



*The French & Indian War is an important part of our nation's history and in keeping with that significance, Butler County's Washington 1753 Commemoration Committee works to raise public awareness of the mission. They have erected circular blue markers with Washington's profile, visible in many places, and along several likely routes of his famous trip. We hope you will follow one of the path options of Washington's first military expedition by hiking, biking or driving through beautiful Butler County, PA. We feature a multitude of places for shopping, dining, historical reference and overnight stays. Stop in to see what Washington commemorative specials might be offered.*



## Welcome to Butler County, PA!

Through George Washington and Christopher Gist's journals, we can trace the path likely taken in 1753 from Williamsburg, Virginia to Fort LeBoeuf, and then back to Virginia. Please note that the blue signs mark a commemorative trail, as sections of the actual path are open to debate. We hope you find it historically interesting and worth a drive via today's roads, highways and sights. The route will give you an interesting trip not only through history, but Butler County, PA as well.

Stop by the **Harmony Museum** where you will find a permanent exhibit on Washington's 1753 mission.  
218 Mercer St., Harmony, PA 16037, 724-452-7341  
[www.harmonymuseum.org](http://www.harmonymuseum.org)

Also visit: [www.washingtonstrail.org](http://www.washingtonstrail.org)

### Brochure References

*Indian Paths of Pennsylvania*, Paul A.W. Wallace  
*The Journals of George Washington and Christopher Gist: Mission to Fort LeBoeuf 1753-1754*  
Edited and Annotated by Kevin Patrick Kopper

Butler County is easily accessible via the PA Turnpike, I-79, I-80 and Routes 422, 19 and 8.

## Create your Experience!

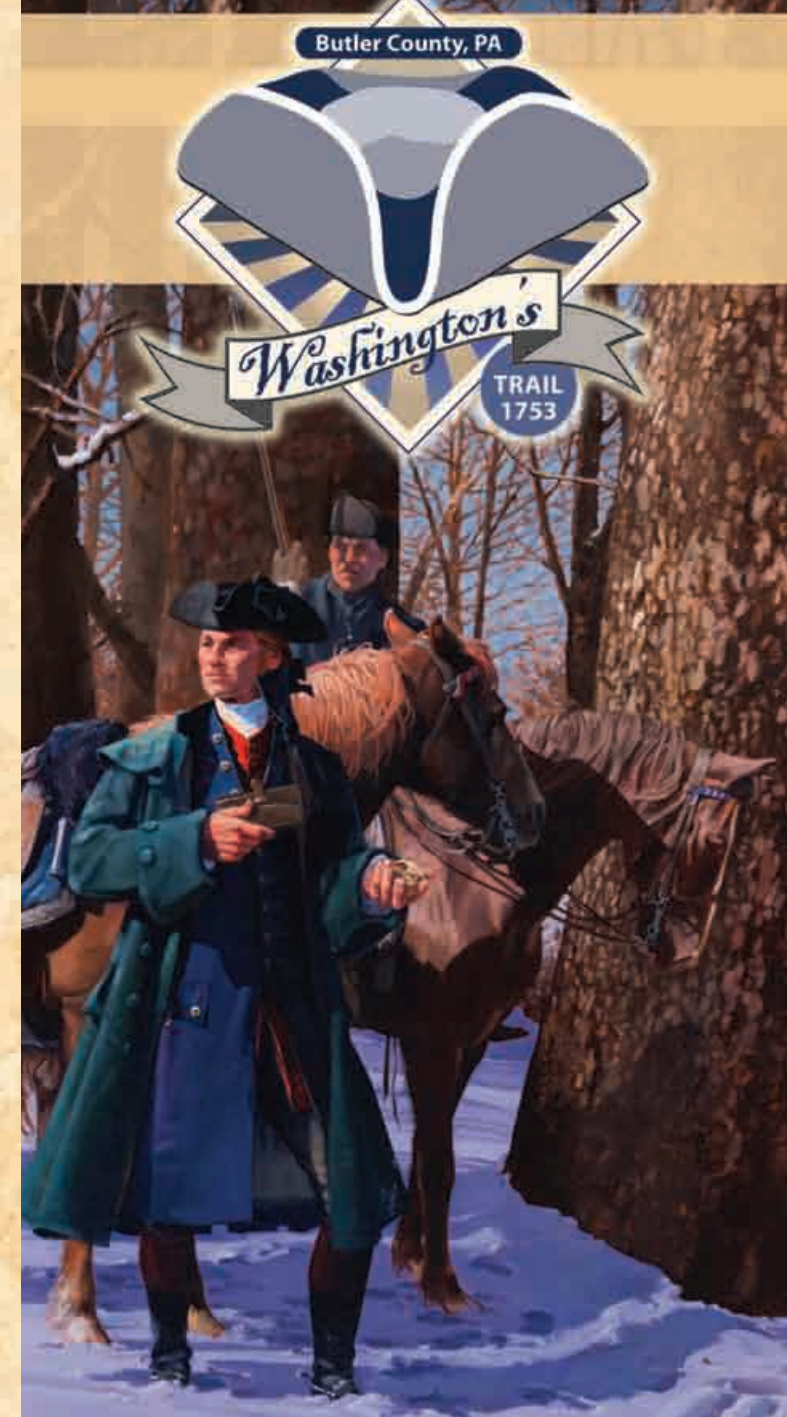
### Butler County Tourism & Convention Bureau

