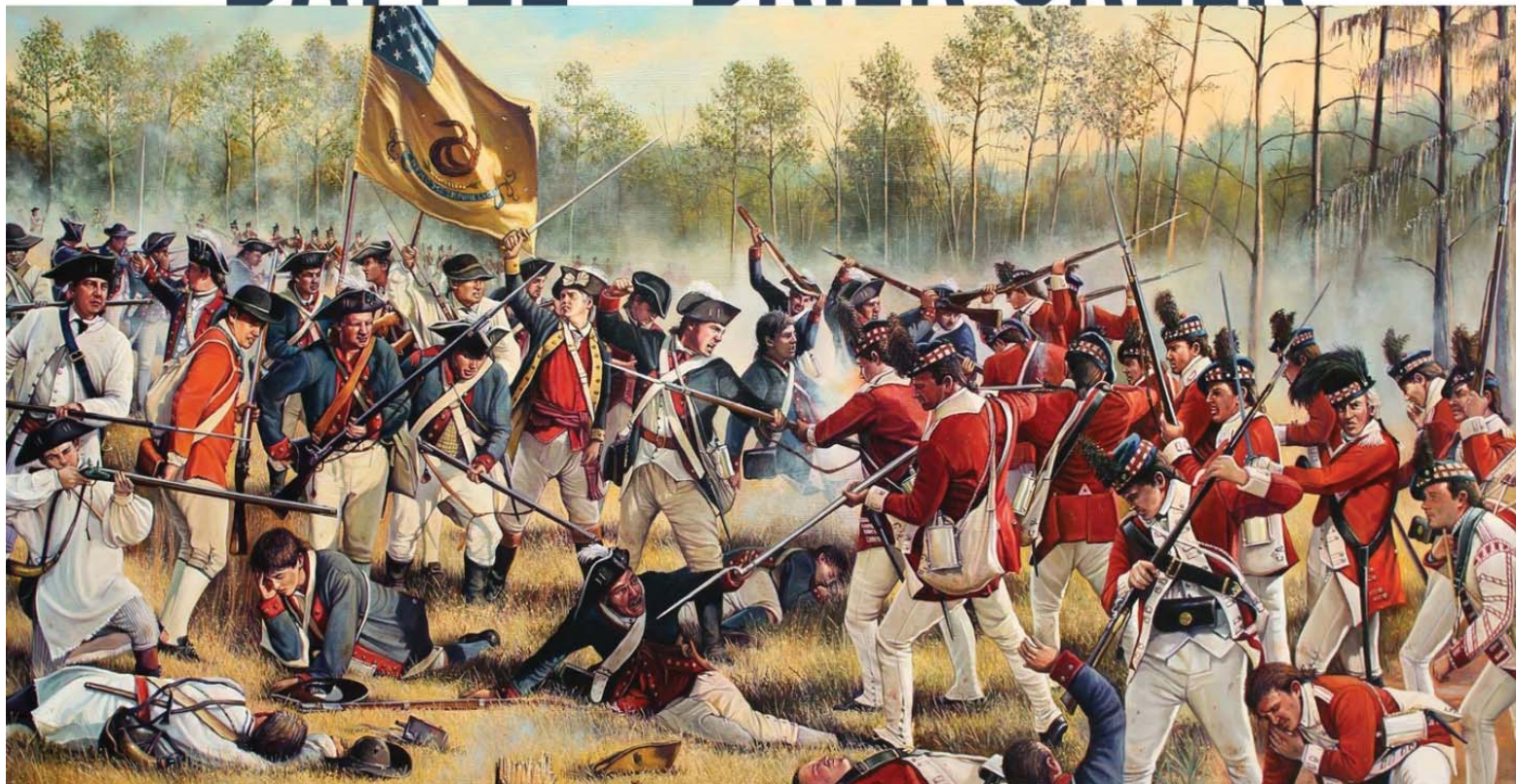




THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA COLLEGE OF ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN NOVEMBER 13-15, 2015 SYLVANIA, GA

# CHARRETTE

## BATTLE OF BRIER CREEK





# The Battle of Brier Creek Charrette Report



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## Introduction

The Battle of Brier Creek was an American Revolutionary War battle fought on March 3, 1779 near the confluence of Brier Creek with the Savannah River in Screven County, Georgia. A Patriot force consisting principally of militia from North Carolina and Georgia was surprised by the British, and suffered significant casualties. The British Southern Campaign began in Georgia and had it not been for the Battle of Brier Creek it could have just as easily ended there. The Battle of Brier Creek swung momentum in favor of the British, crushed Patriot morale, and derailed Rebel offensive plans in Georgia. It also provided the British with the opportunity to secure their foothold in the frontier colony, which changed the course of the war.<sup>1</sup>

The Battle of Brier Creek site is located within the southernmost portion of the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area, which is managed by the GA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as a fishing and hunting preserve. The battlefield site has a historic marker that was placed in the vicinity of the site at a small county picnic park beside Brier Creek,

but the historic battleground is not otherwise recognized nor is it protected, other than the protection provided through state ownership and management as a wildlife management area. Until a recent archaeological study, the exact location of the battlefield and 150 Patriot gravesites were a mystery. The City of Sylvania and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hired an archaeologist in 2013 to locate the battlefield site, which resulted in a confirmation of the general battlefield area and a general idea of burial sites.



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<sup>1</sup> Henry, William, "An Unfortunate Affair: The Battle of Brier Creek and the Aftermath in Georgia" (2012). Electronic Theses & Dissertations. Paper 875.

<http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/875>



## Design Charrette

The City of Sylvania and the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee were interested in developing a network of trails, interpretive signage and a monument to honor the soldiers who died in the Battle of Brier Creek, and to attract tourism to the historical site. The City of Sylvania requested the College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia to conduct a weekend long charrette – a design brainstorming session between local stakeholders and outside designers to create ideas for a park design that would be permissible and sustainable for the Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The purpose of the charrette was to facilitate design ideas that would tell the story of the battle while also being mindful of the historical and archaeological aspects of the site, as well as hunting and fishing concerns in the WMA.



*The UGA charrette team listens to WMA Manager Howard Pope and State Archaeologist Bryan Tucker describe the function and limitations of the site as it relates to hunting and archaeological resources.*

During the weekend of November 13-15, 2015, a charrette team of students and faculty from The University of Georgia spent time touring the site with local historians and members of the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee, as well as the state archaeologist and the WMA Manager, to better understand the physicality, function, history and aesthetics of the site. With their help, the charrette team was able to draft a number of different design options that would bring more recognition to the battle site. The results of the charrette are contained in this report and in the creation of a website <https://thebattleofbriercreek.wordpress.com> in order to begin to share the history of the battle with the public and showcase ideas for its interpretation.



Local historian Alex Rabun showcases a painting by Jeff Trexler entitled "One Gallant Stand", done in commemoration of the Battle of Brier Creek.



The UGA charrette team touring the site where Brier Creek floods the lowlands.



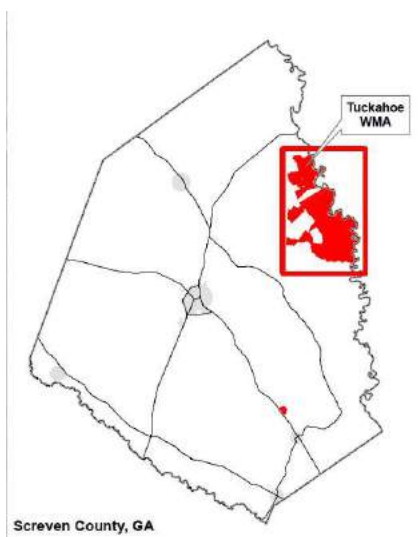
UGA students listen to local historian and reenactor, Dr. Al Freeland, talk about the battle and the consequences of its outcome.



## Battlefield Park

The Tuckahoe Wildlife Management area is a 15,000-acre state-owned hunting and fishing preserve bordering the Savannah River. The Pittman-Robertson Tax Act specifies that the wildlife management area property is to primarily be used for hunting and fishing in perpetuity, and additional activities are allowed if they do not encroach on the primary uses.

Therefore, any battlefield interpretation site within the WMA must consider primary hunting and fishing zones, archaeological resources, and ecological factors, such as flooding, in determining where to locate interpretive trails, signage, and a memorial.



## Site Analysis

The UGA team began their analysis of the site by creating a group of maps in order to understand and overlay the archaeological, hunting and ecological parameters of the site. (These maps are inserted after page 6 of this report.)

### *Archaeological Map*

Using archaeological studies, the team overlaid zones generally related to the battle over the modern WMA site and its existing roads and sites. The identified archaeological zones include the First Patriot Camp site, the American pickets, the Battlefield and the Retreat zone through the swamp to the Savannah River. These zones are not the exact locations of the battle lines, but the general proximity was important to note so as not to inadvertently recommend ground disturbance for interpretive trails.

### *Ecological Map*

Taken from a 1990 rendering, these zones indicate the dominant ecosystem and species types. A trail would ideally run through many different zones, giving spectators a variety of views and the highest level of biodiversity possible. The Loblolly Pine areas, indicated on the map as "pine forest", are dense and would not be appropriate for long stretches of the trail. Clear cut areas will allow an extended view of the landscape, giving the spectator a place to imagine the battle taking

place. The low swamp areas are flood zones and will require a trail that is either elevated or constructed of materials that will withstand inundation.

#### *Hunting Map*

It is key to understand where the hunting areas are located in the WMA. Prime hunting areas are to be avoided to prevent the interaction between heritage tourists and active hunters. While the entire site is dedicated to hunting and fishing, the particular favored zones vary depending on what is in season and the amount of rainfall the area has received. The deeper areas of the site nearest the creek and the river (blue zone) are popular with hunters. However, when these lowland areas flood, wildlife moves inland. The arrows on the map indicate the general movement of hunters during times in which the normal hunting area is inundated. The areas that are never active zones are the roadways, as they are generally avoided by animals and hunters have to keep a certain distance from the roads before shooting.

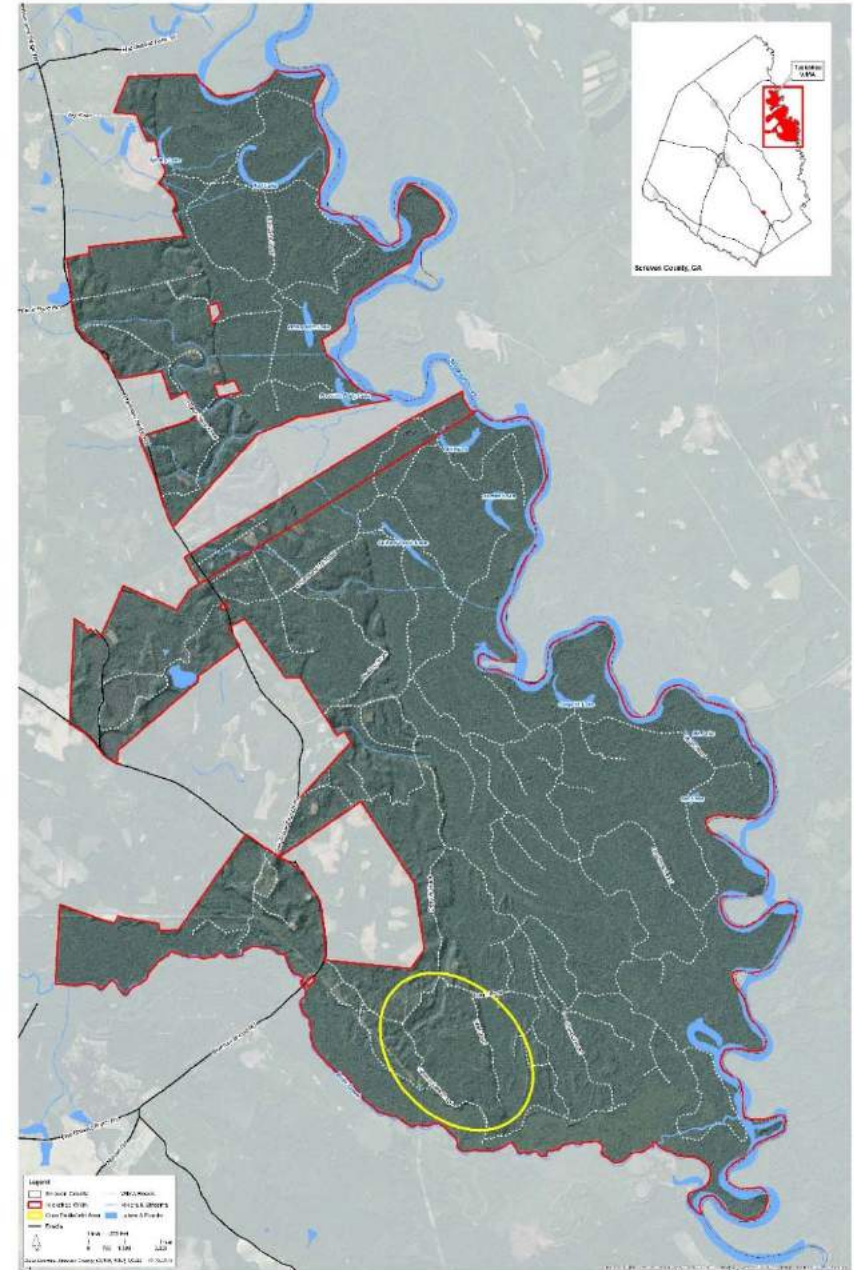
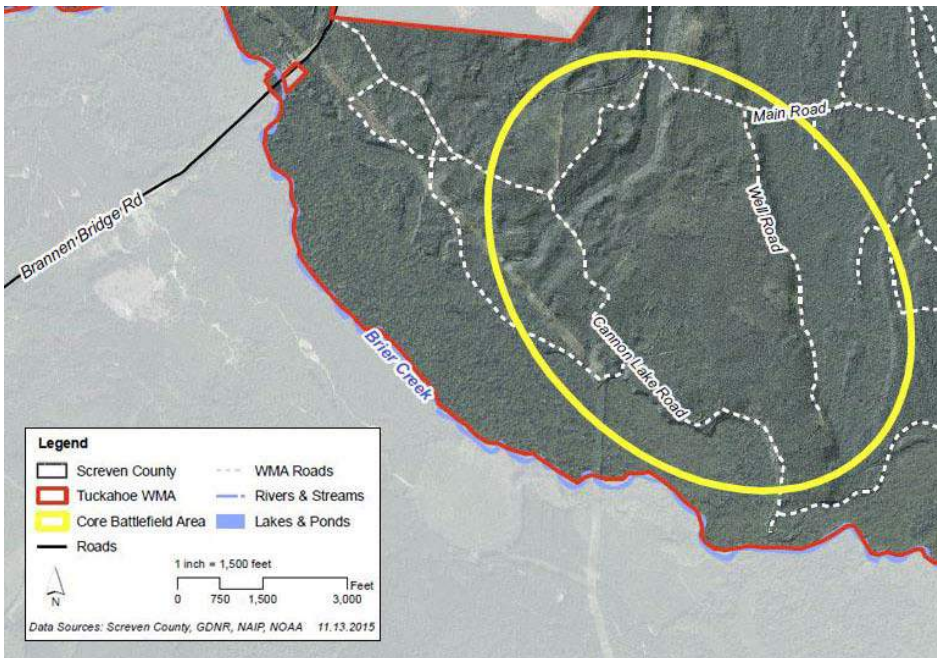
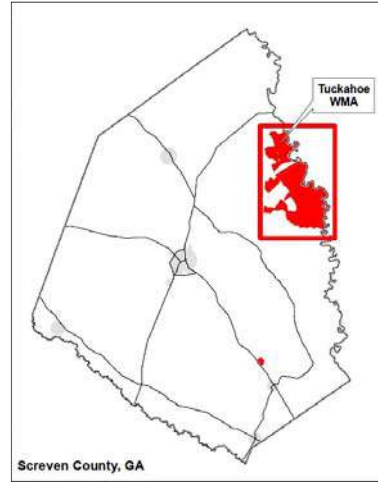
#### *Composite Map*

Lastly, a composite map with the archaeological, ecological and hunting zones were overlaid to show which zones overlapped or left void. With this analysis, the team determined that the three existing roads in this area of the WMA – Cannon Lake Rd, Main Rd and Well Rd – are generally close enough to the battle site so as to provide a sense of the landscape and ecology of the area. Additionally, using existing roads for

a trail system provides safe passage for travel through an active hunting zone and minimizes ground disturbance of any archaeological remains that may exist.



