global recession ended this golden age of preservation at the battlefield.

Finding Camden: The Search For a Historic Battlefield

George Fields is a striking man. While age has softened his features, his alert eyes (and even more alert mind) reveal him as more than just a retiree on the backside of eighty years. Fields has been a military man; he retired as a general in the Chaplain corps before he took an interest in the preservation of battlefields in South Carolina. In 2000, he was a younger man, in his sixties and recently retired. It was the sheer scale of the Camden battlefield that first drew Fields to it: “We started playing around with Camden

because it was so large...The people in Camden, as you know, had tried (to preserve the site) but they couldn't pull it off."³⁶ Fields was employed by the Palmetto Conservation Foundation (PCF), a South Carolina non-profit organization that specialized primarily in the creation of walking trails in the state.

Fields had visited the battlefield, or at least the De Kalb park area, before and so knew the maze of trees and stumps to be more than simply a logging patch. He had spent many evenings reading the accounts of the battle and so was well-versed in Battle of Camden lore when he first got involved in the preservation project. PCF had no real interest in battlefield preservation but Fields was very persuasive and promised to lead the effort if PCF would support him, which they readily agreed to. Fields quickly learned that another state organization, the Katawba Valley Land Trust (KVLT), had been working with Bowater Inc., who owned a large section of the battlefield, in order to secure a conservation easement on the site to prevent any future development on the battlefield.³⁷

³⁶ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015.

³⁷ The Katawba Valley Land Trust had first approached Bowater about the easement in the mid-1990s but negotiations with the paper merchant were excruciatingly slow for all involved. The KVLT is a non-profit organization based out of Lancaster, South Carolina whose purpose is to negotiate conservation easements on areas of natural or historic interest in the state. Camden was their first battlefield project. The easement was finally completed in 2000. It covered 310 acres of battlefield site for the period of 50 years but required the KVLT to complete a long-term strategic plan for the land. This information was explained patiently to me by: Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. Personal interview. Camden, South Carolina, 8/27/2015. See also; See also; James B. Legg, Steven D. Smith, & Tamara S. Wilson, *Understanding Camden: The Revolutionary War Battle of Camden as Revealed Through Historical, Archaeological, and Private Collections Analysis* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2005), 3.

The KVLT was headed by Lindsey Pettus, a man who believed deeply in the preservation of Camden battlefield for future generations. One of the main functions of the organization was to negotiate preservation easements over land of public interest, and this is what Pettus set out to do with the Camden battlefield. The only problem was that no one at the KVLT knew what parts of the pine forest at Camden needed to be protected. In order to solve this puzzle, Lindsey Pettus approached an archaeologist, Jim Legg, in 1996. Legg, who had written his MA thesis on the Battle of Camden and had thus become familiar with the battlefield, suggested an area of 316 acres within the existing National Landmark Boundary to be the first parts to be preserved.³⁸ Further to this, whilst the negotiations for the easement between the KVLT and Bowater Timber were ongoing, Legg received permission in 1998 to do some sample metal detecting on the west side of the battlefield, the results of which confirmed his ideas regarding the initial easement area. The easement would protect the land around the De Kalb monument and a sizeable chunk of the area on which so many men suffered and died over two hundred years prior.³⁹ The easement process was completed in 2000, just as George Fields and PCF began their interest in the project. Thanks to Pettus, Legg and the KVLT, a part of the battlefield was safe, at least for now, but it was then up to Fields to push the project forward.

Independent of Fields, PCF or the KVLT, the people of Camden were also beginning to awaken to the fact that they had a prime piece of battlefield real estate in their own

³⁸ Legg, "The Camden Battlefield, 1996-2010", 8.

³⁹ Ibid, 8.

backyard. The local Camden group actually became interested in the site long before Fields did. Two local lawyers, Charles Baxley and John DeLoach, both of whom had a personal interest in Revolutionary War history, led them. Baxley, a man who is completely self-taught in Revolutionary War military history and yet knows more than most scholars on the subject, was quickly told that his assistance on the preservation movement would be more of a hindrance than a help. He explained, “Johnny put on a meeting of about half a dozen people at his house one day...I was advised to leave it (the preservation) alone and let the experts take care of it.”⁴⁰ Thus, while there was local interest, it was deemed better by the locals to let the larger organizations deal with the battlefield, and for the community groups to play a smaller, supporting role.

The discontinuity between local and larger groups has been one that has plagued the battlefield preservation movement at Camden since its inception. Many small ranch homes dot the road that lead to the battlefield and many of these landowners own land on the battlefield itself. These private landholders had always been concerned that the creation of a battlefield park, or even the preservation of the battlefield in any form, was a threat to their own property rights.⁴¹ This still is particularly concerning considering the number of rural properties that adjoin the existing battlefield site. While there was a

⁴⁰ Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. 08/27/2015.

⁴¹ George Fields, who directly dealt with the families who owned property on or next to the battlefield, summed up his experience, “We made them an offer, that I thought was a real generous offer, but they were zealous in wanting to keep all their property rights.” Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015. Also, the archaeologists at SCIAA believe that some substantial parts of the battlefield still lie on private property outside of that owned by PCF that Fields wanted to purchase, see; Legg et al., *Understanding Camden*, 59.

significant group of people in the local community who wanted to preserve the Camden battlefield, many simply did not care. A vocal minority even opposed the preservation movement entirely.

George Fields knew the value of good public relations and, as a former chaplain, he was a rather persuasive orator. Leading the charge to win the hearts and minds of local residents towards a large scale battlefield preservation project, Fields quickly joined forces with Baxley's pro-preservation group and with Joanna Craig, the director of Historic Camden.⁴² Craig had fought the same battle, with the same types of people, as Fields was now fighting. Craig, a public historian who felt the spiritual nature of the battlefield site and of Camden in general, believed deeply in the project. In the battlefield, she also saw a way to connect her site at Historic Camden with another chapter in Camden's Revolutionary War history.

The triumvirate of George Fields, Charles Baxley and Joanna Craig quickly led to the creation of the Battle of Camden Advisory Council in 2001. The Council was a multi-party group headed by Fields that included local and national preservation agencies, including the National Park Service (NPS). Fields immediately reached out to the dissenting members of the local community, particularly the landowners who lived on or near the battlefield itself, "At first when we went there, those families were not

⁴² Historic Camden is a local non-profit historic site in Camden, South Carolina. The site consists of the reconstructed Kershaw-Cornwallis house, as well as series of other buildings from the local area which were moved to the site in the 1970's, and a reconstruction of the original palisade wall which surrounded the town during the Revolutionary War. Joanna Craig became the director of the site in 1989 and has seen the site grow in popularity since her tenure began. Craig, Joanna. Interview with Gary Sellick. Private Interview. Camden, South Carolina, 09/18/2015.

cooperative at all. But we put some of them on the advisory council and let them take part in the goal setting and what not. By the end of it they were far more cooperative because they saw the potential of it for their economy.”⁴³ By the end of the year, most of the local opposition had been silenced and the Council could move ahead with their plans for the battlefield.

The emphasis on the ideas of “place” in preservation of battlefields was well established by 2001. It therefore became crucial for the Advisory Council to discover where in the maze of trees and underbrush the battle lines were drawn in 1780. This was particularly urgent if there was going to be any pitch to the NPS, who needed to know where the men fought and died if they were to manage and interpret the site. The battlefield preservation movement had also moved away from the traditional histories of rich, white men, the narrative that had driven the DAR interpretation since 1909. Instead, the placement of much greater emphasis on historical accuracy in battleground settings was the new vogue by the start of the 21st century.

At the same time that they were trying to win the hearts and minds of the locals, George Fields was using the PCF establishment in order to write grants for funding. One of the stipulations of the KVLTL preservation easement with Bowater was the creation of a long-term strategic plan for the battlefield. For Fields and the Battle of Camden Advisory Council, there was only one long-term goal that mattered, “we’re here, and so this is going to be a push for the Battle of Camden to become a national park.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015.

⁴⁴ Craig, Joanna. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/18/2015.

