

Application for a South Carolina Historical Marker Commemorating Colonel Thomas Sumter's Clems Branch Camp June–July 1780

Proposed Marker

This is an application to the South Carolina Department of Archives and History for a roadside historical marker commemorating Colonel Thomas Sumter's Clems Branch camp during the Revolutionary War. This document was written for the Lancaster County Historical Commission by William Lee Anderson III and submitted on 1 August 2005.

The suggested marker location is the Clems Branch bridge on Harrisburg Road, SR29-64, in upper Lancaster County. That bridge is about half a mile west, and downstream, of the historical site. Marker text should provide the most value to the public. It should add to the regions rich historical heritage and be inspirational for young people. Marker text specification [www.state.sc.us/scdah/historic.htm] allows one title line of 26 characters plus 11 lines, up to 36 characters each. Suggested text, approximately to scale, for both sides of the marker, is:

<p>THE REVOLUTION IN THE BACKCOUNTRY</p> <p>After British forces took Charleston in May 1780, they set up outposts in the backcountry and attempted to control the state by encouraging Loyalists. Backcountry Patriots organized a resistance in response, with an important camp 1/2 mi. E. at Clems Branch of Sugar Creek, on the wagon road from Camden to Charlotte.</p>	<p>SUMTER'S CAMP AT CLEMS BRANCH</p> <p>In June 1780, Col. Thomas Sumter's troops were among the few organized Patriot units in S.C. The camp at Clems Branch gave him a strategic location, water, and forage while reinforcements joined him in late June and early July. Sumter's troops would play a major role in several Patriot victories in 1780 and 1781.</p>
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Synopsis

Many interesting historical events are associated with Clems Branch. These are:

- Clems Branch, a tributary of Sugar Creek, was a relatively small stream with clean water that flowed even during dry weather conditions. For this reason, during colonial times, a campground developed and became a convenient rest stop for travelers and wagon teams. This location became a market for forage and farm produce.
- Clems Branch campground was on the main north-south Camden-Charlotte road. It was near the state line between the two Carolinas.
- During the Revolutionary War, Clems Branch campground was used multiple times by mounted troops. Sumter probably used it twice. The site offered access to forage. No fortification was built there.
- The historical significance of Clems Branch campground is that, in June–July 1780, it is where South Carolinians began to recapture their state from British Army occupation. Success was not immediate. In August-September 1780, Cornwallis reestablished control. Nonetheless, South Carolinians under Thomas Sumter had demonstrated a willingness to resist. Their perseverance ultimately succeeded.
- Today, Clems Branch campground is privately owned. Segments of the old roadbed are still evident.

Reference Notation

This document inserts references directly into the text in the form [author:year written:series:volume:page] or some appropriate variation. For example, a quote within a reference is cited as [person quoted:year quoted:author:year published:series:volume:page]. This technique helps evaluate authenticity. A list of all sources, articles, and books appears at the end. Place names and an individual's military rank are specified contemporaneous with the event described. For example, Charlestown was the contemporaneous name of present-day Charleston.

Campground Physical Location Evidence

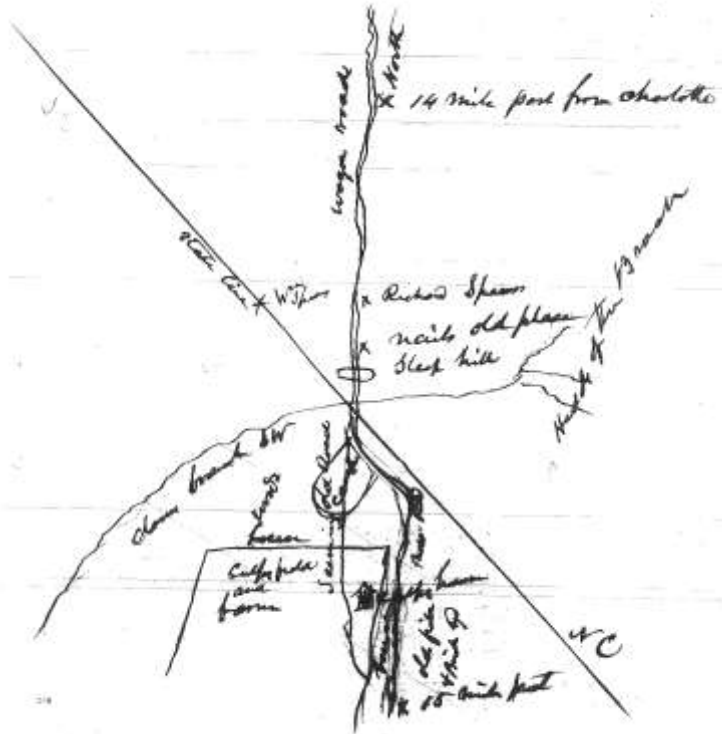
In 1873, John Rosser responded to questions by professional historian Lyman Draper who was gathering historical documentation about Brigadier General Thomas Sumter. John Rosser was born about 1816. His home was about one mile and a half south of Clems Branch campground. In 1827, Rosser moved to Camden and became its major. Later, he moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and became its major. Because of his young age, his knowledge of Sumter's camp was learned from his elders and neighbors, the oldest of whom experienced the Revolutionary War. Rosser pinpoints the physical site of the old colonial-era campground. He drew a map. He also links this campground to where Colonel Thomas Sumter encamped in 1780. On 11 February 1873, from Memphis, Rosser replied to Draper:

... Clems branch is about 14 1/2 miles South of Charlotte N.C. The line between the Carolinas crosses the Camden road at the branch. The first time I saw that branch was in 1819. I began to cross it going to school about 1822. It was a mile & a half north of where I was mostly raised. We lived at a place which you will see in Colton's Atlas of the U.S. put down as a village or Post office called Pleasant Valley. My Father was the first settler there. I helped to cut the bushes away and haul the logs for the first Cabins ever built there. The place pointed out to me as Sumters camp was on the South side a few hundred say two hundred from the branch. In my day there the road did not run through the camping ground but a little east of it — though there seemed to be an old road through the camp that went up through Mr. John Culps farm. Mr. Culps fence was in a quarter of a mile of the branch — then from the fence to the branch was woods, the camping ground was surrounded by the woods. In my day, Clems branch was a farmers camping ground for market and trading wagons. It was a constant stream, and the only stream from McAlpins creek two miles north to 12 Mile creek 10 miles South. There was no spring very near that I ever knew of. ... [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:4.2–4.3].

