

STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA

docs.pa

PY H673.2 B658

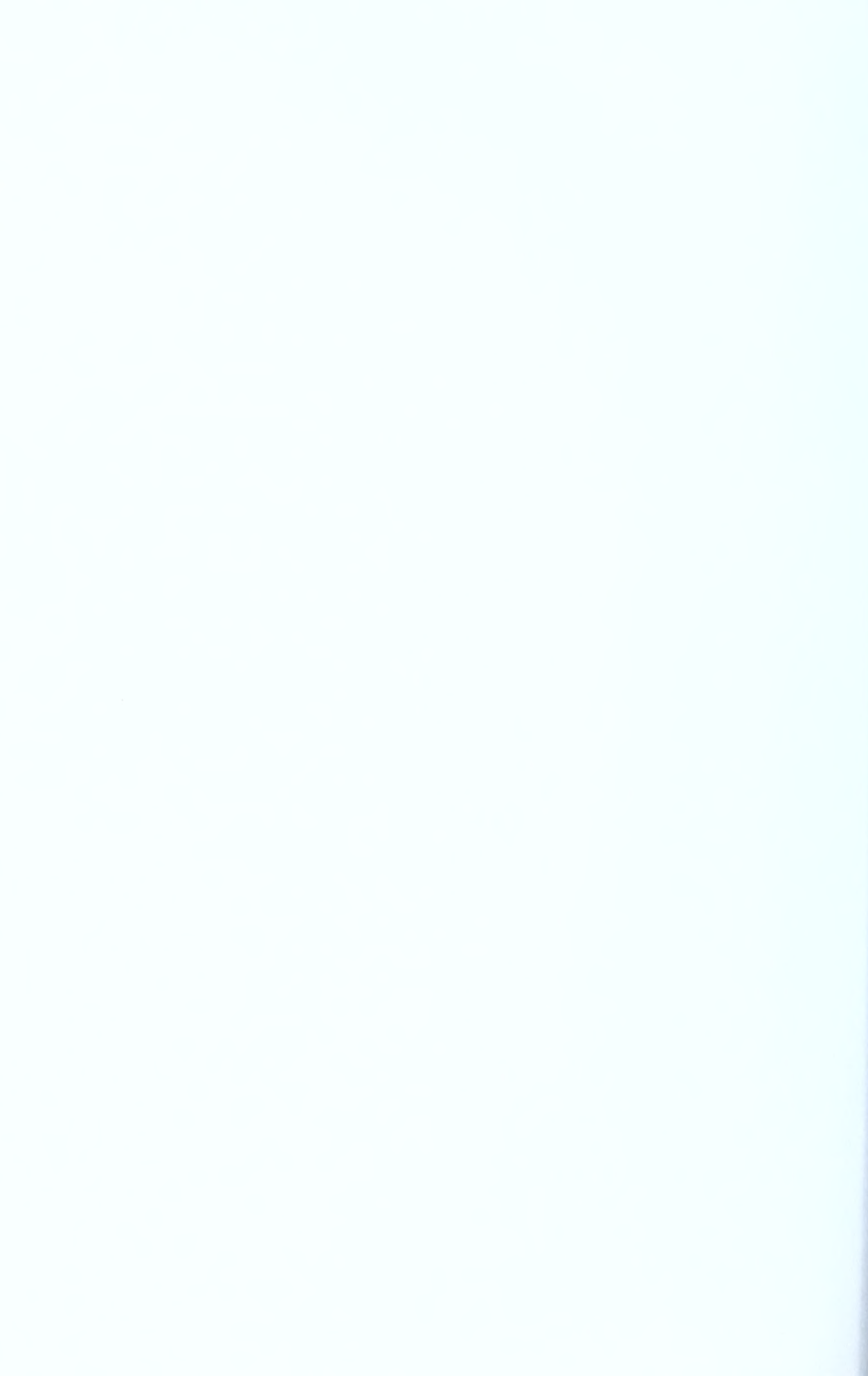
Blunder Camp" :



0 0001 00193739 8

P 658
1968

PENNSYLVANIA STATE LIBRARY
General Library Bureau
Government Publications



58
1

“Blunder Camp”:
A Note on the Braddock Road

By
PAUL A. W. WALLACE

Reprinted for the
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION
from *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*
Vol. LXXXVII, No. 1, January, 1963

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

“Blunder Camp”: *A Note on the Braddock Road*

IN THE mid-eighteenth century, when the French and English in America settled down to their final contest for the interior of the continent, they concentrated at first on the Forks of the Ohio, the strategic site which commanded the best available trade and military routes between the seaboard and the prairies. There, where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers unite to form the Ohio, the French built Fort Duquesne, an offensive move which aroused the British lion.

