

Ethan Allen: The Green Mountain Boys and the Arsenal of the Revolution

“There is an original something about him that commands attention.”
General George Washington commenting on Ethan Allen

Start/Finish: Lakeville, Connecticut by the Cannon Factory just north of Ethan Allen Street on Route 41

Distance: 109.3 miles

Terrain: Mostly country roads with some dirt sections

Difficulty: Moderate with some hills

In 1762, at age 23, Ethan Allen left his hometown of Cornwall, Connecticut, for Salisbury, just a short journey to the east across the Housatonic River, but a huge step towards a new life and business that would have profound implications for the American Revolution. With his younger brother Heman and friend, John Hazeltine, Ethan became part-owner of an iron ore furnace, remnants of which visitors can still see today at the start of the Green Mountain Boys tour.

He sold his share in 1765, a decade before he led the successful capture of Fort Ticonderoga in New York on May 10, 1775. But what he helped build would prove essential to the Patriots' cause; the Salisbury furnace produced more than 800 cannon during the American Revolution.

Ethan headed to Massachusetts and also spent time in the New Hampshire Land Grants (now Vermont), where he quickly became a leader in the dispute between the settlers and the New York Governor, who insisted that their lands fell under New York's jurisdiction and they owed land grant fees. Essentially, the settlers had paid for land that they were now asked to pay for again.

Many other Connecticut residents had moved up north to the New Hampshire Land Grants for many reasons, including cheaper land and more religious freedom, so Ethan had plenty of family and friends to tap when he decided to organize a militia to defend against any incursions from New York, including his cousins Remember Baker and Seth Warner, and brothers Heber, Heman and Levi. The New York Governor vowed to push them back to the Green Mountains, a boast that resulted in Ethan Allen's militia becoming known as the Green Mountain Boys.

The two sides argued and skirmished for years, but it was clear to many of the men that the New York problem was linked to the larger issue of British tyranny over the colonists. When the Green Mountain Boys heard news of the battles of Lexington and Concord—and a call for more military supplies and

munitions for the American cause—the decision to attack the British Fort Ticonderoga in the despised state of New York seemed a sound strategic move.

Of course most historical accounts focus on how the Green Mountain Boys moved through the countryside undetected, often in areas thick with Loyalists, and somehow managed to pull together enough recruits—most of them farmers armed with fowling muskets—to stage an assault. Under the leadership of Ethan Allen and another Connecticut native, Benedict Arnold (see Benedict Arnold: Traitor Torches New London), just 83 men made the actual attack, which caught the British so off guard that no one was killed and Captain William Delaplace, the commanding officer, surrendered immediately. The Americans had their first victory and control of a vital section of Lake Champlain.

But that audacious victory had its roots in Connecticut, signs of which can still be seen all over the landscape of the state. Some are simple, like a street named after Remember Baker's family, but others are profound. Just a short walk through the woods off of Route 125, visitors can find the grave of Ethan's father, Joseph, which reads, "The Pioneers of Cornwall 1739-1763 of whom Joseph Allen only is known to lie here. Four of his sons besides Ethan helped capture Fort Ticonderoga." One family gave so much and this modest marker in a long lost graveyard brings it home as deeply as any visit to a battlefield.

Just down the road from this gem the tour passes by a Congregational Church established in the colonial era, a reminder that Joseph himself left Litchfield in about 1740 for Cornwall for more religious freedom. In general Congregationalists were Patriots and Anglicans were Tories. Thus the father of four of the men who fought at Fort Ticonderoga (and uncle to two others) had lived a life in Connecticut that embraced freedom from tyranny.

Indeed, more than cannons were forged in Connecticut for the Patriots' cause; the very mindset that made it possible for Ethan Allen and his followers to even *consider* an attack on a massive British fort guarding a vital waterway took seed in the farm fields and woodlands along the Housatonic River in Connecticut. Today, Americans can visit Fort Ticonderoga in New York, but they can also return to the roads of northwest Connecticut, many of them still as rural as when Allen, George Washington and other leaders traveled them. As the tale of the Green Mountain Boys so clearly shows, these historic byways carried military supplies, men and ideas vital to the success of the American Revolution.



On May 10, 1775 Connecticut natives Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold with the Green Mountain Boys captured Fort Ticonderoga. British General Gentleman “Johnny” Burgoyne positioned artillery on Mount Defiance in September 1777 to recapture the fort. Vermont “New Hampshire Grants” in the background with Lake Champlain and Fort Ticonderoga in the “Province” of New York in the foreground.