The new preservation plan was simple: find the battlefield and do the research privately in order to make the site as attractive as possible for the park service. “Yes, we thought up front that was the overall goal. It should be a national park. And we should get the kind of accuracy in our research that could back up any applications later for it to become a national park.”⁴⁵ In 2001, that wish became a reality when the PCF received its first grant of \$25,000 from the American Battlefield Protection Plan, a sub-division of the NPS. It was now time for the battlefield at Camden to be unearthed for the first time.

Unearthing a Battle: Archaeology at Camden Battlefield

The South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA) has its headquarters in an aging concrete-fronted building on the campus of the University of South Carolina in Columbia. In an upstairs office, with walls lined with military history books, Jim Legg works behind a cluttered desk. By 2001 Legg, a research assistant at the institute, was one of the few historians who was already embedded in the new move to preserve Camden battlefield. It was after all Legg’s recommendations to Lindsey Pettus that had led to the boundaries of the 2000 preservation easement for the site being drawn. George Fields, who knew of Legg’s previous experience with the battlefield, turned to the archaeologist to try and layout the area of the battlefield that the Advisory Council would aim to protect.

⁴⁵ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015.

Legg had worked at Camden battlefield before and led a new group to the site in order to gauge the likely location of the battle lines. Among the broken pines of a recently logged field, Legg and his team had mapped out the location for Pettus as best they could without doing any large-scale work. This was accomplished with the permission of Bowater and the KVLTL while the easement negotiations were still ongoing, from 1996-98.⁴⁶ Using a small team, and the knowledge of the battlefield that he had gained from doing previous academic research on the battle himself, Legg drew the boundaries of the easement within the much larger National Historic Landmark area (see Fig 2.1).

After looking at Legg's initial work from 1998, Fields then emailed Legg in 2001 asking what his recommendations for the battlefield would be. Legg's main recommendations were as follows:

- 1) A new topographical map of the site should be made of the entire easement area.
- 2) A metal-detector collection should take place over the entire easement area, based on a scaled up version of his 1998, week-long collection.
- 3) All the treasure hunters who had metal-detected on the site prior to the easement being granted should be interviewed.
- 4) The confirmation of unmarked burials from the battles should also be collected.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Legg, Jim. Interview with Gary Sellick. Private interview. Columbia, South Carolina, 09/21/2015. See also; Legg et al., *Understanding Camden*, 13-14.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 13-14; Jim Legg to George Fields. Email. January 8 2001.

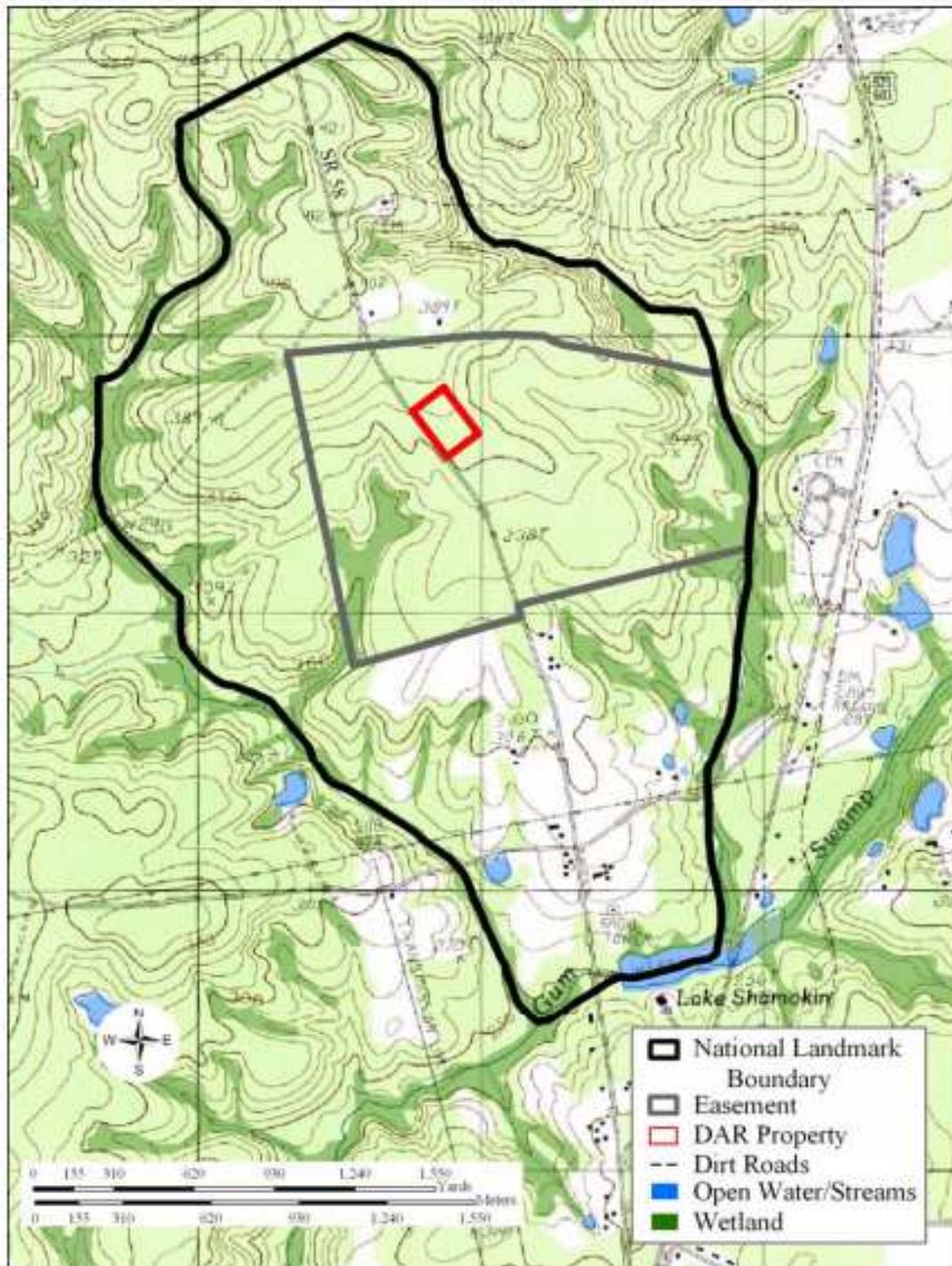


Figure 2.1) Map of easement boundary, DAR property boundary and National Historic Landmark Boundary at Camden battlefield. The easement was agreed by Bowater and the KVLTL based on research conducted by Jim Legg from 1996-98, within the larger National Landmark boundary. The De Kalb monument is located in the DAR property. Image courtesy of SCIAA.

Steve Smith has a much larger office in SCIAA than Jim Legg does. The office has the same miscellaneous items as Legg's, but is also regularly littered with the tools the archaeological trade, including a good number of metal detectors and GPS surveying equipment. As the head of the institute, Smith is responsible for all the projects that his archaeologists work on and so was well aware of Legg's work at Camden. Shortly after Legg had emailed his recommendations to Fields, the latter contacted Smith, at that time the head of the Applied Research Division of SCIAA, and asked him to submit a bid for the grant money the PCF had just received. Fields invited SCIAA archaeologists to bid for the chance of creating a strategic plan for the site. As Field's explained, "And that's when we put it out for bids, because when you deal with federal money that's what you need to do, but I wanted Steve Smith and Jim Legg to do it all along and they won the bid project."⁴⁸ With his academic archaeological team secured, George Fields now turned his attention to getting more grants for the project, while Legg and Smith began their work discovering the Camden battlefield.

After a second grant, again from the American Battlefields Protection Program, the archaeologists began their first in-depth study of the battlefield itself. The first process that the archaeologists undertook did not involve metal-detectors but notepads. In order to get a better sense of the battlefield, the two men decided to undertake Legg's third proposal first, and to interview the multitude of treasure hunters that had scavenged on Camden battlefield for decades. Smith explained the process of their interviews, "we

⁴⁸ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015. For the perspective of the SCIAA archaeologists on their connection to the project, see; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of Camden Battlefield*, 10-11.

were able to build trust with about 14 collectors, ranging all the way from 70's to the 2000's and interview them and collectively we were able to pinpoint, or at least have a general idea of where things (in the battle) were going to have happened."⁴⁹ This is not to say that all the information given to them was useful in mapping the action of the battle.

