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Washington and Rochambeau in Connecticut: Plotting Yorktown

“They wanted me to be another Washington.”
Napoleon while imprisoned at Elba

Start/Finish: Wethersfield, Connecticut by the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum

Distance: 22.4 miles

Terrain: City biking and dirt roads requiring a mountain bike

Difficulty: Moderate

The Webb House in Wethersfield looks modest enough with its two-story colonial styled exterior, bare wooden floors and charming garden out back, but few places in Connecticut hold so much historical weight. It was here that General George Washington and his French counterpart, Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, the Count of Rochambeau, to plan the campaign that eventually led to the victorious attack on Yorktown, Virginia, which destroyed the British chances of winning the war. They chose this spot because it was halfway between their two encampments. Rochambeau stayed at the Stillman Tavern and Washington attended services at the Meeting House on the corner of Main and State Streets.

It's easy to embrace the politically correct version of what transpired—two countries and two generals meet, plot out a perfect plan and bring down the British, but actually it was a long, messy road to that rendezvous in Wethersfield. Less than a year earlier General Washington faced one of the lowest (if not *the* lowest) point of his command. The Continental Army was underpaid, underfed, and under clothed, to the point that men had started to mutiny in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and elsewhere. Washington himself hesitated to meet with Rochambeau, who first arrived to America in March, 1780, because he felt the Patriot army had so little to offer and would look dismal standing next to the better provisioned French soldiers. The situation sunk so low at one point that Washington did not want to take on new recruits simply because he lacked the bread to feed them. His own horse began to starve.

And the first meeting between Washington and Rochambeau, which took place months earlier in September 1780 at the grounds of the Old State House in Hartford, hadn't exactly gone well. The French General, a 37-year veteran of European wars, did find the American troops in a pathetic state and questioned their readiness and the savvy of their commander. Even though Washington had some heavy hitters in his retinue that day—Lafayette, Knox, Hamilton—they could not hide the fact they desperately needed cash, men and supplies. By most accounts Rochambeau's staff took to Washington and found him “handsome and majestic,” but Rochambeau himself made it clear that they

were not ready to launch a major offensive against the British and all he could do was put in a request for the material support.

General Washington left Hartford demoralized, though the cheers of the locals boosted his spirits enough that he even remarked on it in his letters. “Behold an army they [the British] can never conquer,” he said, referring to the citizenry that had come out to celebrate him as he passed through the state. But at this point he knew that many of his men’s enlistments would be up in January and the total extent of the French support remained unclear. He resolved to visit Benedict Arnold at West Point on his way back to his encampment in New York, perhaps thinking that connecting with one of his most accomplished and trusted field commanders would boost his morale.



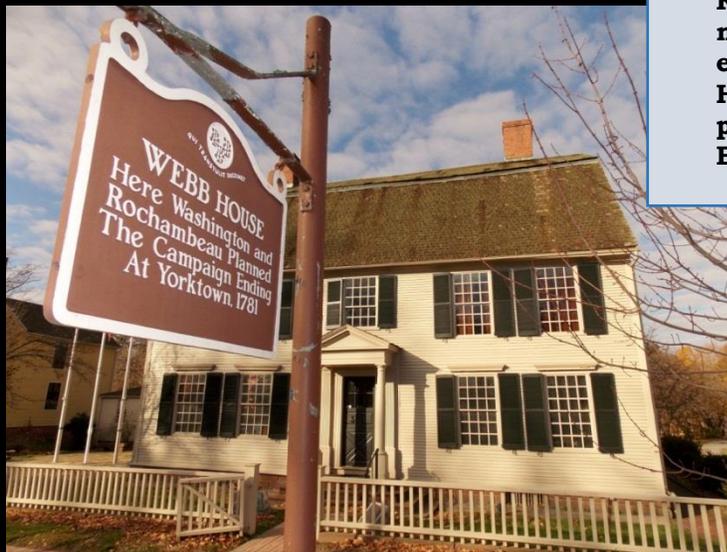
In John Trumbull’s painting, British General Cornwallis prepares to surrender to Major General Benjamin Lincoln, while Washington (right) and Rochambeau (left) look on.