Route Notes

0.0 A historic marker just north of where Ethan Allen Street enters onto Route 41 describes the 1762 Furnace and includes the partnership agreement signed by, among others, Ethan Allen. The Patriots forged over 800 cannons at this location during the American Revolution. Continue around the corner to the Cannon Factory marker on Holley Street.

0.05 Turn LEFT at the T-intersection onto Ethan Allen Street by the Railroad Station.

While in Salisbury and owning part of the iron furnace, Ethan Allen lived on the right (approximately where the pizza place now stands).

0.1 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Sharon Road / Route 41 South.

0.3 Bear LEFT at the fork onto Wells Hill Road in front of the Roman Catholic Church of Saint Mary.

3.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Lime Rock Road / Route 112 East (careful on the downhill before the stop sign).

4.9 Bear RIGHT at the fork onto Route 7 South, continue on Route 7 South after the stop sign (Ethan Allen Highway).

9.7 Turn LEFT onto Route 128 East to West Cornwall (easy to miss). Continue through the covered bridge crossing the Housatonic River from Sharon to West Cornwall.

11.0 Bear LEFT at the fork onto Cream Hill Road across from the Cornwall Fire Department and next to the Cornwall Consolidated School.

11.5 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Cogswell Road.

12.6 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Town Street.

Ethan Allen's boyhood home site is on the right across from the North Cornwall Meeting House.

13.7 At the T-intersection and stop sign turn RIGHT onto Route 128 (no sign).

14.4 Turn Sharp LEFT onto Route 125.

15.0 Joseph Allen's gravesite (Ethan Allen's father) is in the woods to the left across from the intersection of Dibble Hill Road (marked as the Allen Cemetery on some local maps).



The West Cornwall Covered Bridge at a section of the Housatonic River between Salisbury and Cornwall that Ethan Allen often fished and travelled.

15.7 Turn LEFT at the stop sign onto Route 4 East / Cemetery Hill Road.

16.7 At the stop sign and red blinking light turn RIGHT onto Route 4 East / Sharon Goshen Road.

22.1 Turn RIGHT at the traffic circle and yield sign onto Route 63 South by the Congregational Church of Christ.

During the revolutionary period Congregationalists generally sided with the Patriots and Anglicans supported the Redcoats.

28.3 On the right, Sheldon Tavern – General George Washington stayed here overnight.

28.4 On the right, Benjamin Tallmadge's House, number 47 marked with the year 1775 above the doorway.

BENJAMIN TALLMADGE (codename John Bolton) and the Culper Spy Ring

While Ethan Allen and his brothers and cousins started in Connecticut and eventually moved to the New Hampshire Land Grants and battled New Yorkers, Tallmadge actually moved in reverse. He grew up in New York but came to Connecticut to attend Yale. He graduated in 1773, along with his classmate Nathan Hale and others who would eventually help him form an official spy agency for the Patriots. Under General George Washington's direction, the group, eventually known as the Culper Spy Ring, was charged with infiltrating the British encampment in New York City. Despite the fact the British captured and executed Nathan Hale in 1776, the spy ring did manage to make some significant headway against the Tories and exposed a counterfeit money scheme, for example. Hale actually had drawings of British fortifications on him when he was captured. [Side note: Ethan Allen wanted to attend Yale but his father died when Ethan was 17 so he could not afford to go.]

Moving information back then required a lot of hard travel and clever strategy. One sample route involved Anna Strong of Strong's Neck, New York, hanging out black petticoats on a clothesline to signal to the boatman, Caleb Brewster, that the Culper Spy Ring had information that needed to move from New York to Tallmadge in Fairfield, Connecticut. Tallmadge's British counterpart, John Andre, was simultaneously setting up his own spy ring in New York, which was, by most accounts, nowhere near as effective as the American group.

In 1780 Tallmadge became involved in the capture of Benedict Arnold and Andre, though it remains unclear to what extent he truly grasped Arnold's treacherous intentions. In the end, it was Tallmadge who escorted the captured Andre to General Washington, who refused to see the British officer. A military tribunal sentenced Andre to death; Arnold escaped.

After the war Tallmadge settled in Litchfield, served as a president of the Society of Cincinnati and as a Congressman from Connecticut (1801-1817). His grand, cream-colored home still stands facing Route 63, a stunning example of 18th Century early American architecture.

