

Trail of South Carolina Militiamen and Lincoln County Men to Kings Mountain

25 September – 6 October 1780

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Synopsis

The story of the story of the Overmountain Men and Patriots who participated at Kings Mountain is well known. This document supplements this story with that of the South Carolinians and Lincoln County Men who marched to the battle by a separate trail. This group amounted to about 390 men. That was a significant portion compared to: 880 from over the mountains, 180 from Burke and Rutherford Counties, and 240 from Wilkes and Surry Counties. Of the 390 South Carolinians and Lincoln County Men, about 260 participated in the battle. That was about 29 percent of all battle participants. These men deserve recognition. This document reveals important findings with some new insights:

- During September 1780, Colonel James Williams was directed by South Carolina Governor John Rutledge to return to South Carolina with a force of recruited refugees. He also gained permission from the North Carolina Board of War to raise troops in North Carolina.
- Beginning 23 September, some of Williams' recruits assembled at Huggin's Plantation in Rowan County. That approximate location has been found.
- On 25 September, Colonel Thomas Sumter's South Carolina militiamen withdrew from Cornwallis's advance on Charlotte and marched up the west side of the Catawba River.
- On 26 September, they crossed to the east side of the river at Tuckasegee Ford and joined Colonel William Graham's Lincoln County Men.
- On 27 September, this group planned to join the retreating forces under Brigadier General William Lee Davidson. However, Davidson advised them that Overmountain Men were advancing to oppose Ferguson. Consequently, they re-crossed to the west side at Beattie's Ford.
- On 28 September, they marched to Sherrill's Ford. There Williams' men joined. He asserted command over all South Carolinians. Sumter protested but submitted as proven by leaving his troops to seek redress from Rutledge at Hillsborough. Afterwards, the South Carolina forces marched together.
- On 30 September, Williams' troops marched up the fork of the Catawba River. By 2 October, they reached a location near present-day Valdese, North Carolina. This route corrects a mistake in historian Lyman Draper's book.
- On 3 October, Graham's Lincoln County Men separated from Williams and followed the Overmountain Men down Cane Creek. Major William Chronicle caught up and joined at a place later named "Probit's place." This land, later owned by William Probit, was on the upper reaches of Cane Creek.
- On 3 October, Williams probably marched down the east side of South Mountain and eventually camped at the Flint Hills.
- There is no one place called Flint Hill as indicated in Draper's book. Rather there was a region called the Flint Hills.

- By 4 October, American colonels concluded that Ferguson had evaded them and revised their plans. They may have decided to move to threaten Ninety Six.
- Later on 4 October, Graham caught up with the Overmountain Men on Camp Creek near Gilbert Town.
- On 5 October, the Overmountain Men crossed Twitty's Ford on Broad River and Alexander's Ford on Green River. It has been reported that the Overmountain Men were following Ferguson toward Ninety Six. However:
 - Ferguson never marched for Ninety Six. Moreover, he would not have planned that since it would have been contrary to his responsibility to support Cornwallis.
 - For the same reason, Americans never believed Ferguson marched for Ninety Six. In particular, Williams could not have convinced the Overmountain colonels to follow Ferguson to Ninety Six as alleged in a myth that originated before 1799.
 - The route from Gilbert Town to these two fords, although in a southwesterly direction, provided good access to the ridgeline road running east-west on the opposite side of Broad River. So, their destination could have been Lawson's Iron Works via Cowpens.
- On 6 October, Campbell credited Williams with the information that Ferguson was near Cherokee Ford on Broad River which was within capturing distance.
- An appropriate name for the route taken by the Lincoln County Men and the South Carolinians is the *Catawba River Valley Victory Trail*.

Many findings in this document became evident by forcing historical events into an exacting timeline. The tool used was the [American Revolution Sites, Events, and Troop Movements](#) web application. It quickly reveals when a hypothetical scenario is improbable or impossible, and thus excludes it from consideration. Each candidate scenario has a context of what was known and unknown on any day and in which original evidence can be analyzed for consistency. The researcher can refine the scenario in an iterative process.

Trail of South Carolina Militiamen and Lincoln County Men to Kings Mountain

September–October 1780, Ferguson, Overmountain Men, South Carolina Militiamen and Lincoln County Men to Kings Mountain

In September 1780, the patriot situation was desperate. During the previous May, Charlestown fell with many Continental soldiers taken prisoner, including all active North Carolina and South Carolina Continental Army regiments. In late May, 260 Virginia Continentals were brutally killed or wounded at Buford's Defeat. Tories proved they could assemble in large numbers as at Ramsour's Mill on 20 June. On 16 August, 1050 soldiers, including many Continentals, were killed or captured at Gates' Defeat. American Major General Horatio Gates was discredited. Two days later, 150 of Colonel Thomas Sumter's soldiers were killed at Fishing Creek. Finally, Charlotte was occupied. It appeared that Cornwallis would soon subdue North Carolina. It is remarkable that rebel resistance continued.