Major General Edward Braddock, an experienced field commander, concentrated an army of some 2,200 men for his march across the Allegheny Mountains to capture the French fort. Establishing a base at Wills Creek (Cumberland, Maryland), Braddock prepared to follow Nemaocolin's Path¹ across a formidable array of mountains: Wills Mountain, Big Savage Mountain, Red Ridge, Meadow Mountain, Negro Mountain, Winding Ridge, Division Ridge, and Chestnut Ridge.

Most of the way the route was not difficult to follow. Nemaocolin's Path, which had already been touched up a little with ax and pick in an effort to make it passable for wagons,² led all the way to the summit of Chestnut Ridge (a few miles southeast of Uniontown), where it debouched onto a branch of the Catawba Path. At Jacobs Creek, the Catawba Path intersected the Glades Path, a branch of which led to the Forks.

A detachment of several hundred men preceded the main body, opening a twelve-foot-wide wagon and artillery road. These pioneers felled trees, bridged creeks, and laid causeways across the swamps.

¹ See Paul A. W. Wallace, "Historic Indian Paths of Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (PMHB), LXXVI (1952), 435-436.

² Hugh Cleland, *George Washington in the Ohio Valley* (Pittsburgh, 1955), 4; James Veech, *The Monongahela of Old, or Historical Sketches of Southwestern Pennsylvania to 1800* (Pittsburgh, 1858-1892), 27.

Despite their efforts, baffling difficulties plagued the army's march. The strain of hauling supply wagons over roads that, in Colonel John St. Clair's words, were "either Rocky or full of Boggs,"³ was too much for the horses, many of which sickened and died. Of necessity, the men turned to and helped pull wagons and guns out of mud holes and up steep river banks at the fords. A detachment of sailors, experienced in the use of block and tackle, had been brought along for just such a purpose.⁴ But to move artillery—six pounders, twelve pounders, and howitzers—over those hastily widened Indian paths was nearly impossible. On Wills Mountain it *was* impossible. Here, on the first stage out from New Cumberland, Braddock had to admit defeat. After wrestling with the mountain for several days, during the course of which a number of wagons broke down, the advance party reported that the way was not passable for howitzers. In consequence, Braddock risked making his road through the narrows of Wills Creek, a way that was dangerously subject to flood, although easily negotiable in good weather.⁵ Today, the National Highway, U. S. 40, follows Braddock's road through the narrows which, despite the artificial channeling of the creek's water, still provides one of the most spectacular "water gaps" in these mountains.

The course of the road and the sites of Braddock's twenty camps have been pretty well determined. In the nineteenth century, James Veech broached the subject in *The Monongahela of Old* (Pittsburgh, 1858–1892). In 1855, Winthrop Sargent published the journal of Captain Robert Orme, General Braddock's aide-de-camp, with a long historical introduction.⁶ Best of all, in 1914, John Kennedy Lacock, after exhaustive research among the available records and after walking over as much of the road as could still be traced, published an all but definitive study, "Braddock Road," in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*.⁷

³ Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, VI, *The Years of Defeat* (New York, 1946), 83.

⁴ Winthrop Sargent, *The History of an Expedition against Fort Du Quesne* [Historical Society of Pennsylvania *Memoirs*, V] (Philadelphia, 1855), 366.

⁵ John C. Schmidt, "The Maryland Pass that Opened the West," *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 18, 1960, 10–12.

⁶ Sargent, 281–357.

⁷ *PMHB*, XXXVIII (1914), 1–38. The present writer, who has studied Prof. Lacock's printed work as well as the notes he left behind with his nephew, Voy Lacock of Washington, Pa., conferred frequently with the late William J. Laughner of Greensburg, Pa., one of Lacock's

Lacock, however, was aware that he had not resolved the entire matter. In particular, he recognized that Robert Orme's journal, his principal source of information, did not provide clear evidence of exactly where the army camped each night between July 1 and July 7.

Recently, new sources have come to light which help to solve these problems, notably Gist's map, "The Draught of Gen^l Braddocks Route towards Fort Du Quesne as deliver'd to Capt. M^cKeller, Engineer, by Christop^r Gist The 15th of Sep^r 1755." Mr. Donald A. Kent of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has found two variant drafts of this map, both apparently made from Gist's original, which no longer exists. One of these drafts is in the Huntington Library and the other is in the John Carter Brown Library.⁸ The drafts are especially valuable because Gist, who was an experienced woodsman and accurate observer (if one may judge from his report of the journey made with Washington to Fort Le Boeuf in 1753), lists the distances between camps and shows the location of each camp in relation to identifiable creeks or runs.