28.5 At the traffic light, turn LEFT onto Route 118 East.

Benjamin Franklin's son William Loyalist Governor of New Jersey was held prisoner on the site to the right. A hanging tree was also at this location.

28.7 Bear RIGHT at the fork continue on Route 118 East.

29.1 The East Street Cemetery is on the left, the final resting place of Benjamin Tallmadge and Oliver Wolcott.



Portrait of General Benjamin Tallmadge, head of the Culper Spy Ring. Courtesy of Litchfield Historical Society.

After visiting the Tallmadge and Wolcott graves, turn RIGHT out of the driveway onto Route 118 West.

29.5 Bear LEFT at the fork.

29.6 Turn LEFT at the stop sign onto South Street / Route 63 South.

The Litchfield Historical Society is on the left.

29.8 The Tapping Reeve Law School is on the right. Reeve's bother-in-law Aaron Burr and John Calhoun were both graduates and Vice-Presidents.

29.9 The Oliver Wolcott house on the left. King George III's statue torn down by angry Patriots at Bowling Green in New York City was melted and turned into musket balls in Wolcott's Orchard.

30.1 RIGHT fork onto Old South Road.

30.4 Ethan Allen's birthplace is on the left number 149.

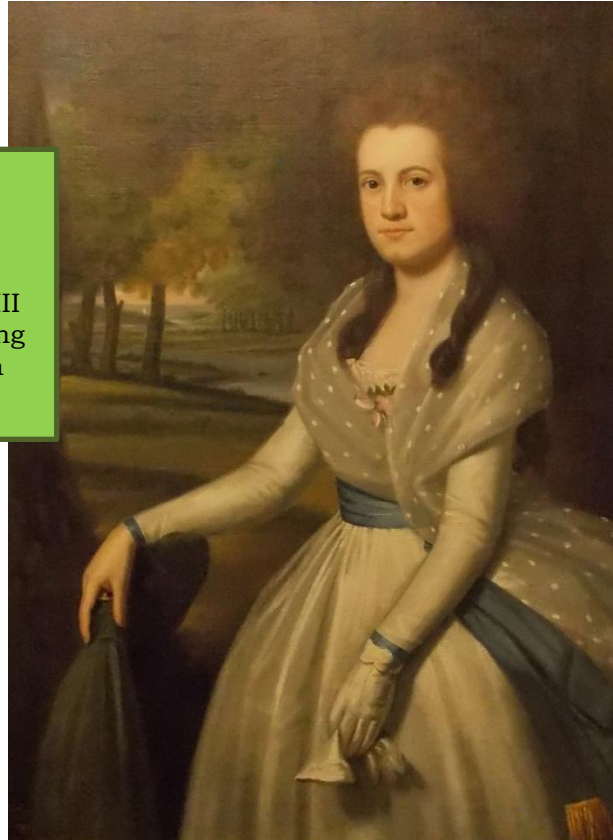


Postcard image of Ethan Allen's birthplace in Litchfield. Today the building has several additions, though the original house still stands and includes the original wooden floors.



Oliver Wolcott lived in Litchfield, where his house still stands. He signed the Declaration of Independence, helped raise a Connecticut regiment for the Continental Army, and had a son who also served as governor of Connecticut. The garden behind the Wolcott House where Litchfield Patriots created bullets.

Mariann Wolcott, daughter of Oliver Wolcott, signer of the Declaration of Independence, tallied 42,088 bullets she and her fellow Patriots made from the 4,000 pound lead statue of King George III that was yanked off its pedestal in Bowling Green in New York City and melted down in Litchfield.



30.8 At the stop sign and T-intersection, turn LEFT onto Route 63 North (no sign).

32.0 Turn LEFT at the stop sign onto West Street by the Litchfield Historical Society and Town Green (no sign).

32.1 Turn RIGHT at the stop sign then LEFT at the next stop sign onto Route 202 West.

39.4 Turn RIGHT onto Route 341 West direction Kent.

40.2 Turn LEFT onto Jack Corner Road.

41.2 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Rabbit Hill Road.

41.7 Bear LEFT at the fork onto Tanner Hill Road.

42.1 Scenic view of Lake Waramaug.

42.8 At the stop sign and T-intersection, turn LEFT onto Lake Road / Route 45 South.

WILLIAM FRANKLIN

Since the Patriots won, it's hard to imagine that by most estimates about a third of the colonists were Loyalists and another third were neutral. Of course those ratios shifted as the war progressed and the Continental Army had some successes, but by no means were all colonists behind the battle against King George III.