But, of course, as the General learned upon his arrival, Arnold had turned traitor (See Benedict Arnold: Traitor Torches New London). Despondent, the General wrote of the weight of his command and his longing for home. “I hoped, but hoped in vain,” he wrote in a letter, “that a prospect was displaying which would enable me to fix a period to my military pursuits and restore me

to domestic life...but alas! these prospects...have prov[e]d delusory and I see nothing before us but accumulating distress.”

From the vantage point of the 21st Century it might be hard to understand why the American soldiers did endure so much and remain so committed to General Washington for so many years, but the General himself only went back to his beloved home at Mount Vernon in Virginia **one** day during the eight year war; he did not ask any more from his men than he asked of himself and they knew it.



In May 1781, Washington and Rochambeau decided to meet mid-way between their encampments at the Webb House in Wethersfield to discuss plans for an attack on the British.



As you travel from Wethersfield to Hartford by car or bicycle, reflect on the road Washington walked in 1780 to 1781, the road of despair, defections, and deserters. The one bright flash: an American victory by Brigadier General Daniel Morgan at Cowpens, South Carolina, which resulted in 300 British soldiers killed (70 American) and 500 captured. After his defections, Arnold had helped lead the British on a series of scorch-earth attacks in the south, which made the Cowpens triumph that much sweeter.

At Wethersfield Rochambeau insisted on attacking the British by way of the Chesapeake Bay, but Washington remained dogged about taking New York. Fortunately, Rochambeau's view won the day, in part because they received news that the French had responded with more money and military support (thanks in large part to Benjamin Franklin and John Laurens work as ambassadors for the American cause) and French Admiral de Grasse was on his way with 28 ships, 4 frigates and 3500 men. The British General Cornwallis would soon find his 8,000 troops bottled up on the Yorktown peninsula, fenced in by thousands of ground soldiers and de Grasse's navy.



The two generals actually met months earlier in Hartford at the Old State House site, which sits on a hill overlooking the Connecticut River.

No matter what the French might have initially thought of the bedraggled Continental soldiers and their commander, when it came time to ignite the first gun in the attack on Yorktown, Virginia, they made sure to have General Washington do the honors. For six years (1775 – 1781) he had held together what one French observer called a “mongrel” army, something the French truly respected. For the battle of Yorktown, he had to orchestrate with Rochambeau the movement of thousands of men over hundreds of miles through often rough terrain to positions in the south before Cornwallis could escape.

The payback: on October 19, 1781 the British signed the articles of surrender at Yorktown. The Americans took 8,000 British soldiers prisoner. The plan they first began mapping out on a wooden table at the Webb House in Wethersfield had worked.

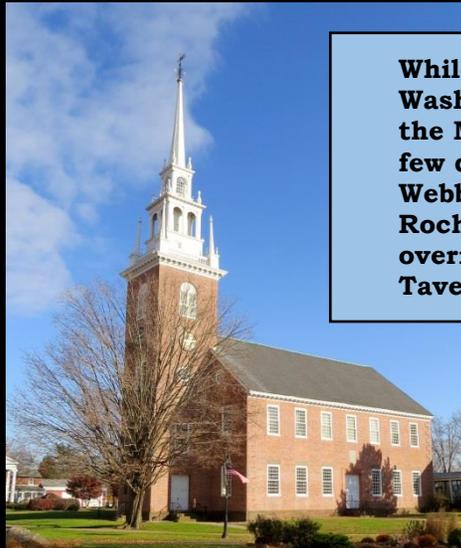
Route Notes: Washington, Rochambeau and Victory at Yorktown

0.0 Start at the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield and drive south on Main Street.

In 1781 Washington and Rochambeau planned the campaign ending at Yorktown at the Webb House.