310 East Grandview Ave.  
Zelienople, PA 16063  
866.856.8444

[www.VisitButlerCounty.com](http://www.VisitButlerCounty.com)



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"Washington at the Point" Courtesy John Buxton. [www.buxtonart.com](http://www.buxtonart.com)





# Washington's Mission:

In 1753, the English, French and Native Americans laid claim to the Ohio Country (present-day Western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio), all of which was wilderness and had been Native American territory. Twenty-one-year old George Washington was chosen to undertake a dangerous expedition into the wilderness where the only villages were Indian, the roads were merely paths, the weather was unpredictable, and winter was just days away. Chosen for the journey by Virginia's governor, Robert Dinwiddie, Washington's assignment was to demand the French end their occupation of the region.

He would carry a letter to the commanding officer at Fort LeBoeuf demanding the French depart from the Ohio Country because "the Lands upon the River Ohio in the Western Parts of the Colony of Virginia are so notoriously known to be the Property of the Crown of Great Britain."

France's Celeron de Blainville had marked Western Pennsylvania with lead plates as he determined an inland route to the Gulf of Mexico.

By this time in history, the French had already erected three forts to reinforce their claim to the region as part of New France: Presque Isle (Erie), LeBoeuf (Waterford) and Machault (Franklin).

**Landscape:** Wilderness included large trees with a dense forest canopy that cut out the light low to the ground. As a result, there was not much underbrush. Some parts of Western Pennsylvania that George traveled through were quite marshy and wet—the weather contributed greatly to the conditions. It was difficult to cross streams, and the snow made travel more perilous.

**George's Qualifications:** He was young, ambitious, and volunteered for the mission. He used his surveying experience and his contacts with the influential Fairfax family and Lord Fairfax (shareholders in the Ohio Company, which exported furs and was involved in the fur industry) as a reference.

**George's Appearance:** George was 6' 3" with red-ish hair. He was tall for that time period and would have made a commanding figure.

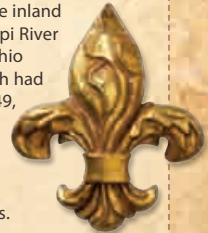
**Weather:** The winter of 1753-54 was exceptionally cold, snowy and rainy, often influencing the route and timing of the trip to Fort LeBoeuf. Washington made repeated references to its severity in his journal.

