

# **Auto Tour of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route (W3R) through Rhode Island**

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*We thank the Rhode Island Department of Transportation for recommending the auto route on the following pages, following or paralleling the historic 1781 land route of the French army.*

In July 1780 a 5,000-man French army commanded by General Rochambeau landed in Newport RI to assist the Continental Army under General Washington in freeing the American colonies from British control. In June of 1781 the French army moved north to Providence and then west through Connecticut to join forces with the Continental Army on the Hudson River (near Dobbs Ferry) north of British-controlled New York City.

Moving several thousand men nearly 700 miles is a complicated task that requires considerable experience, planning, and organization. After six years of war the Americans were familiar with the terrain and with the local sources of food and hay for the livestock, but the French were not. Nearly 2,000 horses and oxen accompanied the French army to carry the officers, pull the wagons, and provide meat. Mounted patrols checked and mapped the route and made arrangements to purchase provisions. The French quartermasters paid farmers and merchants with silver coins, which were much preferred to Continental dollars. The French army traveled in four divisions spaced a day apart and stayed in campsites that had been used by the Continental army throughout the war. To avoid the summer heat the soldiers marched out of camp at 4 AM and completed their daily 14-mile march before noon. Soldiers slept in eight-man tents, and company-grade officers slept in two-man tents, while regimental and general officers lodged in nearby taverns, such as Waterman's Tavern in Coventry RI.

After several weeks testing the defenses around New York City Washington and Rochambeau found there was an opportunity to trap and capture a British army under General Cornwallis. That army had caused great damage in Virginia but was now in Yorktown surrounded by thousands of Virginia militia and Continental regiments commanded by Generals Lafayette, Steuben, and Greene. The key to success would be to coordinate a rapid march south with the movements of a French fleet -- commanded by Admiral de Grasse -- which was about to sail north from the Caribbean. It was important for the allied troops to get a good head start before the British in New York realized where they were going.

A screening force of Continental troops built large ovens on the coast of New Jersey so that the British would think the French were preparing to bake bread for their army there. Meanwhile the U.S. and French armies made a rapid march

south through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware to Maryland, where most of them boarded transport ships bound for Williamsburg, Virginia. The officers and baggage train took a land route to Williamsburg. Meanwhile a British fleet tried to break into the Chesapeake Bay and rescue Cornwallis' army, but the de Grasse's fleet held them off.

At Williamsburg the troops under Washington and Rochambeau joined thousands of additional French troops from Admiral de Grasse's fleet and acquired the French siege guns brought from Newport by Admiral Barrass. The combined forces then marched to nearby Yorktown to dig siege lines and batter the Yorktown defenses with round-the-clock cannonfire. After ten days of siege Cornwallis surrendered the British army on October 19, 1781. This ended what turned out to be the final U.S. campaign in the American Revolution.

Washington and the Continental Army immediately went north to keep the British from breaking out of New York City. After wintering-over in Virginia Rochambeau and his army followed the 680-mile land route north from Virginia to Rhode Island, greeted along the way by thousands of thankful Americans.

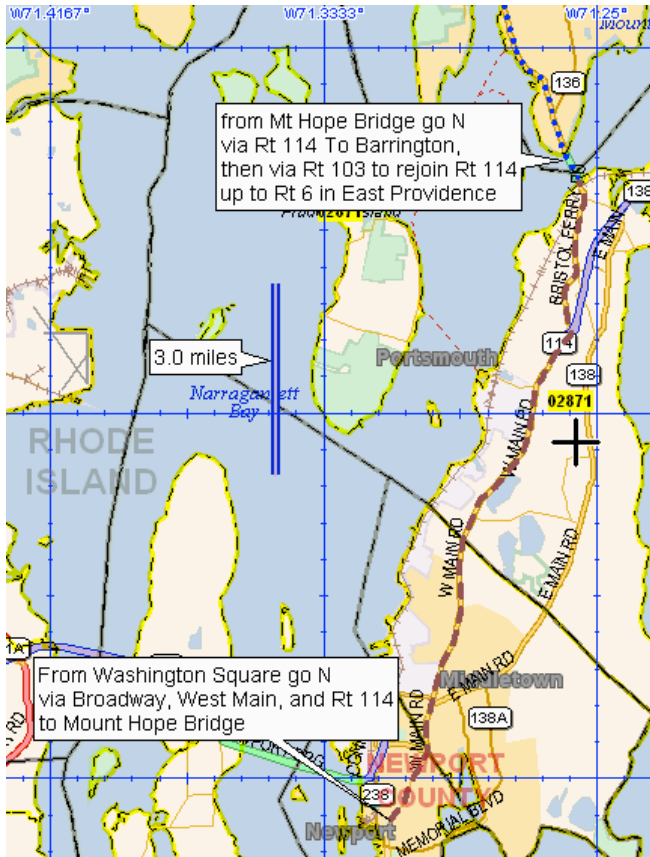
In 2006 -- to celebrate the 225th anniversary of this march -- many youth, historical re-enactors, and other individuals re-traced the steps of these allied troops along portions of the 680-mile route from Newport to Yorktown. The 225th anniversary start-of-the-march activities in Rhode Island were coordinated by the Rhode Island Rochambeau Commemoration Commission and peaked on the weekend of June 16-18, 2006 in Providence RI, with an historical symposium at Brown University, ceremonies at the State house, and participation by the Rhode Island Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, the Society of Colonial Wars, the Alliance Française, and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America.