0.2 At the stop sign turn LEFT onto Garden Street.

0.4 STRAIGHT at the stop sign across the Green onto Constitution Avenue.



While in town, General Washington worshipped at the Meeting House just a few doors down from the Webb House, and General Rochambeau stayed overnight in the Stillman Tavern.

On the Broad Street Green in 1765 local residents forced the Royal Stamp Master to resign, and in 1776 the nation's first Cavalry unit was formed.

0.5 Turn LEFT onto Broad Street at the T-intersection (no sign).

0.6 At the yield sign turn RIGHT onto Broad Street.

0.7 At the triangle and stop sign, turn LEFT onto Marsh Street.

Dating back to the 18th Century and one of the oldest landmarks in the state, the Buttolph-Williams House is on the left.

0.9 Turn RIGHT at the stop sign onto Main Street.

While at the Wethersfield Conference in 1781 with Rochambeau, Washington worshiped at the Meeting House on the right.

2nd Continental Light Dragoons: First Cavalry Unit of the American Revolution

The historic section of Wethersfield still has a spectacular town green surrounded by one of the finest examples of 18th Century homes and buildings in the United States. It was here on this grassy expanse that Colonel Elisha Sheldon, commissioned by the Continental Congress, mustered the American's first cavalry unit. Even during the French and Indian War, the British and Americans did not form cavalry units because they considered the heavily wooded landscape too difficult to navigate on horseback. But this group, later joined by others from New Jersey and Massachusetts, saw action at the battles of Brandywine, Whitmarsh, Germantown, Saratoga and Yorktown, among others.

Today, volunteers keep the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons legacy alive with reenactments and tributes to the unit's commander, Major Benjamin Tallmadge, another Connecticut resident (he attended Yale and lived in the Litchfield area as an adult), who also oversaw the first secret service division known as the Culper Spy Ring. For more information on Tallmadge, see the biography in the *Ethan Allen: The Green Mountain Boys and the Arsenal of the Revolution* chapter.

1.1 Rochambeau and his entourage stayed at the Stillman Tavern site on the right by the intersection with Hart Street.

1.2 Turn LEFT onto State Street.

1.6 Wethersfield Cove on the right.

2.3 Turn RIGHT onto Wolcott Hill Road.

3.2 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Victoria Road.

3.4 Turn RIGHT onto George Street.

4.0 Turn LEFT onto Standish Street.

4.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection, turn RIGHT onto Campfield Avenue (no sign).

4.7 Bear LEFT at the fork, Webster Street becomes Washington Street.

6.0 Turn RIGHT onto Capitol Avenue.

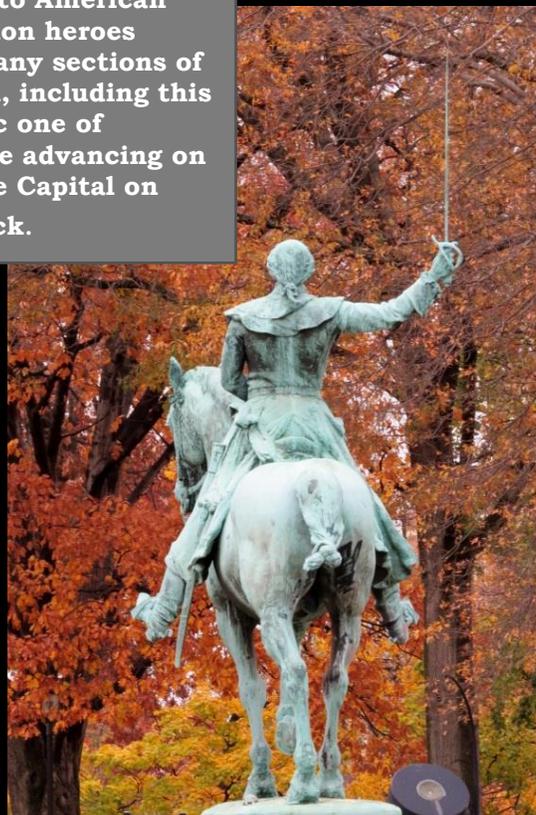
To the left, on horseback the Marquis de Lafayette gallops towards the state capitol.