The life story of William Franklin, the illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin, captures the complex and often shifting loyalties that took place within each state, town, and even families. Benjamin and his wife Deborah raised William in their household and the father and son had a close relationship for many years. By most accounts, Benjamin cared deeply for William, gave him an excellent education, brought the son with him to Pennsylvania on work-related trips during the French and Indian War and eventually helped him travel to England for law school. While there William showed all the charm and intelligence of his father and made many contacts and even met his wife, the wealthy Elizabeth Downes. He returned to the colonies in 1763 with a new job: Royal Governor of New Jersey. He appears to have been a capable administrator but, obviously, did not accurately measure the mood of the times. While his own father became ever more adamant about revolution, William sided with the Tories.

In Litchfield at the intersection of Routes 63 and 202, visitors can see the location where William was imprisoned in 1777 in horrific conditions for six months of solitary confinement. Completely estranged from his father, he looked to Connecticut Governor Jonathon Trumbull for relief. In a letter, he begged to be released, claiming that a "speedy or sudden death being every way more eligible than such a miserable lingering." He was freed, but his wife had died, his property was confiscated and the British basically ignored him. Bitter, he organized the Board of Associated Loyalists, essentially a group for other Tory refugees, which at one point actually hanged a Patriot, Joshua Huddy. By war's end, he had to flee to England, leaving behind a father he once loved and a country he misread.

44.8 Bear LEFT at the fork in New Preston.

44.9 At the traffic light, cross Route 202 onto Baldwin Hill Road.

45.0 After meeting with French General Rochambeau in Wethersfield, in May 1781 General George Washington "breakfasted" at the Cogswell Tavern on the left by Christian Road.

Baldwin Hill Road becomes Route 47 South in Washington Depot.

49.3 Turn RIGHT onto Route 199 / Roxbury Road.



Riding along the northwest Connecticut countryside visitors often come upon unexpected remnants of the colonial area. The Grand Union Flag of 1775 on the side of a barn in Roxbury. Colonel Seth Warner, a commander of the Green Mountain Boys and leader at the Battle of Bennington, was originally buried in this cemetery on Old Roxbury Road.

54.0 At the stop sign and T-intersection, turn LEFT onto Route 67 South direction Roxbury.

55.0 Bear LEFT at the fork and triangle, then turn LEFT at the stop sign and continue on Route 67 East.

Ethan Allen's first cousin Colonel Seth Warner leader of the Green Mountain Boys is buried at the Monument on the right.

55.1 Turn RIGHT onto Route 67 East / Southbury Road.

56.2 Turn LEFT onto Old Roxbury Road.

56.5 Colonel Seth Warner was originally buried at the cemetery to the right by the Roxbury Congregational Church marker.

56.6 Bear LEFT at the fork onto Lower Country Road.

57.7 At the stop sign and T-intersection, turn LEFT onto Route 317 North / Good Hill Road (no sign).

58.7 Bear RIGHT at the fork onto Route 67 West by Colonel Warner's Monument.

60.1 Another of Ethan Allen's first cousins and Green Mountain Boy, Remember Baker's house 1733 is on the right by the intersection of Sentry Hill Road.

SETH WARNER

Seth Warner lacked the boisterous, more aggressive style of his cousin Ethan Allen, but had no less an influential role during the American Revolution. Born in Roxbury, Connecticut, in 1743, he stayed in the state for twenty years before moving to the New Hampshire Land Grants in the section that's now Bennington, Vermont. At Fort Ticonderoga, he served as second in command of the Green Mountain Boys, and, while he did not participate in the attack, he did command the rearguard force. On May 11th, the day after the Americans captured Fort Ticonderoga, he led a group of men north a few miles up Lake Champlain to a second British fort at Crown Point, which they also successfully seized. Overall the Green Mountain Boys secured 111 cannons and other munitions from their bold strikes, weapons that were then moved across land to Boston and used to drive the British out of Boston Harbor.

Like Allen, Warner had honed his military skills while working with the Green Mountain Boys in the early 1770s to counteract the New York influence in the New Hampshire Land Grants. He returned to his native Roxbury in 1782, however, and eventually died there completely broke at age 41. On the Roxbury section of the tour, you will head down a dirt road little changed from colonial times and come upon the Old Boston Post Road and markers for two former large churches at what was once a major thoroughfare. Warner was originally buried in the old graveyard on the right. His remains are now in Roxbury's center green under the large memorial dedicated to him in 1858. This leader at Fort Ticonderoga, and, later, at the Battle of Bennington, had a reserved style and left few records of his life, but in 1975 the Connecticut Legislature brought him out of the shadows and posthumously named him a General in the Connecticut Militia.