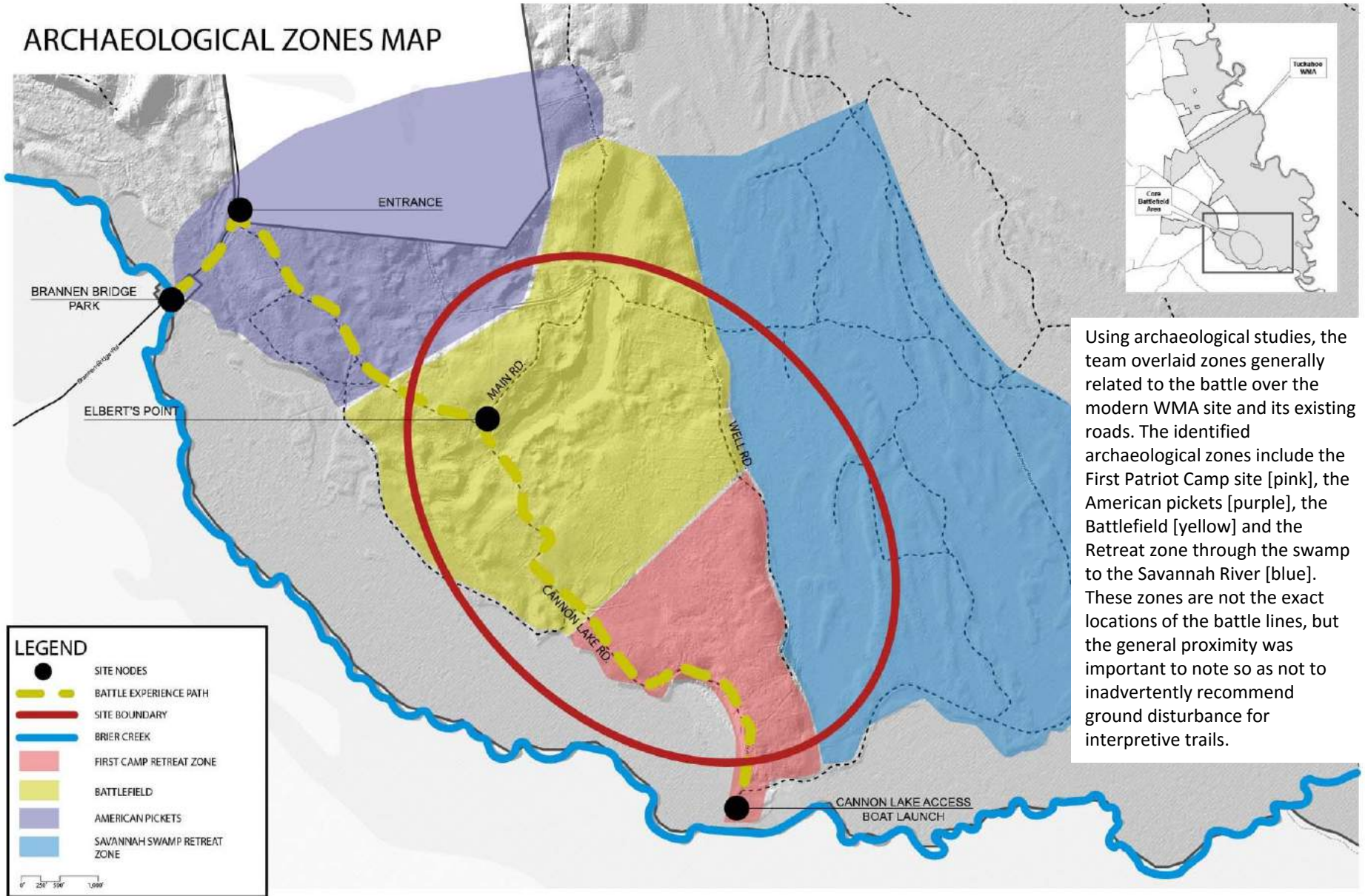




Maps showing the location of the battlefield area (yellow oval) within the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area of Screven County, GA.

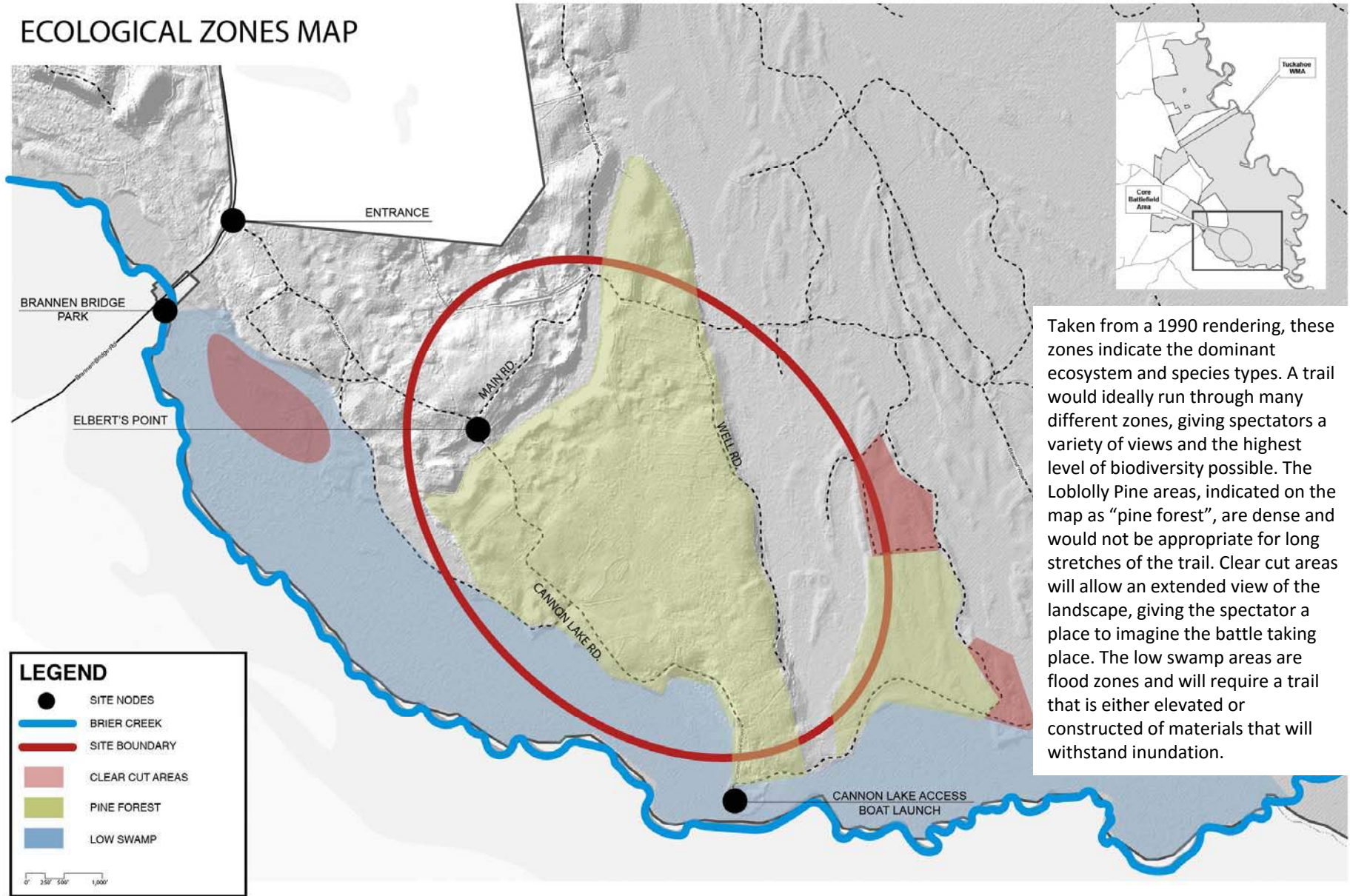


# ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONES MAP



Using archaeological studies, the team overlaid zones generally related to the battle over the modern WMA site and its existing roads. The identified archaeological zones include the First Patriot Camp site [pink], the American pickets [purple], the Battlefield [yellow] and the Retreat zone through the swamp to the Savannah River [blue]. These zones are not the exact locations of the battle lines, but the general proximity was important to note so as not to inadvertently recommend ground disturbance for interpretive trails.

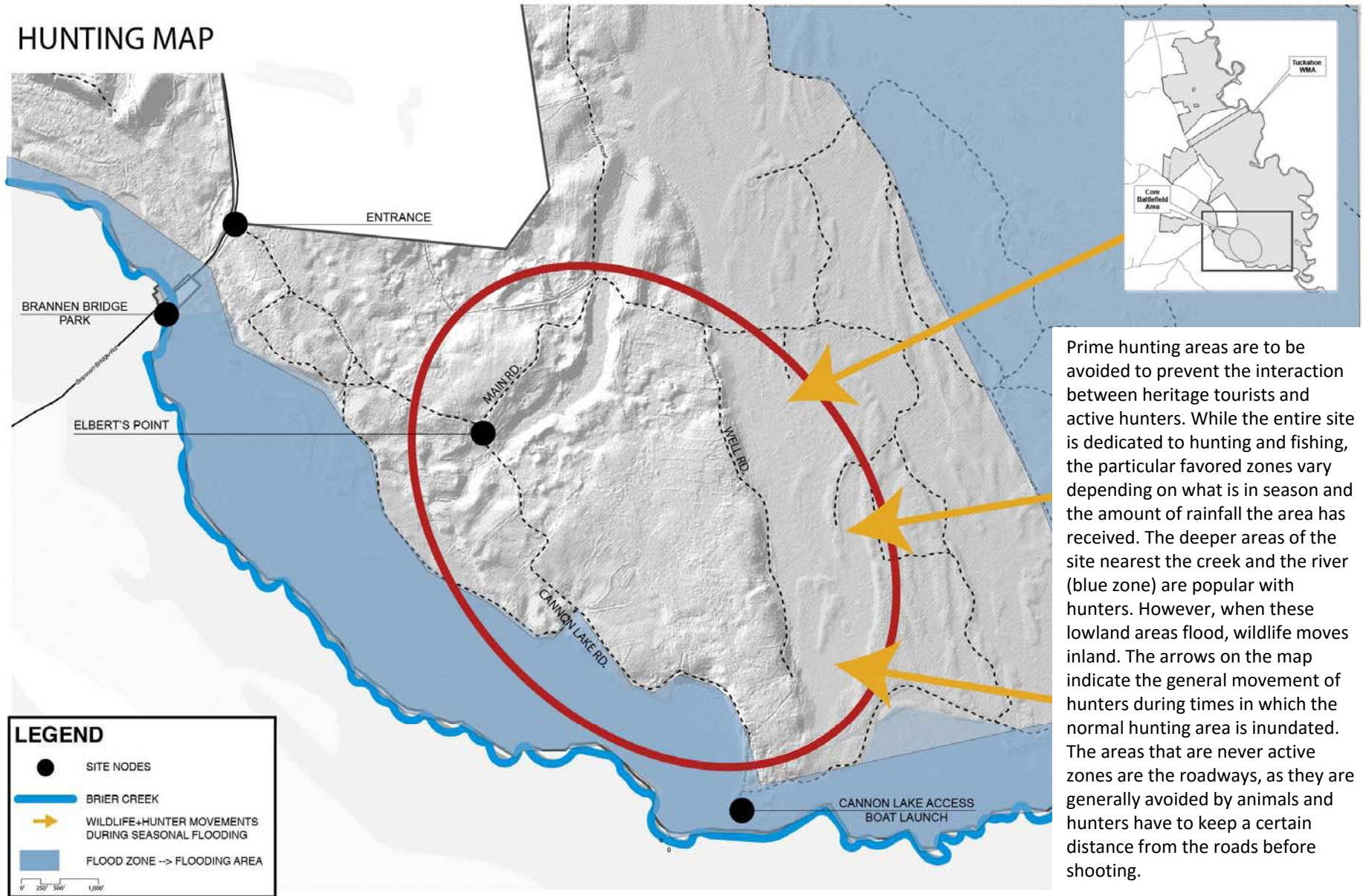
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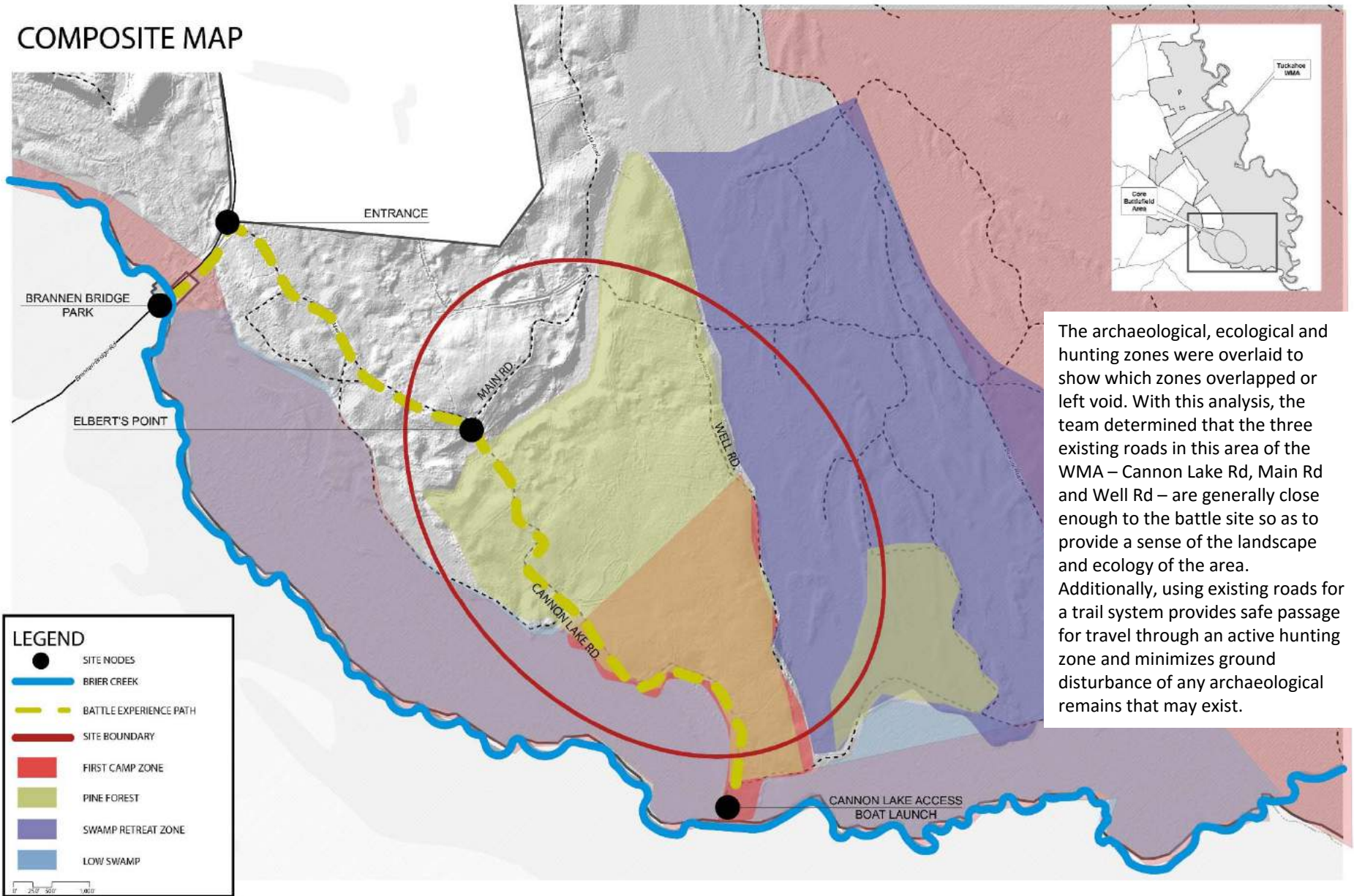


# HUNTING MAP



Prime hunting areas are to be avoided to prevent the interaction between heritage tourists and active hunters. While the entire site is dedicated to hunting and fishing, the particular favored zones vary depending on what is in season and the amount of rainfall the area has received. The deeper areas of the site nearest the creek and the river (blue zone) are popular with hunters. However, when these lowland areas flood, wildlife moves inland. The arrows on the map indicate the general movement of hunters during times in which the normal hunting area is inundated. The areas that are never active zones are the roadways, as they are generally avoided by animals and hunters have to keep a certain distance from the roads before shooting.