6.4 At the traffic light and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Main Street.

The Butler McCook House and a statue commemorating Revolutionary War hero Pulaski are straight ahead.

6.6 In 1780 Washington and Rochambeau met at the Wadsworth Homestead, where the Wadsworth Atheneum now stands to the right. Nathan Hale greets visitors in front of the museum. The generals kept their horses at the Wadsworth stable near the present location of the Travelers tower.

Statues to American Revolution heroes grace many sections of Hartford, including this dramatic one of Lafayette advancing on the state Capitol on horseback.



6.7 On the left are the Center Church and the final resting place for many Hartford founders at Ancient Burying Ground. In September 1780 as the two generals met for the first time, Washington and thousands of Hartford residents welcomed Rochambeau at the Old State House site to the left. A Gilbert Stuart painting of President Washington is on the second floor.

6.8 Turn LEFT onto Asylum Street at the traffic light.

Jeremiah Wadsworth: “Uncle Wadsie” Brings Home the Bacon

Socks. Pork. Tin kettles. The list of items that the Continental Army needed to survive could fill a book. Few things plagued General Washington more than trying to figure out how to provision his troops. The Continental Congress was always strapped for cash and many of the soldiers went months without pay. We’ve all read about the men freezing in winter encampments like Valley Forge in Pennsylvania. Things often got so bad the soldiers in a given cabin might have one pair of shoes among the lot of them and they’d give those to whoever was on watch.

Jeremiah Wadsworth, a Connecticut native raised in Hartford and Middletown, stepped into this breach to become one of the most important providers of provisions for the American troops. A former sea captain and merchant, he proved so adept at finding money and the materials that the Continental Congress appointed him the official Commissary General of the army in 1778. He eventually played the same role for the French troops under General Rochambeau. Given the endless accounts of soldiers and others never receiving payment from the Congress, it’s even more remarkable that Wadsworth found a way to make a considerable profit from his work and ended the war the richest man in Connecticut. Few seemed to begrudge him this accomplishment and most considered him a smart, energetic, witty man. His relatives often referred to him as Uncle Wadsie in their correspondence!

Today, the Wadsworth Athenaeum, the oldest public art museum in the United States and one of the hidden gems of the artistic heritage of the country, sits just blocks away from the Old State House where Washington and Rochambeau first met. The museum itself, founded in 1842 by Jeremiah’s son Daniel, brims with American Revolution art, statues, and artifacts, including a statue of Nathan Hale out front, his left hand over his heart and youthful face staring bravely forward. Just down the hill towards Bushnell Park, you can visit the Ancient Burying Ground, established in 1640, where you’ll find Jeremiah Wadsworth’s grave.

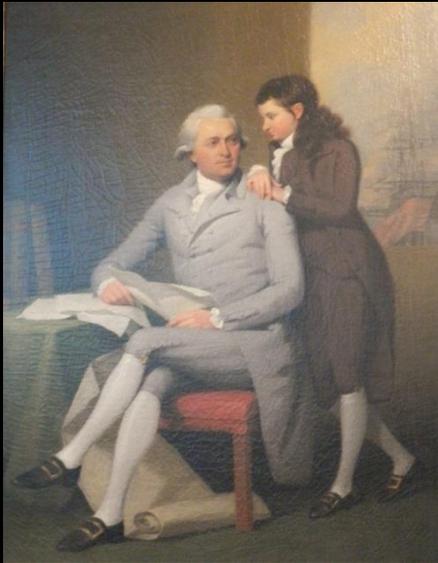
7.3 At the traffic light turn left onto High Street.

7.4 Turn RIGHT onto Trinity Street and continue through the Soldiers and Sailors Arch.

7.6 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Washington Street.