Murthing Town was also referred to as "Murdering Town"

**October 31, 1753**  
Washington's journey began in Williamsburg, Virginia. He engaged Jacob Vanbraam to interpret Indian languages for him, and then proceeded to get the "necessaries" for the trip. He traveled on to Wills Creek (today Cumberland, Maryland) where they arrived the 14th of November. There he engaged four "servitors" and Christopher Gist to guide him.

### Why were the French here?

The Canadian French were interested in connecting New France with their investments in the Mississippi River delta area (today New Orleans). The fur trade was important, as was the inland route down the Mississippi River (via the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers) because the British had control of the sea. In 1749, French Ensign Celeron de Blainville marked French territory from New France south along the rivers with lead plates.



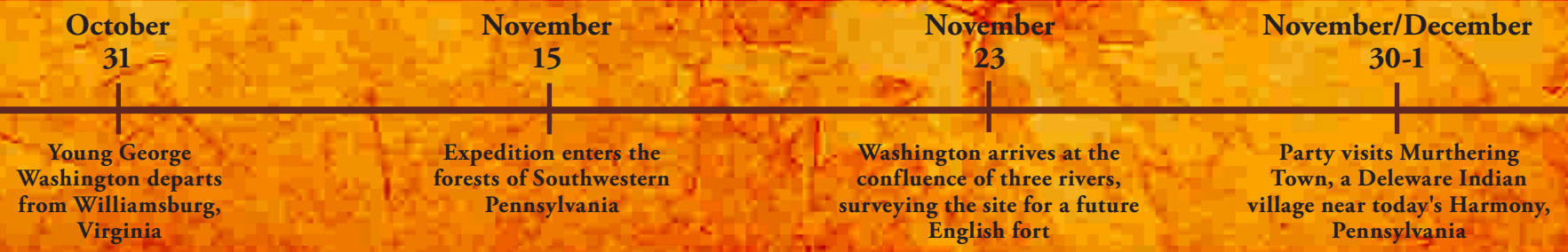
**November 23**  
As they followed the Monongahela River northbound, Washington noted in his journal that the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers was "extremely well suited for a Fort, as it has the absolute Command of both Rivers." (Today, we refer to the triangle of land where the two rivers converge as "The Point.")



### November 30 - December 1

The group continued on to Logstown, near present day Ambridge, to ask "advice and assistance," procure provisions and help in safeguarding against French Indians (Natives allied with the French). By November 30th, they reached Murthing Town, approximately 15 miles northeast of Logstown. As their trek continued through Butler County, the group may have traveled through present-day Portersville, West Liberty, north to Harrisville, then beyond Butler County to Venango, the location of the French fort.

## Timeline: October 31 - December 1, 1753





**Clothing for this Trip May Have Been:**

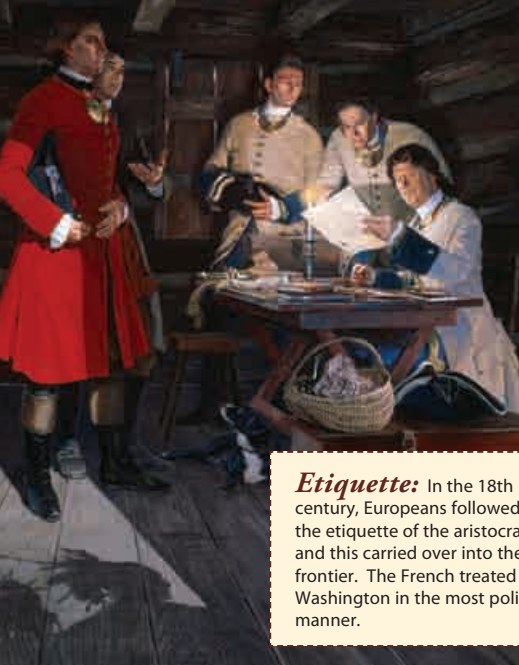
- **Breeches** (pants extending to just below the knee, probably woolen for winter wear)
- **Trade shirt** (long sleeved, often linen, with a collar and coming down to about the thighs)
- **High woolen stockings** (extending up to the thighs)
- **Waistcoat** (vest)
- **Capote** (winter coat made from a woolen blanket)
- **Leggings** (extending from the top of the shoe to the thighs, used to protect the socks and held up with leg ties or garters)
- **Boots**
- **Tricorn hat** (made of beaver fur felt, worn by most all men, developed by the military)
- **A strip of wool** similar to a scarf to wrap around their heads and cover their ears
- Woven or fur **mitten**s might also be worn



"Swim the Horses" is when the rider stays on the horse and the horse swims across the river, its feet not touching the ground.