On 12 April 1873, Rosser wrote again to Draper.

... The size of the camp ground was two or three acres — it was then used as a camping ground for market wagons. It had never been cleared for cultivation, and was surrounded by woods then it extended 200 yards from the branch. The water of the branch was always clear & pure enough for any use except just after a rain. The camp was on gradually rising ground & I suppose the new road was made to go round the highest of it, the hill on the north side was rather steep a more sudden rise than on the South and a hard pull for a team. When I last saw it appeared to have worn down and the ascent was longer. There was no road that I ever know of leading from there to the Nation Ford on Catawba River which was 4, 5 or 6 miles to the West or perhaps a little South of West. ... [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:5–6].

In this letter, Rosser sketched a map of the campground and surrounding landmarks.



Map 1, John Rosser map of Clems Branch campground, [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:6]
 A milepost immediately south of the campground indicates 15 miles from Charlotte.

On 19 April 1873, Rosser wrote again to Draper:

... I can't tell you how high the ground was where Sumter camped at Clems Branch but it was not very high. Nor was it likely that he chose the ground. It had been a camping ground for trading and market wagons — travellers [illegible] it on to forty years after the war when I first knew it in 1819 it was the only stream that crossed that great highway the Steel Creek road from McAlpins Creek 4 miles above to 12 Mile Creek ten miles below. They doubtless cut the wood to make their camp fires. That road was travelled then ten times as much as it is now. Wagons frequently hauled cotton from there to Charleston, S. C., over 180 miles. I have seen twenty pass in one day. ...
 [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:7.2].

The name Steel Creek Road, as used in this quote, was sometimes applied to Camden-Charlotte Road. Other occurrences are: [Davie:1810:24], [Davidson:1780:Davidson:1951:89], [Graham:1827:249], [Bass:1961:86], [Stinson:1871:Draper:VV:5:45], and [Pettus:18Nov1990]. This is confusing because Steele Creek in York County flows into Sugar Creek from the west, almost directly opposite Clems Branch that flows from the east. There is another important road with that name that passes by Steele Creek Presbyterian Church in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Presumably, the name, when applied to Camden-Charlotte Road, meant convenient access to the Steele Creek area, particularly for northbound travelers. This name led to confusion in at least one history book [Robinson:1957:69].

In the 1800s, D. G. Stinson, a resident of Chester County, compiled historical documents of local Revolutionary War veterans. From this information, Stinson drew two maps indicating Clems Branch campground and surrounding landmarks. On 10 December 1871, he sent these maps to historian Lyman Draper [Stinson:1871:Draper:VV:5:45-46].

Today, Thomas Culp lives about two miles south of Clems Branch campground. He identified the physical site from knowledge passed to him through Culp Family tradition. He grew up in the area and has relatives who lived a short distance from the campground. He is related to John Culp who owned the farm immediately south of the campground during the Revolutionary War. Thomas Culp pointed out the old roadbed in South Carolina that is evident today. It extends along the western border of BridgeHampton housing development.



View along roadbed approaching campground from South Carolina.

Today, the most convenient access to the campground is from the end of Camden Woods Drive. The old road probably extended along the base of the hillside and could have crossed Clems Branch at the only embankment cut that is evident today. That location is about 100 yards downstream of the precise state line crossing.



Embankment cut on Clems Branch. Possible historical road crossing.
View south over creek to campground in the distance.

The road opposite the embankment cut is not clearly evident because of soft soil. But on slightly higher ground, a long linear depression is evident. It is not a stream bed. It is sunken, characteristic of many old roads near stream crossings. The depression runs about 100 yards up to modern development.



Probable road continuation in North Carolina.
Partially obscured by trees in this view.

Beyond there, the old road is obliterated in the Providence Pointe housing development. Thomas Culp pointed out how the old road extended northward to the top of the long hill, connecting with Harrison United Methodist Church where it ran directly in front of the present-day sanctuary and graveyard.

In conclusion, Thomas Culp, Rosser's map, and both Stinson's maps are consistent in expressing the campground's location. Thus, the location is verified by three independent sources. Each of these sources links Clems Branch campground to Sumter's 1780 camp.

Colonial Campground Documentary Evidence

In 1873, John Rosser wrote, "Nor was it likely that he [Sumter] chose the ground. It had been a camping ground for trading and market wagons" [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:7.2]. Thus, Rosser, who grew up within two miles of Clems Branch, had knowledge that before 1780, a campground existed on Clems Branch. It was used by crews and teams transporting agricultural goods by wagons from the upper Catawba River valley to Camden and then to Charleston.

Before the age of bridges, Indian trails and roads usually followed the ridgeline between major watersheds and thus remained passable after heavy rains. Such a trail almost certainly separated the large watersheds of Sugar Creek and Twelve Mile Creek. During colonial times, a segment of this trail became known as Camden-Charlotte Road, for Camden, South Carolina, and Charlotte, North Carolina. However, this road has one exception. It crosses one stream, Clems Branch, a short stream whose small watershed could have been easily circumvented. Why is this? Did this crossing offer advantages? The stream's flow rate was not large enough to totally obstruct a crossing. It quickly drains after a rain. It is described as a "constant" stream, one that did not dry up during hot summer months [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:4.3]. Its short length meant its water was relatively clean. Consequently, the crossing became a convenient rest stop for travelers and teams of wagons between McAlpine Creek and Twelve Mile Creek. It became a market for local farmers to sell supplies and forage for horses, oxen, and livestock headed to Charleston. Fellow travelers could trade goods and assist each other repairing wagons, equipment, shoeing horses, etc. [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:5-6].