9.0 LEFT / STRAIGHT at the traffic light onto Campfield Avenue (becomes Folly Brook Boulevard).

11.2 Turn LEFT onto Nott Street.



Washington and Rochambeau met at Jeremiah Wadsworth's Homestead and kept their horses at the Wadsworth stable where the Travelers Tower now stands.

11.6 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Wolcott Hill Road.

11.9 At the stop sign turn LEFT onto Church Street.

12.8 Continue STRAIGHT onto Marsh Street. An unimproved dirt road is on the next section of the route, mountain bikes and all-terrain vehicles are recommended.

The Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum is on the right.

13.0 Bear LEFT at the fork onto Marsh Street.

13.3 Turn RIGHT onto Great Meadow Road.

13.4 After driving under the overpass, continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light, then turn RIGHT at the T-intersection onto Burbank Road. Follow the curving road under the overpass.

13.9 Continue through the gate to the dirt road (Great Meadow Rd. no sign).

14.3 Turn RIGHT onto 2nd Lane (no sign).

Admiral Charles-Henri-Louis d'Arsac de Ternay: Bringing Rochambeau's Troops to America

Convincing the French to provide more money and ships to help the Americans proved difficult and ate up crucial time in 1780-1781 as the Continental Army struggled to subsist with poor food, clothing and military supplies. But even once the French came through, getting the supplies and ships across the Atlantic proved dicey; the British had the most powerful navy in the world and controlled the seas. General Rochambeau asked Admiral de Ternay to come out of retirement to lead the *Expedition Particuliere* that would eventually bring the troops, ships and supplies to Newport, Rhode Island.

This veteran of the Seven Years Wars, during which de Ternay fought the British, sailed out of Brest harbor in France on April 15, 1780, one of the most important moments of the Revolution, because without French naval assistance the Americans never could have won the war. He spent months navigating his way to North America, dodging British patrols and even engaging in a skirmish off of Bermuda before finally landing safely on July 10, 1780 in Narragansett Bay in Newport, Rhode Island. Sadly, in December de Ternay died of typhus, often also known as gaol fever, because prisoners crammed into cells contracted it from lice. Admiral de Grasse took command of the French naval force as it sailed for the Chesapeake Bay and, eventually, the victory at Yorktown in October 1781. De Ternay is buried in Newport in the Trinity Church cemetery.

15.1 Bear LEFT at the fork and continue along the river, Elm Street Extension (no sign).

16.3 Bear RIGHT at the fork onto Great Meadow Road (no sign).

18.2 **Rocky Hill – Glastonbury Ferry** pavement begins.

The country's oldest continuously running ferry since 1655.

18.5 After the railroad tracks, turn RIGHT at the stop sign onto Riverview Rd.

18.9 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Old Main Street.