**December 5-10**

It took about five days to travel from Venango to Fort LeBoeuf. The group was unable to ford Sugar Creek and had to "swim our horses" and "carry all our baggage over on trees" (belongings were tied to downed trees and floated across). Excessive rains, snows and bad traveling through many mires and swamps made the remainder of the trip to Fort LeBoeuf difficult. They arrived around sunset on December 10th, 1753, and waited...



**Etiquette:** In the 18th century, Europeans followed the etiquette of the aristocracy, and this carried over into the frontier. The French treated Washington in the most polite manner.

**"Domain of Three Nations"**  
Courtesy John Buxton. www.buxtonart.com

**December 12**

On December 12th, Washington attempted to meet with the highest French official, Legardeur de St. Pierre, in order to present him with the governor's letter. He was forced to wait until Monsieur Reparti, the captain of the next fort (in Erie) was sent for and arrived (in order to translate George's letter). During the wait, he took note of the size of the fort, number of structures, munitions and the number of canoes. (That information gave him a good idea of the strength of the French and how many natives were at the fort.) Upon the arrival of the captain, the meeting finally took place and the French politely declined to leave the territory. It was essential that Washington get back to Governor Dinwiddie with their refusal as soon as possible.

The French delayed the Indians accompanying Washington, but as he was anxious to begin the return trip, he and Gist set out on their journey from Fort LeBoeuf on December 16th, arriving in Venango on the 22nd. Although the group had ridden horses on the first leg of the expedition, bad weather, bitter temperatures and lack of food had made the horses weak and feeble and they were left behind. Washington put himself "in Indian walking dress" for the return trip to Virginia.

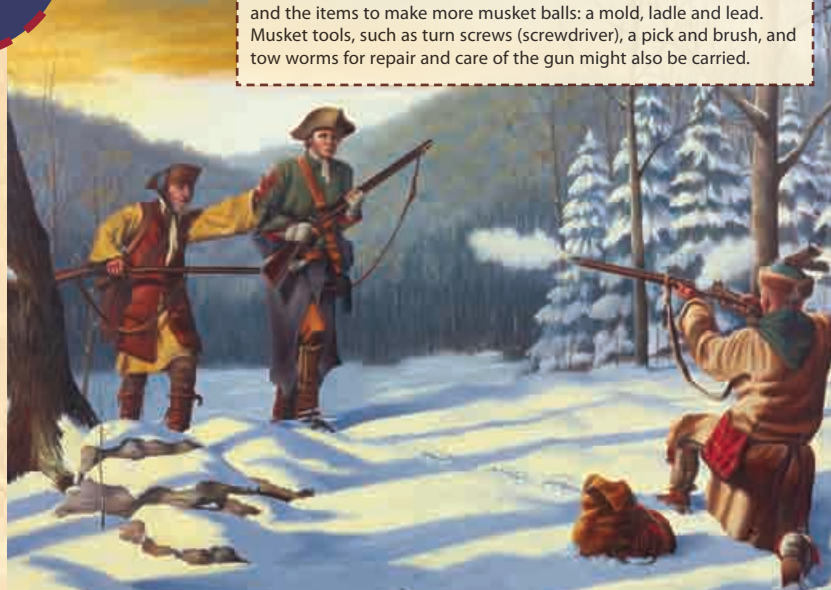
**December 27**

On December 27th, just beyond Murthering Town, an Indian allied with the French (also called a French Indian) joined Washington and Gist as a guide. As the men grew more and more uneasy at his behavior, they came to a clear meadow. The Indian stopped, turned and shot at Washington and Gist from just 15 steps away, missing both. They took him into custody, but released him around nine o'clock that night. After building a fire, as though they were staying, Washington and Gist continued walking

Indian Walking Dress— breechclout, leggings, moccasins and "watch coat"

**Weapons:** Their guns were flintlock muskets with a smooth bore, possibly a 60-75 caliber, using ball and powder. The guns shot up to about 50 yards, but they were not very accurate.