Clems Branch was named for Clem Davis an early settler who owned land at its headwaters in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina [Pettus:22Jul1990]. On 5 November 1763, the Catawba Indian Nation boundary was legally established in the Treaty of Augusta [Pettus:2005:20]. Interestingly, that

boundary passes close to where Camden-Charlotte Road crosses Clems Branch. In 1772, the two Carolinas agreed that the Catawba Nation was in South Carolina [Salley:1929]. Being on the state line made the crossing a well-known point of reference for travelers and a kind of portal between the two states. A mile post immediately south of the crossing indicated 15 miles from Charlotte [Rosser:1873:Draper:VV:13:6].

John Springs was an early settler who lived close to Clems Branch. Joseph F. White, born 1795, said in an 1871 interview with D. G. Stinson:

John Springs lived nearly or quite all his life in the Catawba lands — wrote something about the Catawbas — Sugaw creek, &c. Thinks it was not published. He first lived on Clem's Branch; & his eldest son Richard resides near Rock Hill, S.C. — & his son Col. Baxter Springs on his father's old place, which runs nearly to Clem's Branch — Fort Mill, his P.O. John Springs died some 15 years ago, about 70 years old. [White:1871:Stinson:Draper:VV:11:297].

Sumter's Clems Branch Camp Documentary Evidence

During the Revolutionary War, after the fall of Charleston on 12 May 1780, the military action shifted to the upstate Carolinas. Events occurring there during June–July 1780 were quite complicated, involving multiple leaders, militias, partisans, and their locations at various times. Sometimes leaders coordinated their actions and sometime they acted independently. Later, many veterans recorded their experiences in pension applications and petitions. Their statements are primary sources in this document.

The purpose of this document is to support a historical marker for Sumter's Clems Branch camp. Marker text indicates historical significance. An essential requirement is an accurate date. However, research indicates that Sumter probably camped twice at Clems Branch. Sumter's biographer, Anne King Gregorie, refers to two events [Gregorie:1931:81,87], but most sources refer to one. A source author may have participated in only one event or mentioned the only event he thought important. So for the purposes of this document, what method can analyze multiple pieces of independent data, each of which is incomplete? The method selected is detailed timeline that chronologically orders information from many sources. It indicates who was where and when, and as such, can potentially exclude a conjectured event as impossible, if for example, it required a person to be in more than one place at one time. At a minimum, a side benefit is a more complete story of what was going on at that time. It might reveal why Sumter selected Clems Branch for a camp and what were its advantages and disadvantages. This timeline traces Sumter's activities and itinerary during May–July 1780. The timeline shows that Sumter definitely used Clems Branch campground, and that he probably used it twice.

Sumter escapes the British

The American defenders of Charleston, after a six-week siege, surrendered the city on 12 May 1780. To extend British control over South Carolina, Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis and his army crossed Santee River and proceeded towards Camden. He dispatched the mobile British Legion to pursue the withdrawing Virginia Third Regiment of Continental soldiers who missed the Charleston siege and were escorting South Carolina Governor John Rutledge to Salisbury, North Carolina. (Rutledge's actual official title was President of South Carolina.) The British Legion was led by 26-year-old Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton. Colonel Thomas Sumter, the former commander of South Carolina Sixth Continental Regiment, knew he was a likely target. He moved his family from his primary home just north of Nelson's Ferry on Santee River to his second home in the High Hills of the Santee. On 28 May, as the British Legion approached, Sumter left his family and escaped north. A few hours later, British soldiers burned his home [Bass:1961:52]. Up the road, 14 miles north of Camden, Rutledge was a guest at the home of Colonel Henry Rugeley [pronounced Rūg-lē] on the hilltop just north of Grannies Quarter Creek [Landers:1929:20]. Sumter was on the same road at the same time, but it is not known if Sumter conferred with Rutledge. That night, the British Legion bivouacked for a few hours in Camden, allowing just enough time for Rutledge to learn of the threat and evade capture. In the morning, the Legion continued to move quickly [Tarleton:1787:28]. By 3:00 PM., on Salisbury Road, it caught and brutally killed or maimed many Virginia Continentals. This shocking event induced widespread resentment among residents of the Carolina upcountry.



Brigadier General Thomas Sumter
Painted by Rembrandt Peale, 1796.

Sumter at Salisbury, North Carolina

In reaction to Buford's defeat, Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford called up the North Carolina Western (Salisbury) District militia. Lieutenant Colonel William Lee Davidson volunteered to serve under Rutherford as second in command. On 3 June, 900 men assembled near Charlotte [Graham:1827:212] [Robinson:1957:42]. Included were South Carolina refugees driven from their farms by loyalists emboldened by the advancing British Army. When it was learned that Tarleton had returned to Camden, Rutherford dismissed the militia with orders to have their arms "in good repair and be in readiness for another call." [Robinson:1957:42].

Sumter visited Governor Rutledge in Salisbury. Four months earlier, the South Carolina General Assembly delegated to Rutledge sweeping emergency powers. Sumter got 19 certificates worth \$1,000 each [Bass:1961:54].

Meanwhile, Cornwallis captured Camden and began erecting a strong fort. He established outposts at Cheraw, Hanging Rock, Waxhaws, and Rocky Mount. The Waxhaw camp was led by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon and is believed to be where present-day highway US521 crosses Waxhaw Creek.