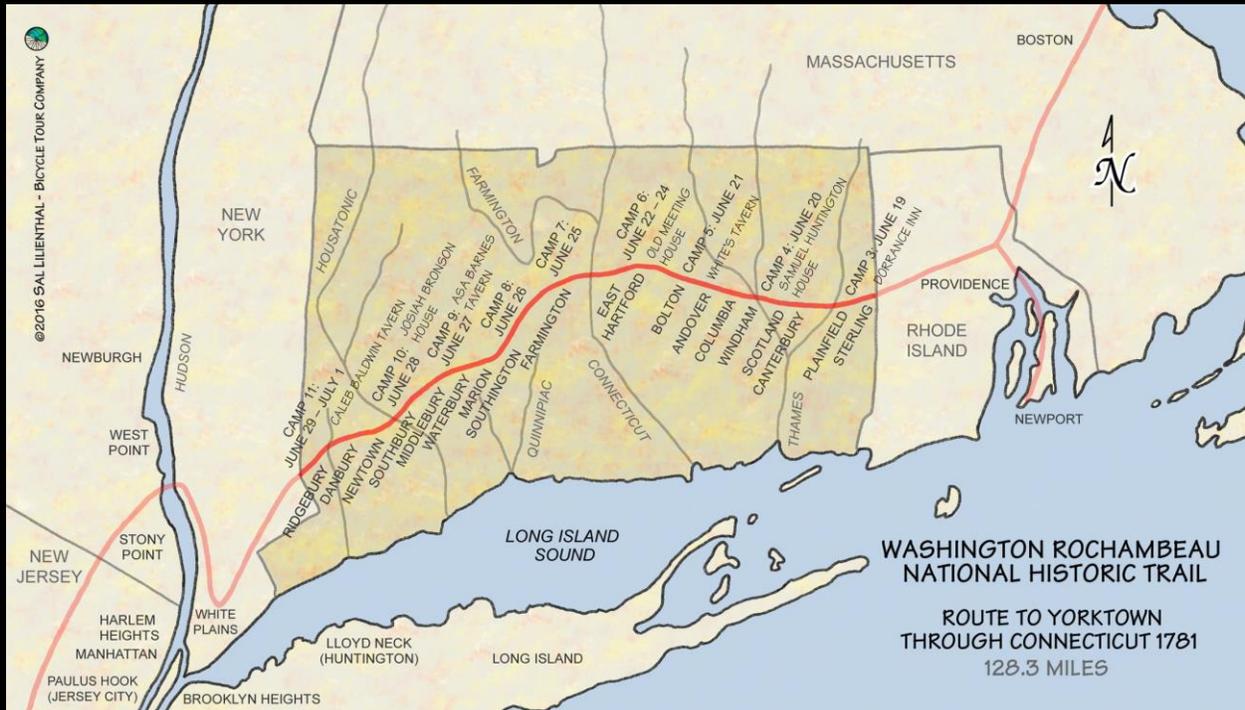
21.4 Continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light onto Springs Road then turn RIGHT onto Middletown Avenue North.

- 21.7 Bear LEFT at the fork onto Broad Street by the Green.
- 22.0 Turn LEFT onto Garden Street.
- 22.2 Turn RIGHT onto Main Street.
- 22.4 Finish by the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum on the left.



A statue of Nathan Hale stands watch in front of the Wadsworth Atheneum, which has a tremendous collection of Colonial art and artifacts.

WASHINGTON – ROCHAMBEAU NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL CONNECTICUT GOOGLE MAP ROUTE NOTES



Link to W3R (Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route) on Google Maps:
<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msa=0&ie=UTF8&z=9&msid=209906619738887673153.0004a262479ecf46ddb7>

Cycling Sections: 0 to 43.5, 88.9 to 110.1, 122.5 to 128.3
70.5 of the 128.3 mile route (54.5 %) considered
“bike friendly” for advanced cyclists

Start: Sterling, Connecticut

Finish: Ridgebury, Connecticut

Distance: 128.3 miles

Terrain , Highways and City Sections

Difficulty: Moderate with some hilly sections

0.0 Start at the Connecticut – Rhode Island border in Sterling; follow Rochambeau’s French Army march West on Route 14A.

A Connecticut Washington – Rochambeau Revolutionary Route sign is just ahead as you enter the State.

3.0 W3R June 1781 Sterling marker on the right.

6.7 Cross under I-395.

7.1 Turn LEFT at the traffic light and continue on Route 14A / Norwich Road.

7.5 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light and continue on Route 14A.

8.1 W3R Plainfield marker on the right.

10.4 At the yellow blinking light continue STRAIGHT on Route 14.

11.0 Continue STRAIGHT on Route 14 at the red blinking light and stop sign.

17.5 Continue STRAIGHT at the yellow blinking light in Scotland (Huntington Road).

17.6 Declaration of Independence Signer Samuel Huntington Birthplace is on the right. A W3R plaque and an informational display are on the lawn in front of the house. En route to the Hartford Conference in September 1780, General Rochambeau and Admiral de Ternay's carriage broke down near the Huntington House.