Keen to find an untouched piece of land on which to search, a small number of relic hunters in the 1980s searched a ridge that rises from the marshland to the northwest of the De Kalb monument. In a thick stand of trees, over half a mile from the rumoured site of the battle lines, they worked alone with their metal detectors. Against all odds, the relic hunters made a huge discovery of artefacts, including a large number of gun parts, uniform buttons and other Revolutionary War equipment. When Legg and Smith interviewed these relic hunters, they were faced with an anomaly. The three relic hunters who had searched this northern part of the battlefield had an entirely different narrative of the battle than the others that were interviewed. Nonetheless, Jim Legg states that they were able to explain away the inconsistency rather easily, "they were relative latecomers to the battlefield in terms of relic hunting and wandered into an area that nobody had ever really gotten into because it was off the battlefield essentially...you see I think its in the American rear and it hadn't been metal-detected badly."⁵⁰ In their 2005 report, *Understanding Camden*, Legg and Smith explained away the anomalous findings

⁴⁹ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. Private Interview. Columbia, South Carolina and Camden, South Carolina, 09/11/2015. For more information on the process of the SCIAA interviews with collectors regarding the battlefield, including their methods, see; Legg et al., *Understanding Camden*, 46-59.

⁵⁰ Legg, Jim. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/21/2015. For a more comprehensive explanation of the SCIAA archaeologist's explanations of the anomaly of the so-called "Northern Solution" to the site of the battle, see: Legg et al., *Understanding Camden*, 66-72.

of the three relic hunters and their distorted view of the battle as the “Northern Solution.” Overall, however, the process went smoothly and they gained a good idea of where to start the search for the battle lines from the collecting patterns of these relic hunters.

In archaeology planning a dig may be important, but actual fieldwork is the ultimate goal. Stuck in a stuffy office plotting the probable location of the Camden battle site, both Smith and Legg wished to be out among the pines finding the evidence that would support their theories. While they had conducted some sample fieldwork in 2004, the SCIAA archaeologists had yet to search the site in detail. However, by the time that the first archaeological report was nearing completion on the Camden battlefield, George Fields had secured a third grant from the Save America’s Treasures fund, which would actually allow Legg and Smith to conduct large-scale fieldwork at the site.⁵¹ It was the first time that Save America’s Treasures had ever sponsored an archaeology project, so Smith and Legg were determined to set a good example. Their eventual findings were published in a report titled *The Archaeology of Camden Battlefield* in 2009. In consultation with the SCIAA archaeologists working on the battlefield, Fields was able to narrow down the land that the PCF would want to actually purchase from Bowater. Since the start of the easement negotiations, it had been clear that the company had no real imperative to keep the land and so the Fields made his move.

⁵¹ While the third grant was the first to allow for large scale fieldwork by SCIAA at Camden, it was not the first time the organization had done metal detecting at the site. The first SCIAA related metal detecting at the site had occurred as early as 1998, when Legg investigated the battlefield on behalf of the KVLVT during the easement process. As well as this, both Smith and Legg had done some field work at the site in 2004 before the publication of *Understanding Camden* in 2005. For more on SCIAA’s fieldwork at Camden prior to 2005, see; Legg, “The Camden Battlefield, 1996-2010,” 8-9; Legg et al., *Understanding Camden*, 75-77.

At our interview at his suburban ranch house in Spartanburg, George Fields made clear how important the archaeology was to the first purchase in 2002, “when you start buying land you can’t afford to buy it all. You’ve got to set a priority on which land you buy first and which is your highly essential land, which is of course the core of the battlefield...that’s where you’ve got to do your research later in archaeology.”⁵² The original preservation easement land, a 310-acre site that represented most of the land that collectors had identified as the location of the original battle lines on the battlefield, was the first piece of land to be purchased by the PCF. The land included all of that which surrounded the DAR owned land on which the De Kalb monument stood. The money for the purchase came from an open mortgage. The South Carolina Conservation Fund eventually paid off the mortgage in 2007, five years after PCF formally took charge of the management of the site.⁵³ Now that the purchasing of land was complete and thus the core battlefield area saved from possible destruction, the archaeologists could get to work on surveying the site for interpretive purposes.

The metal detector is a relatively crude piece of equipment and is easy to use but difficult to master. It works by a sensor probe being swept over the ground, beeping whenever the user moves the probe over a metal object. The cheapest model can be

⁵² Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015. After the purchase of the original easement property, Fields used the archaeological findings of the SCIAA team in order to decide what other land to purchase. See; Legg, “The Camden Battlefield, 1996-2010,” 9.

⁵³ According to most people that I have spoken to about this initial land purchase, PCF agreed to become temporary custodians of the site until a new owner, most preferably the NPS, could be found. Today, almost 15 years since the purchase, PCF still manages the land. Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. 08/27/2015. See also; Legg, “The Camden Battlefield, 1996-2010,” 9.

purchased with a child's pocket money in a toy store, the most expensive runs into thousands of dollars. This device allowed Smith and Legg to conduct studies of the Camden battlefield between 2003 and 2007. The main problem that the SCIAA crew faced was that they were working over land that amateur metal detectorists had been picking over for the previous thirty years.⁵⁴ It is therefore a testament to the skill of the trained archaeologists at SCIAA that so many new artefacts were discovered during their third Camden project. In addition to metal detecting, the archaeological team also used GPS mapping devices in order to mark the location of their finds (see Fig 2.2).

When the crew first arrived, dressed in their work clothes and carrying a mixture of hi-tech equipment and gardening tools, the Camden battlefield represented a formidable obstacle to their mission. "The areas that are cut now looked like Cambodia." Legg explained, "And when we did finally go back out it was 2003, I guess, for the third project we had to use a mower to cut things down."⁵⁵ For long periods, it seemed that the battlefield itself controlled how it released its secrets, with the overgrown areas largely inaccessible to the archaeologists. The sporadic nature of the investigation is shown on the GPS map created by the team.

Often Smith and Legg would arrive on the battlefield to find whole areas of pine forest and undergrowth engulfed in flame. George Fields used mowing and controlled burns to tame the wilderness of Camden battlefield, and the clearing that resulted gave

⁵⁴ In fact, many relic hunters had actually considered the site "hunted out" in the years before the SCIAA fieldwork began. See; Legg et al., *Understanding Camden*, 74.

⁵⁵ Legg, Jim. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/21/2015. For more on the methods used by the SCIAA team to make the battlefield workable, see; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of the Camden Battlefield*, 49-50.

the archaeologists the perfect conditions to survey the land. Thus, where Fields mowed and burned, the archaeologists followed. In consequence, despite planning their investigation using the tried and tested method of pre-planning large rectangular dig spots the actual investigation did not follow this pattern in any real way. “What we ended up doing was largely reactive,” says Legg, “because George would burn something off and that is what we would cover.”⁵⁶ However, despite the haphazard method that the archaeologists were forced to employ, they were very happy with their results, which confirmed many of their original hypotheses in regards to where the battle was actually fought (See Fig 2.3).⁵⁷

Rooting through the ashes and smouldering earth, the archaeologists were able to make some outstanding finds. As well as their success in finally marking the battle lines that existed throughout the battle, the archaeology was able to unearth over a thousand pieces of Revolutionary War era material that had been buried for over two centuries. This was quite surprising considering the many years of amateur collection that took place at the site before the modern preservation effort began. When asked what the teams they led at the site had found, Steve Smith listed, “primarily lead shot from British Short Land Pattern muskets, musket balls and buckshot from French Charleville muskets. Very,

⁵⁶ Legg, Jim. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/21/2015.

⁵⁷ Legg, “The Camden Battlefield, 1996-2010,” 9.