The day after Lord Rawdon reached Waxhaw, he with a life guard of twenty cavalry, visited the Catawba Indian towns, six or eight miles distance from his encampment. These towns are situated above the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek, on the east bank of the Catawba River. The warriors, headed by their General New River had left their towns on the preceding evening to join the troops under General Rutherford. Curiosity alone seemed to have induced Lord Rawdon to visit the towns; but his approach frightened the Indians, who fled from their houses. His Lordship discovered two white men and four or five Indians, armed, moving briskly down the bank of the river, and thinking it to be a movement to intercept his return, he hastened at full gallop to his encampments. [Graham:1827:213].

Rawdon sent a commissioner to meet local citizens at Colonel William Hill's Iron Works on Big Allison Creek. The commissioner demanded their signed submissions for British protection. He proclaimed that the Continental Congress had decided to forfeit both Georgia and South Carolina and that General Washington's army had fled to the mountains [Hill:1815:6]. These falsehoods were refuted by William Hill [Hill:1815:7]. Hill and Andrew Neel assembled the local militia and soon moved to Tuckasegee Ford on Catawba River in Mecklenburg County.

Because of Rawdon's proximity to Mecklenburg County, on 8 June, Rutherford recalled the Mecklenburg militia, which assembled on 10 June at Reese's plantation 18 miles northeast of Charlotte. On 12 June, these 800 men moved to Mallard Creek. A battalion of 300 light infantry was formed and assigned to Lieutenant Colonel William L. Davidson, an experienced Continental Army officer. North Carolina Governor Abner Nash commissioned William Richardson Davie a major and appointed him commander of North Carolina cavalry [Hamilton:1907:7]. Davie was a 1776 graduate of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton [Hamilton:1907:5]. He was active partisan, located at New Providence where his uncle, William Richardson, had been minister of the Presbyterian Church ten years earlier [Matthews:1967:46]. Davie raised 65 cavalymen that he helped equip using much of his inheritance [Hamilton:1907:7].



William Richardson Davie

Patriot Officer. North Carolina Governor 1798–1799. Special envoy to France 1799–1800.
Buried in Waxhaw Presbyterian Church cemetery.
Painted by John VanderLyn in Paris, France, 1800.

The remaining 500 militia were directly commanded by Rutherford [Graham:1827:213]. On 14 June, Rutherford learned that Tories were embodying at Ramsour's Mill, in present-day Lincolnton, North Carolina. Rutherford ordered Colonel Francis Locke, commander of Rowan County militia, to disperse these Tories. On 15 June, Rutherford moved his force to a location 2 miles south of Charlotte to better counter any further advance by Rawdon. As it turned out, on 10 June, Cornwallis had recalled Rawdon back towards Camden [Graham:1827:214] [Robinson:1957:43]. Cornwallis strengthened Rocky Mount by sending a detachment of 150 British Legion dragoons under Captain Christian Huck.

At this time, the British Army occupied all of South Carolina with no organized opposition within the state. Cornwallis next turned his attention to establishing civil government and commercial regulations. About the middle of June, he returned from Camden to Charleston leaving Rawdon in command [Tarleton:1787:89]. Cornwallis described his plans for North Carolina in a 30 June letter to his superior General Henry Clinton.

I have established the most satisfactory correspondence, and have seen several people of credit and undoubted fidelity from North Carolina. They all agree in the assurances of the good disposition of a considerable body of the inhabitants, and of the impossibility of subsisting a body of troops in that country till the harvest is over. This reason, the heat of the summer, and the unsettled state of South Carolina, all concurred to convince me of the necessity of postponing offensive operations on that side until the latter end of August, or beginning of September; and, in consequence, I sent emissaries to the leading persons amongst our friends, recommending, in the strongest terms, that they should attend to their harvest, prepare provisions, and

remain quiet till the King's troops were ready to enter the province.
[Cornwallis:1780:Tarleton:1787:118].

Most of Tarleton's British Legion returned with Cornwallis to Charleston to prepare an offensive into North Carolina.

Sumter at Tuckasegee Ford

Colonel William Hill wrote to Sumter in Salisbury describing his men's intention of joining Rutherford [Hill:1815:8]. Sumter joined the South Carolina refugees at Tuckasegee Ford on Catawba River. On 15 June, Sumter was selected to lead these South Carolina militiamen. They recognized him as a brigadier general [Gregorie:1931:80], although Governor Rutledge did not grant this commission until the following October. One of these refugees was John Adair, later Kentucky Governor, 1820–1824. He certified on 12 July 1832:

... about three hundred men who had fled from the enemy of whom I was one did assemble in North Carolina where they had fled and entered into a solemn obligation to place themselves under the command of Genl. Thomas Sumpter and to continue in a body and serve under his command until the war was at an end, or until their services were no longer necessary, they were to find their own horses, arms, clothing and all accessories, It being absolutely necessary that they should act on horseback. [Adair:1832:Draper:VV:10:15–17].

The men who joined Sumter arrived as militiamen, although many had prior military experience and some had been Continental soldiers. When they acted under Sumter's orders they were official state troops of South Carolina. However, with no way to pay his men, Sumter could not force strict discipline. Small detachments came and went.

On 17 June, Rutherford, after he learned that Rawdon withdrew from Waxhaw Creek to Hanging Rock, planned to join Locke in attacking the Tories at Ramsour's Mill [Graham:1827:214] [Robinson:1957:43].

On 18 June, from Rocky Mount, Lieutenant Colonel George Turnbull dispatched Captain Huck to burn the valuable and strategically important iron works of Colonel William Hill, one of Sumter's principal subordinates.

Sumter at Ramsour's Mill

On 20 June, Sumter was with Rutherford as they approached the Tory encampment at Ramsour's Mill. They arrived after the Rowan County militia under Colonel Locke won the battle. As Tories fled, Sumter got authorization from the state of North Carolina to confiscate their military property in order to equip his force [Hill:1815:8].