By early September, Major Patrick Ferguson had recruited over 1100 loyalists, about half from upstate South Carolina and half from North Carolina (Draper 1881, 293). In addition, he had a cadre of uniformed provincial troops, mostly New Yorkers, from four regiments: *King's American Regiment* commanded by Captain Abraham DePeyster, *Loyal American Regiment* commanded by Major Main, *New Jersey Volunteers* commanded by Captain Samuel Ryerson, and *Prince of Wales American Regiment* led by Sergeant Townsend.

Meanwhile, Colonel James Williams with his unit of Little River District militia delivered prisoners taken at Musgrove's Mill to Hillsborough. There South Carolina Governor John Rutledge authorized Williams to raise a regiment and return to South Carolina. He received permission from the North Carolina Board of War to recruit soldiers within that state. Some came from Caswell County (Graves 2012, 58).

About 11 September, Ferguson sent a threatening verbal message to rebels in western North Carolina, which at that time included present-day Tennessee, saying he would "march his army over the mountains,

hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword.” (Draper 1881, 169). This threat was certainly counterproductive since among the addressees it provoked a determination to destroy Ferguson before he destroyed them. More than 400 Scotch-Irish rebels, some called *Overmountain Men*, assembled and pursued Ferguson. These men were led by Colonel William Campbell, Washington County, Virginia, militia; Colonel Isaac Shelby, Sullivan County, North Carolina, militia; and Colonel John Sevier, Washington County, North Carolina, militia. On 25 September 1780, they assembled their forces at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River, at present-day Elizabethton, Tennessee. The next day, they began ascending the west side of the mountains. On 27 September, they crossed Yellow Mountain Gap, 4640 feet above sea level. That location was covered with “shoe-mouth deep” snow (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:372–373). Although it was not known at that time, this traverse was the highest elevation of all military operations during the American Revolution (Dugger 1932, 15) (Lindsey 2015). It greatly exceeded the 1450-foot highest elevation of Colonel Benedict Arnold’s epic expedition to Quebec City during the winter of 1775.

During the summer 1780, about 60 Lincoln County militiamen assembled at Espey’s plantation (Hunter 1877, 265), under the leadership of Colonel William Graham and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambright. They moved to Lincoln County Courthouse and Moses Moore’s plantation. Moore’s home was near where present-day Shoal Road crosses Indian Creek (Dellinger 2006–2011). Their show of force prevented loyalists from assembling (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832).



Major William Chronicle’s South Fork Boys
Part of the Lincoln County Men. Mural at Belmont City Hall, Belmont, North Carolina.
Painted by Peter DeAnna, 1940. (Davis 2008) (Robertson 2015)

About 15 September, because of the threat posed by Ferguson moving into the upper Catawba River valley, the Lincoln County Men moved to the east side of Tuckasegee Ford on the Catawba River.

hearing that [Patrick] Ferguson was coming on in considerable force, it was concluded to retreat across the Catawba River at the Tuckasegee Ford (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

On 23 September, one of Williams’ principal subordinates Major Samuel Hammond issued a call for recruits from the refugees from South Carolina and Georgia:

A Call to Arms: Beef, Bread & Potatoes
Huggins’ Plantation 23rd Sept. 1780

The undersigned has just returned from Hillsborough to this neighborhood. While there he obtained an order on the Companies and Quartermasters upon this frontier for supplies of provisions and forage for such of the patriotic Citizens of South Carolina & Georgia as might be embodied for actual services and being informed that there is a number of you, resting with patriotic friends in the Two adjoining Counties no doubt anxiously looking for an opportunity to embody for the performance of duty, but without the power or means of supporting yourselves or your horses from you own resources I have thought

your wishes would be forwarded by the Establishing of a Camp at a rallying rendezvous at a convenient place for your assemblage, and to be ready when occasion might offer to give our aid for the recovery of Our County.

I have with this view formed a Camp at Huggins' Plantation a few miles from Capt. Brannon's Tavern, near the road leading westwardly to Torrence's Crossroads, where we will be supplied with the needful. I am justified in the expectation of the arrival of a powerful support shortly and that we may return toward home with a strong army. Let us be prepared to do our part, our little force will be important if Combined possessing as we do a better knowledge of the County and its resources. Now is the time to show ourselves and I invite you, both Officers & soldiers to obey the call: I here assure you that I shall cheerfully surrender the Command, and Cooperate fully to and with any Officer of Senior Rank of either State that may think proper to Join; Should an opportunity offer immediately for my advancing toward the enemy with a prospect of doing good an officer will be left at this Camp authorized to obtain Rations for such as may Join there after my departing. I have some other good news. Come and hear it.