**Hunting Pouch or Possibles Bag** likely contained tow (linen), spare flints, strips of greased cloth to wrap around musket balls when the flintlock is loaded, ball bag for musket balls, and the items to make more musket balls: a mold, ladle and lead. Musket tools, such as turn screws (screwdriver), a pick and brush, and tow worms for repair and care of the gun might also be carried.



throughout the night along the Venango Trail (Route 528 and Franklin Road). They were certain the Indian would follow their tracks as soon as it was light and wanted to get a head start. How different our history would have been if this shot had been accurate!



**"Washington's Crossing, 1753"**  
Courtesy John Buxton. www.buxtonart.com

Traveling until the next evening at dark, they approached the Allegheny River, expecting it to be completely frozen. It was not. They felt a raft was the only means of crossing and a "poor hatchet" was their means of building it. Following a whole day's work, they were able to launch the raft, but hit ice about halfway across, in such a manner that they expected to sink. Washington was thrown into about ten feet of water and managed to pull himself back onto the raft. Not being able to make it to either shore, the men landed on a small island with no inhabitants. They spent a cold, wet night huddled around a fire.

**December 30**

The following morning, the cold being so extreme as to freeze the Allegheny, they were able to walk across the remainder of the river on the ice, proceeding on to John Frazier's cabin, located about ten miles away on the Monongahela River at Turtle Creek. Frazier was a blacksmith and trader. From the first day of December until the 15th, it rained or snowed incessantly. The trip continued to be difficult and filled with hazards.

**January 16**

Washington finally arrived back in Williamsburg where he reported to the governor that the French intended to remain entrenched in the Ohio Country. At Governor Dinwiddie's request, Washington published the journal he had kept throughout the trip. Dinwiddie felt that it might influence the legislature.

**What happened next...**

By April of 1754, the French had control of the point of land at the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers and commenced to build Fort Duquesne. In late May, as Washington and 400 Virginia and South Carolina troops were camped at the Great Meadows (near today's Farmington, Pennsylvania), he received a report that a group of Frenchmen was camped nearby. Upon investigation, they found the French in a secluded spot. The English attacked, had the advantage and took a heavy toll, including the death of the French leader, Ensign Joseph de Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville. Washington then retreated to the Great Meadows and constructed a makeshift shelter called Fort Necessity. The French attacked during a rainstorm that turned the British trenches into a quagmire. Washington was forced to surrender, signing a document in which he took responsibility for the death of Jumonville. His admission would haunt him the rest of his life and gave the French another reason to start a war against the British. Want to know more? The story continues at other French and Indian War sites and museums throughout Western Pennsylvania.

**"The First Shot"** By Deac Mong.  
Commissioned by retired Butler County Judge Martin J. O'Brien.

**Timeline: December 10, 1753 - January 16, 1754**



December 10

Washington arrives at Fort LeBoeuf and delivers message to French commander

December 16-26

Washington departs from Fort LeBoeuf on return journey

December 27

A "French Indian" attempts to shoot Washington east of Murthering Town

December 29

Washington nearly drowns crossing the Allegheny River

January 16

Washington reports to Governor Dinwiddie at Williamsburg

**Think About It!**

Our history would be different if George Washington had been shot or drowned on his return trip from Fort LeBoeuf. His influence was monumental in our country. He had a hand in the start of the French & Indian War, an important role in the Revolutionary War, and the establishment of our government. As well as being our first president, his presence directed many aspects of our nation's growth.