# COMPOSITE MAP



The archaeological, ecological and hunting zones were overlaid to show which zones overlapped or left void. With this analysis, the team determined that the three existing roads in this area of the WMA – Cannon Lake Rd, Main Rd and Well Rd – are generally close enough to the battle site so as to provide a sense of the landscape and ecology of the area. Additionally, using existing roads for a trail system provides safe passage for travel through an active hunting zone and minimizes ground disturbance of any archaeological remains that may exist.



### Battlefield Experience Path

Given the results of the site analysis, the recommendation for an interpretive plan is to create a “Battlefield Experience Path” along existing roads in the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The design solutions presented include recommendations for redesigning the entrance of the WMA to reflect the inclusion of a battlefield park, creating a lasting memorial to the Patriot soldiers, and an Interpretive Trail comprised of walking and driving tour options that could be installed in phases.

Additional recommendations include design improvements to the Brannen Bridge Park (currently the location of the only historic markers for the battle), new opportunities for engaging the public in local Revolutionary War history, and case studies of similarly-sized historic Revolutionary War parks in the region.



*Charrette students explore options for a Battlefield experience path within the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area.*

### Park Entrance Design

To immediately notify visitors and users that the Wildlife Management Area also has historic significance, the main entrance could be redesigned as a more formal entrance for non-sportsmen as well as hunters and fishermen. Identifying the Battle of Brier Creek site inside the Wildlife Management Area is important to let visitors know they have reached their destination, but also that the predominant use of the site is to be respected and observed.



*This photo-illustration shows how the existing Tuckahoe WMA signage could be modified to include the battlefield site.*

Interchangeable signs cautioning visitors of the current hunting season and weapons being used could be displayed at the very beginning of Main Road, the primary entrance visitors will be using to enter the Wildlife Management Area.



As people drive down the entrance road, flags representing each state and battalion that participated during the Battle of Brier Creek could be flown to honor their service and sacrifice.





## Battlefield Park Entrance Design

Flags line the main road into the site representing the warring countries, and from where their forces hailed (e.g. North Carolina 71st Regiment). The large WMA entry sign guides visitors into the site and includes the name of the battlefield. The smaller sign beyond the flags could be interchangeable to tell what type of hunting activity is going on. This information helps sportsmen as well as other visitors plan accordingly and be aware of each other's presence.

## Elbert's Point Memorial



*The fork at Cannon Lake Rd and Main Rd creates a cleared area that would be an appropriate setting for a memorial. The charrette team refers to this area as "Elbert's Point" in reference to General Samuel Elbert and his leadership in the battle.*

The fork in the road of Main Road and Cannon Lake Road is envisioned as "Elbert's Point" – a location central to the battle with existing WMA-managed roadways that can accommodate visitors wanting to experience the historic site. In addition to being an appropriate site for a memorial to the fallen soldiers, this area could potentially allow for a small visitor center to accommodate bathrooms, a parking lot, and a kiosk of information about the site and the interpretive trail.

It is important to memorialize this important site for the role it played in the founding of our country and to honor the men who gave their lives for a cause. The charrette team introduced the concepts of "emblem" and "expression" to provide differing memorialization strategies. Thomas Whately, the author of *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London, 1770) introduced those concepts during the same era as the battle, defining "emblem" as "cultural meaning including narratives, metaphors, and other forms of storytelling" and "expression" as "a direct emotive response to physical features."



*The FDR Memorial in Washington DC is a good example of emblematic design, as in this portion where the sculpture literally represents the bread lines of the Great Depression.*

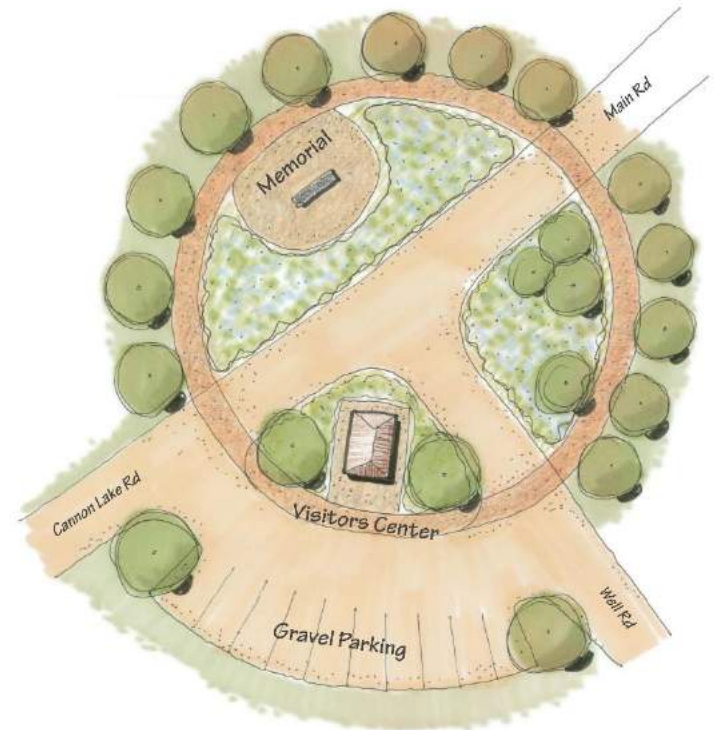
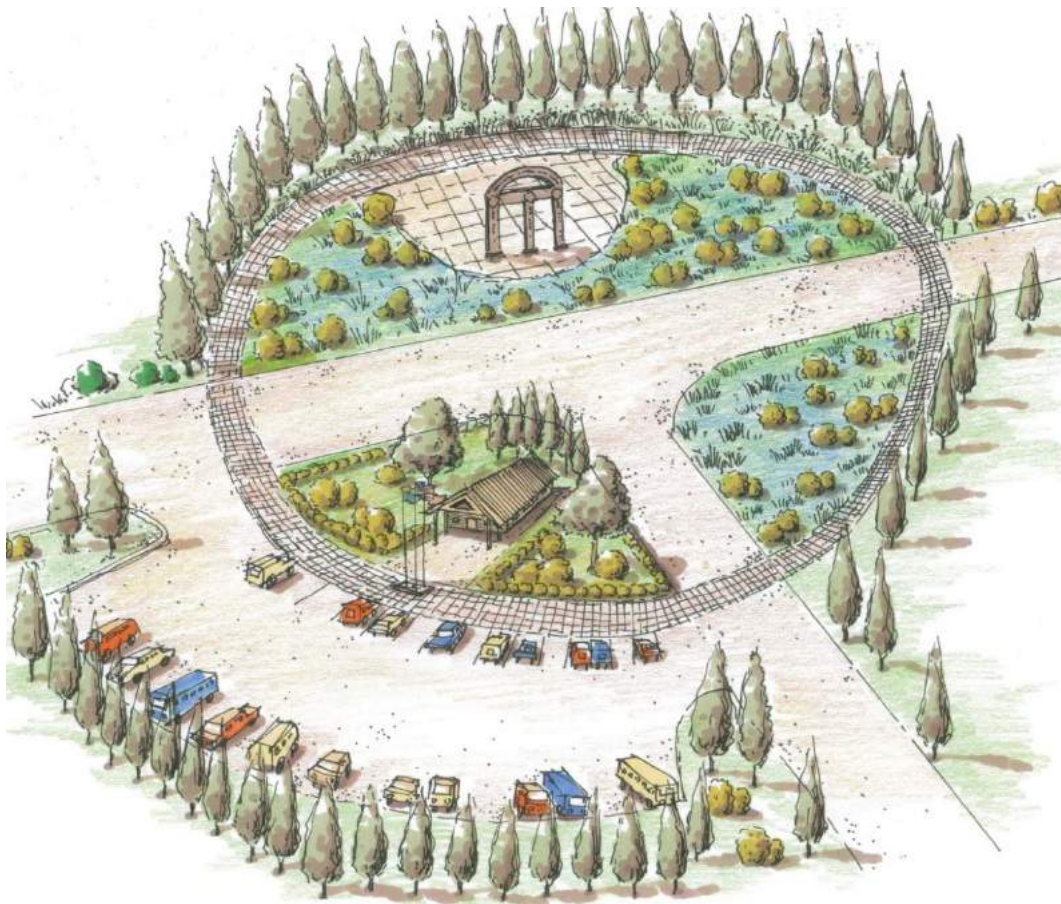




*Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington D.C.*

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is an example of how emblem and expression can be creatively combined – it is emblematic in the way the names of fallen soldiers are logically listed but is also expressive in the monument’s blackness, reflectivity, and the visitor’s experience of descending into the ground as if into a grave.

Both emblematic and expressive memorial designs have value. During the charrette, three Landscape Architecture students suggested designs for the memorial based on their understanding of the battle and the site. Their designs are discussed on the following pages and show the variety available in interpretation and creative expression.