On 22 June [Graham:1827:229], Rutherford ordered Major Davie and his 65 cavalymen set up a post at Waxhaw Creek. Davie later wrote:

Major Davie was ordered to take a position near the South Carolina line opposite to the Hanging rock that might enable him to prevent the enemy from foraging on the borders of the State adjacent to the Waxhaws and check the depredations of the Loyalists who infested that part of the Country; for this purpose he chose a position on the North side of the Waxhaw creek, his corps was reinforced by some South Carolinians under Major Crawford the Catawba Indians under their chief General Newriver, and a part of the Mecklenburg militia commanded by L^t Col^o Heaggins. This ground being only eighteen miles from the Hanging-rock where the enemy were in force, ... [Davie:1810:8].

Major Robert Crawford's unit included brothers Robert Jackson and future President Andrew Jackson, then age 13. Lieutenant Colonel William Hagins was one of Sumter's subordinates [Pettus:1995]. One of Hagins' privates, Edward Curry, applied for a pension in 1833. He testified in court:

... he [Curry] got his horse and gun went with them and next day joined Col William Hoagans (of the North Carolina militia) who had collected three or four hundred men on the road leading from Charlotte to Camden at a creek called Waxhaws.
[Curry:1833:Draper:VV:10:251].

Curry was in Hagins' unit for two years. He portrays a partisan organization engaged in small-unit operations [Curry:1833:Draper:VV:10:249–252].

Sumter at Hagler's Branch

After Tarleton with most of the British Legion returned to Charleston, Sumter and his men returned to South Carolina. They temporarily camped on Hagler's Hill next to Hagler's Branch inside Catawba Indian Lands. That location was where the branch crosses Nation Ford Road, also known at that time as Old Saluda Road. Today, it is within Anne Springs Close Greenway Park in York County. Evidence of this encampment is found in James Jameson's pension application:

... immediately after fought & defeated the Tories at Ramsour's in North Carolina, — after this battle returned & again joined Genl. Sumpter at Haggler's Branch, crossed the Catawba and defeated the British under Capt. Hook at Williamson's.
[Jameson:1832:Draper:VV:10:46].

One account sent to historian Lyman Draper stated that John Barnett and other Mecklenburg men said that at Hagler's Hill, Sumter's men wrestled, jumped, and ran foot races
[White:1871:Stinson:Draper:VV:11:294].

Sumter at Clems Branch campground

At Hagler's Hill, Sumter's men complained of poor forage, and called it "Poor Hill" [Gregorie:1931:81] [Bass:1961:57]. Consequently, Sumter relocated to Clems Branch campground where forage was available and presumably could be purchased from local farmers. The strongest evidence for this Clems Branch encampment is a memoir written by Colonel William Hill, one of Sumter's principal subordinates. He later wrote:

— and then it was that Col. Sumter met with us from So. Ca. He [Sumter] then got authority from the civil & military authority of that State [North Carolina] to impress or take waggons horses, provisions of all kinds, from the enemy that was in that action [Ramsour's Mill battle] — & to give a receipt to that state for the same — This being done we returned to So. Ca. & formed a camp on the East side of Catawba River at the place called Clems branch — from this out all our proceedings of importance, was done by a convention of the whole — a commission of captains appointed to take notice of all the property taken either from the enemy or friends. & a commissioner to supply us With provisions &c — [Hill:1815:8]

In 1827, William Wylie, then living in Alabama but originally from Chester County, wrote a petition in which he fixes the time of Sumter's Clems Branch encampment before Huck's Defeat on 12 July
[Wylie:1827:Draper:VV:9:102–106].

[William] Wylie Entered the army at 16 years of age — with Sumter at Clems Branch — Obtained leave a few days before Houck defeat to visit his friends — when near his home he lay down to sleep — while a comrade who was journeying with him was washing his shirt — was waked by & found a British soldier standing over him with a bayonet presented to his bosom — was taken prisoner & carried to Rocky Mount — Kept there a few days & then paroled — On his return he met a few Stragglers of the remnant of Houck's & [Tory militia Colonel James] Furguson's party which had been cut up that morning

at W^{mson}'s plantation endeavoring to make their way to Rocky Mount —
A little farther on he met a party under M^cLure in pursuit — M^cLure
had some prisoners & made an exchange for Wylie ...
[Wylie:1827:Draper:VV:9:104].

The recorded activities of William Anderson of Chester County suggest a Clems Branch encampment time before Huck's Defeat.

William Anderson, meanwhile, joined the forces of General Thomas Sumter under Captain John Steel at Clem's Branch, east of the Catawba River, and he fought at the battles of Williamsons [Huck's Defeat], Rocky Mount, Hanging Rock and Carey's Fort. [Ellet:1850:181-182] [Edgar:2001:64] [Kennedy:2005].

In 1832, George Gill applied for a pension [Gill:1832:Draper:VV:10:68-73]. He testified:

... the next service was under the same Capt. [McClure] he believes in General Sumpter's command at Steel Creek. Marched from there to the camp at Clems branch; hence to the neighborhood of Rocky Mount and was in that battle. [Gill:1832:Draper:VV:10:68].

Gill probably substituted Steel Creek for its tributary Hagler's Branch.

A secondary reference written by D. G. Stinson in 1873 states that Sumter appointed a subordinate commander Andrew Neel. Such appointments are believed to have occurred in June 1780. Stinson wrote:

His [Thomas Neel's] son Andrew [Neel] rose to the rank of Col. in place of his father, and was detached by Sumpter at Clems branch as commander of the troops of York & Chester. He afterwards fell in the battle of Rocky Mount. [Stinson:1873:Draper:VV:9:208].

In late June, Sumter's force at Clems Branch was the only organized South Carolina patriot military force resisting British Army occupation. However, at this time, Davie with 65 North Carolina cavalrymen were posted on the north side of Waxhaw Creek [Davie:1810:8].