Where Gist's evidence conflicts with Orme's and Lacock's, his map finds corroboration in two recently published journals, that of an anonymous British officer who made the campaign with Braddock, and that of Captain Robert Cholmley's batman.⁹ Colonel Sir Peter Halkett's orderly book, which is published in the same volume, contributes further to elucidating Braddock's itinerary in the names it gives to certain camps.

With these new source materials at hand, the sites of camps 14 to 19 (July 1 to 7) can now be determined with much greater accuracy. In the following list, each camp is identified by the name Gist gave it, with Lacock's better known name in parentheses.

No. 14, July 1: TARRIPEN CREEK (Great Swamp Creek). Lacock was correct in placing "the great swamp" at Green Lick Run.

field assistants, visited many parts of the road and walked it from Fort Necessity to the Half King's Rock, and who has examined many warrantee surveys that show the old road's course, can vouch for Lacock's painstaking and penetrating research, as well as the acumen and good sense he brought to bear on the sometimes intricate problems of camp site identification.

⁸ Copies of these drafts are at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

⁹ Charles Hamilton, *Braddock's Defeat* (Norman, Okla., 1959).

Captain Orme noted that, after having traveled "about 5 miles" from the last camp (which was one mile north of the crossing of the Youghiogheny at Connellsville), they "could advance no further by reason of a great swamp which required much work to make it passable."¹⁰

No. 15, July 2: JACOBS CABBINS (Jacobs Cabin). Lacock was wrong in supposing that from the camp at the swamp the army marched only one mile to Jacobs Cabin, which he took to be on the south side of Jacobs Creek.¹¹ Captain Orme, Cholmley's batman, and the anonymous British officer agree that Jacobs Cabin was about six miles from the preceding camp. Gist puts the distance at five miles.

The evidence of these four contemporary observers—namely, that Jacobs Cabin was five or six miles beyond the camp at Green Lick Run—is reinforced by a warrantee survey¹² showing a plot of land described as "a Mile and an half from Jacobs Hunting Cabbin on Braddocks road." Enough of the surrounding country, together with the road, is shown to pinpoint "the place where," as the surveyor has written on the draft, "Jacobs Hunting Cabbin is said to have stood." Since he marked and described features of the landscape which are still easily identifiable, it is not difficult today to locate pretty closely the site of the cabin. It was on a gentle ridge just east of what was once Jacobs Swamp (since drained) and on or near a still passable road about two and a quarter miles north of the head of Eagle Street (the Braddock Road) in Mount Pleasant. In other words, Jacobs Cabin was five and a half miles, by the Braddock Road, from the crossing of Green Lick Run.