In 1780, en route to meeting with Washington in Hartford, poor roads damaged a wheel from General Rochambeau and Admiral de Ternay's carriage near Declaration of Independence Signer Samuel Huntington's birthplace in Scotland.

21.6 W3R November 1782 Windham marker on the right.

21.5 At the stop sign turn RIGHT and stay on Route 14. A post office is on the right.

22.4 Continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light Route 14 West.

24.3 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Route 66 West.

25.0 Frog Sculptures on threaded spools decorate the bridge to the left commemorating the 1758 Battle of the Frogs and Willimantic's textile history.

26.5 Bear LEFT at the traffic light and fork, continue on Route 66 West.

29.1 Turn LEFT at the traffic light and continue on Route 66 West by intersection with Route 6.

31.0 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto Route 87.

Frog Sculptures on threaded spools decorate the bridge commemorating the 1758 Battle of the Frogs and Willimantic's textile history. An interesting site on the route although separate from Revolutionary Connecticut.



34.4 At the traffic light and T-intersection, turn LEFT onto Route 6 West. A bike lane is on the left.

38.0 A W3R informational display plaque is on the right by Hendee Road. For Daniel White's Tavern, turn RIGHT on Hendee Road then immediately turn RIGHT again on Huntington Road, 0.3 miles on the right.



Rochambeau stayed at Daniel White's Tavern in Andover more than any location in Connecticut.

39.4 W3R October 1782 Bolton marker on the right.

40.1 TURN LEFT ONTO STEELES CROSSING ROAD. EASY TO MISS.

40.4 Cross the Hop River Trail.

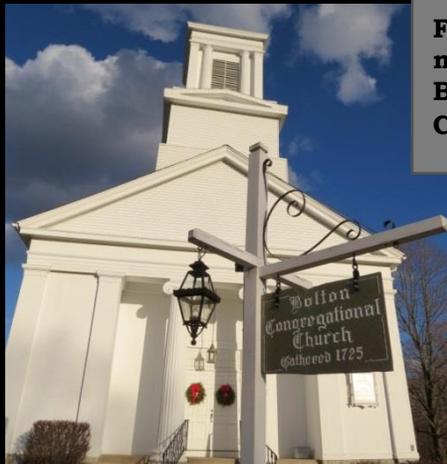
40.7 At the stop sign and T-intersection, turn RIGHT onto Bolton Center Road.

40.9 W3R Rochambeau June 1781 Encampment marker on the right.

41.3 Turn RIGHT at the fork by the Bolton Congregational Church.

A W3R display plaque is to the left in the triangle.

Continue STRAIGHT at the stop sign on Bolton Center Road.



French Troops camped near the site of the Bolton Congregational Church.

43.5 Turn LEFT at the traffic light onto New Bolton Road Route 6 / 44 West.

45.4 A W3R sign and the Woodbridge Tavern site stone marker are on the right. President Washington was entertained at the Tavern on his visit through Connecticut in 1789.

47.5 Bear LEFT at the traffic light and fork onto West Center Street (becomes Silver Lane).

52.5 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Roberts Street after Rentschler Field.

52.9 Turn RIGHT onto I-84 West.

55.5 Cross the Connecticut River.

56.4 Exit 48 Asylum Street.

56.5 Continue STRAIGHT onto Farmington Avenue.

57.6 Mark Twain House and Harriet Beecher Stowe Center are on the left.

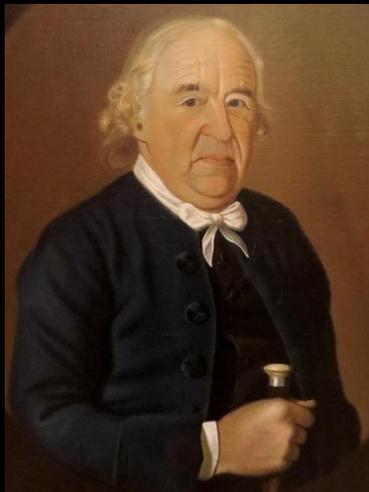
64.4 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto Route 4 West.