Sumter's encampment had about 300 men. Although there is no known written description of its appearance, it can be inferred from historical knowledge of how such camps were equipped, organized, and operated [Peterson:1968]. Most of Sumter's men arrived in small units. Each militiaman brought his own horse, weapons, and bedroll. But an individual could not easily bring wagons or heavy equipment, like tents and tools, from his local militia armory. That is probably the reason Sumter got permission to impress Tory equipment after the battle at Ramsour's Mill. So, at Clems Branch there were few, if any, tents. Hundred of horses grazed along the creek. The camp probably extended on both sides of the creek, exceeding the bounds of the 2 to 3-acre campground. A portion could have been in North Carolina. Sumter trained his men in raiding, or ranger, skills rather than traditional close-order infantry drills [Bass:1961:57]. Some modern history books represent Sumter's Clems Branch camp as "hidden" or "secret" [Bass:1961:57]. Actually, the camp was on the main north-south Camden-Charlotte road. That location was easy to find by newly arriving militiamen from distant regions of South Carolina. The camp's location, just south of the state line, meant South Carolina militiamen need not leave their state, a sensitive political issue for some. Newly arriving militiamen brought intelligence of British force dispositions. Nonetheless, the camp had some disadvantages. The ground was not ideal for defense. It was vulnerable to sudden attack by British cavalry, in particular by Captain Christian Huck's detachment of 150 British Legionnaires based at Rocky Mount. There is no evidence that Sumter erected any defensive fortifications. Perhaps Sumter felt secure in his larger force, all of which were mounted. At this time, Davie's 65 North Carolina cavalrymen stationed at Waxhaw Creek provided a guard [Davie:1810:8]. If necessary, Sumter could have withdrawn to the camp of Mecklenburg and Rowan County militias in North Carolina.

Sumter at Nation Ford

On 4 July, Sumter moved his men to take control of the strategic Nation Ford on Catawba River, at the present-day *Norfolk & Southern Railroad* bridge. There they controlled wagon transport across the river. They could project force on both sides of Catawba River, to both protect their farms and threaten loyalists.

Politically, this move asserted recapture of a portion of South Carolina. By 12 July, Sumter's force grew to 500 men [Graham:1827:233] [Bass:1961:58]. Captain Joseph Graham, later brigadier general, wrote that Sumter was concerned about a possible enemy attack. He ordered that a crude fort be erected 5 miles up the road at Hagler's Branch. Oak timbers were felled in different directions to quickly construct an improvised fort [Graham:1827:233] [Gregorie:1931:84].

... the general ordered the timber to be felled in different directions around the camp, somewhat in the form of an "abattis," and the body of the trees split and leaned over the pole, supported by forks on some high stump, the other end on the ground at an angle of thirty degrees elevation, and facing the avenues left through the brush or abattis for passage, so that it would answer the double purpose for the men to be under and for defence. If the enemy's cavalry had come, unless supported by a large body of infantry or artillery, they could not have forced the camp. [Graham:1827:233].

In early July, Sumter visited North Carolina authorities to raise money and arms. He visited the Gillespie brothers who were armorers living in the mountains [Bass:1961:60]. James Hemphill may refer to this event in his 1832 pension application [Hemphill:1832:NARA]. He testified:

Some time in the summer of 1780 having moved to Mecklenburg County in North Carolina after the taking of Charleston by the British, our regiment then under the command of Lt. Col. Watson and Major Bratton (Col. Neel having died) joined the forces commanded by Col. Sumpter and a few days afterwards moved down to Hagler's Branch in S.C. and after staying there between one and two weeks went about eighteen or twenty miles to the mountains having understood that there were several British Dragoons and Tories in that neighborhood and when we had a battle with about four hundred British and tories commanded by a Capt. Huck of whom we defeated very badly. [Hemphill:1832:NARA].

These mountains may be Spencer Mountain or Kings Mountain area where a number of iron works existed. Colonel Andrew Neel actually died later at Rocky Mount. On 27 September 1832, Samuel Watson Jr., described this same event.

... as the troops collected together Col. Brattan [Bratton] directed Capt. Moffitt to raise as many volunteers as he could with a view specially to rout a gang of tories assembled in the neighborhood of Kings Mountain. He went with Capt. Moffitt in that forlorn hope. When they had reached the neighborhood of the tories not being on their guard were surprised by them and a considerable engagement ensued in which he had his horse shot down from under him they succeeded however in putting the Tories to flight and pursued them to an almost impenetrable cane brake and left them and immediately returned to the balance of the troops with Col. Brattan who were then encamped on a creek he thinks called Clams Creek [Clems Branch] ... [Watson:1832:Scoggins:2005:181-182].

Huck's Defeat

British Lieutenant Colonel Turnbull, commander of Rocky Mount, sent an order to Huck who was posted at White's Mill along Fishing Creek.

You are hereby ordered, with the cavalry under your command, to proceed to the frontier of the province, collecting all the royal militia with you on your march, and with said force to push the rebels as far as you may deem convenient. [Gregorie:1931:84].

Colonel William Hill later wrote:

After we had been some time at this camp [Clems Branch] as before mentioned. in order to prepare for actual service a number of men together with y^r author. being desirous to go into their own settlements on the west side of the River, in order to get a reinforce as well as other necessaries to enable us to keep the field — shortly after we crossed the River we were informed by our friends. that Capt. Hook [Huck] the same that had a few weeks before destroyed the Iron works had sent to most of the houses in the settlement. to notify the aged men, the young being in Camp, to meet him at a certain place, that he desired to make terms with them, & that he would put them in the King's peace accordingly they met him, he undertook to harangue them, on the certainly of his majesty^s reducing all the Colonies. to obedience, and he far exceeded the Assyrian Gen^{ls} who we read of in ancient writ in blasphemy by saying that God almighty had become a Rebel, but if there were 20 Gods on that side, they would all be conquered, was his expression — Whilst he was employed in this impious blasphemy he had his officers & men taking all the horses fit for his purpose, so that many of the aged men had to walk many miles home afoot — This ill behaviour of the enemy made an impression on the minds of the most serious men in this little band and raised their courage under the belief that they would be made instruments in the hand of Heaven to punish this enemy for his wickedness and blasphemy [Hill:1815:8–9].