S. Hammond Major
Comdg Refugees Lower Regt.
So Carolina 96 Brigd.

Huggins' Plantation near Brannon's, Roan [Rowan] County, NC (Hammond, Samuel, pension application 1832)

The purpose of the recruitment was to "return towards home [South Carolina] with a strong army." However, Ferguson's northward movements obstructed Williams' plans and forced him to confront the enemy earlier. These two objectives may be the source of the misunderstanding with Colonel William Hill that arose later. Huggins plantation (Miller 1988) was west of Salisbury and near Colonel Francis Locke's plantation. Williams may have personally stayed at Locke's plantation (Whelchel, John, pension application 1832).

Among those who joined Williams were Georgia refugees under Colonel William Candler.

On 25 September, Colonel Thomas Sumter's 260 South Carolina militiamen camped on the east side of the Catawba River at Bigger's Ferry (Hill 1815, 17). His subordinates included Colonel William Hill of the New Acquisition District militia and Colonel Edward Lacey of the Chester District militia. When pursued by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Rawdon (Money 1780, 24 Sep), Sumter crossed to the west side and continued up river. On 26 September, he joined Graham at Tuckasee Ford (Hill 1815, 18) (Draper 1881, 214).

arriving at that point we then met with some South Carolina troops retreating before Cornwallis, whom they informed us was then in Charlotte (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

This group intended to join Brigadier General William Lee Davidson who was retreating towards Salisbury before Cornwallis's advance on Charlotte. However, Davidson informed them that a large force including Overmountain Men was assembling to confront Ferguson (Hill 1815, 18). Consequently, on 27 September, this group marched up the river's east side to Beattie's Ford and re-crossed (Hill 1815, 18) (Merrell, Benjamin, pension application 1833).

On 27 September, Ferguson withdrew from Gilbert Town and the next day crossed Twitty's Ford (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509). In later accounts, it was conjectured that Ferguson intended to march to Ninety Six (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 21). However, Ferguson's mission was to support Cornwallis's advance into North Carolina. Consequently, he never contemplated returning to Ninety Six, as made clear from the contemporaneous diaries of Lieutenant Anthony Allaire (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509) and Uzal Johnson (Johnson 1780 in Moss 2000, 69-71).

On 28 September, Sumter and Graham's men proceeded to Sherrill's Ford (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:158) (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832). There, probably early on 29 September, Colonel James Williams' joined with his unit of Little River District militia and new recruits from North Carolina, many from Caswell County. Sumter and Williams did not agree who had superior rank. Nonetheless, Williams prevailed since Sumter with a few principal subordinates departed from his troops to resolve the dispute with Rutledge in Hillsborough. Sumter's absence indicated that Williams had overall command. This is confirmed by several original sources (Williams 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:94) (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:663–664) (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832). Although Hill and Lacey objected in principle to Williams' as commander (Hill 1815, 18), the combined forces moved as one unit. On 30 September, these troops marched towards the advancing Overmountain Men (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:158). Some of Williams' men joined after passing Island Ford on the Catawba River (Whelchel, John, pension application 1832).

In Charlotte, Cornwallis learned of this gathering threat against Ferguson. On 1 October, he wrote Ferguson:

I am informed that Colonel [James] Williams with part of Sumpter's corps marched yesterday from Kerrel's [Sherrill's] Ford, giving out that they were going against you. My informant saw only 150, but the enemy told him they had 400 more — that is not good authority. Sumpter has had a quarrel with Williams about command and is gone to Hillsborough to refer it to Gates. (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:158)

On 30 September, about 1060 Overmountain Men camped at Quaker Meadows, the wide bottomland just north of present-day Morganton, North Carolina. There about 240 militiamen from Wilkes and Surry County joined. That evening, the six militia leaders planned tactics under a large tree, later known as *Council Oak*.



Colonel Charles McDowell House, built in 1812
Quaker Meadows, Morganton, North Carolina

On 30 September at Step's Plantation, Ferguson wrote Cornwallis that he necessarily had to retreat towards Charlotte and that a protective escort would help (Draper 1881, 201–202). Because the carriers took a circuitous route, they were delayed, and Cornwallis did not receive this message until 7 October (Draper 1881, 202). On 1 October, at Dennard's Ford on Broad River, Ferguson desperately attempted to recruit more local loyalists. He wrote:

Denard's Ford, Broad River, Tryon County, October 1, 1780

Gentlemen: — Unless you wish to be eat up by an inundation of barbarians, who have begun by murdering an unarmed son before the aged father, and afterwards lopped off his arms, and who by their shocking cruelties and irregularities, give the best proof of their cowardice and want of discipline; I say, if you wish to be pinioned, robbed, and murdered, and see your wives and daughters, in four days, abused by the dregs of mankind — in short, if you wish or deserve to live, and bear the name of men, grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp.