65.4 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Route 10 South / Main Street.

66.5 W3R October 1782 Farmington marker on the left.

67.9 Bear RIGHT at the fork Route 10 South (bike lane).

72.9 Cross under I-84 stay on Route 10 South.



Josiah Bronson advised George Washington, outlived four of his wives, and survived an axe blow to his forehead. While Rochambeau's Troops camped near his Tavern on Breakneck Hill in Middlebury, he locked-up his daughter Esther to keep her from eloping with a French Officer.

75.8 At the traffic light continue STRAIGHT onto Old Turnpike Road (Do NOT follow Route 10 the right).

78.0 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Meridan Waterbury Turnpike / Route 322.

80.0 W3R marker on the left at the intersection of Marion Road. Asa Barnes Tavern 0.5 miles on Marion Road to the right. Barnes entertained the French troops while in the area.

81.2 Continue STRAIGHT at the yellow blinking light onto Meridan Road.

84.6 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Woodtuck Road / Meridan Road.

85.3 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto East Main Street.

87.5 Follow Main Street around the Green then continue on West Main Street.



A W3R informational display is on the West end of the Green near the Civil War Memorial and across the street from the Mattatuck Museum. A sculpture of General Washington and a portrait of Josiah Bronson are on the Museum's second floor.

88.2 Cross under Route 8.

88.9 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Park Road.

90.5 Continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light onto Park Road Extension.

91.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Watertown Road.



French Troops travelled over Carleton's Bridge from Southbury to Newtown, but the heavy artillery with siege cannon were forded across the Housatonic River a few miles north.

93.3 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Breakneck Hill Road.

93.7 Bear LEFT onto Artillery Road.

Josiah Bronson's Tavern 0.4 miles to the right on Breakneck Hill Road.

94.9 Continue STRAIGHT at the stop sign onto North Road (no sign).

95.1 Turn RIGHT at the stop sign onto Middlebury Road / Route 188 South (no sign) becomes Southford Road.

98.6 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Old Waterbury Road before the I-84 intersection.



French troops worshiped at the Meeting House in Newtown, a flag pole on Main Street marks the location near the Caleb Baldwin Tavern.

101.7 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Main Street / Route 6 South.

102.0 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto South Main Street.

105.0 Turn LEFT onto Ichabod Road.

105.1 At the stop sign after the overpass, turn RIGHT onto Fish Dock Road.

105.7 Bear RIGHT at the fork over the bridge onto River Road.

106.9 Turn LEFT over the bridge onto Glen Road (no sign).

Rochambeau's Army crossed the Housatonic River at this location.

108.6 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light over the bridge onto Route 34 West.

109.1 Becomes Route 6 West.

109.8W3R informational display and stone markers are on the right.

110.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Main Street Route 6 West, becomes Mount Pleasant Road then Stony Hill Road.

116.0 Stay in the left lane and cross I-84 twice on the one-way section onto Newtown Road then becomes White Street.

119.0 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Main Street.

119.3 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto West Street.

119.7 Turn LEFT onto Division Street.

119.8 Turn RIGHT onto Park Avenue.

121.1 Becomes Backus Road after crossing under Route 7.

122.5 Continue STRAIGHT at the stop sign onto Miry Brook Road.

123.1 Bear LEFT at the fork onto George Washington Highway.

124.3 Turn LEFT onto Ridgebury Road (no sign).

125.3W3R informational display plaque on the left for the Ridgebury encampment. Rochambeau celebrated his birthday while in Ridgebury.

126.1 Turn RIGHT at the stop sign onto Ridgebury Road.

126.7 Bear RIGHT at the fork Ridgebury Road.

127.2 Turn RIGHT onto North Salem Road / Route 116 (no sign).

128.3 State Line Connecticut - New York.

SOURCES

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