On 11 July, Huck captured James McClure and Edward Martin molding lead musket balls and ordered their execution the next morning. During that evening, McClure's sister Mary raced to Sumter's camp at Nation Ford to inform her father Captain John McClure. A large detachment immediately left to attack Huck. At dawn, these patriots defeated Huck severely at Williamson's Plantation [Hill:1815:9] [Edgar:2001:66–87]. Colonel William Hill later wrote:

The number of the Americans was 133, and many of them without arms Capⁿ. Hook [Huck] had about 100 horse & Col. [James] Ferguson, at this time commander of the Tory Militia, had about 300 men: they were encamp^d. in a Lane — a strong fence on each side — the Horse picketed in the inside of a field next to the lane, with their furniture and the officers in a mansion house in the field, in which was a number of women, which the said Hook had brought there. and at the moment the action commenced, he was then flourishing his sword over the head of these unfortunate women. & threatening them with death if they would not get their husbands & sons to come in — and marching all night, we made the attack about the break of day — The plan was to attack both ends of the Lane at the same time, but unfortunately the party sent to make the attack on the east end of the lane met with some embarrassments, by fences, brush, briars &c. that they could not get to the end of the lane until the firing commenced at the west end — The probability is that if that party had made good their march in time very few of them w^d. have escaped — However Cap. Hook was killed, and also Col. [James] Ferguson of the Tory Militia — Hook's Luit^t was wounded & died afterwards; considerable number of privates the number not known, as there were many of their carcasses found in the woods some days after — This happened about the 10th .. of July 1780 at Williamsons Plantation in Y^k. D^t [York District], and it was the first check the enemy had received after the fall of Charleston; and was of greater consequence to the American cause than can be well supposed from an affair of small a magnitude — as it had the tendency to inspire the Americans with courage & fortitude & to teach them that the enemy was not invincible [Hill:1815:9–10].

In 1839, John Craig wrote an article for *Pendleton Messenger* newspaper. It reappeared in the *Chester Standard* newspaper on 16 March 1854.

On the 26th [20th] June, 1780, we had an engagement with a company of Tories at Ramsower's mill. — We defeated them with considerable loss; among the slain was Capt. Falls. We then joined Gen. Sumter at Charlotte and moved on near the Old Nation ford in South Carolina, where we took up camp, and thence we moved to Steel creek, where we had an increase in numbers. Our next engagement was at Williamson's lane, commanded by Colonels Andrew Neal, and Lacy, Bratton, Major Dickson, Capt. McClure, and Capt. Jameson. Gen. Sumter remained in camp. This engagement was on the 12th of July, 1780. Our number was one hundred and ten and we defeated four hundred, commanded by Col. Floyd; killed Major [James] Ferguson and Capt. Hook, and took Capt. Adams prisoner with 30 or 40 privates, with the loss of one man. We then went back and joined camp with Gen. Sumter at Steel creek. [Craig:1839:Chester Standard:1854:Draper:VV:5:150].

On 18 March 1822, Archibald Brown stated:

Immediately after the fall of Charleston when the enemy came into the back country he joined Gen^l Sumter at Clems Branch in the Indian Land, Capt. Nixons company, was at Hooks defeat near Colonel Brattons, was at the battle of the Hanging Rock, was with Gen^l Sumter when attacked by the British at Fishing Creek, was at the Battle of Blackstocks. [Brown:1822:Scoggins:2005:162].

On 13 November 1834, Hugh Gaston stated:

... He was afterwards at the battle at James Williamson's plantation. The night previous to the battle they encamped at Clems Branch when they crossed the Catawba river and attacked the united forces of the British & Tories about day break. ... [Gaston:1834:Scoggins:2005:167].

On 6 May 1834, Samuel Houston stated:

... From the Battle ground at Ramsour's Mills he was again marched across the Catawba River into the Catawba Indian's Land and encamped for some time at a place called Clem's branch in Lancaster district South Carolina. From thence in Captain McLure's Company under the Command of Col. Lacey he was detached to cross the Catawba River into York district to meet some British & Tories, whom we met and defeated at Col. William Bratton's. Capt. Hook [Huck], a British officer, and Col. [James] Ferguson a Tory, was killed & a Capt. Edmonson [Adamson] of the British Infantry was taken prisoner. From Col. Bratton's we were again marched across the Catawba & joined Genl. Sumpter at Clem's Branch. Thence he was marched with Genl. Sumpter to Rocky Mount where we had a battle with some British & Tories under the Command of Col. Turnbull of the British army. [Houston:1834:Scoggins:2005:169].

On 1 July 1833, James Kincaid stated:

... That he was first marched into Lancaster District South Carolina in the indian Land at Clem's branch. That he was shortly after his first enrolment marched to Fishing Creek in York District South Carolina and was there in the engagement under Capt. Moffet and Col. Bratton, at Hooks [Huck's] defeat, and that shortly thereafter he was then marched to Rocky mountain [Mount] and was there in that engagement

under the command of Genl. Sumpter, Col. Moffet [Bratton] and Capt. Moffet where Genl. Sumpter's army was repulsed. [Kincaid:1833:Scoggins:2005:170].

On 27 September 1832, Samuel Watson Jr., stated:

... [Col. Bratton's men, including Watson,] immediately returned to the balance of the troops with Col. Brattan who were then encamped on a creek he thinks called Clams Creek [Clems Branch]. At this place there had assembled a good many volunteers some from Georgia who were commonly called refugees. This place was selected as a place of greater safety from the Tories than any other known at the time and the place from which several important sorties were made during those times. In a short time he does not remember how long, the troops under command of Col. Brattan the company of Capt. Moffitt among them crossed over the Catawba River leaving a number of troops at Clam's Creek and marched a distance of twenty eight or thirty miles in the dead of night and early next morning had an engagement with a party of British and Tories under command of a British officer whose name was Hook [Huck], and defeated them. ... [Watson:1832:Scoggins:2005:181-182].