The Back Water men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby, and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be degraded forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them.

Pat. Ferguson, Major 71st Regiment. (Draper 1881, 204)

On 1 October, the Overmountain Men group moved to Bedford Hill. Because of rain they remained there for two days.

On 1 or 2 October, Williams' troops camped near present-day Valdese, North Carolina. On 2 October, Williams reported to Gates:

Burke County, Oct, 2d. 1780.

Sir:

I am at present about seventy miles from Salisbury, in the fork of the Catawba, with about four hundred and fifty horsemen, in pursuit of Col. Ferguson. On my crossing the Catawba River, I dispatched to different quarters for intelligence, and this evening I was favoured with this news, which you may depend on: That Col. Clarke, of the State of Georgia, with one hundred riflemen, forced his way from South Carolina to Georgia. On his route thither, being joined by seven hundred men, he proceeded to the town of Augusta, and has taken it with a large quantity of goods; but not finding it prudent to continue there, he has retreated to the upper parts of South Carolina, in Ninety Six district, and made a stand with eight hundred brave men. This moment another of my expresses is arrived from Cols. McDowell and Shelby; they were on their march, near Burke Court House, with fifteen hundred brave mounted men, and Col. Cleveland was within ten miles of them with eight hundred men, and was to form a junction with them this day.

I expect to join them to-morrow, in pursuit of Col. Ferguson, and under the direction of heaven I hope to be able to render your honor a good account of him in a few days.

I am, &c.,

James Williams. (Williams 1780 in Tarleton 1787, 194) (Williams 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:94)

There are important inferences in Williams' correspondence:

- Williams considered himself in command of all South Carolina and Lincoln County troops by reporting directly to Gates.
- Williams' estimate of 450 horsemen would require all of Hill's, Lacey's and Graham's troops be with him. The actual number was probably closer to 390.
- Williams said he would join the Overmountain Men the next day. Thus he was within a day's march of the Overmountain Men who were at Bedford Hill. That meant Williams could not have been in central Lincoln County.
- Williams indicated that pursuing and defeating Ferguson was his near-term objective.
- By indicating that he would report any victory to Gates, Williams implied that he might command the Overmountain Men although his force was much smaller. He might have expected that since he was the oldest colonel at age 40.

Williams wrote that he was in Burke County, 70 miles from Salisbury, and "in the fork of the Catawba". Historian Lyman Draper could make no sense of this and concluded a different route:

This party of South Carolinians and their associates marched through Lincoln County, crossing the upper forks of Dutchman's [now Killian] creek, proceeding on to Ramsour's

Mill, on the South Fork of the Catawba; thence bearing somewhat south-westerly, crossing Buffalo and First Broad rivers, to Flint Hill. (Draper 1881, 194)

Draper was well aware of the above discrepancy between his route and Williams' location. He wrote:

By some unaccountable mistake, or misprint, this letter of Colonel Williams is dated "Burke County:" when all the other authorities, Hill, Floyd, Hammond and Whelchel — the two latter of Williams' party — combine to show, beyond a doubt, that they were at this time in Lincoln County, west or south-west of Tuckasegie Ford. (Draper 1881, 192)

Here Draper cited William Hill's Memoirs (Hill 1815, 18–19), and the pension applications of Andrew Floyd (Floyd, Andrew, pension application 1832), Samuel Hammond (Hammond, Samuel, pension application 1832) and Dr. John Whelchel (Whelchel, John, pension application 1832). However Draper must not have read these sources carefully, because none of them explicitly mentions the direction south-westerly or Buffalo Creek or First Broad River or even Ramsour's Mill in this context. So why was Draper so confident in the route through the center of Lincoln County? Was he influenced by another historian? This might be discovered by a thorough search into the Draper Manuscripts, in particular the correspondence of Colonel John Randolph Logan and W. L. Twitty (Draper 1881, 194). Also, in Draper's above quote, he made the minor mistake assuming Flint Hill was a particular place. Original sources refer only "the Flint Hills" which apparently meant present-day Cherry Mountain and its surrounding hills in all directions.