62.2 Turn RIGHT onto Old Turnpike Road East.

64.5 Turn LEFT onto Second Hill Road.

65.3 With commanding valley views, Second Hill was an ideal location for the Connecticut Militia to spot approaching enemy troops at a great distance.

65.6 At the red blinking light and stop sign, turn RIGHT onto Route 67 West / New Milford Road.

68.8 Continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light Route 67 West / Route 202 West.

68.9 Quick RIGHT by the New Milford Green / Main Street.

Declaration of Independence Signer, Roger Sherman's home site is on the right.

69.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Elm Street by the Lincoln Statue.

69.3 Turn RIGHT onto Railroad Street at the stop sign, then turn quickly to the LEFT onto Housatonic Street.

69.5 At the stop sign turn LEFT under the railroad bridge.

69.6 At the T-intersection and stop sign turn RIGHT onto Housatonic Street.

71.6 Turn RIGHT onto River Road (easy to miss).

72.6 Careful on the rail road tracks by the stop sign.

76.1 Bear RIGHT at the fork onto Station Road.

76.2 Turn LEFT after the rail road tracks onto Brown's Forge Road (Merwinsville Hotel on left).

77.2 Turn LEFT onto Long Mountain Road, cross rail road tracks.

77.3 At the T-intersection and stop sign turn RIGHT onto South Kent Road (no sign).

78.8 Turn LEFT onto Bull's Bridge Road, careful on the rail road tracks.

81.2 Continue STRAIGHT through the traffic light, cross Route 7 then continue through Bull's Bridge (covered bridge).

General George Washington passed over Bull's Bridge at least three times during the Revolution, and on one occasion a horse in his entourage fell into the Housatonic River. According to a local legend, Washington's horse slipped on a loose plank while being walked across the Housatonic.

Notice the dramatic view at Bull's Bridge Gorge to the left after the bridge.

81.6 Turn RIGHT onto Schaghticoke Road immediately after the low clearance gage for vehicles (no sign). This section of road is part of the Appalachian Trail.

85.9 At the T-intersection and stop sign, turn LEFT onto Macedonia Road / Route 341 West.

87.0 Turn RIGHT onto Macedonia Brook Road.

88.3 Remains of the Macedonia Iron Furnace is on right.

90.4 Turn RIGHT onto Keeler Road after the small bridge.

92.0 Continue STRAIGHT on Keeler Road after the stop sign.

92.6 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Skiff Mountain Road then keep bearing LEFT onto West Woods Road #1.

96.2 Turn RIGHT onto West Woods Road #1.

97.2 Continue STRAIGHT at the stop sign merge onto Route 41 North (no sign).

97.7 Hessian Prisoners captured from Burgoyne's army at Saratoga camped in the field to the left.

98.1 Continue STRAIGHT at the yellow blinking light and stop sign on Route 41 North.

The Gay-Hoyt House is on the right after the intersection, Sharon Historical Society.

102.3 Salisbury Association's Tory Hill on the left with a view of Mudge Pond in the background.

103.6 At the red blinking light and stop sign, turn LEFT onto Route 112 West / Interlaken Road.

105.7 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Route 44 East.

CONNECTICUT MILITIA AT TICONDEROGA

Simsbury's Noah Phelps along with 15 other Connecticut Patriots joined Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys to capture Fort Ticonderoga. They travelled through Canaan stopping at the Lawrence Tavern and then to Salisbury on their way. Once connecting with Ethan Allen in Vermont (New Hampshire Grants) Noah Phelps disguised himself as a weary Tory traveler to spy on the British garrison. Phelps found the enemy's gun powder wet and their soldiers weak and sick. The Americans seized the fort and artillery critical for the Continental Army.

Phelps Tavern, Simsbury, Connecticut

105.8 Ore Hill Mine is on the left. This pond was a deep mine with an extensive network of tunnels to extract ore for the area's iron industry.

107.6 Holley Street and Cannon Factory on right.

109.1 Stiles Meadow, Burgoyne's "Hessian" Prisoners also camped at the field on the left.

109.3 Salisbury Association on the right across from the Salisbury Town Hall.

SOURCES

On location, in-the-field reporting at all stops on the tour.

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