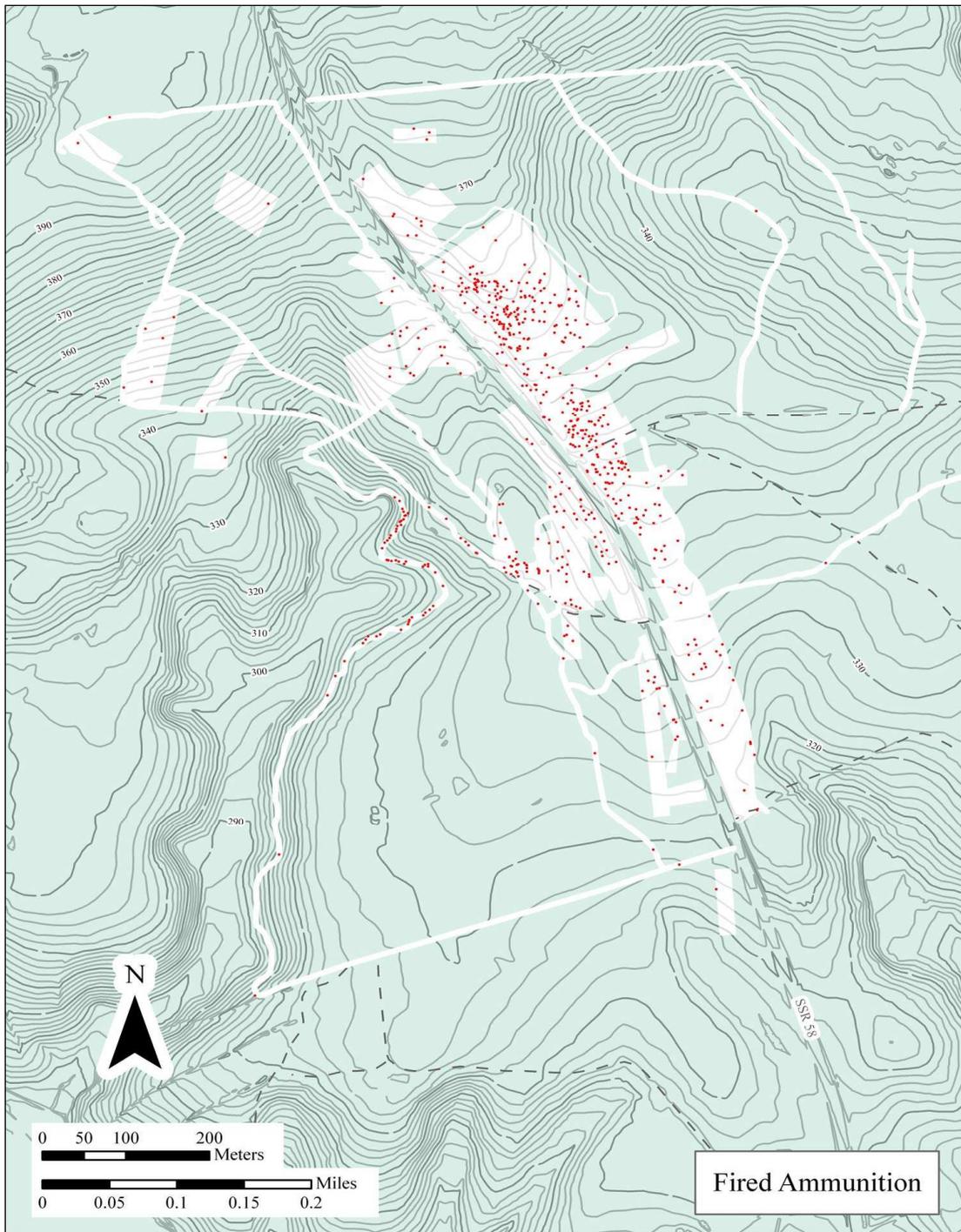


Figure 2.2) GPS topographical map recording location of artefacts found by SCIAA at Camden Battlefield. The red dots show the position of artefacts found during the dig – the greatest concentration are in the cleared area surrounding the present location of the De Kalb monument. This was the area where some of the final actions of the battle took place. Map courtesy of SCIAA.

very little rifle shot out there. A few buttons. The occasional buckles, and horseshoes.”⁵⁸ Most of these items were given to the Camden History Museum where they are currently preserved, and some are on display in the institution.

Things did not always go smoothly during the dig. Legg and Smith were filled with horror when they arrived early one summer’s morning in 2004 to find the sun rising on a huge manmade berm running along the highway opposite the De Kalb monument. The mound was constructed from earth that had yet to be surveyed by the team, its artefacts lost forever due to a miscommunication. George Fields had wanted to clear the area for visitors. Unfortunately, he did so without checking first with the archaeologists. By doing this, Fields inadvertently created a human-built oddity (a 200-foot long push pile) right in the center of the battlefield which remains a feature of the site to this day.

Overall, however, the archaeological investigation of the battlefield had been successful. The team was able to achieve 100% coverage of 36.7 acres of the core battlefield and to achieve smaller levels of coverage throughout the site.⁵⁹ In doing so, they had mapped out for the first time the likely positions of both armies throughout the battle, providing a crucial tool for interpretation. This discovery was perhaps the biggest

⁵⁸ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015. Overall, the SCIAA dig found 1165 new artefacts on the Camden battlefield, most being fired and unfired ammunition. See; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of Camden Battlefield*, 84.

⁵⁹ Jim Legg, “The Camden Battlefield.” 9. For more information on the total area covered by the SCIAA team, see; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of the Camden Battlefield*, 50-51.