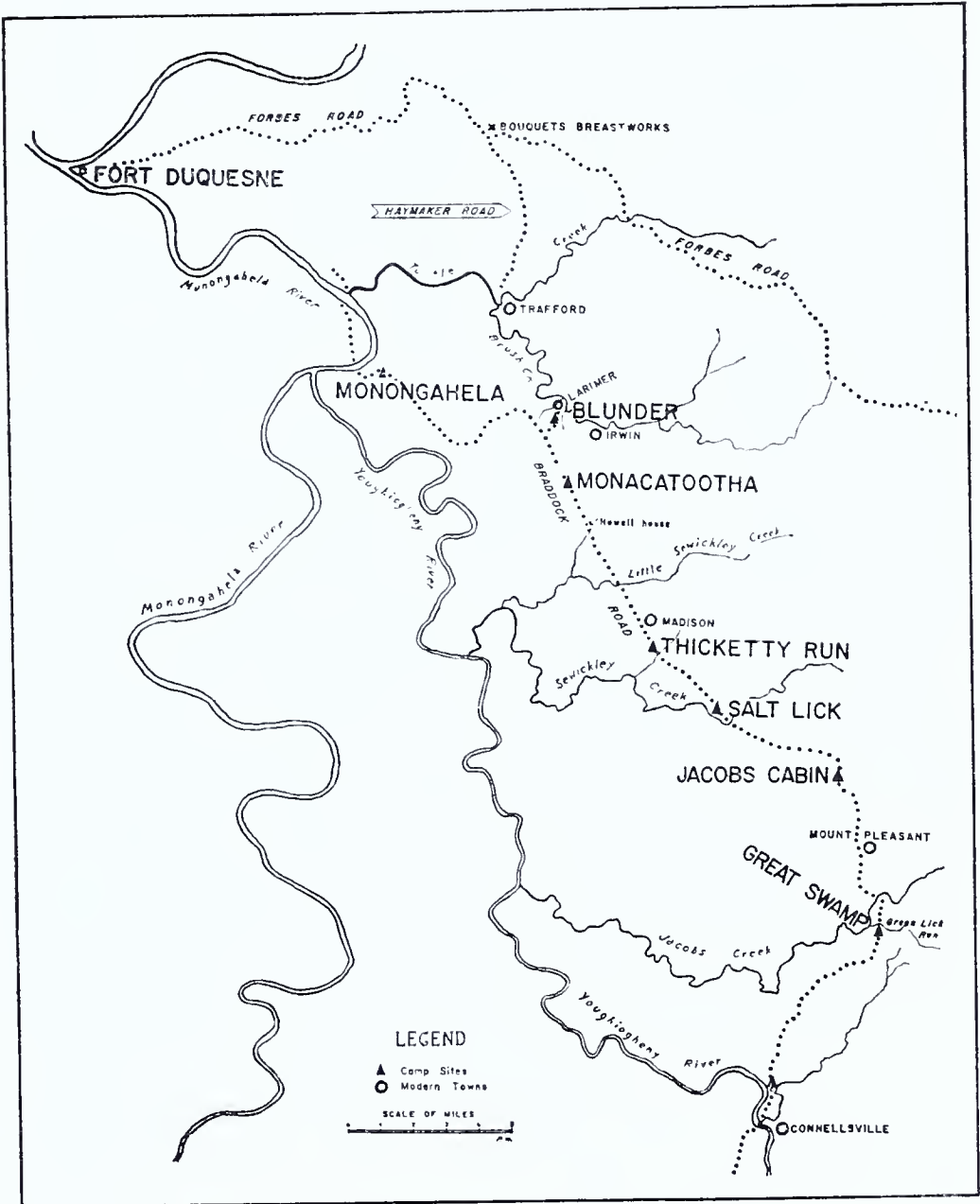
To this identification it might be objected that camp No. 14 at the swamp was called "Camp Near Jacobs Cabbin" in Colonel Halkett's orderly book. But the objection must be overruled. Halkett called the next camp (No. 15, July 2) the "Camp at Jacobs Cabbins."¹³ The change from *near* to *at* does not indicate that there were

¹⁰ Sargent, 346.

¹¹ *PMHB*, XXXVIII (1914), 29 (note 65). The creek is thought to have been named for Captain Jacobs, a famed Delaware war chief who assisted in the defeat of Braddock in July, 1755, and a year later in the capture of Fort Granville on the Juniata. He was killed at Kittanning on Sept. 8, 1756, by Col. John Armstrong's raiders.

¹² This survey, D 46-100, Bureau of Land Records, Harrisburg, Pa., was made in 1787 in pursuance of an order of survey dated Apr. 3, 1769.

¹³ Hamilton, 117.



CAMP SITES ON THE BRADDOCK ROAD

two places called Jacobs Cabin. It indicates, rather, that Jacobs Cabin was an important landmark, like the Great Meadows.¹⁴ Only Halkett referred to Jacobs Cabin on July 1. They all referred to it on July 2, Orme and the British officer calling it "Jacobs Cabbin," while Gist and Halkett called it "Jacobs Cabbins."

There is further evidence in support of the survey's identification of the site as north of Mount Pleasant. The "Journal of a British Officer" noted that, whereas the direction of the march on July 2 approaching Jacobs Cabin was "still to ye Northward," the direction changed when they left the cabin on July 3 "to ye Westward of the North."¹⁵ It is a fact that within half a mile north of the camp site by Jacobs Swamp the Braddock Road turned sharply from a north to a northwest course, which it held thereafter for many miles.

No. 16, July 3: LICK CAMP (Salt Lick Camp). Colonel Halkett called this the "Camp at the Deers Lick." The British officer called it "Lick Creek" and observed, "This Creek takes its Name from a Lick being there, where Deer, Buffaloes & Bears come to lick ye Salt out of ye Swamp. . . ."¹⁶

Where was this salt lick? Christopher Gist said it was four miles from "Jacobs Cabbins." What used to be called "Goudy's Fording" of Sewickley Creek (at Hunkers, about a mile southwest of New Stanton) is exactly four miles from the cabin by way of the Braddock Road. On Sewickley Creek, about half a mile beyond that crossing, there was formerly a salt mine.¹⁷ Jack Veetch, whom the writer met at the mine on June 4, 1962, said: "They drilled for a well here [*near the south bank of Sewickley Creek*] four months ago and got water heavy with salt. The same thing happened on the other side of the creek. We understand this mine was used originally for salt." No doubt, Lick Camp was a little west of Goudy's Fording and on the edge of the salt swamp of which these vestiges remain.