The combined effect of Ramsour's Mill and Huck's Defeat plus Sumter's control of Nation Ford did much to encourage local Whigs and discourage local Tories.

Sumter joins Davie at Waxhaw Creek

At this time, the Continental Army Southern Department was advancing to challenge Cornwallis. It was camped on Deep River in North Carolina. Major General Baron Johann DeKalb was temporary commander awaiting the arrival of Major General Horatio Gates. On 17 July, from "Camp Catawba River," Sumter sent a long letter to DeKalb that summarized the South Carolina situation, estimated British strength, and suggested a strategy [Gregorie:1931:86].

With Huck's cavalry threat eliminated, on 17 July, Sumter moved his men to join Davie's 65 North Carolina cavalymen at the Waxhaw Creek camp. From this location, they could control access to strategically important Land's Ford. At that time, there were 700 horses in one camp [Gregorie:1931:85]. The men moved towards Land's Ford and turned their horses loose in the cornfield of Doctor Harper, a known loyalist [Gregorie:1931:87]. Sumter and Davie often cooperated in South Carolina even though they were not under the same chain of command.

On 19 July, these Americans learned of a large body of British soldiers marching forward from Hanging Rock. During the night of 19-20 July, the Americans attempted to trap the British in an ambush. For whatever reason, the British did not appear [Graham:1827:234] [Gregorie:1931:87] [Robinson:1957:45]. On the night of 20 July, Davie took his men to Flat Rock, 5 miles below the British outpost at Hanging Rock, at the present-day granite quarry. There they waited until the following afternoon to destroy a British supply convoy and capture its men. Davie returned by the alternate road over Beaver Creek, arriving back at Waxhaw Creek on 22 July [Davie:1810:9].

Sumter at Clems Branch campground, second encampment

About 22 July, Sumter returned to Clems Branch campground for a second time [Graham:1827:235] [Gregorie:1931:87]. The strongest evidence for this encampment is from Captain Joseph Graham, who was adjutant of the Mecklenburg militia [Graham:1827:48]. He later wrote:

It was not thought advisable to attack the enemy at his camp [Hanging Rock], and as Lord Rawdon, when there [at Waxhaw Creek] before had consumed the forage at the neighboring farms, General Sumter moved back on the road to Charlotte sixteen miles to Clem's Branch, and encamped where he could draw his supplies from the fertile settlement of Providence on his left. [Graham:1827:234-235]



Brigadier General Joseph Graham
Artist unknown, about 1805.
[Graham:1904:frontispiece].

Sumter, without a plan of immediate action to keep his men busy, furloughed most of his men who returned to their farms. His strength fell to 100 [Graham:1827:235]. But soon afterwards, Sumter believed the British outposts at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock were vulnerable and decided to attack. On 25 July, he recalled his own men and requested the Mecklenburg militia to join [Graham:1827:235].

Sumter attacks Rocky Mount

On 28 July, Sumter's men departed Clems Branch campground [Graham:1827:236] [Gregorie:1931:87], and crossed Catawba River at Land's Ford. Simultaneously, Davie's men started a raid on the British camp at Hanging Rock. On 30 July, Sumter attacked the British fort at Rocky Mount. This assault was unsuccessful [Hill:1815:11], but at least temporarily put the British on the defensive.

Other evidence of this second encampment at Clems Branch is provided by the life story of Jane Gaston in the March 1850 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book* written by Elizabeth Fries Ellet.

... the Whigs, who had been driven back by the British, returned, and formed a camp not far below, on Clem's Branch, in the upper edge of Lancaster District. At this time, Alexander, a son of old Mr. Haynes, was about starting to join the fighting men in this camp. When his mother bade him adieu, she gave her parting counsel in the words, "Now, Alick, fight like a man! Don't be a coward!" Such was the spirit of those matrons of Carolina! After two weeks had elapsed, Alexander was brought home from the battle of Rocky Mount badly wounded in the face. Mrs. Haynes received him without testifying any weakness or undue alarm, and seemed proud that he had fought bravely, and that his wound was in front. He was taken thence to [the hospital in] Charlotte. [Ellet:1850].

Alexander Haynes while peeking behind a rock during the battle at Rocky Mount had an eye shot out and his cheek badly disfigured. He lived to be an old man. [White:1871:Stinson:Draper:VV:11:292].

Mecklenburg militia under Colonel Robert Irwin did not respond quickly enough to participate at Rocky Mount, but on 31 July, 30 of them [Adair:1832:Draper:VV:10:16] joined Sumter at Land's Ford [Graham:1827:237]. There a meeting was held to plan the next action [Davie:1810:11]. On 6 August, all participated in the battle at Hanging Rock [Hill:1815:12].

Sumter's Clems Branch camp conclusions

The purpose of this document to provide sufficient evidence to support a historical marker for Sumter's Clems Branch camp. As described above, evidence for at least one encampment is supported by nine independent primary sources. Those are: [Hill:1815:8], [Graham:1827:234–235], [Wiley:1827:Draper:VV:9:104], [Gill:1832:Draper:VV:10:68], [Brown:1822:Scoggins:2005:162], [Gaston:1834:Scoggins:2005:167], [Houston:1834:Scoggins:2005:169], [Kincaid:1833:Scoggins:2005:170], and [Watson:1832:Scoggins:2005:181–182]. Of these, [Graham:1827:234–235] and [Houston:1834:Scoggins:2005:169] support the second encampment. It is probable that more references can be found in Draper Manuscripts, series VV, volumes 6, 12, and 13.

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