

George Washington and the French and Indian War

French and Indian War

Worksheet 1: Three Groups that Wanted the Ohio Valley

The French

The French had settlements in Canada. They needed access to the Ohio River because it was the best route between their settlements in Canada and those in the Mississippi Valley where St. Louis is today.

The French also wanted to keep the British from settling on lands west of the Allegheny Mountains. The French were rivals of the British in Europe. They knew that if they kept the British east of the Allegheny Mountains, they would have to use naval and military strength to protect their colonies and this would weaken the British power against the French in Europe. The French did not need to settle in the Ohio River Valley, but they needed to be able to travel through it to trade.

There were about 70,000 French colonists in New France. They were excellent soldiers and had a good trading relationship with the Indians.

The English

The British wanted to settle in all of the land west of the Allegheny Mountains. Virginia's charter designated their western boundary as the Pacific Ocean. They saw owning land as a way to become wealthy. Some of the best land was just west of the Allegheny Mountains. They already had land grants on the Ohio River. Until they could settle that area, their goal was to prevent the French from gaining control of the region and waterways. They could also make money by trading.

At the beginning of the war, the British had more than 1,000,000 colonists. They had a strong agricultural economy. However, the French controlled more territory. The British settlements were mainly between the Allegheny Mountains and the eastern coast. At the end of the French and Indian War, the British government issued a proclamation stating that all of the land west of the Allegheny Mountains should be left for the Native Americans. The American colonists were angry!