On first reading, Williams' description of his location is suspect because the usual meaning of "in the fork of the Catawba" is the region around present-day Belmont, North Carolina, about 25 miles south of Sherrill's Ford where Williams' men had been. It would not make sense for Williams to have moved so far south and be so close to British occupied Charlotte. There appears to be no way to reconcile "in the fork of the Catawba" and "Burke County". However, Williams could have meant a broader interpretation of "fork" which leads to a timeline consistent with other facts.

By "in the fork of the Catawba", Williams could have included the land between the Catawba River and Henry Fork, a tributary of the South Fork River. That is consistent with being in Burke County and "seventy miles from Salisbury". That location was near present-day Valdese, North Carolina, between Hickory and Morganton. This casts a new light on how these troops marched from Sherrill's Ford on the Catawba River to Cowpens. It suggests that their first objective was to join the gathering Overmountain Men. It implies that they took the ridgeline road between Sherrill's Ford to where Williams wrote on 2 October. There, Williams learned that McDowell and the Overmountain Men were moving towards Ferguson who had recently been at Gilbert Town.

There is other evidence to support this northern route along the west side of the Catawba River. Abraham Forney testified in his 1832 pension application:

we united with these forces under the command of a Colonel [James] Williams and marched up the West side of the Catawba River (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

Veteran Benjamin Merrell testified:

crossing the Catawba River at the Tucasejah [Tuckasegee] Ford thence up the East side of said River to Baiteys [Beatties] Ford thence up the South fork of the Catawba (Merrell, Benjamin, pension application 1833)

In Williams' 2 October correspondence to Gates, he indicated that he planned to join the Overmountain Men and pursue Ferguson (Williams 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:94). It made good military sense to combine forces before confronting Ferguson's 1100 troops. So, if Williams had followed his stated intention what would have been his expected action? He would have followed the Overmountain Men. That way:

- He would have minimized the risk of losing the Overmountain Men's trail by following in their footsteps.
- For safety reasons, he would have had the Overmountain Men between him and Ferguson.

Although he had the opportunity to join the Overmountain Men, Williams chose to remain separated. Perhaps an express message from the Overmountain Men described the latest decisions made at Bedford Hill including their planned departure for Gilbert Town. By early 3 October, Williams decided not to immediately join the Overmountain Men. His reasons are not known with certainty, but could have been one or a combination of:

- Ferguson had withdrawn from Gilbert Town and his last known position was Dennard's Ford on 1 October. It would make sense for him to move eastward towards Cornwallis's army at Charlotte. So, Williams may have wanted to take the shortest route to Ferguson assuming that the Overmountain Men would join him rather than vice versa.
- Williams was jealous not to lose command the South Carolinians.
- Williams surmised that he would not command the Overmountain Men since their colonels already agreed on Campbell.
- Williams wanted to maintain the independence of the South Carolinians since his ultimate mission, as directed by Rutledge, was to suppress the Tories around Ninety Six.

Hill intimated some of these reasons (Hill 1815, 19–20).

On 3 October, Williams probably marched down the east side of South Mountain and camped. This route matches Hill's description of the topography (Hill 1815, 19–20).

Colonel William Graham, the commander of the Lincoln County Men, who had been with Williams since 30 September, was not required to follow Williams because Graham was a North Carolina militia colonel. Graham's first responsibility, as directed by Davidson, was to join the other North Carolina colonels. So, on 3 October, Graham's Lincoln County Men separated from Williams, as implied by (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834), and marched towards the Overmountain Men. Major William Chronicle, one of Graham's subordinates, led an advance group of about 20 militiamen and caught up at a location later called Probit's Place (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 21). Archeologist Ken Robinson, who has investigated this area, discovered the property of William Probit, who was enumerated in the 1790 United States Census in Burke County and listed on the 1805 tax list as being in the militia company of Captain James Dysart (Robinson 2015).

On 4 October, Campbell marched to Camp Creek near Gilbert Town, north of present-day Rutherfordton, North Carolina. The objectives of the Overmountain colonels had changed. Apparently, they abandoned the pursuit of Ferguson. They wrote Gates:

Rutherford County, Camp near Gilbert Town
October, 4, 1780.

Sir:

We have now collected at this place about 1,500 good men, drawn from the Counties of Surry, Wilkes, Burke, Washington and Sullivan Counties in this State, and Washington County of Virginia, and expect to be joined in a few days by Colo. Clark of Georgia and Colo. Williams of South Carolina, with about 1,000 more. As we have at this time called out our militia without any orders from the Executive of our different States, and with the view of Expelling the Enemy out of this part of the Country, we think such a body of men worthy of your attention, and would request you to send a General Officer, immediately to take the command of such Troops as may embody in this quarter. All our Troops being Militia, and but little acquainted with discipline, we could wish him to be a Gentleman of address, and able to keep up a proper discipline, without disgusting the Soldiery. Every assistance in our power shall be given the Officer you may think proper to take command of us.