A small band of Scouts, joined by several re-enactors, made hikes on five successive weekends to traverse the entire 55 miles of the W3R trail in Rhode Island. Four re-enactors traveled the entire route as "America's March to Yorktown" on the same itinerary and schedule as in 1781, giving talks and attending ceremonies in all nine states along the route. A replica of General Rochambeau's ceremonial baton, made by a Rhode Island artisan, was passed from one state's representative to the next at each state border along the way to symbolize the interstate cooperation that was vital to achieving independence.

The 225th anniversary day-of-surrender activities were held on October 19, 2006, in Yorktown VA. For photo-reports of the 2006 march see [www.w3r-us.org](http://www.w3r-us.org). In 2009 the U.S. Congress designated the route of the allied army from Newport RI to Yorktown VA as the W3R National Historic Trail.

## Auto Tour following the W3RNHT from Newport to the CT border

### 1. Go north from Washington Square, Newport RI to the Mount Hope Bridge

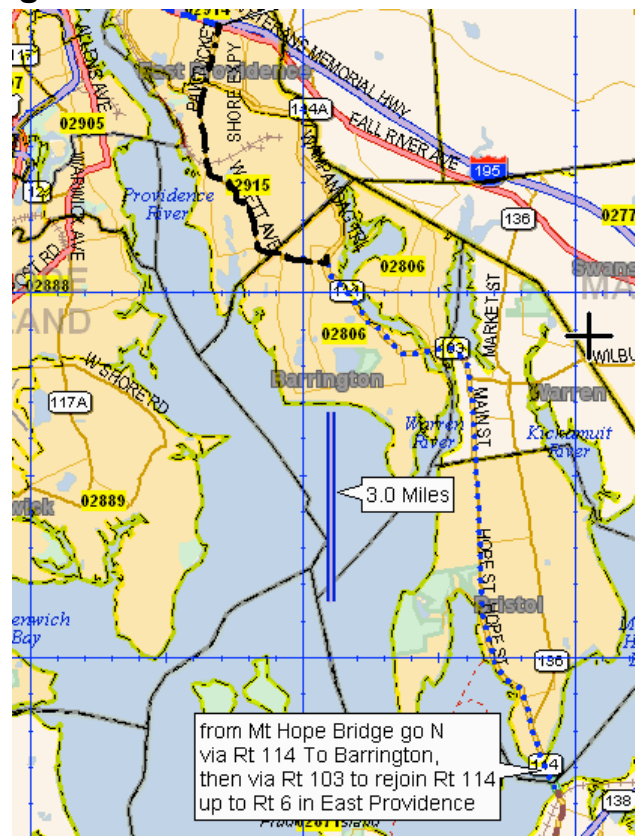


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**Disclaimer:** Auto touring involves many safety hazards that are beyond the knowledge and control of the authors and publishers of these guides. Thus the use of the information here is at your own risk.

Plan carefully, be alert for problems, and enjoy the scenery, the fresh air, and the history.

### 2. Go north from the Mount Hope Bridge to East Providence



### 3. Go west through Providence and south to Cranston (4x larger scale)



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### 4. Go west from Cranston to the border with CT