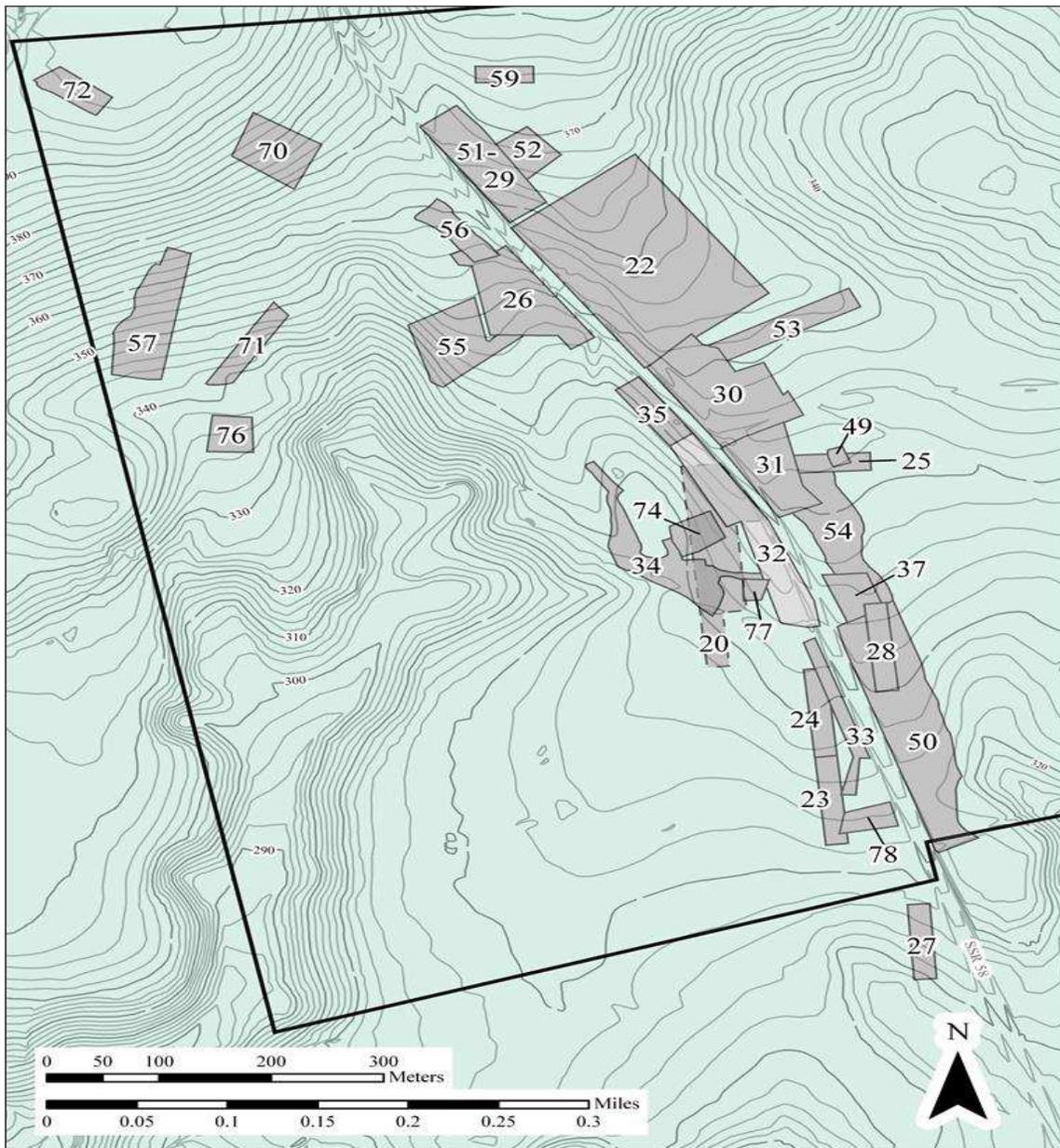


Figure 2.3) Topographical map indicating SCIAA dig locations at Camden Battlefield. Each grey box received 100% coverage by metal detector from the archaeological crew. Box 20 was the area covered by Jim Legg in his first study for George Fields in 1998. The black lines mark the edge of the battlefield property. Map courtesy of SCIAA.

split between the first and second phases of battlefield preservation efforts at Camden in the 20th century, bridging the gap between local enthusiasts and academic scholars, as well as folklore and science in a way that earlier efforts had simply failed to do.



Figure 2.4) Photograph of Jim Legg during SCIAA fieldwork at Camden Battlefield. Note the recently cleared pineland behind him. Photo courtesy of SCIAA.

Reinterpreting the interpretation at Camden Battlefield

By the time that the third archaeological report was published, 479.2 acres of battlefield property belonged to the PCF. The land included the core battlefield area,

where most of the fighting had occurred, and De Kalb Park, which the DAR gifted to the group. However, the site was still largely inaccessible to the public; no interpretive markers existed and undergrowth covered the majority of the battlefield as no walking trails were in existence. Due to the previous experience of the PCF in the creation of walking trails, it was no surprise that the addition of this feature to the battlefield was high on their priority list.

With a fair idea of the battlefield narrative and with much of the site under PCF ownership, Fields moved quickly to interpret the site. He personally approached a Charlotte-based graphics design company to create the signage, based on text that would be written by historians familiar with the battle.⁶⁰ From the very start, the decisions regarding the signage were contentious. At many battlefields, including National Park sites, signage around battlefields in recent years has been intrinsically connected to “place”. These signs inform visitors of the history of specific spots on the battlefield and their importance for the wider battle. At Camden, the advisory council decided against this approach, providing signage that explained the narrative of the battle and the context of the action, but failed to specify the importance of specific sites. When Steve Smith was emailed the first conceptual designs for the signage, he was disappointed, “I don’t think you’re gonna get a sense of the battle unfolding from the signs...as I think you’ll see, it’s not like ‘on this spot, this happened.’”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick, 10/19/2015. See also; Legg, “The Camden Battlefield: 1998-2010,” 9; National Park Service, *Battle of Camden and Historic Camden: Special Resource Study* (US Department of the Interior, September 2015), 42.

⁶¹ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015.

Smith was not the only person to be frustrated by the design of the signs. His colleague, Jim Legg, wrote a sign-by-sign breakdown of his grievances in an email that he sent to the designers. In a lengthy endnote Legg explained, “All 11 could be placed side by side at the De Kalb monument, as they do not relate to any particular locations on the site...On a basic level, visitors need orientation.”⁶² Legg was even more critical of some of the images of soldiers that looked to him very cartoonish. While some of the changes suggested by Legg were incorporated, such as the replacement of the cartoon soldiers and the addition of some site specific information, many of the signs still did not represent the sense of ‘place’ that many in the project wanted (See Fig 2.5).

George Fields was less angry at the signs than their placement on the battlefield. Nearing the end of a walk around the new, neatly trimmed path shortly before the official unveiling of the signs, Fields was horrified to find one of the signs in the wrong location. He laments that, “I’m happy with all of them but one. I think it’s in the wrong place. It’s the one right behind the monuments which interprets the second stage of the battlefield...It’s pointed the wrong way.”⁶³ However, George Fields was beginning to step back from the Camden project by 2009, the year of the installation of the signs and did little to rectify the mistake. Despite the flaws for specialists, what the signs achieve is to give the casual visitor an excellent overview of what occurred at the site and why, something that had been totally missing at the site before 2009.

⁶² Jim Legg, comments on draft signage at Camden Battlefield, Email, 02/06/2009.

⁶³ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015.

Meet the American Army of 1780



The Americans who fought the Revolutionary War reflected Colonial society: an array of backgrounds, ages and skill. Professional soldiers mixed with non-military tradesmen, idealistic Europeans shared battlefields with illiterate farmers, Native Americans, slaves and freedmen.

Citizen soldiers formed the militia, serving for a short period when the fighting came to their area.

They lacked training and discipline as well as uniforms. State Troops enlisted for longer terms and received more training than the militia.

SC Militia Officer



Continental Infantryman

Members of the Continental Army, simply called "Continental," each received a musket, bayonet and ammunition.

Organized in standard military hierarchy, they trained and were paid, though not as regularly as hoped.



The infantry were the foot soldiers who carried single shot, muzzle loading muskets.

They maneuvered in close ranks, fired their muskets in short range volleys, and then charged with bayonets.



Charge and Countercharge



Cornwallis ordered Rawdon to advance on his left. Through heavy fire, they drove back the 2nd and Maryland Brigade until de Kalb succeeded in halting the British attack and leading a counterattack.

De Kalb refused to surrender his sword except to an officer. A skirmish ensued resulting in his being fired on and bayoneted. Three days later, de Kalb died a prisoner of war and is buried on the grounds of Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Camden.



For almost an hour, a bitter struggle raged with neither side able to gain the advantage.

Cornwallis brought up his reserve, the 7th Regiment, but the Continentals held until their center gave way.

The entire British army then assailed the Americans from front, flank, and rear, forcing surviving patriots to escape as best they could.

The death of De Kalb

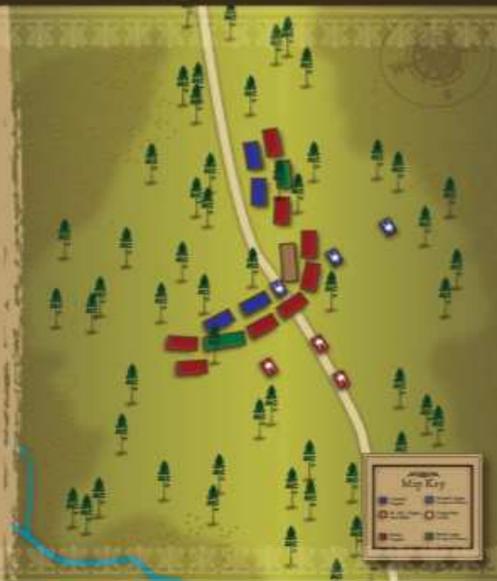


Figure 2.5) Drafts of wayside markers created for the Palmetto Conservation Foundation. Note the cartoon-like depictions of soldiers. This image was revised. The second sign was placed on the battlefield. Note how either are site specific and how both look like National Park equivalents. Photos courtesy of Jim Legg.

Perhaps the most frustrating failure of the signage at Camden is that the interpretation does very little to work on the physical evidence that the second phase of the preservation project had discovered on the battlefield. In particular, the original draft of the signage did not incorporate any of the archaeological at the site.⁶⁴ While the final drafts corrected some of this, the failure to utilise the findings made by Smith and Legg during their extensive projects excellent new archaeological evidence shows the communication problems which had begun to set in to the Camden battlefield preservation project by the final years of the decade.