It is the wish of such of us as are acquainted with General Davidson and Colo. Morgan (if in Service) that one of these Gentlemen may be appointed to this command.

We are in great want of Ammunition, and hope you will endeavor to have us properly furnished with Article.

Colo. [Charles] McDowell will wait upon you with this, who can inform you of the present situation of the Enemy, and such other particulars respecting our Troops as you may think necessary.

We are, Sir,
Your most obdt. and very hble. Servts.,

BENJA. CLEVELAND.
ISAAC SHELBY.
JOHN SEVIER.
ANDW. HAMPTON.
WM. CAMPBELL.
JO. WINSTON. (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:663–664)

It is noteworthy what this correspondence did not mention:

- Ferguson or his position.
- A pursuit plan of Ferguson.
- A sense of urgency.

It is also noteworthy that the Overmountain colonels recognized Williams as commanding the South Carolinians with no mention of Hill or Lacey. Since Graham did not sign this correspondence, presumably he had not yet joined. It was possible that Graham did not actually join but veered to the east towards Cowpens, possibly passing Biggerstaff's Plantation (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834).

Since the Overmountain Men included both Virginians and North Carolinians, the correspondence was sent to Gates. There is no mention of informing Brigadier General William Davidson who officially commanded all the western North Carolinian militia.

The Overmountain colonels' mindset suggests that they had concluded that Ferguson had already evaded them. And since the simple tactic of chasing Ferguson no longer applied, they needed a general officer to strategically plan their next actions. Also they did not want to exceed their authority without explicit executive orders. Of course, the colonels had no expectation that a general officer would arrive soon. They may have believed Colonel Charles McDowell was not their most dynamic leader, and thus asked him to carry the correspondence to Gates. On this mission, McDowell passed through the South Carolina camp (Draper 1881, 189).

On 4 October, Williams probably camped between South Mountain and present-day Cherry Mountain.

Late on 4 October, the remainder of Graham's troops joined the Overmountain Men at Camp Creek (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 Schenck 1891, 21). This is based on Colonel David Vance's narrative of 1799 which was written in the company of Joseph McDowell and Robert Henry, all three who were present at this juncture. Had the juncture not happened, either McDowell or Henry could have challenged the assertion or Henry could have corrected it any time before his death in 1863. Nonetheless, the cited troop strength of 160 horsemen was too large. According to Vance's narrative, Graham told the Overmountain colonels to expect Williams at Gilbert Town. This is evidence that Graham had earlier separated from Williams, but recently enough to know Williams' plans. The narrative also indicated that Graham told the Overmountain colonels that Ferguson had "left Gilbert Town and had crossed Broad River at Twitty's Ford on his way to [Lieutenant Colonel John Harris] Cruger at Ninety-Six." In actuality, Ferguson left Gilbert Town on 27 September (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509) which had to be old news to the Overmountain colonels by 4 October. Those present at the Vance's 1799 narrative, knew that Ferguson did not actually move

towards Ninety Six. So the narrative must mean that on 4 October, Graham had a rumor of Ferguson's movement towards Ninety Six. If so, it would have been quickly dismissed with knowledge of Ferguson's proclamation on 1 October at Dennard's Ford. In actuality, Ferguson never intended to return to Ninety Six (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509) (Johnson 1780 in Moss 2000). That would have been contrary to his responsibility to support Cornwallis's advance in North Carolina. By not mentioning that the Ferguson's movement towards Ninety Six was bad information at the time, the Vance 1799 narrative created a myth that was repeated, and even suggested that Williams deliberately misled the Overmountain Men (Hill 1815, 20) (Moore 1859).



Robert Henry, 1765–1863
Daguerreotype 1859 (Arthur 1914, 96) (Holland 2014)

It is also possible that Graham, although trailing Overmountain Men along Cane Creek, never actually joined them. Instead, after learning of the plan to rendezvous at Cowpens, Graham may have veered to the east to take the shortest path. That route led past Biggerstaff's Plantation. This scenario is suggested by the pension application of Malcolm Henry:

In a short time Colonel Shelby returned to Rutherford County to Gilbert Town. He [Malcolm Henry], this applicant, was sent to Shelby by Colonel Graham to know of Shelby where the troops under his command should join those under Shelby. It was agreed that all the troops should rendezvous at the Cowpens 16 miles from the Cherokee Ford on Broad River. It was then expected that Ferguson and his Tories were there [at Cherokee Ford]. On the same evening Colonel Graham marched to that place [Cowpens] with his command and met the troops commanded by Colonel Shelby, Col. Campbell, Colonel Sevier, Colonel Cleveland, Col. Williams and other officers not recollected. (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834)