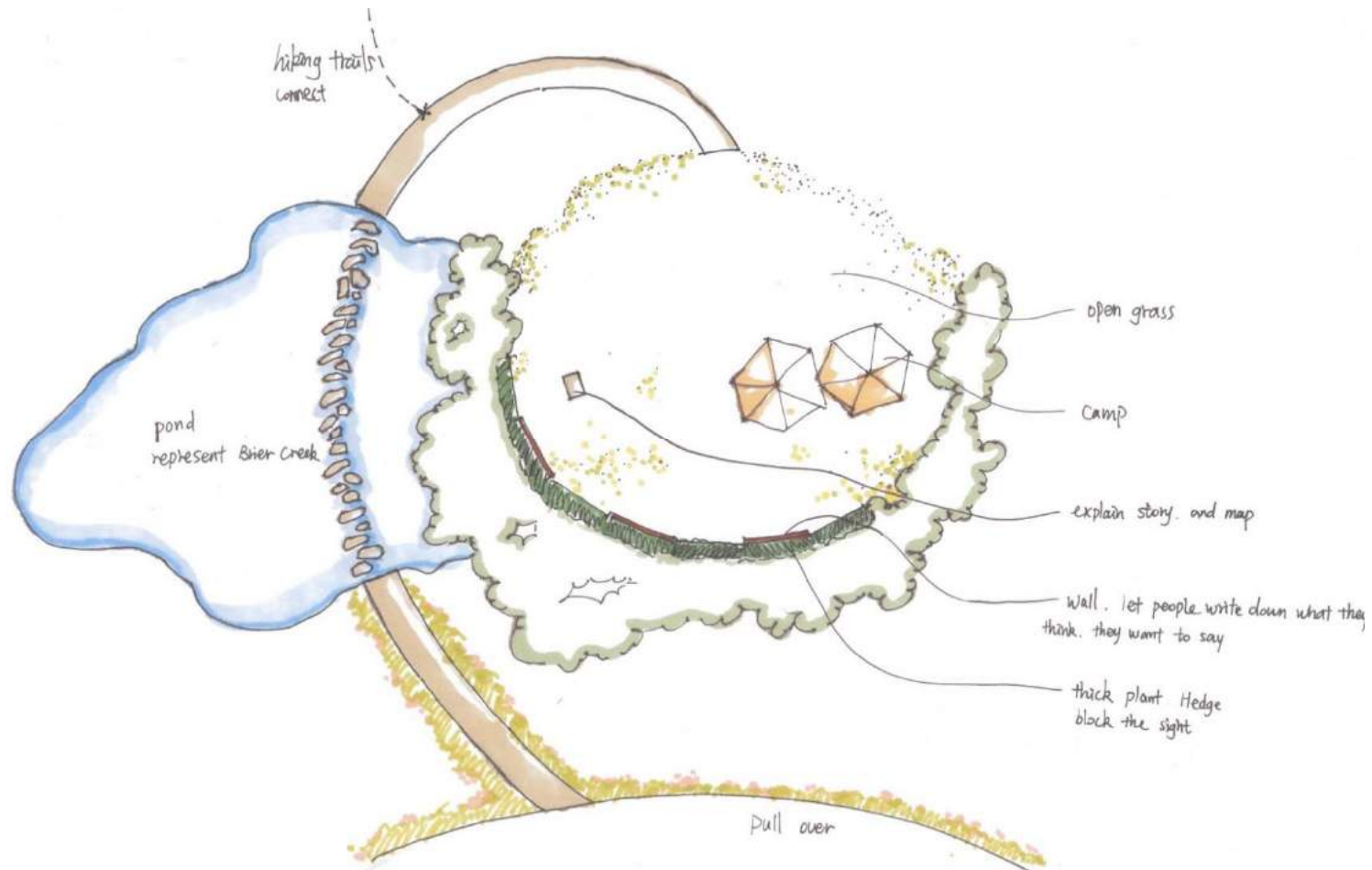


*Plan view of memorial site.*

## **Granite Arch Memorial by Tao “Tommy” Wang**

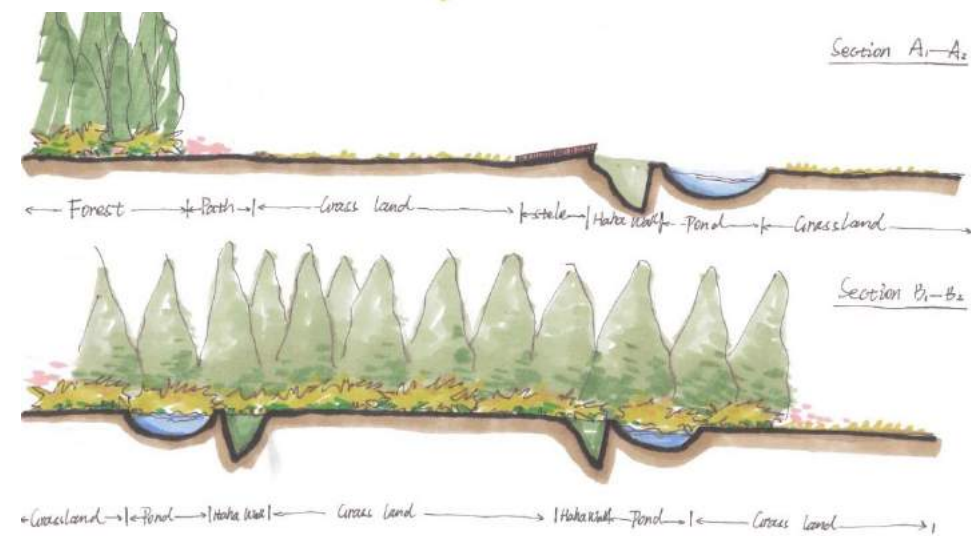
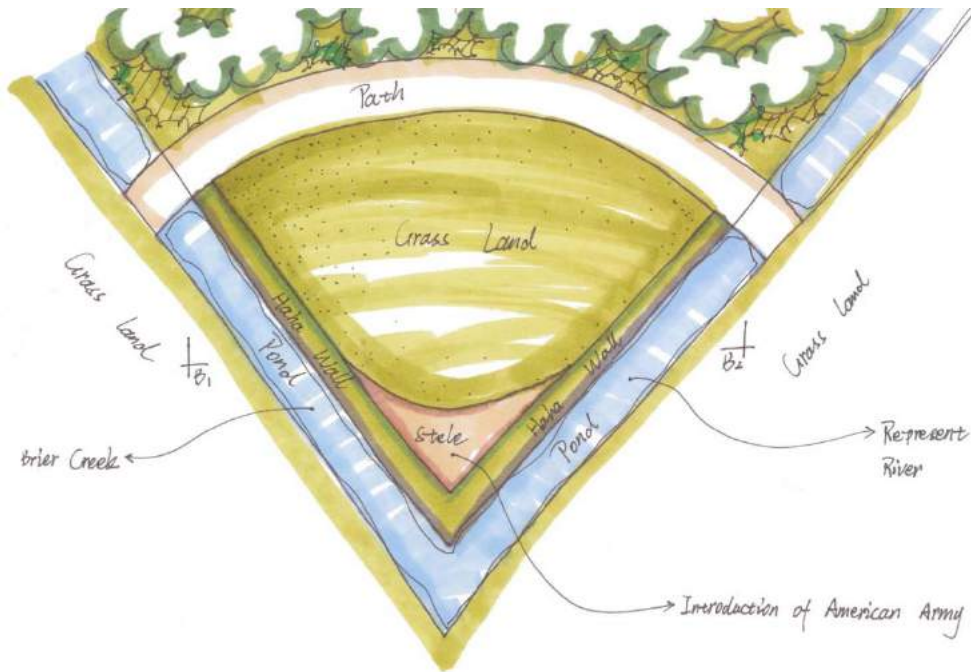
The design of this plan view follows a circular form, incorporating an emblematic granite arch designed by local historian Alex Rabun. The circular area of land for the memorial was divided into several parts and two main roads go across the entire space for the purpose of circulation convenience. A paved path defines the entire circular space, allowing visitors to access to each part of the space. On the lower part of the area is a visitor center serving as a reception space and bathrooms for the visitors, and a Semi-circular parking space with sufficient parking spots was next to the visitor center. The semi-circular shaped space next to the road serves as a memorial space in memory of the battle. The major visual point is an arch surrounded by vegetation of native plants. Evergreen trees were set along this space to serve as a visual border of the memorial area.





### ***Spiral Memorial by Tianyu Wu***

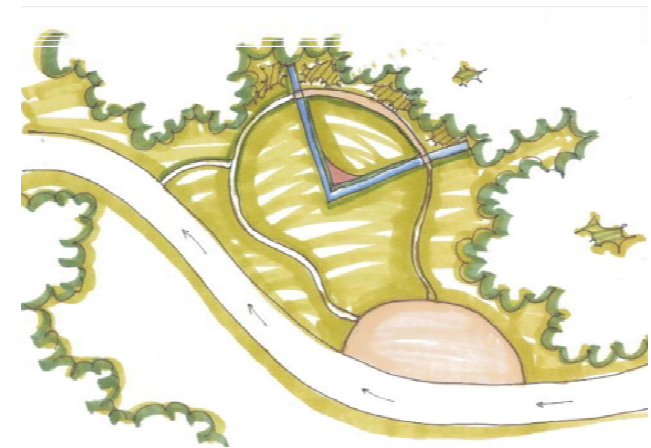
This expressive memorial illustrates the movement of the British troops as they changed their battle strategy to curve around and attack the Patriot forces from the opposite direction. The pattern of this troop movement is used to re-create a landscape design as a memorial and area of reflection and remembrance. The visitor approaches the site via the road and walks into the memorial, mirroring the British approach to the Patriot camp. Once inside, one experiences a shift in perspective as the visitor is surrounded by a thickly planted hedge in an open grass field, feeling the Patriot militia's sense of enclosure and entrapment. Additionally, there is an interpretive panel that tells the story of the battle.



Section view of a Ha-Ha wall.

### Ha-Ha Wall Memorial by Fuyu Yang

As another way to express the drama of the battle story and honor the soldiers' sacrifice, this design incorporates open space, wooded borders and water to illustrate an enclosed field. The triangular space is bordered by densely planted trees and two narrow ponds of water, representing Brier Creek and the Savannah River. A path crosses the ponds leading to a lawn in the center of the triangular space. A "ha-ha" wall – a British landscape design element originally used to keep livestock out of garden areas without interrupting the view shed – is used here to represent how trapped the Patriot soldiers were when overcome by British, and the panic of their retreat.



Plan view of memorial adjacent to the roadside.



## Case Study: Spring Hill Redoubt and Memorial, Battlefield Park, Savannah, GA

<http://www.savannah.com/battlefield-park/>



An example of a historic recreation and an emblematic memorial, Battlefield Park commemorates the 1779 Revolutionary War battle for Savannah, for which the British held off Patriot and French troops to maintain control this important port city.

In 2005, archaeologists from the Coastal Heritage Society found evidence of the Spring Hill redoubt, using the remnants to construct a separate recreation of the earthen fortification to show visitors what the bunker would have looked like.

The memorial grounds also include a rectangular grid of 800 granite squares that list the names of those who died or were wounded in the battle, arranged to represent the five columns of soldiers that attacked the British lines. The stones are available to the public for engraving the name of a Revolutionary War ancestor. The project was funded through the Coastal Heritage Society, the City of Savannah and private donations.



*Images from Instagram.com via @coastal\_heritage\_society*

## Memorial Design Competition

Many of the memorials in Georgia are emblematic in nature and are recognizable in their similarities. Exploring alternative, expressive designs for a memorial at Brier Creek could distinguish this battlefield site from others in the region.<sup>2</sup> The Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee would benefit from hosting a Memorial Competition to receive additional designs from a variety of artists experienced in outdoor monument design and installation. An artist employed to creatively combine emblematic and expressive characteristics can tell the story factually but also convey the sense of surprise such as the attack evoked, as well as other expressive emotions.

Any design for the memorial site may want to consider a larger scope of interpretation. Visitors should realize how the landscape has changed considerably since the time of the battle, and how it is similar, as a way to evoke the setting of the battle. This can be done through illustrative panels or by a small demonstration area that changes the viewshed – assuming it didn't interrupt the hunting and fishing uses of the site. For example, selective clearing can be used to recreate meadows and fields, or more elaborate interpretation could introduce historic farming patterns with more detailed planting design schemes. This level of interpretation would need to be pursued in concert with the state

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<sup>2</sup> War memorials found across the country are catalogued at the Memorial Day Foundation website: <http://www.memorialdayfoundation.org/war-registry/types-of-war-memorials.html>

archaeologist's office and the Tuckahoe WMA Manager to ensure the site didn't experience further damage or hinder WMA efforts.

## Two Case Studies and a Template

Looking towards art competitions and war memorial design solicitations, two examples surfaced that include elements the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee could draw on in crafting language for their own design completion. A template is included as a guide at the conclusion of this chapter.

### American Icon Art Competition – “How Americans Celebrate”

Sponsored by the Sausalito Art Festival; Sausalito, CA

[http://www.americanicon.net/;](http://www.americanicon.net/)

Application:

[http://sausalitoartfestival.formstack.com/forms/application\\_form\\_copy\\_copy](http://sausalitoartfestival.formstack.com/forms/application_form_copy_copy)

The Sausalito Art Festival is one of the oldest and most prestigious open-air art festivals in the country, showcasing artists from all over the world in a variety of media. The American Icon Art Competition is showcased at the festival every Labor Day. This competition fosters the personal expression of American Imagery and is open to amateurs and professionals. The 2016 competition asks artists to submit their



interpretation of how and why Americans celebrate holidays. The theme for submissions is described as follows: “Americans have many reasons to celebrate and we want to know what you celebrate and how you do so. Do you celebrate because of national or local holidays? Or, is it because of a cultural tradition or family occasion? Do you celebrate when your favorite team wins or when you accomplish a personal goal? Based on your unique experiences, upbringing and beliefs, we want to see how and why you celebrate the things that are meaningful in your life.” The entry form is simple and the prizes include a first to fourth place prize and three honorable mentions (all ranging in monetary values).

Similarly, a Brier Creek memorial competition could follow this example by outlining what is expected from participants with a preliminary competition statement, such as, “using sculpture, we seek artistic interpretations by both professional and amateur artists that capture the historic and significant event of the Battle of Brier Creek. The winners of the event will win cash prizes and be exhibited through a multimedia presentation (website, local paper, etc.)” The statement could specify an emblematic or expressive memorial design, or leave it open to personal interpretation.

### World War I Memorial Design Competition

Sponsored by the World War I Centennial Commission; Washington, D.C.

<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/competition-overview.html>

The goal of the World War One Centennial Commission was “to create a dynamic urban space and, more importantly, a timeless memorial that will duly honor the service of America’s World War I veterans while inspiring Americans today and tomorrow to better understand this profound event in our nation’s history.” Sited at Pershering Park on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C., the memorial honors the 4.7 million Americans who served during World War I.

The competition was made up of two stages that included an initial submittal stage and a more intensive second stage. Stage two required designers to further refine and develop their concepts for the memorial with the help of the Design Oversight Committee, who provided input and advice for the design teams. The teams then resubmitted their concepts, which were then displayed on the website and to the public, and a winner was then selected. By having two stages, especially one that requires designers to meet with a committee to receive feedback, the Design Oversight Committee had more control over the final design.

A project statement for Brier Creek could be similar to the following: “The memorial should honor and commemorate the service of the Patriot forces in the Revolutionary War at the Battle of Brier Creek, with

sufficient scale and gravity. The designers should also focus on creating linkages to the landscape elements surrounding the site in addition to the other historical elements of Sylvania, GA.” A website posting advertising the competition should describe the battle, include information about site and surrounding county, and the entry info for the competition.

Having researched art, monument and memorial competitions with similarities to the goals for a memorial at the Brier Creek battlefield park, the following page contains a template of a Memorial Competition Announcement. The Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee, the City of Sylvania, the Tuckahoe WMA manager and the state archaeologist can use this template as a starting point for planning for a memorial installation.



## Template: Competition Announcement for Battle of Brier Creek Memorial [sample language]

**Overview:** The Battle of Brier Creek was an American Revolutionary War battle fought on March 3, 1779 near the confluence of Brier Creek with the Savannah River in Screven County, Georgia. A Patriot force consisting principally of militia from North Carolina and Georgia was surprised by the British, and suffered significant casualties. The British Southern Campaign began in Georgia and had it not been for the Battle of Brier Creek it could have just as easily ended there. The Battle of Brier Creek swung momentum in favor of the British, crushed Patriot morale, and derailed Rebel offensive plans in Georgia. It also provided the British with the opportunity to secure their foothold in the frontier colony, which changed the course of the war.

The site is located within the southernmost portion of the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area, which is managed by the GA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as a fishing and hunting preserve. The battlefield site has a historic marker that was placed in the vicinity of the site at a small roadside park beside Brier Creek, but the historic battleground is not otherwise recognized nor is it protected, other than the protection provided through state ownership and management as a wildlife management area. Until a recent archaeological study, the exact location of the battlefield and 150 Patriot gravesites were a mystery. The City of Sylvania and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hired an archaeologist in 2013 to locate the battlefield site, which resulted in a confirmation of the general battlefield area and a general idea of burial sites.

**Objective:** The City of Sylvania, GA, and the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee is pleased to sponsor a memorial competition in

commemoration of the battle fought in present-day Screven County, GA. Submissions should honor and commemorate the service of the Patriot forces in the Revolutionary War at the Battle of Brier Creek with sufficient scale and gravity. The designers should also focus on creating linkages to the landscape elements surrounding the site.

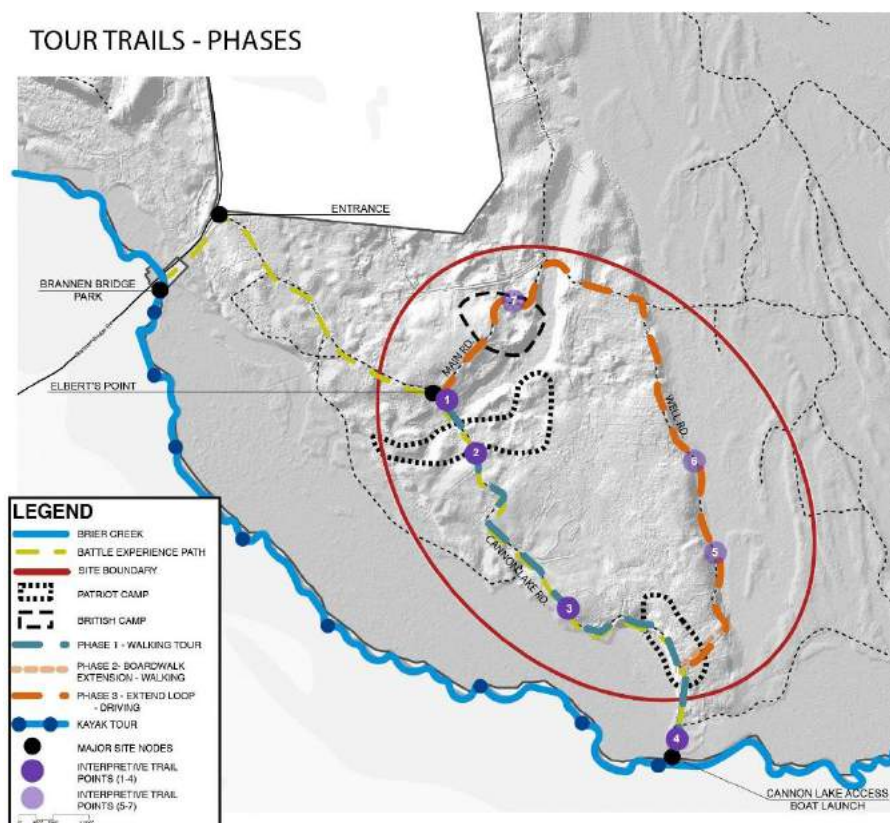
**Competition:** We seek artistic interpretations by both professional and amateur artists and designers that capture the historic and significant event of the Battle of Brier Creek and memorializes the 500 Patriot soldiers who died for the cause of Freedom. Artists should include examples of past work and commissions as references and evidence of experience in memorial construction. The acreage for the project site is \_\_\_\_\_ and the budget for construction and installation is \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Entry + Prizes:**

- The competition is a two-stage review process. Initial submissions should be made online or via mail that include sketches, image, or mock-up and a description. [Entry fee could be \$25 -- goes towards prize money]
- If selected for the second stage, applicants will meet with a Design Review Committee to refine their work in concert with the committee, who will post final submissions for public review and comment.
- Finalists work will be shown on the web and in the local paper [recognition may motivate people to enter the competition]
- [Must state on the announcement and application who will be deciding on the winner, e.g., public vote, committee, both, etc.]

For More Information, visit:

<https://thebattleofbriercreek.wordpress.com/>



### An Interpretive Trail

In addition to safely accommodating non-sportsmen into a Wildlife Management Area, an interpretation plan for a historic site must carefully consider who might visit. Among heritage visitors there will be differing levels of knowledge, differences in age and physical ability, levels of interest, and the need for suggesting various educational experiences and an array of recreational opportunities.