It was no coincidence that the signs (and brochures) created by the PCF for the battlefield bear a striking resemblance to those of the NPS (see Fig 2.6). The Advisory Council specifically used the traditional color scheme of the NPS in order to appeal to the Park Service. The signage at the battlefield also connects the site to the rest of the Revolutionary War sites in Camden, including Joanna Craig's Historic Camden site, and the Battlefield of Hobkirk's Hill.⁶⁵ A large map, with all three sites on it, was produced – the plan being that Historic Camden or the visitor center in town would give out a map and encourage visitors to see all three sites, increasing foot traffic at all three. It was hoped that by connecting the battle to the rest of the town, the negative result of the

⁶⁴ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015.

⁶⁵ The Hobkirk's Hill battlefield no longer exists as an extant site due to the urban growth of Camden, which has completely covered it. The plan for the site was that interpretive markers could be placed along roads in order to show the strategic points of the battle. This was supported by some metal detecting performed by a small group, including Charles Baxley, which showed the site of the battle. Also, Historic Camden had been evaluated to become a National Park in its own right in the 1970s but had been rejected. It was thought a larger application, including all three sites may be more successful.

battle itself would be lessened and be seen as part of a more successful independence narrative. The Patriot success at Hobkirks Hill and the historic town of Camden would distract from the defeat. This would winter's breeze, giving the new interpretive signs further historical legitimacy. That day in November, a group of enthusiasts and supporters of the Camden battlefield project gathered by the new interpretive kiosk that had been erected by the De Kalb monument as the newly interpreted battlefield was unveiled for the first time. The interpretive idea of the trails was to follow a sort of chronological order of the battle, beginning with the night skirmish and ending with the wounding of De Kalb, where both trails ended. By being vague, and not site specific, the signs were able to interpret the battlefield as a whole but not any single site in particular. However, for the first time public visitors now had full access to the battlefield and an interpretation that was based on historical fact rather than folklore.

George Fields had not been entirely happy with the appearance of the pine forest at Camden from the very outset of the project. Looking around at the rows of newly planted, fast-growing loblolly pine, a completely different species from that which existed in 1780, he decided that the site could never be historically accurate while they remained on the battlefield.⁶⁶ Fields therefore decided to embark on a time consuming mission to replant historically accurate long-leaf pine in any areas of the battlefield that he could.

⁶⁶ Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. 08/27/2015. See also; Smith et al., *The Archaeology of the Camden Battlefield*, 10-11; National Park Service, *Special Resource Study*, 42.

The Battle of Camden Hiking Trail

Further Reading

Richard Hann, *The Battle of Camden: The British and the American Revolution in the South*, see the book listed below.

Robert D. Ham, *My Way: The Struggle for the South* (Camden Trail Co., 2007).

John Buchanan, *The Road to Shiloh* (Chickamauga: The American Revolution at the Center, 1997).

William R. Inge, *The Battle of Camden: The Southern Conflict that Turned the Tide of the American Revolution* (Meyers, 2002).

Thomas J. Curran and Brian M. Kennedy, *History Comes Alive: Camden and South Carolina* (1980) (The College of William and Mary).

Robert R. Lyman, *South Carolina in the American Revolution* (University of South Carolina Press, 1972).

H. L. Lovell, *The Battle of Camden* (South Carolina, 1972).

John R. Lynch, *The American Revolution: The Battle of Camden* (University of Alabama Press, 1976).

Jim Powell, *The Battle of Camden: A Documentary History* (University Press, 2002).

Jim Powell, *Four Steps, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South* (University of South Carolina Press, 2002).

Jim Powell and Mark H. Stebbins, *“Let William Carry” His Eager Heart in the American Revolution* (National & American Publishing, 2004).

Seven Smith, James Legg, and Tamara Wilson, *The Challenge of the Great Swampy: History, Travel, Culture, and Self-Discovery*.

Information is also available online at www.southcarolinahistory.org.

The Battle of Camden

The battle fought on this site on August 16, 1780, was one of the largest and most important battles of the Revolutionary War. More than 4,000 American soldiers faced 1,200 British and Loyalist troops in an hour-long struggle during which nearly one-fourth of the participants were killed, wounded, or captured.

To download and listen to a podcast that discusses key events of the battle, go to www.palmettoconservation.org.

Begin your walking tour at the book, where you will find information on the battle and leaders. From here, continue your walking tour along the old led of the Great Wagon Road, the route that brought the armies to battle that fateful August. As you proceed, you will learn about the American army at Camden, the British army, and the night battle that resulted when the two armies encountered each other on the road.

The next phase of your tour traces the fighting east of the Great Wagon Road. You will explore the ground where the Americans made their opening attack and were met by a British counter-attack. You can see where the American soldiers fell from the charging British, sweeping General

Horatio Gates and other officers along with them on their rush for safety. The next signs describe the efforts of the Continental soldiers to repair their line and the British attack that finally overwhelmed them.

The trail will take you back to the book, and you will cross Flat Rock Road to tour the rest of the battlefield.

On the west side of the road, you will see where Baron De Kalb led his Maryland and Delaware Continentals in a series of attacks that nearly defeated Lord Rawden's Loyalist troops. Moving further along the trail, you will learn how the British nearly encircled and finally drove off the Americans who made a last stand near here. The final sign describes how the British cavalry pursued the defeated Americans more than twenty miles from the field of battle.

The Battle of Camden ended in a costly American defeat, and coming just three months after the British capture of Charleston, seemed to cement British control of South Carolina and Georgia. However, determined American patriots continued to resist, and they applied the lessons learned here to recover and eventually triumph in the long and decisive Southern Campaign.

Learn more at www.battleofcamden.org and www.palmettoconservation.org.

The Camden District Revolutionary War Trails

Historic Camden

Welcome to Historic Camden and Camden's Revolutionary War Battlefields.

Camden was at the center of some of the hardest fighting between the Americans and British in the struggle for independence.

Your tour begins at Historic Camden Revolutionary War Site, where the original town was located. After its occupation by the British in 1780, Camden became their most important base in the South Carolina interior and was the intended starting point for the British invasion of North Carolina.

Because of Camden's strategic importance, American forces tried twice to regain control of the town. These efforts resulted in two of the Revolution's most important battles, the Battle of Camden in August 1780 and the Battle of Hobbes Hill in April 1781.

- Ca - A. Welcome to Historic Camden
- B. American Commanders
- C. British Commanders
- Ca - Historic Camden Site Map
- Cb - The Southern Campaigns Camden Strategic Key
- Cc - Whom in the Revolution
- Cd - Native Americans
- Ce - The Fortified Post
- Cf - War in the Backcountry
- Cg - Joseph Kershaw
- Ch - Prisoners of War
- Ch - Loyalists
- Ch - African Americans Choose Sides
- Ch - Citizen Soldiers
- Ch - British Evacuation
- Ch - Maj. Gen. Baron Johann de Kalb's Original Gravesite
- Ch - Col. Joseph Kershaw's Tomb
- Ch - Old Camden Courthouse and Gad

When the American Revolution began, Camden was the most important town in the South Carolina interior. The book next to the parking lot... provides information about Historic Camden Revolutionary War Site and the famous American and British commanders associated with the town. Be sure to visit the Historic Camden Exchange and gift shop for guided tours and additional information.

Your exploration of Historic Camden continues at the book... describing the Southern Campaign, the most crucial phase of the Revolution that almost ended in a British victory. Here you will learn why Camden was such a crucial strategic location in that struggle. A 10-minute animated film at the only Camden and the Revolutionary War park can be viewed in the "Dig Time" building. The "Dig Time" and "Dig Time" houses contain exhibits and nearby signs describe the roles of women and the Camden before... in the Revolution. Signs... explain the extensive fortifications that the British built to protect Camden from American attack.