Also the pension application of Abraham Forney indicated that the Graham's Lincoln County Men joined at Cowpens:

[We marched] towards South Carolina in the rear of Ferguson and fell in with the overmountain troops under the command of Campbell, Cleveland, Shelby & Sevier at the Cowpens (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

On 5 October, Cornwallis ordered Major Archibald McArthur to march the 71st Regiment 1st Battalion from Waxhaw Creek to Armour's Ford on Catawba River on either 7 or 8 October to support Ferguson (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:282). At the same time, he ordered Ferguson:

I would have you come to Armer's Ford just below the forks [of the Catawba River]. If we can then fix the enemy, or if they presume to pass on towards Ninety Six, I will detach in force against them. Take all possible pains to get intelligence and let me hear when you arrive at Armer's Ford. Major McArthur will meet you there. (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:161)

Cornwallis was concerned for the safety of Ninety Six. Since Ferguson did not move towards Armour's Ford during 6–7 October, he probably never received this order.

On the morning of 5 October, the two American camps were 20 miles apart. That was close enough for Williams to have personally taken a "pathway that led to the mountain," presumably conspicuous Cherry Mountain, and conferred with the Overmountain colonels (Hill 1815, 19). Williams considered himself in command of all South Carolinians and was probably concerned about the terms of joining the North Carolina and Virginia Overmountain Men: who would command, length of commitment, etc.

Since Hill described Williams as having taken a "pathway that led to the mountain," then implicitly Hill did not take such a path (Hill 1815, 19). For that reason, Hill and Lacey's South Carolinians marched to the Flint Hills, southeast of present-day Cherry Mountain.

When Williams met with the Overmountain colonels early on 5 October, what was the situation? Ferguson's current position was not known. Yet it was known that he had been at Dennard's Ford 4 days earlier and that he was likely moving toward the safety of Cornwallis's army at Charlotte. That gave Ferguson a 4 day lead to reach safety 70 miles away. Given this premise, what were the options? Ferguson had been the target of the Overmountain Men. He was the reason so much effort had been expended over the previous 10 days. But if Ferguson had evaded capture, the next best strategy was to threaten the British posts, like Ninety Six, behind Cornwallis's advance. This secondary aim was doable. Even though the Overmountain Men might not be expected to stay a long time, Williams' South Carolinians had every motive to regain control of the South Carolina upcountry. Besides, that was Williams' mission as directed by South Carolina Governor John Rutledge and the purpose of his recruitment during September. Such a move could stop Cornwallis's advance and force him to return to South Carolina which is what actually happened on 12 October (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126). Not only was this move viable, it was arguably the best option before these officers, and certainly less risky than battle. Unfortunately, the deliberation of these officers is not known. However, their decision can be surmised from what they did. The meeting ended with a decision to join forces at Lawson's Iron Works on the way to Ninety Six.

Consequently, later in the day, the Overmountain Men marched over Twitty's Ford to Alexander's Ford to get to the west side of Broad River. Did they know that Ferguson had been on the east side since 2 October? The route they took avoided the many tributaries on the east side. Hill indicated that their destination was the iron works on Lawson's Creek (Hill 1815, 20), a tributary of the Pacolet River. Interestingly, a good, perhaps the best, road to that location passed through Cowpens.

While Williams was away on 5 October, Hill indicated that the South Carolina troops moved on to the Flint Hills (Hill 1815, 19). This camp was likely at the southeast base of present-day Cherry Mountain since that is about 18-20 miles from Alexander's Ford (Draper 1881, 219) and 20 miles from Cowpens (Draper 1881, 221). On this day, during Williams' absence, Hill and Lacey learned of Ferguson's position with more precision (Hill 1815, 19). He was at Cherokee Ford, within capture distance.

When Williams returned that evening, the situation had changed and notification had to be sent to the Overmountain Men. Some historians dismiss everything Hill reported in his memoirs. But could there be some insights from Hill's description? Williams described to Hill his deliberations with the Overmountain colonels including a plan to march to Ninety Six by way of Lawson's Iron Works. Hill was probably angry that he and Lacey were excluded from the deliberations. He interpreted Williams' subtle distinctions as devious. Later, Hill impugned Williams' reputation by assigned self-serving intent (Hill 1815, 20). In any event, Lacey made an overnight ride over a "spur of the mountain" to the Overmountain Men to acquaint them of Ferguson's approximate position (Moore 1859). Apparently, there was no alternative plan if Lacey failed to reach them. That meant the South Carolinians waited for the initiative of the much larger Overmountain force. During the night of 5–6 October, Lacey caught up with the Overmountain Men at

Alexander's Ford on Green River and arranged a rendezvous at Cowpens. The Overmountain Men probably planned to pass through Cowpens anyway, but knowing that Ferguson was within reach made their march urgent (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:163–165). In the morning 6 October, Lacey returned to the Flint Hills camp. The South Carolinians immediately began their march to Cowpens. They crossed Broad River at Island Ford (Merrell, Benjamin, pension application 1833) (Robertson, *Global Gazetteer of the American Revolution* 2006–2014).