Creating an interpretive trail could accommodate those who want to experience the site in a quiet, contemplative way on foot, as well as a

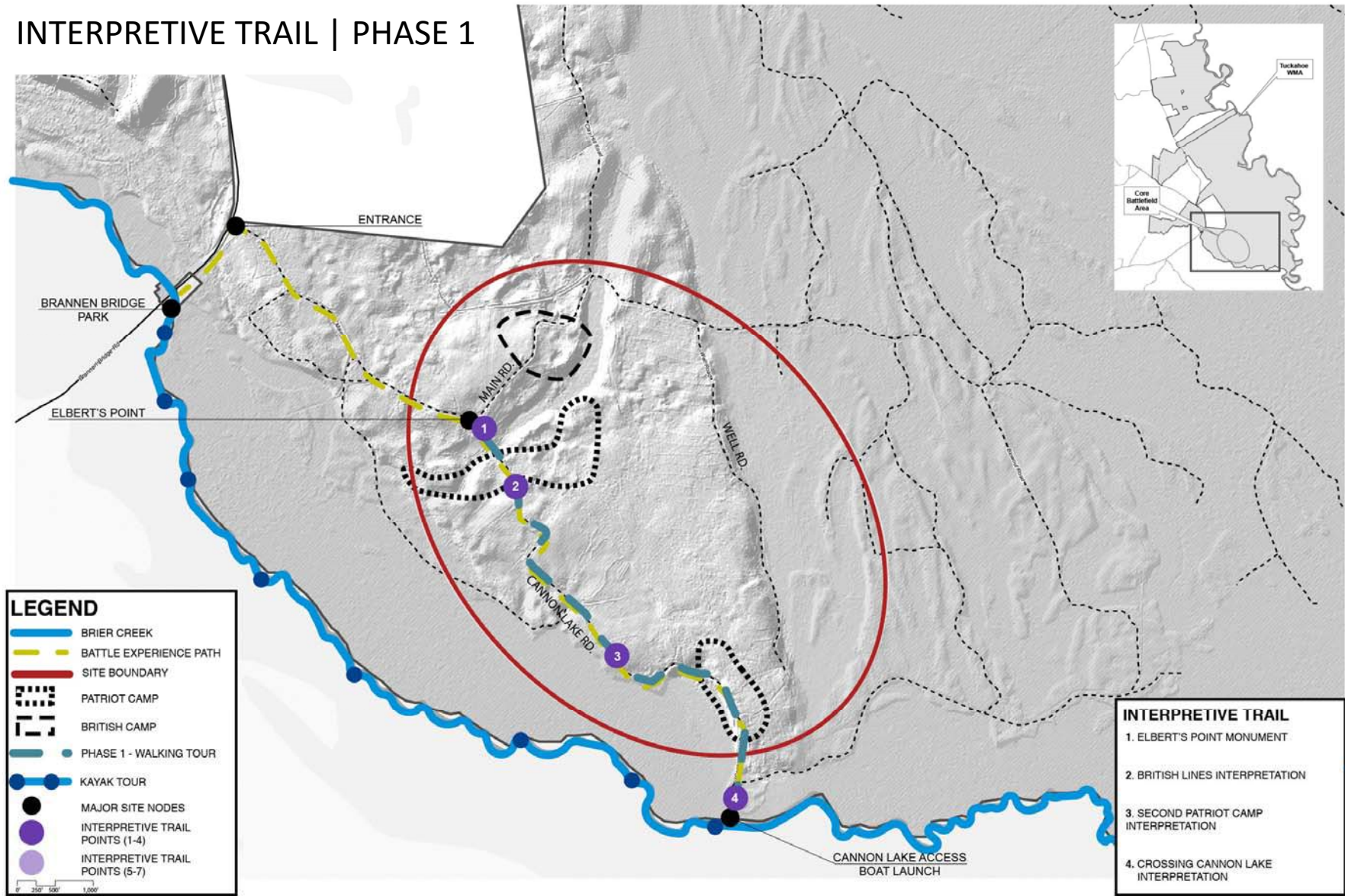
driving tour for those who physically need comfortable transport over the length of the site. Both options can be accomplished simultaneously by locating the trail on existing roads and providing interpretive panels at a widened spot in the road at various locations on the pathway.

Because the existing roads surrounding the general area of the battle (Cannon Lake Rd, Main Rd and Well Rd) do not make a complete loop – the southern end of Well Rd and Cannon Lake access is prone to flooding and therefore is not accessible to cars – three solutions for interpretive trails are presented as options for telling the story of the battle. These options, or phases, present alternatives for either a condensed interpretation at a minimal number of stops along a short path (Phase 1), or the extension of the trail, and the story, for a longer path (Phases 2 and 3).

A larger map of each phase of the trail follows, with a description of what might be included at each stop.



# INTERPRETIVE TRAIL | PHASE 1







*Looking south down Cannon Lake Rd from Elbert's Point.*

### **Phase 1 – Elbert’s Point to Cannon Lake Access**

This trail follows the general path of the British in their approach to the Patriot campsite and continues down to the creek, mimicking the escape path of the overwhelmed militia and the river they had to attempt to cross for survival. Several stops along the way could include interpretive panels that discussed the progression of the battle timeline, terminating at the Cannon Lake Access boat launch. While Cannon Lake Access is only one part of the lowland in which soldiers escaped – most accounts indicate the majority fled in the direction of the Savannah River to the safety of South Carolina – the ecology of Brier Creek is similar and would give visitors a sense of the army backed up against the river with nowhere to go. This location emulates the same scenario of the militia’s retreat and attempted navigation through the swamp and across the Savannah River. It would be an ideal place for reflection and an interpretive display, as it perhaps accompanied by a poem or first-hand account or the panicked retreat. The following Interpretive stops are proposed along the path:

#### **Stop 1: Elbert’s Point Monument**

Elbert’s Point is located where Cannon Lake Rd and Main Rd meet. In addition to the memorial, Point One could include a visitor area for people to park and gather information about the site. Educational signs or panels would begin the tour and give a broad overview of the historical site. In later developments, this could be a site for reenactments or musketball demonstrations.



### Stop 2: British Lines

Information about the 70 days leading up to the battle as well as the British perspective and strategy. This information could be explained to visitors through signage, panels, and images. The exact location of the second point on the tour is not defined, but should generally be located 1/3 of the way between Stop 1 and Stop 4 at a point in the road conducive for a small pull-off.

### Stop 3: Second Patriot Camp

Insight about the area of the second Patriot campsite, describing why the encampment moved inland from the water and how they were caught unprepared by the British. The exact location of the third point on the tour is not defined, but should generally be located 2/3 of the way between Stop 1 and Stop 4 at a point in the road conducive for a small pull-off.

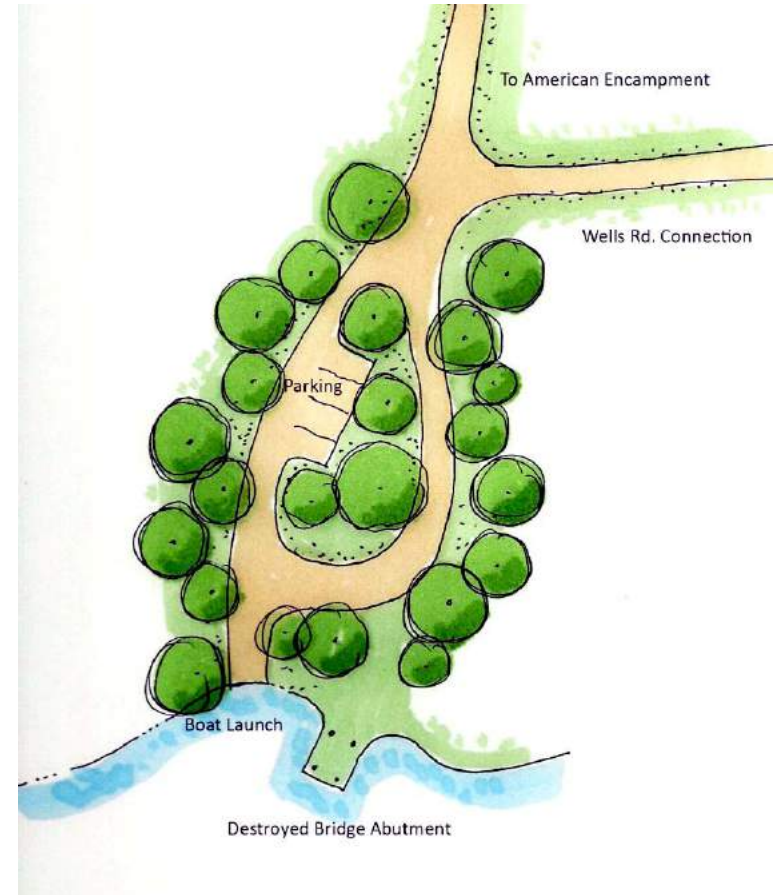
### Stop 4: Crossing Cannon Lake

Allows visitors to see the creek and visualize the complications in crossing this type of swampy environment. Here, interpretive panels could tell the story of the cannon falling into the creek in advance of the battle, as well as the panicked retreat of Patriot soldiers at the battle's end. Cannon Lake is aesthetically pleasing and could be a spot for people to picnic and relax, therefore a larger parking area could be considered, as well as space for cars to turn around and return the way they came. Any changes or expansion of the site should be done with a

light touch so as not to interrupt the natural beauty of the site or add complicated maintenance issues.



*High water conditions at Cannon Lake Boat Access on Brier Creek.*

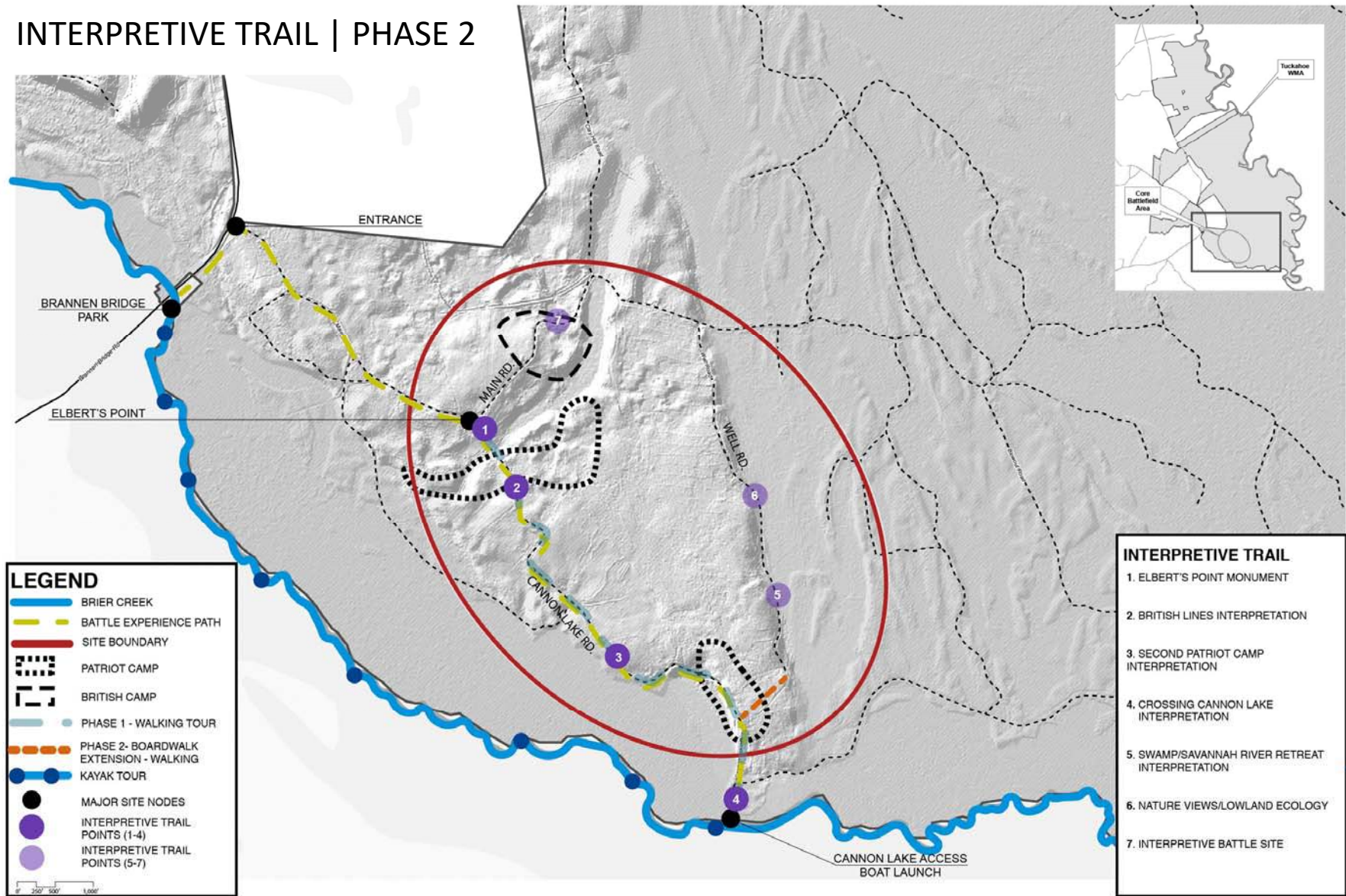


### ***Cannon Lake Access Interpretive Area***

The end of Cannon Lake Rd. provides an opportunity to tell the story of the Patriot troops as they crossed Brier Creek looking for a place to set up camp, as well as the aftermath of the battle when the militia panicked and attempted to flee back across the swampy lowland. An expanded parking area plan is shown above, as well as a photo-illustration of an installed interpretive panel.



# INTERPRETIVE TRAIL | PHASE 2



## Phase Two – Extended Walking Tour

Extending the length of the walking trail to elaborate on the aftermath of the battle, as well as delve into the ecology of the site, could be accomplished via a boardwalk system to connect Cannon Lake and Well Road. The boardwalk should be low impact and could be implemented through fundraising, or perhaps a volunteer/Eagle Scout project. The extension of the walking trail over to Well Rd would create a walking loop for visitors – desirable in providing a slower pace to take in the site, an exercise trail that doesn't require walking back the same way one came, and allows walkers to see new areas within the battle site. The tour points on the map are generally located as to approximate an equal distance, and should be sighted in accordance with the advice of the WMA manager, the state archaeologist and local historians.

### Stop 5: Swamp Retreat

Stop Five is an area where the Patriot's retreat across the swamp could be further interpreted. While the soldiers may not have retreated at this exact location, the area is aesthetically and geographically similar. An interpretive panel could be located here to tell the story and provide imagery to the visitors, perhaps including quotes from soldiers who survived the ordeal.

### Stop 6: Lowland Ecology

This location allows visitors to experience different stages of forestation, a mix of ecology due to flooding patterns, and different



types of animals. Information could be provided on these different environments, and discuss how the land has changed since the time of the Revolutionary War.

### Stop 7: Interpretive Battle Site

Close to where the actual battle occurred, this stop could be considered for research as a larger interpretive landscape to recreate historic land patterns, i.e. forested and farmed areas, and perhaps a reenactment of the battle. This should be done in consultation with the state archaeologist and the WMA manager as to the appropriateness of a large interpretive site within the WMA and an important archaeological zone.