No. 17, July 4 and 5: CAMP THREE MILES FROM LICK (Thicketty Run Camp). Gist and Lacock agree that this camp was beside a small run a mile southeast of Madison. The modern road crosses it at the approximate site of the camp.

¹⁴ Note Gist's mention of "Camp 6 M. east of gt. Meadows," and Halkett's "Camp beyond the Great Medows." *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Its place is now taken by No. 10 mine of the Delmont Fuel Company.

No. 18, July 6: MONACATOOTHA CAMP (Monacatuca Camp). This camp, named for the unhappy accident by which Monacatootha's (Scaroyady's) son lost his life, was, according to local tradition,¹⁸ beside a stream in a wide, comfortable valley where the late William B. Howell's house (now presided over by his two daughters) fronts a road that is undoubtedly Braddock's. But, if Gist correctly measured the distance from the preceding camp, Monacatootha Camp was a mile and a half *beyond* the Howell house. Orme, the British officer, and the batman agree with Gist that the distance between the two camps was "about 6 miles." A march of six miles over these pleasant hills from Thicketty Run by the almost straight north-northwest course of the Braddock Road would bring the army to a spot two miles southwest of Irwin, and two miles north of Rillton.

Since, however, this location is on high ground, an objection at once comes to mind. Why should Braddock have set his camp on a dry hill instead of in a well-watered valley? One might expect the proximity of good water to be a first consideration in the selection of a camp site. In reply, we have Gist's map, which shows camp 18 to be some distance from any stream. We have also the word of the British officer that, as a matter of fact, Braddock's camps were not usually situated near a good water supply. Complaining on July 7 about the difficulty in getting water at camp No. 19, the officer went on to make the general observation that they were "obliged to go generally half a Mile or more [to get water] & even then very bad."¹⁹

The site here proposed for Monacatootha Camp not only fits the recorded mileages up to that point, but also agrees with (as the Howell house site does not) the new evidence for the recorded distance—two miles—between Monacatootha Camp and the one following it.

No. 19, July 7: BLUNDER CAMP (Camp near Stewartsville). Of all the camps, this one raises the most questions. Where was it? What was Braddock trying to do here? What was the blunder? How did he retrieve it?

Lacock avoided committing himself to any precise location; he said only that it was "in the neighborhood of Circleville and Stewartsville."²⁰ It is now possible with the new evidence to place

¹⁸ *PMHB*, XXXVIII (1914), 34 (note 74).

¹⁹ Hamilton, 48.

²⁰ *PMHB*, XXXVIII (1914), 34.

"to avoid the dangerous pass of the narrows." Whether or not the "narrows" here referred to were those on Turtle Creek, it is certain that the lower Turtle Creek Valley was an awkward place for an army that feared ambush. At some points there was scarcely room for the road to pass between the cliffs and the water.

The term "narrows" was also used for the path along the east bank of the Monongahela, above Fraser's (Frazier's) trading post at the mouth of Turtle Creek. The guides warned Braddock that there he would find "a narrow pass of about two miles, with a river on the left and a very high mountain on the right, and that it would require much repair to make it passable to carriages." They went on to explain, however, that he could, with a little trouble, outflank these narrows. "They said," continued Orme, "the Monongahela had two extreme good fords, which were very shallow, and the banks not steep. It was therefore resolved to pass this river. . . ." ²⁴

Having decided to give up the ridge route and to avoid the dangerous narrows of Turtle Creek as well as those on the Monongahela, Braddock and his army retraced their steps a little and camped that night, July 7, at a spot which the British officer said was within six hundred yards of where they had first halted. ²⁵ Because of the time lost, they advanced, according to Gist, only two miles that day. Gist's figure is corroborated by the batman, who wrote, "We marched about two Miles and Incamped Near Turtels Creek."

Next morning they went down the west side of the ridge (taking elaborate precautions to avoid ambush in the valley of Long Run) and camped within "a Small Mile" ²⁶ of the Monongahela at what is now McKeesport.

Camp No. 20, July 8: HEAD SUGAR CREEK (Monongahela Camp). At two o'clock on the morning of July 9, Lieutenant Colonel Gage advanced with between three and four hundred men to secure the fords of the Monongahela. There was no opposition. By early afternoon the whole army had made the double crossing and the men, as one of them wrote, "hugg'd themselves with joy. . . ." ²⁷

Harrisburg

PAUL A. W. WALLACE

²⁴ Sargent, 352.

²⁵ Hamilton, 48.

²⁶ Charles Stotz, ed., "A Letter from Will's Creek: Harry Gordon's Account of Braddock's Defeat," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, XLIV (1961), 129-136.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 132, 134-135.