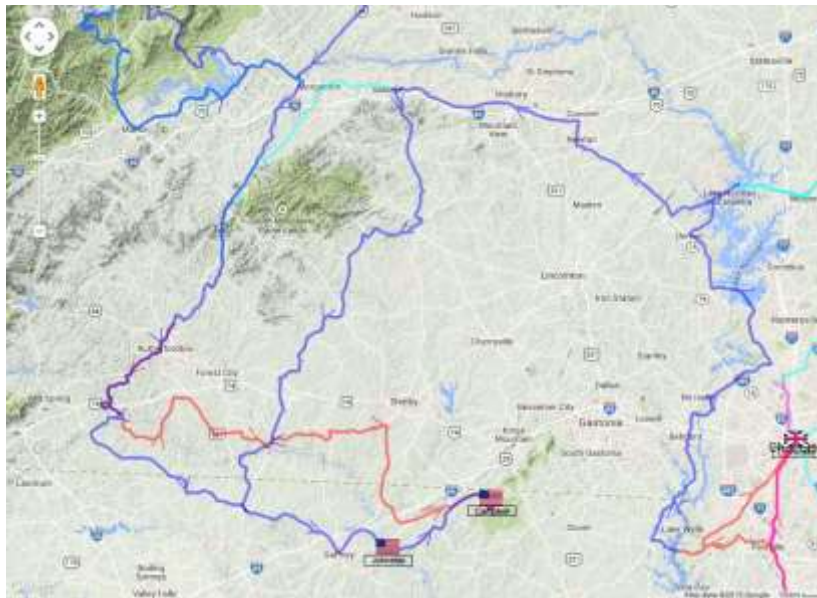
It is noteworthy that Hill's memoirs do not accuse Williams of telling the Overmountain colonels that Ferguson went to Ninety Six, but of arranging a rendezvous of Americans at Lawson's Iron Works to march to Ninety Six (Hill 1815, 20).

On 6 October, the three groups marched and united about sundown at Cowpens, a well-known crossroad in South Carolina (Draper 1881, 223–227). Officers selected their ablest men with good horses for the final pursuit. Campbell later wrote:

We marched to the Cowpens, on Broad River in South Carolina, where we were joined by Col. James Williams, with four hundred men, on the evening of the 6th of October, who informed us that the enemy lay encamped somewhere near the Cherokee Ford of Broad River, about thirty miles distant from us.

By a council of the principal officers, it was then thought advisable to pursue the enemy that night with nine hundred of the best horsemen, and leave the weak horsemen and foot-men to follow as fast as possible. We began our march with nine hundred of the best men, about eight O'clock the same evening, and marching all night, came up with the enemy about three O'clock P. M. of the 7th, (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:163–165)

At Cowpens, Colonel William Hill delegated command of the New Acquisition District militia to his subordinate Lieutenant Colonel James Hawthorne (Hill 1815, 22).



Trail of South Carolina Militiamen and Lincoln County Men to Kings Mountain
24 September – 7 October 1780

The approximate mileage of the three major routes to Kings Mountain was: 248 miles from Abingdon, Virginia, 178 miles from Surry County muster ground, and 173 miles from Tuckasegee Ford. An appropriate name for the latter route is *Catawba River Valley Victory Trail*.

In Hillsborough, Colonel Thomas Sumter conferred with South Carolina Governor John Rutledge. On 6 October, Rutledge promoted Sumter to militia brigadier general (Scoggins 2010–2015). Sumter's promotion settled the rank issue with Williams. However ironically, it had no practical consequence because of Williams' death on 8 October.

Conclusion

Colonel James Williams asserted and assumed command over the South Carolina militiamen under Colonel Thomas Sumter. This group marched up the fork between the Catawba River and South Fork River. This trail is a new finding, not recorded in other historical descriptions. The Lincoln County Men separated and joined the Overmountain Men along Cane Creek. By 4 October, Americans believed that Ferguson had evaded them, and planned action behind Cornwallis's advance. On 6 October, after learning of Ferguson's approximate position, the American acted quickly to attack. See reference (Anderson, Lincoln County Men at Kings Mountain 2009a) for a description of these units in the Kings Mountain battle and aftermath.

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