As you continue to location... you will learn about the fighting in the backcountry around Camden. You can also see a partial reconstruction of the Northeast Redoubt, part of the British fortifications. The reconstructed Kershaw-Carruthers house was originally the home of Camden's principal founder, Joseph Kershaw... During the British occupation it served as the headquarters of Lord Cornwallis and Lord Rawden. The reconstructed Southeast Redoubt is due to the house.

Signs tell the story of the British and Loyalist soldiers, African-American soldiers who fought in and around Camden... the prisoners who held at Camden... South Carolina African Americans who participated in the Revolutionary War by joining the British... and the loyal Loyalists who supported King George III.

The foundation of the town's powder magazine, built by Joseph Kershaw to store military supplies for the state, was founded during the Revolution in a defense against Loyalist attack. The British later enlarged the facility. As you conclude your tour of Historic Camden, signs... explain the British occupation of Camden in May 1780.

What you learn in Historic Camden, turn right on Broad Street and left on Bull Street (the next street), where you will find the Kershaw family gravesite... Continue west on Bull Street and turn left onto Campbell Street. The old Quaker Cemetery (c. 1750) will be on your right. Turn left on Millington Street to visit the Revolutionary War Memorial, which honors Patriots from Kershaw County as well as Delaware and Maryland. On the opposite side of the street is the original head site of the hero general, Baron Johann de Kalb... Continue your tour by turning left on Broad Street. At the corner of King Street, you can view the location of the original Camden courthouse, now occupied by the Robert Mills Courthouse, built in 1818. Camden's original jail was located across the street.

Continue north on Broad Street to visit and tour right on DeKalb Street to see the grave of Baron de Kalb. Then return to Broad Street and turn right to begin the Battle of Hobbes Hill tour.

Figure 2.6) Tourist map of the Camden battlefield created by the Palmetto Conservation Foundation. Note the design, meant to replicate similar brochures produced by the NPS. Courtesy of Palmetto Conservation Foundation.

The decision to return the battlefield to its original 1780 condition was not one unique to Camden. In the 1990s, Gettysburg famously began a similar project in the hope of reinterpreting historic vistas for the benefits of its visitors.⁶⁷ Even if the project at Camden worked, Fields knew that it would take decades for the battlefield to reach a 1780 appearance. For those on the project, Field's decision was met with enthusiasm, "Yeah, I like it." remarked Steve Smith, "I think it would be really cool if we could get those pines to grow because you could interpret the battlefield so much easier."⁶⁸ The problem was a lack of funds assigned to the project. As a result, some areas were planted but the majority of the battlefield is unchanged in regards to its appearance. Again, it was the financial restrictions on the preservationists that inhibited the fruition of their well-intentioned plans at Camden.

Just as the preservation project at Camden was reaching its zenith, a disaster was gripping the United States that threatened to derail any future developments at the site. As the battlefield trails were opening at Camden, the US was in the midst of its greatest recession since the Great Depression. The recession halted all momentum that the Battle of Camden Advisory council had built up over the previous decade. Grants were no longer available and enthusiasm for the project waned as the amateur preservationists that made up the core of the committee turned their attention to their own financial affairs. No new preservation or interpretation has occurred at the site since that November day

⁶⁷ Murray, "On a Great Battlefield," 14

⁶⁸ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015. The replanting of the long leaf pine, commenced by Fields, was commended by the NPS in their special resource study on the battlefield, see; NPS, *Special Resource Study*, 42.

in 2009, yet many of the committee still feel there is more to do at the site. Most echo Charles Baxley's sentiments that "Those signs are a lightyear away from where (the battlefield) was before they went there but they are not adequate to do the finished job."

⁶⁹ The only question is when will the time come to finish the job?

The Political Battle for Camden Battlefield

During the second phase of preservation and interpretation at the battlefield, the Battle of Camden Advisory council had been sure to cultivate strong relationships with state politicians who could promote their cause. The advisory council recognised the value of having wider government assistance at both the state and federal level. George Fields had successfully manoeuvred between state and federal funding in order to gain over \$2 million for the preservation efforts at the battlefield. As a result, by 2008, the advisory council had strong supporters in the form of Senator Lindsey Graham, Congressman John Spratt, and their local South Carolina Senator Vincent Sheheen.⁷⁰

The NPS had always avoided a close association the Camden battlefield. The organization ran numerous other Revolutionary era sites around South Carolina, most of them the site of American victories. Thus, they had little time or money to consider using on Camden. It was therefore always going to be an uphill battle trying to get the Camden site incorporated into the NPS system. Any hope that the Advisory Council and PCF had

⁶⁹ Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. 08/27/2015.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

for Federal recognition of Camden battlefield lay with a long-time Democratic Congressman named John Spratt. Spratt, a Vietnam War veteran, was the Congressman from the Camden district and had long been a firm supporter of the battlefield project. He was also an influential powerbroker in Washington DC, as he was the speaker of the House Budget Committee. Spratt arranged for Fields and Craig to speak before the Budget Committee on the hopes of getting a new NPS special resource study done on the Camden site.

On the day of the hearing, Fields and Craig sat nervously in front of a committee of men who held the future of their project in their hands. John Spratt was late. As the minutes ticked by towards the moment the hearing would start, Craig began to worry that their powerful ally had reconsidered, or was at least less enthusiastic of the project than he had earlier let on. Suddenly, with only a minute left before the hearing began, Spratt strode into the meeting room and, without the aid of notes, launched into a speech supporting the new study. Of Spratt's performance on the day, Craig praised her Congressman, "he goes through and opens his mouth and does this incredible presentation on the whole thing."⁷¹ The result of the meeting was approval for a new special resource study for the site. The Camden battlefield looked well on its way to achieving National Park status.

The NPS special resource study went badly from the start. Beginning in 2010, the Park Service began its special resource study at the Camden battlefield and its fellow

⁷¹ Craig, Joanna. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/18/2015. For the legislation that pushed the NPS to conduct the study, see; NPS, *Special Resource Study*, 1, 55.

Revolutionary sites around the town. Despite the fact that a scholarly archaeological group had already completed a thorough investigation of the Camden battlefield only a few years prior, the National Park Service insisted on conducting its own research at the site. “Yeah, they just kinda ignored (our reports) and said ‘we’re gonna do our own study.’ And they brought in archaeologists from Colorado.” explained Steve Smith.⁷² The archaeologists from the original project, who wanted desperately to help the Park Service and explain their findings, were almost totally ignored. As were the American Battlefield Protection Program, the actual branch of the NPS that had helped fund some of SCIAA’s work at the site. The only real communication that the original team had with the Park Service was when they were initially told about the special resource study. While they did sit in on some meetings, they rarely spoke. “That’s the curious thing about this whole process,” Jim Legg opined, “on the one hand we’ve been involved all along, but on the other hand we’ve been roundly ignored...the Park Service didn’t use us. We’re not well liked!”⁷³

The lack of communication between the Park Service and the advisory council was also a sour point for many members of the latter organisation. Initially, there was great communication between the two bodies, the Park Service even flew select members of the committee to Denver to discuss the Camden proposal with them. There was also a

⁷² Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015. It is also worth noting that SCIAA is only mentioned once in the entire NPS study, and that for their 2005 report *Understanding Camden*. Their later 2009 report, which features all of their major archaeological findings on the Camden battlefield is not mentioned and was presumably ignored by the NPS. For the single mention of SCIAA in the NPS report, see; NPS, *Special Resource Study*, 57.

⁷³ Legg, Jim. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/21/2015.

town hall meeting where the Park Service explained the process of the study, which took place in Camden in 2011. Then the communication broke down almost entirely. Plans were made for the resource study to be made public in 2013, but the publication was delayed by two years, until Fall 2015.

The lack of communication from the NPS from the completion of the special resource study had serious repercussions within the Battle of Camden Advisory Board. The seeming lack of National Park Service interest caused the impetus of the group to slow and communication between the various interests in the organisation has suffered as a result. Joanna Craig lamented, “We have to get together and meet because it’s getting to that point again where it’s like, ‘if it happens, it happens.’ That’s not how you make things happen.”⁷⁴ This slow decent into complacency, as they awaited the next move by the National Park Service, had a stagnating effect on the preservation and interpretation movement at the battlefield.