### *Boardwalk System for Well Road*

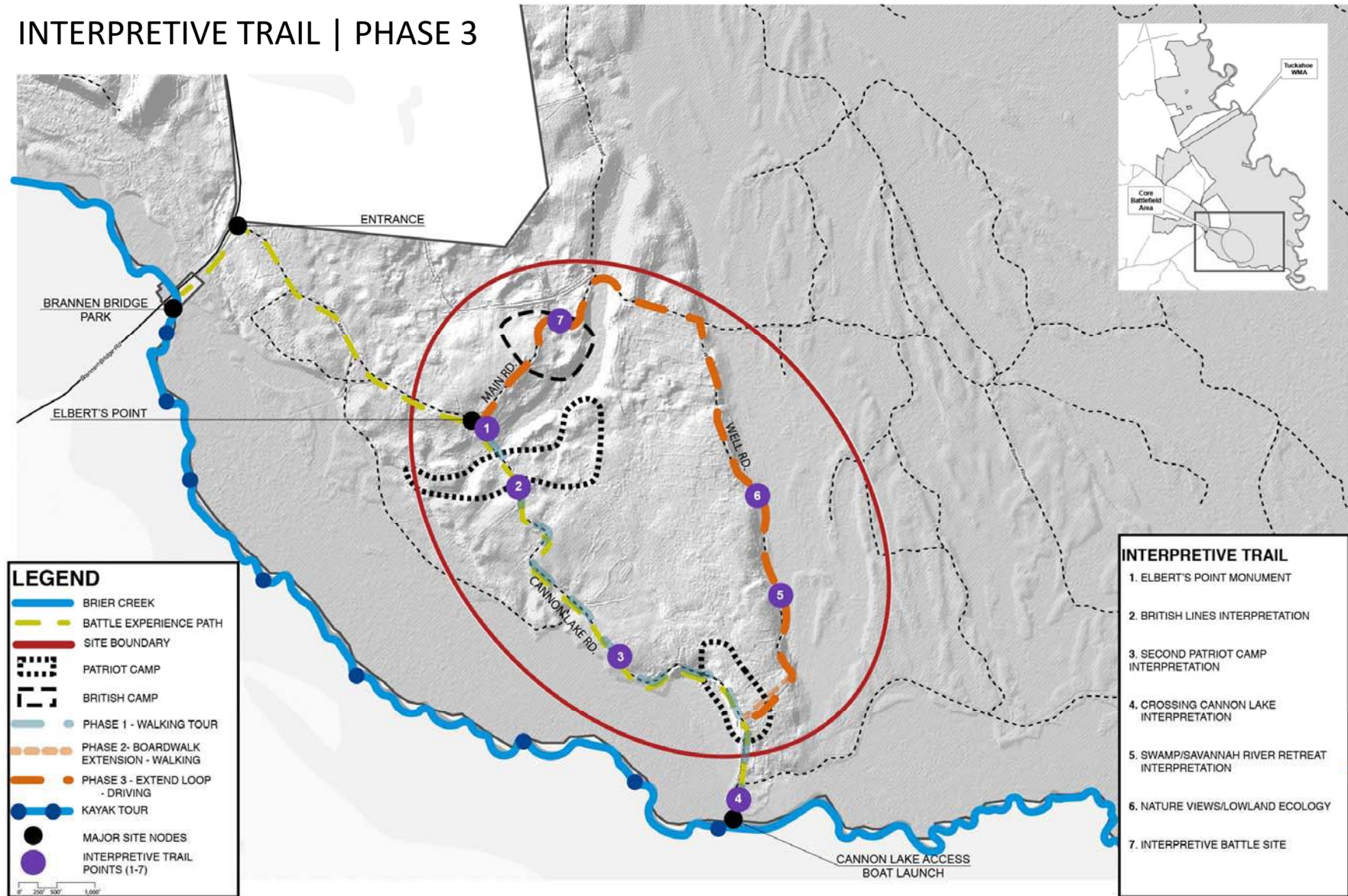
Certain areas within the WMA site are not currently accessible by cars or pedestrians due to flooding. Two areas were assessed that would benefit from the installation of a boardwalk in the future, if the walking trail is to be extended beyond Cannon Lake Road. Phase Two of the Interpretive Trail suggests extending Wells Road to connect to Cannon Lake Road for potential pedestrian access via a boardwalk. A trail marker could be used to direct hikers from the Cannon Lake Access (Stop 4) to Stops 5 through 7 on Well Rd. Additionally, a boardwalk system could prove necessary along portions of Well Rd to Main Rd.

Any boardwalk system should be low impact and low maintenance. Wood planks are recommended, as they are lower impact, cost efficient, and have a cohesive aesthetic with the property. Two materials were evaluated for cost: the average wooden decking costs between \$50-75 per linear foot and “ipe” wood (pronounced like “hippie” without the “h”), which is similar to teak, costs around \$100-110 per linear foot. Boardwalk sizing could vary between 6’ across and 8’ across depending on the section needed and the amount of foot traffic predicted.



*A photograph of the end of Well Rd looking toward Cannon Lake Access, shown with a boardwalk.*

# INTERPRETIVE TRAIL | PHASE 3





### Phase Three – Extended Driving Tour

In order for a driving loop to be provided allowing for a longer and fully-accessible interpretive trail, the connection between Cannon Lake Rd. and Well Rd. must be cleared out for a road. In addition, various spots along Well Rd. would have to be maintained as well as Canon Lake Rd is currently. While the benefits of this option allow for a longer tour experience for those who need transportation to experience the site, the downside is that Well Rd is more flood-prone and harder to maintain for non-all-wheel-drive vehicles. Also, limiting Cannon Lake Rd and Well Rd to one-way vehicular ingress/egress provides a benefit to the law enforcement needs of the WMA staff. This is a high priority consideration for the WMA and may add to the limitations of the Interpretive Trail design.

The Interpretive Trail and its optional phases are presented as a logical way to tell the story of the Battle of Brier Creek given the pros and cons of a site being actively managed as state hunting and fishing grounds. Any proposals for interpretation should be tied to historical documentation, consider a wide range of user groups, be sensitive to archaeological protection measures, and be practical for the ongoing maintenance of the Wildlife Management Area.



*The existing terminus of Well Road is deliberately disconnected from Cannon Lake Rd to limit poachers from having two routes out of the forest.*

## Engaging the Public

In addition to creating an interpretive trail, the charrette team provided suggestions for further engaging the public in experiencing the Battle of Brier Creek.



### Brannen Bridge Park

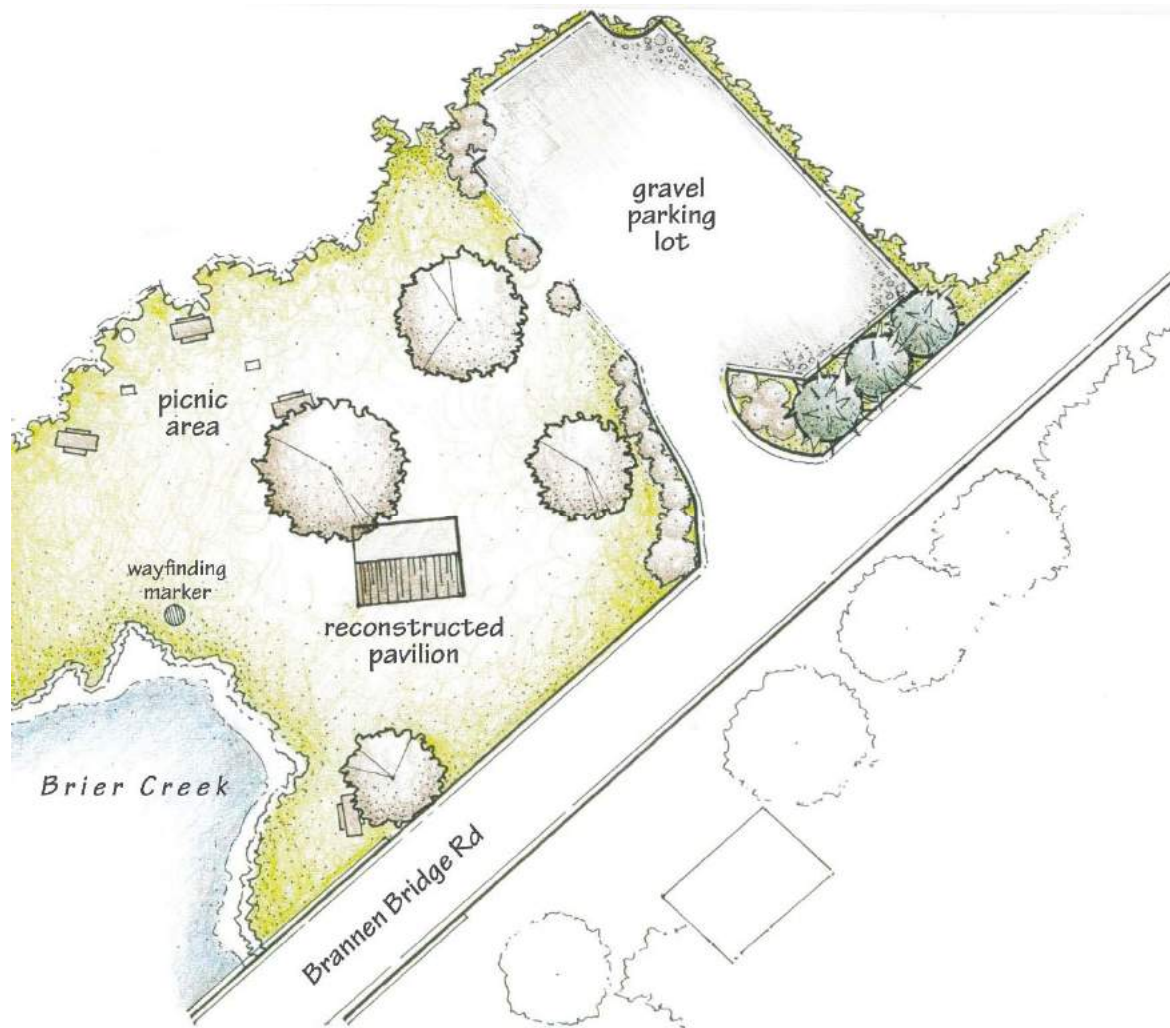
For many citizens of and visitors to Screven County, the roadside park and local swimming hole at Brier Creek and Brannen Bridge Road marks the location of the Battle of Brier Creek, as this is where the only historic markers for the battle are located. There is an opportunity to accommodate more diverse visitors to the swimming hole through recreation opportunities, to refocus the area's significance to the

Revolutionary War, and direct visitors to the actual battle site and interpretive trail, once it is developed.



The existing pavilion appears neglected and is not inviting, though its location within the park is good. A new pavilion with possible restroom and storage facilities, would offer individuals, families, and other groups additional space to gather, socialize, and recreate in a beautiful setting beside Brier Creek. Permanent restrooms, picnic tables and grills, would better accommodate visitors. A locked storage facility that could hold extra picnic tables and trash cans, would allow the park to accommodate larger groups.

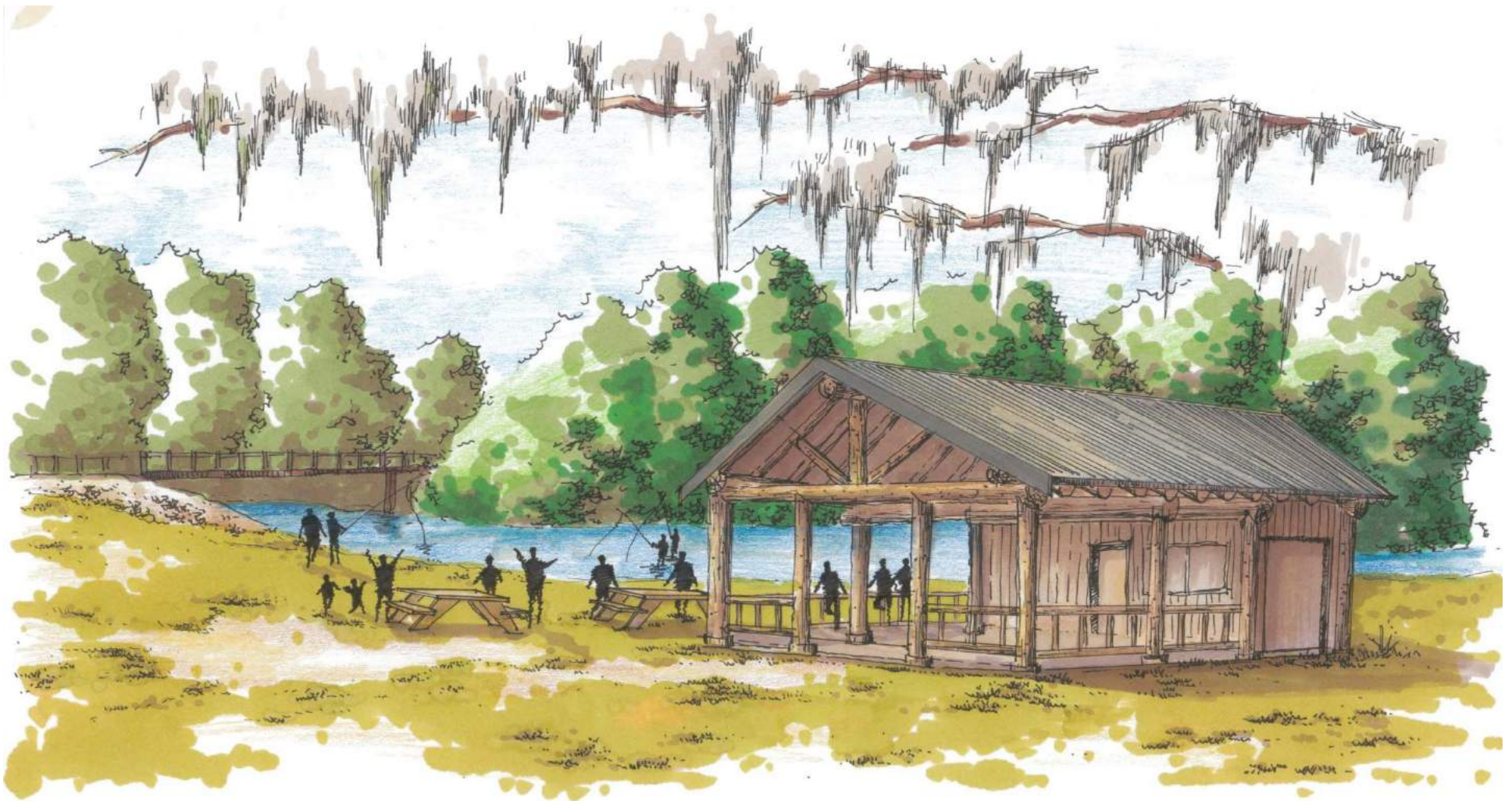




*Potential wayfinding signage beside the creek showcases the relationship of the park to the battle site across the road.*

### **Brannen Bridge Park – Plan View**

This improvement plan for Brannen Bridge Park has many new features. Parking has been defined with loose gravel and border plantings (not curb and gutter). The existing trees have been maintained and along with the large tree stump by the stream bank. More permanent picnic tables, grilling stations, and trash cans would further enhance the park.



### **Brannen Bridge Park – New Pavilion**

A new pavilion with possible restroom and storage facilities would offer individuals, families, and other groups additional space to gather, socialize, and recreate in a beautiful setting beside Brier Creek. Permanent restrooms, picnic tables and grills would better accommodate visitors. A locked storage facility that could hold extra picnic tables and trash cans, would allow the park to host larger groups.





To incorporate a compelling visual at the swimming hole site, create a “timeline” mural of the Battle of Brier Creek along the side of the bridge with a mural of the battle. This would have a dual-purpose of highlighting the history and sacredness of the space whilst covering up offensive graffiti.

Tonya Bonitatibus, Executive Director & Riverkeeper  
Savannah Riverkeeper, Inc.  
P: 706-826-8991 | e: [riverkeeper@savannahriverkeeper.org](mailto:riverkeeper@savannahriverkeeper.org)  
[www.savannahriverkeeper.org](http://www.savannahriverkeeper.org)

### Kayak tours

Learning about the Battle of Brier Creek while paddling the creek itself would be a natural fit for this historic site. Launching from the roadside park at Brannen Bridge and paddling downstream to Cannon Lake Access provides a leisurely 2-mile paddle and could take about an hour.



Offering guided kayak and canoe tours several times a year led by an experienced paddler and/or a local historian would be a way to gauge interest and build demand for a more regular tour offering. Long-term goals could envision a self-guided tour with an outfitter providing kayak rentals, an audio tour and shuttle service. For assistance in finding regional outfitters and river advocates, contact the Savannah Riverkeeper organization.