While some considered the delay in the Park Service publishing the resource study as something sinister, there is one major reason that likely explains the long interval: money. Just as the Battle of Camden Advisory council found that the recession hit their own funding for the preservation project at the battlefield, the National Park Service had also been under severe financial pressure during this period. George Fields, who knows first-hand the impact of the recession on the Camden project, sympathises with the Park Service, “with the NPS suffering on their appropriation, they don’t want any new parks.

⁷⁴ Craig, Joanna. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/18/2015.

They've got reasons to turn it down."⁷⁵ It is hard not to feel sympathy for the National Park Service, in 2014 alone, the organisation lost over \$11 billion in federal funding, forcing it to cut back on much needed maintenance to many of its parks.⁷⁶ In such a climate, it is understandable that a special resource study on a park that they did not have the funds to support would take so long to complete. This underlines again the unfortunate impact that the recession had on the Camden project and highlights again the unhappy history that the site has had in relation to national economic downturns.

The delay in the publishing of the Park Service study was the not the only misfortune to be caused to the Camden project by the recession. As America fell into the worst economic misfortune it had experienced since World War 2, the people of Camden began looking to political extremes in order to find answers. The 2010 midterm elections robbed the advisory council of their most vocal advocate in the federal government. John Spratt was defeated in an election by a local Tea Party candidate, Mick Mulvaney. Charles Baxley described the change, "(Spratt) was replaced by a Republican whose focus is the national debt and the huge, huge deficit spending problem...if you ask (Mulvaney) probably he would be forced to say he couldn't support anything."⁷⁷ Losing a key political ally at the same moment that the National Park Service started to receive substantial budgetary cuts was crushing for the Camden project, and shows another way in which the recession negatively affected the battlefield.

⁷⁵ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015.

⁷⁶ Josh Hicks, "National Park service delayed \$11 billion in Last Year Because of Budget Challenges," *The Washington Post*. March 25 2015.

⁷⁷ Baxley, Charles. Interview with Gary Sellick. 08/27/2015.

Overall, the Camden project was a political catch 22, it needed political support to succeed, but in the end, it was politics that brought the project to a halt. Some would say that the project has just been very unlucky, every time in its history when substantial impetus towards preservation and interpretation of the site has taken place, substantial financial crises have brought them to a halt. Political alliances brought the project the closest it has ever come to National Park status but these may be regarded as fruitless endeavors if no sustainable future plan for the site is designed. In terms of the Battle of Camden Advisory council, the group has done as much as it can to create a National Park at Camden, and the fate of the battlefield has been in flux ever since the publication of the Special Resource Study in 2015.

Conclusion: The Future of Camden Battlefield

Preservation is a game of momentum; success builds from success, but when that momentum slows, a project can become stagnant. That was the situation with the preservation efforts at Camden battlefield by the Fall of 2015, when the National Park Service finally published their special resource study on the Camden sites. Unfortunately, it did not contain good news. While the Park Service did consider that the battlefield was both historically relevant and suitable for inclusion as a National Park, they found that it is economically unfeasible to do so currently.⁷⁸ The majority of the remarks made on the battlefield itself, including in the feasibility study, were positive. The one negative point was the location of SC 58, the highway that bisects the battlefield.⁷⁹ That being said, it was the financial cost of the site's potential conversion to a National Park that proved the fatal blow to the project rather than any roadway.

Ironically, in the same month as the publication of the report but before he had read it, Steve Smith correctly identified this issue and the response of the Park Service, "(the NPS) will come to the conclusion that they can't make it into a National Park because there's a road through the middle of (the battlefield)."⁸⁰ Smith was half right, but the real issue that the Park Service stated was the potential annual cost of running the sites, which

⁷⁸ National Park Service, *Special Resource Study*, 2-3.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 43.

⁸⁰ Smith, Steve. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/11/2015.

it estimated to be \$600,000 - \$800,000.⁸¹ Perhaps in a better economy this price tag would not have been an issue, but since the recession it simply made the site unattainable. As an added insult to Smith, Legg, and the archaeologists from SCIAA, the NPS had completely ignored their studies in order to advance their own inaccurate view of the battle, largely based on the Northern Solution that the *Understanding Camden* report had so thoroughly dismissed.

In recent months, the upkeep of the battlefield has also begun to falter. Since the retirement of George Fields, the PCF has spent less time working on the Camden battlefield. PCF are not entirely to blame for this, after all, they signed onto the project as temporary custodians of the site before it was to be passed on to another, long-term owner.⁸² Because of the latest NPS rejection, the organisation look to be stuck holding onto the site for the near future. With less funds coming in then before the recession hit, their upkeep of the battlefield, in particular the vegetation and the trails, has suffered. George Fields visited the site in 2015 for the 235th anniversary of the battle, what he saw shocked him, "I was ashamed. About how the trails look, they let the weeds grow, and I was just utterly ashamed."⁸³ There now is a fear among those in the Battle of Camden Advisory Council that such neglect could become commonplace, and there is a real fear for the future of the site that they had struggled for so long to preserve and interpret.

⁸¹ NPS, *Special Resource Study*, 45.

⁸² Craig, Joanna. Interview with Gary Sellick. 09/18/2015.

⁸³ Fields, George. Interview with Gary Sellick. 10/19/2015.

A theme that has run through this essay is the need for finance in the preservation of battlefields. In 1930, the DAR gained full rights to buy the battlefield but failed due to the onset of the Great Depression. The access to Federal funding, as well as grassroots money, allowed George Fields and the Camden Advisory Council to purchase the battlefield and interpret it thoroughly. Yet, with the coming of the Recession of 2008, the entire movement stagnated and shows little sign of resuming its once rigorous progress. It was also the Recession that affected NPS funding, at least contributing to their refusal to take the Camden battlefield into their system.

Furthermore, the changing interpretations of the battlefield have been on display throughout this essay. The battlefield was long ignored due to its negative perception as an American military disaster in the national narrative of its birth. The DAR were the first to challenge this interpretation by focusing on the figure of Baron De Kalb and using him to turn the battlefield into a site of heroic defeat. The second phase of interpretation focused on the idea of historical accuracy. Historical accuracy was, and is still, a prized commodity in battlefield preservation and so the members of the advisory council worked hard to ensure their interpretation was as historically accurate as possible. The use of archaeology, and later interpretive trails and signage, meant that the battlefield preservation effort followed a model that applies to most preserved battlefields presently. This makes the battlefield more user friendly to the public, and so justifies the large economic expenditure of the group.

This essay has shown how powerful grassroots activists can be in Public History given the right conditions. The DAR worked for over half a century without any formal

outside financial assistance and made the first concerted effort to interpret and preserve the battlefield at Camden. This group worked on the project passionately and believed, unlike the NPS, that all of American history should be celebrated, not just the successes. The early success of the DAR was built upon and expanded in the second phase of preservation due to the access to outside funding that the Battle of Camden Advisory Council and the PCF was able to obtain. The dedication of all of the individuals involved in both organisations deserve a huge amount of credit for advancing the preservation effort to a stage where the battlefield is now interpreted and open to the general public. The success of the project thus far has been due to the dedication of the core group of local players, and perhaps rather than looking to national agencies this is where the future of the battlefield lies. Since the NPS report, the Advisory Council has been in talks with South Carolina State Parks to change the management of the site. Only time will tell if such a move can be successful.

The Camden battlefield has come a long way since the DAR first began attempts to memorialise the battle in 1909. The story of its preservation is the story of the hard work and dedication of thousands of people from the local Camden area, and beyond. Despite the many setbacks that have been detailed in this study, the movement has been successful in its ultimate goal: The battlefield has been protected and interpreted so that the public may enjoy it. This should be the underlined take away from this study as, despite many setbacks, a group of local actors managed to save a battlefield that had largely been forgotten or ignored in American national memory. Their example is one to

be followed, if improved upon in parts. Whatever the future of the battlefield may hold, one resounding point is clear, at least the battlefield at Camden now has a future.

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