### Physical and Virtual Visitor's Centers

As we heard from Sylvania Mayor Margaret Evans, a Visitor Center is something that will be implemented into the Downtown revitalization plan for Sylvania. Such a center could provide off-site services that are not allowed on the WMA property due to regulations, such as: kayak rentals, a gift shop, scheduling and payment for guided tours and workshops. The Visitors Center can also act as a more accessible location for the general public to get the information they need to visit the battlefield site.

Brochures are a very common way to advertise historic and recreational sites. Since the site is a hunting hot-spot, a brochure can advise visitors on seasonal activities so that they plan their visit at the right time. The brochure would also include a description of the site and some of the activities provided. Brochures should be located at the Sylvania Visitors Center, the historic Georgia Visitors Center on Highway 301, and all visitor centers within a 100-mile radius of Sylvania.

Having an online presence is crucial for attracting visitors to the site, and the area. There are limited opportunities to learn about the Battle of Brier Creek online, and none describe its actual location. The Sons of the American Revolution have developed a "Georgia's Revolutionary War Trails" site<sup>3</sup>, but it is not yet populated with the information listed on its headings. If updated, it has great potential for linking the regions

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.georgiasocietysar.org/revtrail/grwt.htm>

important sites in the "Southern Strategy" together as a history trail, and the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee should encourage these linkages. In the meantime, a website dedicated to the Battle of Brier Creek can elevate its importance and increase its visibility. It would be important to include a map of the site, a history of the battle, and a bibliography of sources and related web sites to direct individuals toward further information. It would also encourage people to visit the site if they can. Eventually, it can be used to announce tours and workshops and provide online registration. The UGA Charrette Team has begun a website that the local committee can maintain and amend, as an example: <https://thebattleofbriercreek.wordpress.com/>





## Special Events at the Battlefield



*Flag installation at the Battle of Brier Creek. Photo courtesy of the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee.*

The annual commemoration of the battle on March 3<sup>rd</sup> is a long-standing ceremony that should continue at the site, and a wider offering of special interpretive programs should be considered during the year. Many battlefield sites across the nation offer scheduled guided tours, reenactments, and educational demonstrations, such as cannon firing and teaching how to make musket balls. Shorter half-day offerings could accommodate school field trips or teacher workdays when kids are out of school for the day. Longer offerings could include programs that supplemented local summer camp experiences. For college and high school-aged students, educational workshops could be implemented from a variety of fields of study, including history, archaeology, and ecology that can be translated into an outdoor-classroom setting.



*Musket firing demonstration at Yorktown Victory Center, Yorktown, Virginia.*

### Case Studies of Revolutionary War sites

Two Revolutionary War battlefield sites are profiled below that are of similar size, geography and timeframe to the Battle of Brier Creek. These sites provide examples and inspiration for an interpretive plan at Brier Creek that relies on self-guided tours and semi-annual, volunteer-led programming.

#### **Case Study: Battle of Camden – Camden, South Carolina**

The Battle of Camden occurred on August 17, 1780, when Patriot forces attacked what they mistakenly presumed was a vulnerable British encampment. On the contrary, the British proved more than capable and many of the untrained Patriot militia retreated without firing a shot. This battle is significant in that it provided lessons to the Continental Soldiers on how to best use the militia going forward, and shifted the decision of who appointed Generals from Congress to the President, as Commander in Chief.

The battle site is on a former pine plantation located about 8 miles north of downtown Camden, SC, which, at the time of the battle, was South Carolina's largest inland city. The timber company who owned the land agreed to a conservation easement of 310 acres. In 2001, an interpretive trail was developed led by the Palmetto Conservation Foundation, a statewide non-profit dedicated to the protection of natural, cultural and historic resources and the promotion of active



outdoor recreation. <http://palmettoconservation.org/about/> The Palmetto Conservation



Foundation conducted archaeological research to locate and protect the gravesites, curated a collection of found artifacts for display, created a replanting plan to re-establish the historic longleaf pine forest, and developed walking trails, interpretive signage and an audio podcast for self-guided tours.

The Camden battle site is geographically similar to Brier Creek – it is a former pine plantation with sandy soil and minimal natural amenities. Therefore, the focus is solely on telling an important story in the place where it happened. The trail uses simple markers to help explain the battle on short, level, and easy walking paths (1.4 mi). Admission is free, and there are different wildlife and fauna to view from the trail. There is an option to extend the hike to the dirt drive through the nearby Camden Revolutionary War site that features reconstructions, including the Kershaw House that headquartered the British during their occupation of the town.

Historic Camden: <http://historiccamden.org/discover/>

Trail Information:

<http://www.sctrails.net/Trails/alltrails/Interpretive/HistoricCamden.html>

Battle site and podcast:

<http://palmettoconservation.org/about/military-heritage/>

Brochure: [http://www.battleofcamden.org/camden\\_trail\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.battleofcamden.org/camden_trail_brochure.pdf)

News article about the trail:

<http://www.thestate.com/living/article14355599.html>

## Battle of Camden Battlefield



Palmetto Conservation owns the 476-acre core battlefield in Kershaw County, SC, where Revolutionary War soldiers fought and died at the Battle of Camden on August 16, 1780. Half of the troops under British Lt. Gen. Cornwallis were American Loyalists fighting a civil war to preserve ties with Great Britain. The battle was a disastrous defeat for American Patriots who wanted independence. Hundreds of men lost their lives.

The battlefield is located off US Hwy 521 about 8 miles north of Camden. Flat Rock Road (S-28-58) cuts across the site, which offers 3 miles of walking trails with interpretive signage. An accompanying podcast shares battle stories and contemporaneous commentary, including a quote from Thomas Jefferson.

Since assuming ownership in 2001, PCF has conducted archaeological research to locate and protect graves and cultural resources, curated artifacts for public display, developed digital topographic maps, constructed walking trails with signage and podcast, and replanted the longleaf pine forest to help restore the battlefield landscape. The Katawba Valley Land Trust holds the property under permanent conservation protection.

[Learn More](#)

The podcast is a series of MP3 files in a compressed (.zip) file. Simply click on the link below and save it to your computer. The MP3 files can be saved to iTunes® or the destination folder of your choice. There, you can download it to your MP3 player.

We hope you enjoy your audio tour of the Battle of Camden!

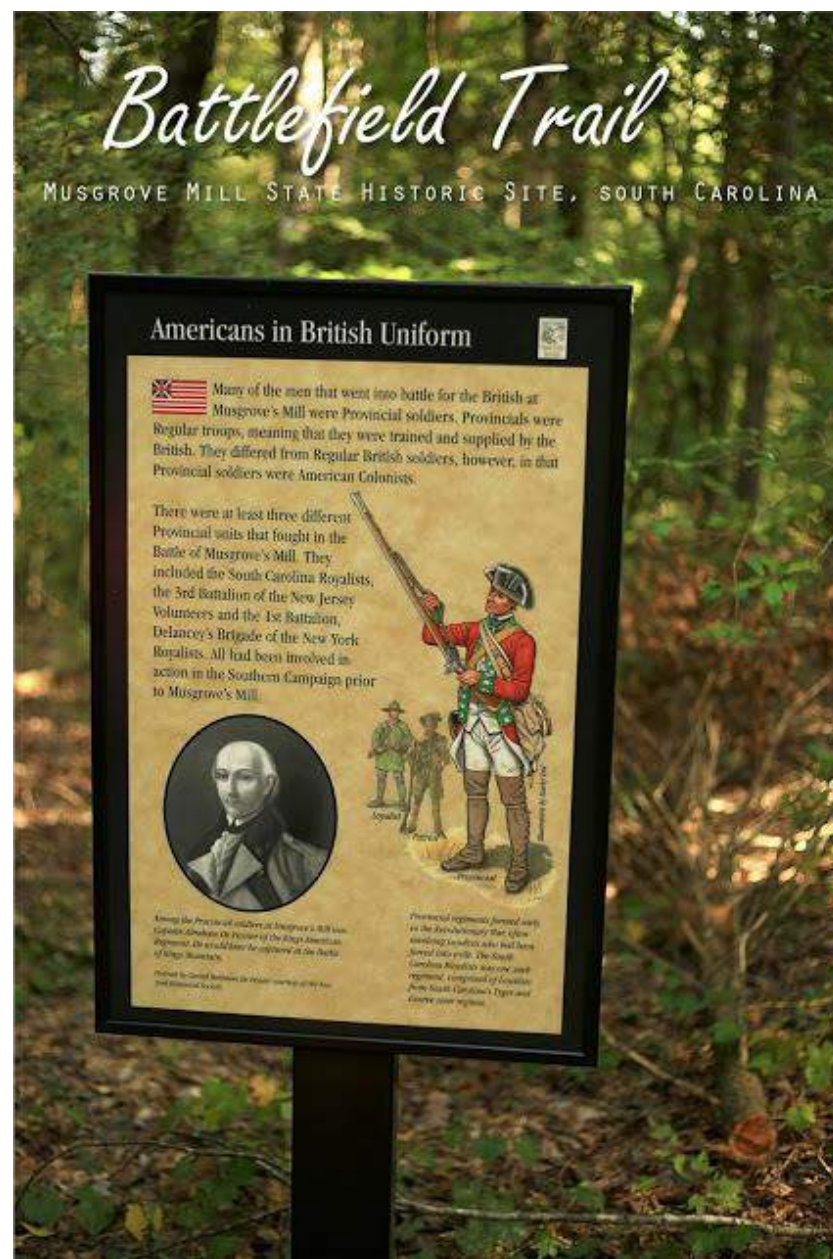
[Download the Battle of Camden Podcast](#)

Screenshot of the Battle of Camden website with audio tour link at <http://palmettoconservation.org/about/military-heritage/>

### Musgrove Mill State Historic Site – Clinton, South Carolina

The Battle of Musgrove's Mill occurred on August 19, 1780 in present-day Clinton, SC. A group of Patriot militia was able to overwhelm a larger force of Loyalist militia and British regulars when several of the British officers were wounded and forced their retreat. It was a turning point in the Southern Strategy after losses at Brier Creek and Camden, and led up to an American victory at Kings Mountain. The site is now a state historic site and offers programs and tours on a regular basis, a visitor center and an interpretive trail.

The site is similar to Battle Creek because of the size and geographic characteristics – the Musgrove Mill area is woody and relatively flat. The trail at Musgrove Mill Historic Site is 1.3 miles long and easy for walking. There are a variety of interpretive signs along the route that tell the story and significance of the battle as well as how the Musgrove Mill battle relates to other battles in the region. The signs are well-illustrated, designed for users of all ages, and are small enough so as not to overwhelm the location. A similar design and approach is recommended for Brier Creek, though using a tilt-table style design might help prevent the signs from being used as target practice in the WMA.



*Images of Musgrove Mill State Historic Site from the weblog:  
<http://www.aninnovativepursuit.com/2015/08/battlefield-trail-musgrove-mill-state.html>*



While the site is a recognized state historic site and has the benefit of state park system support, some lessons on good visitor information can be taken from their website that a locally-initiated effort could incorporate. For example, a short YouTube video is embedded on the site that includes footage from a day of remembrance and demonstrations that provides a great history lesson of the battle site.

Musgrove Mill State Historic Site:

<http://www.southcarolinaparks.com/musgrovemill/introduction.aspx>

User's blog about the trail:

<http://www.aninnovativepursuit.com/2015/08/battlefield-trail-musgrove-mill-state.html>



Images of Musgrove Mill State Historic Site from the webblog:  
<http://www.aninnovativepursuit.com/2015/08/battlefield-trail-musgrove-mill-state.html>



## Conclusion

The Battle of Brier Creek site is an important resource not only for the history of Screven County and Georgia, but for the nation's history. For too long, the relatively small skirmishes in the swamplands and farmlands of the southern states have been overlooked in favor of telling a grander story of large armies, days-long battles and now-famous Founding Fathers who waged the revolution in the northern part of these now United States. However, as Southern historians will tell you, it was these multiple guerilla-style tactics of Patriot militia that whittled away at British troops and ultimately gained the upper hand in the Americans' battle for freedom.

Those of us involved in the design charrette – a contingent of Southerners, Northerners, Midwesterners and International faculty and students – all learned a vast deal more about the Revolutionary War and the founding of this country than we ever knew before. This was especially eye-opening to those of us who had grown up surrounded by hallowed ground but were only taught the Revolutionary War with stories of Paul Revere's midnight ride, the Boston Tea Party, and George Washington's Battle of Yorktown. There is plenty of history to go around, and how much more relevant it is when students can learn about it in their own backyards.

Therefore, it is our hope that the members of the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee succeed in their goal for greater

recognition of the Brier Creek site, but that they further efforts with a coalition of southern Revolutionary War enthusiasts and historians to collectively bring greater recognition to how these regional resources – Kettle Creek, Augusta, Sunbury, Ninety-Six, Camden... just to name a few – are related and inseparable for telling the whole story.

We are richer for having been a part of this experience, and are grateful for the time spent with Sylvania's greatest champion, Mayor Margaret Evans, and the distinguished gentlemen who wove tales for us with the oration of one's favorite teacher: Alex Lee, Dr. Al Freeland, Dr. David Buie, Daniel Johnson, and Senator Jesse Stone. We are also grateful to Bryan Tucker, state archaeologist, who with great humor and patience explained the challenges of protecting, celebrating and memorializing the underground past. Howard and Caroline Pope were our hosts in navigating the endless roads of the WMA and shared their knowledge of the site through the lenses of timber management, ecology, wildlife management and the resources of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Our final thanks goes to *The Sylvania Telephone* Editor Enoch Autry for telling the story of the weekend experience through beautiful words and photographs, to City Manager Stacy Mathis for her solid support, and to Chief Gary Weaver and the men of the Sylvania Fire Department for hosting and feeding us so well.



## APPENDIX: History of the Battle of Brier Creek and its Significance in the Revolutionary War

Two writings about the Battle of Brier Creek assisted the charrette team in understanding the history of this brief battle, the prior events of the Southern Strategy leading up to the battle, and how the outcome affected the rest of the Revolutionary War. The first is an overview of the Battle of Brier Creek written by local historian Rabun A. (Alex) Lee, one of several Screven County resident historians we were fortunate to have guide us during the charrette.

The second is selected excerpts from a 2012 thesis written by Georgia Southern University student William Henry, in defense of his Master of Arts in History degree, that advocates for why more attention should be paid to this small, yet significant battle. Both are included in the Appendix to provide readers with a greater understanding of the event, and have been included with permission of the authors in the charrette-produced website <https://thebattleofbriercreek.wordpress.com/> as a comprehensive history.



*Alex Lee (Top, L) shares the story of the Battle of Brier Creek through historic documents and oral history for the UGA faculty and students during the charrette. Photos by Enoch Autry, Sylvania Telephone.*



## ***The Battle of Brier Creek, Georgia***

Prepared by Rabun A. (Alex) Lee, Mill Creek Chapter, Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution.

In the fall of 1778, British Lord Germain directed Sir Henry Clinton to subdue the Carolinas and Georgia. His "Southern Strategy" was based on the Royal Governors' reports that a large Loyalist militia could be recruited to return these Colonies to the Crown. Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell was dispatched from New York to Savannah which he captured on December 29, 1778. Then Campbell marched to Augusta to recruit Loyalists in the back country. After realizing limited success and fearing the gathering Patriots, on February 14, he decided to retreat to Hudson's Ferry on the Savannah River in Burke (current Screven) County. Campbell learned of Lt. Col. Boyd's defeat at Kettle Creek when some of the survivors rejoined his forces.

Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, in charge of the Patriot Southern Department, developed a campaign to retake Savannah and secure Georgia. Lincoln ordered Gen. John Ashe and his North Carolina Militia to rebuild the Freeman- Miller Bridge at Brier Creek and await reinforcements. On February 27, Gen. Ashe with 1,300 men arrived at the bridge which had been burned by the British. His camp included Gen. William Bryant's 2nd North Carolina Militia, Col. Anthony Lytle's North Carolina Infantry, remnants of Col. Samuel Elbert's Georgia Continentals and Georgia Militia as well as Lt. Col. Leonard Malbury's

Calvary. Ashe was immediately summoned to a council of war at nearby Black Swamp by Gen. Lincoln who directed his Purrysburg troops, Gen. Rutherford's at Black Swamp, and Gen. Andrew Williamson's near Augusta to join Ashe at Brier Creek where they would launch an offensive to drive the British seaward.

At Hudson's Ferry, Campbell relinquished his command to Lt. Col. Marc Prevost, brother of Maj. Gen. Augustine Prevost, commander of the British forces. Realizing the urgency of rapid deployment, Campbell instructed Prevost to immediately proceed northwestward to Paris Mill, cross Brier Creek and attack Ashe from the rear. Campbell directed Maj. Duncan McPherson's 1st Battalion of 71st Regiment up the river road as a diversion. Prevost with over 1,000 men reached Parris Mill on the morning of March 2, after a long all-night forced march off the roads to avoid detection. Finding the bridge destroyed by the Patriots, Prevost used materials from the Parris house and pontoons and completed the crossing on the morning of March 3, about fifteen miles above Ashe's camp.

When Ashe returned from Lincoln's council of war on March 2, he ordered the clearing of a path to Matthew's Bluff to aid the crossing of Rutherford. Scouts returned from Paris Mill on March 2 without knowledge of Prevost's forces. On the morning of March 3, Ashe sent Maj. Frank Ross with 300 dragoons to assess the British forces at



Hudson's Ferry which Ashe intended to attack as soon as Rutherford's reinforcements arrived Ross discovered the trail of the British having moved north, but did not report it to Ashe.

As Prevost moved south on the river road towards Ashe's camp on March 3, he encountered scouts and took them prisoner. Late in the afternoon, Prevost's men skirmished with the forward line of Ashe's pickets and gunfire was heard in the Patriot camp. An express rider galloped to inform Ashe of the imminent attack by the British coming down the road six abreast. Ashe ordered the beat to arms, but cartridges had not been issued and men grabbed what they could. Many had guns with the wrong bore for the ammunition, and battle lines were formed with much confusion.

The New Bern N.C. Militia was to the left against Brier Creek with Elbert and the Continentals in the center and the Edenton N.C. Militia to the right. Seventy yards behind were the Halifax and Wilmington N.C. Militia. Facing the Patriots were Sir James Baird's Light Infantry on the left, Prevost's 2nd Battalion 71st Highland Regiment in the center, and the Carolina Loyalists to the right. The Florida Grenadiers, Tawse's Light Dragoons, Rangers and mounted militia were in the rear.

The British opened with artillery fire into the Patriot's center line. Ashe ordered Elbert forward and to the left within thirty yards of the

Highlanders. This movement cut off many in the New Bern Militia. The Edenton Militia advanced but did not close ranks with Elbert's Continentals due to the threat of being flanked, creating a gap in the center. The Highlanders surged into the gap with a bayonet charge and the Patriot militia began to break and run in a disorderly retreat. Almost alone, Elbert's men stood and fought, but were pressed against Brier Creek. So fiercely did these Georgians fight that the British had to bring up reserves that overwhelmed Elbert's men in a short but intense fight. Elbert was knocked to the ground by a Highlander for dispatch by bayonet, but was saved by a British officer after making the Masonic sign of distress.

Ashe pursued his retreating troops on horseback in an attempt to rally them but to no avail. He escaped at Matthew's Bluff as did many others. The total dead on the Patriot side were at least 150 with over 200 captured, including Col. Elbert and Lt. Col John McIntosh. An unknown number were lost by drowning in an attempt to cross the river. Col. John Dooly and his Wilkes County Militia arrived on March 4 from Kettle Creek and buried the dead in a mass grave. The British only lost five men with eleven wounded.

Lt. Col. Prevost was made acting Royal Governor of Georgia. Gen. Ashe was acquitted at court martial but was censured for his failure to prepare his soldiers against attack.

### ***Excerpts from "An Unfortunate Affair: The Battle of Brier Creek and the Aftermath in Georgia"***

William Henry (2012), Electronic Theses & Dissertations. Paper 875. <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/875> Used with permission of the author.

#### REVOLUTIONARY WAR BACKGROUND LEADING UP TO THE BATTLE

To understand the importance of the Battle of Brier Creek, it is necessary to examine the events leading up to that engagement. The British Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War hinged on success in Georgia. Failure to secure the small colony would almost certainly spell disaster for the British military. The British needed quick and decisive victories in hopes of bringing out the many loyalists who were said to inhabit Georgia and South Carolina.

By 1778, the Revolutionary War for in the northern colonies was not going well for the British. As much as Sir Henry Clinton wanted to destroy George Washington's Continental Army, he could not lure Washington into a decisive battle in which this could be accomplished. Washington always managed to slip away, and as long as his army remained intact, the war would continue. Add to this situation the French entry into the war and British success was becoming less and less certain. Because of this crisis, Lord George Germain, the [British] Secretary of State for the American Colonies, decided it was necessary to shift the war to the south. The idea was that by securing the southern colonies, the British would be able to further isolate the northern

colonies and cut them off from much needed supplies coming from Virginia and the Carolinas. The plan laid out by Lord Germain first involved the capture of Georgia, and then the army would move up into South Carolina, North Carolina and then Virginia.

The British enjoyed a series of successful expeditions in Georgia. First taking Savannah and then moving north to outposts like Ebenezer. When Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell set out to take Augusta [Georgia], he met but minimal resistance along the way. The first major defeat of the expedition came during Thomas Brown's raid into Burke County, when his Florida Rangers were repulsed by a group of Patriots. Brown was even wounded during the affair. This began a shift in fortunes in favor of the Rebels. Upon reaching Augusta, Campbell found only a fraction of the loyalists he had hoped for and had to watch as the Patriot army across the river swelled to more than twice the size of his own. As his position became more and more precarious, he was finally compelled to withdraw back down the Savannah River towards General Prevost's army. The same day that he abandoned Augusta, [British] Colonel Boyd's Loyalist militia was annihilated at Kettle Creek. It is obvious that the British had failed to inspire confidence in the local Tories and even more so among the neutral inhabitants. The situation was beginning to look bleak for the British Southern Campaign, but the Battle of Brier Creek would reverse their fortunes.



## HOW THE BATTLE OCCURED

Patriot General John Ashe had around 1,100 troops under his command, but they were mostly militia. General Ashe met with General Lincoln during a council of war on March 1 to devise a plan to move against Savannah (which was being held by the British). While at this meeting, General Ashe left his army at Brier Creek and had set some of them to repairing the bridge, which Colonel Campbell destroyed after crossing. Ashe assured Generals Lincoln and Moultrie that his position was secure. After all, he had Brier Creek to his left and a deep swamp on his right, meaning the enemy could not outflank him. He also believed the enemy to be afraid of him, since they thought he had a much larger force than them. This was obviously not the case. Once it was realized by [British] Colonel Prevost that the Rebels [Patriots] encamped at Brier Creek were only there to prevent communication with the upper part of the colony and to threaten his army, he set a plan in motion. He sent a Regiment of trained soldiers, along with some irregulars and a couple of field pieces [cannons], to move towards the burned out bridge at Brier Creek to mask the movement of the rest of the army - who took a circular route around Brier Creek in an attempt to get to the American rear. The plan required surprise and Colonel Prevost hoped that the feint towards the bridge would be sufficient to hold the attention of the Rebels across the creek, while he swung his army around from upstream. The Patriot force camped at Brier Creek had just had their mounted forces on horseback leave for another task, and they were

poorly equipped and had no entrenching tools to build a defensive work around their camp. General Ashe was informed by a rider that the British were about to attack, and they ended up with only 15 minutes to scramble and be ready. They were completely surprised by the British, and the rush to fight was stymied by the fact that many of the cartridges available did not fit the guns that most were carrying.

Colonel Prevost gave the order to charge with bayonets [long guns with knives on the end of the guns]. General Ashe's army was comprised mostly of militia and therefore had no bayonets to defend themselves. As such, the line crumbled as the British surged forward. With the lines breaking away all around them, General Elbert's Georgians held their ground and continued firing. It was not until they were completely surrounded that Elbert finally surrendered. This was a testament to the differences between Continental troops and militia. It also highlights why Continentals were so valuable to American commanders. In the face of a British bayonet charge, Continental regulars could be expected to hold their ground and continue fighting. In the case of the militia, it rarely took something as dire as a bayonet to encourage their departure from the field.

By the time Elbert and his Georgia Continentals surrendered, General Ashe had given up trying to rally the men, who by this point, were running in every direction. Ashe turned to the swamp and proceeded to make his escape. He was fortunate that he was able to avoid capture, as

were many others. Mainly this resulted from the British soldiers stopping to plunder the American camp which was almost entirely intact. This gave Ashe and many men the chance to escape and avoid capture or death. The British so completely surprised the Rebels at Brier Creek that they had to leave their camp with cook fires burning to rush out to form a line of battle. During the retreat, most of the men threw down their arms and belongings in order to get away with their lives. Not only was General Ashe's army routed, it lost almost all of its supplies and provisions. Arms, ammunition, and seven cannon were among the list of items seized by the British. This was particularly important for an army that could barely arm and supply its troops.

#### OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE AND CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WAR

The Battle of Brier Creek could easily be called a disaster for the Americans in the southern colonies. The defeat effectively ended any hopes of an immediate American offensive against the British in Georgia and crushed the morale of American troops in Georgia and South Carolina. It changed the course of the conflict in Georgia and gave the British ample time to complete their work on fortifications in and around Savannah. The British success at Brier Creek allowed them to continue their Southern Strategy and eventually move into South Carolina and then North Carolina. The Americans had an opportunity to unite their forces and possibly drive the British out of Georgia. The

Battle of Brier Creek effectively slammed the door on that opportunity for the Americans and gave the British one of their own.

Despite the importance of the Battle of Brier Creek, it has sadly been understudied. The historiography is rather short and there are only a handful of articles that focus solely on the events at Brier Creek. Some authors have ignored the Battle of Brier Creek completely, even when discussing events in Georgia. Some only make a brief mention of it and then move on to something else. There are several reasons why this has been the case. First and foremost, the number of documents relevant to the Battle of Brier Creek and its consequences are few and far between. There are other reasons that the battle has been overlooked. Patriotic American historians may have steered clear of it because it was such an embarrassment for the Patriots and their cause, while others did so because it was also a very brief engagement involving small armies. Whatever the reason, it is unfortunate that the consequences of the Battle of Brier Creek have been ignored for so long.

The Battle of Brier Creek had many consequences. It resulted in a substantial loss of men and equipment for the Patriots, along with a loss in momentum and a severe drop in morale. For the British this battle allowed them to secure their position in Georgia and maintain their southern strategy. The southern strategy of the British relied heavily on loyalists flocking to the King's Colors when the army arrived. From these loyalists a militia would be created that could defend the conquests



already made by British regulars. To obtain loyalist support, however, the British had to show that they could ensure the safety of loyalists in Georgia. Momentum would play a large role in this. The British needed swift decisive victories to show their superiority. The hope was that the sight of the British marching through Georgia would rally the spirits of loyalists who had been living under patriot authority for quite some time. In the beginning, the British succeeded.

By March 3, 1779, the British had lost most, if not all, of the momentum that they had built up in the months preceding the Battle of Brier Creek. Colonel Campbell's force was under the very real threat of being cut off from reinforcements in Savannah. If that had happened, a larger Rebel force could have overrun his army, should they have chosen to bring together their forces for such an attack. The Rebels were preparing to unite their forces for an all-out assault on Savannah instead with a force of around 7,000 men, a sizable force to say the least. It is very possible that this force could have driven the British out of Savannah, or at the very least, bottled them up inside the town. The British needed a decisive and swift victory to reverse their fortunes in Georgia. The Battle of Brier Creek provided exactly that.

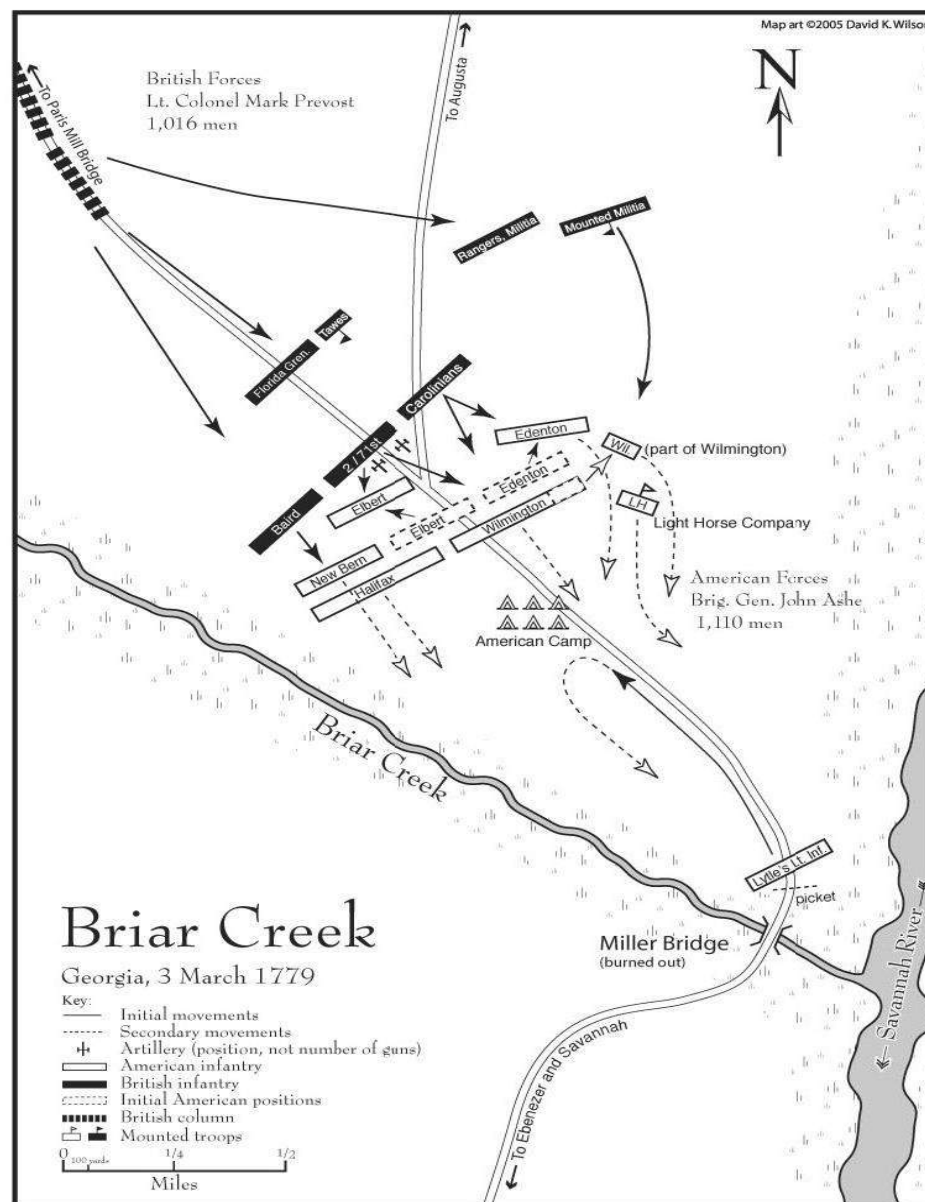


Figure 2.1. In: David K. Wilson. Brier Creek [map].

*The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775-1780*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005.



UGA charrette team with members of the Remember Brier Creek Battlefield Committee and the Sylvania Fire Department on November 15, 2015. Photo by Enoch Autry, Sylvania Telephone.

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