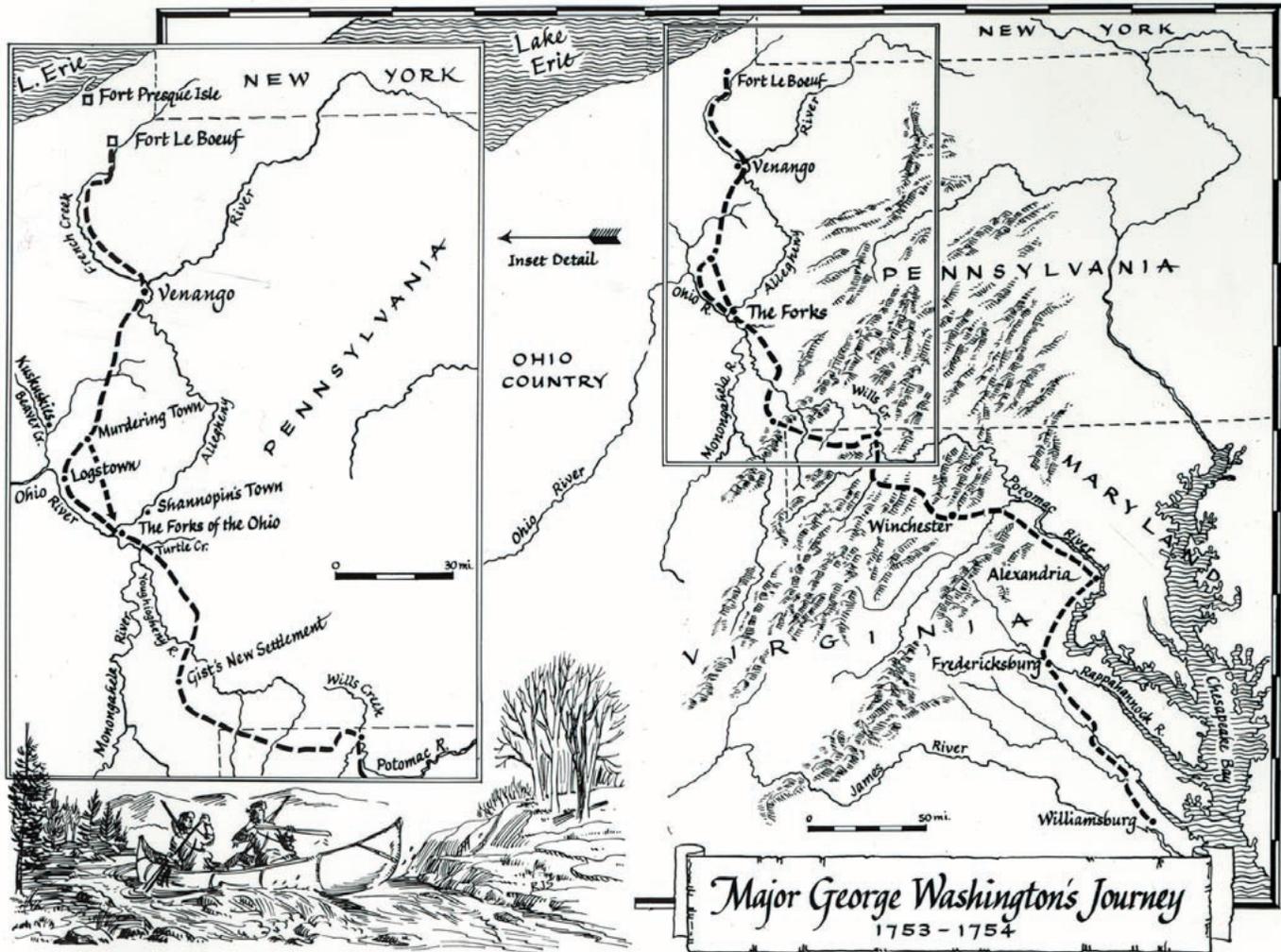
The Native Americans

The Iroquois claimed they owned the land because they had won it in wars with other tribes. There were other tribes living here, but the Iroquois said that they were under the authority of the Iroquois. The Native Americans were afraid that the settlers would take away their land and destroy their way of life. They worked to keep peace with both the French and British to preserve their interests and way of life. They still wanted to trade with both nations. They wanted to keep the French and English on their side by encouraging each to give them gifts and fight each other. Some tribes allied with the strongest country in hopes of continuing their way of life.

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Worksheet 2: Map of George Washington's Journey



Credit: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

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Worksheet 3: Analyzing the Trip Home

Directions: Use the map and Washington's Journal to fill in the chart below. Turn paper over if you need more space.

Date and/or place	Problems with weather or physical features	Problems with people	Other problems (animals, baggage, etc.)
December 23-25	Weather was getting colder, and the snow was deep. Roads were in bad shape. Washington decided to travel through the woods on foot.	White Thunder hurt himself and couldn't walk. Half-King stayed with him for several days. Washington feared Joncaire would flatter him to win him over to the French. Half-King said not to worry.	Horses were weak. Washington and others gave up riding and carried packs. Only the drivers rode.
December 26 Murdering Town			

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Reading 1: Student Information on Washington's Trip (Session 3)

The year was 1752. The French began to build a chain of forts in the north, one of which was Fort LeBoeuf between Lake Erie and French Creek. They would next move to fortify the forks of the Ohio where the Allegheny and Monongahela meet to form the Ohio, which is present day Pittsburgh.

In Virginia, Governor Dinwiddie heard about the forts. He wanted Virginia to control this territory and the vast wilderness. Governor Dinwiddie needed someone to deliver a message to the French at Fort LeBoeuf asking them to leave.

The year was 1753. George Washington, a major of one of the military districts of Virginia, was twenty-one years old. He could not speak French, but he had spent time in the wilderness as a surveyor. The governor selected Washington to deliver the message to the French. He was to ride from Williamsburg to the Forks of the Ohio, make contact with friendly Indians and obtain guides and protection from them. They were to go north to meet the French at a fort they were building. Here they were to deliver a polite order to leave English territory, return with their answer, and with any other secret information that he could gather about French intentions, strengths, intentions, and equipment.

Washington had seven men in his party when he crossed the Allegheny Mountains and came to the Forks of the Ohio in late November. Christopher Gist, his guide, Jacob van Braam, his French interpreter, John Davidson, a trader, his Indian interpreter, and four "servitors." He went first to the house of John Fraser in Turtle Creek where he stayed eight days near the Forks. Fraser operated a trading post and a shop for repairing guns. He visited McKees Rocks Hill on the left bank of the Ohio at Chartiers Creek, which had been chosen as the site to build an English fort. He inspected the triangle of land at the confluence of the three rivers, Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio, and decided that this was a better place to build a fort. "A fort at the forks would have the entire command of the Monongahela; which runs up to our settlements and is extremely well designed for water carriage, as it is of a deep, still nature," he writes in his journal.

Washington visited Shingas, chief of the Delawares, and Tanacharison, vice regent of the Iroquois. He met with them and lesser chiefs in a four-day conference at Logstown. The Iroquois leader and three braves decided to accompany him.

On November 30, Washington departed with his guide, two interpreters, his servitors, and the four Indians to call on the French. On December 11, the group reached Fort LeBoeuf. Washington had written in his journal that "there was much rain and snow." The travel had been hard.

The French commander, Saint-Pierre, read the letter. He was polite but responded very clearly. "As to the summons you sent me to retire, I do not think myself obliged to obey it. He stated that the country belonged to the French and "no Englishman had the right to trade upon those waters," and that he "had orders to make every person prisoner who attempted it on the Ohio, or the waters of it."

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Reading 2: Student Information on Washington's Trip (Session 4)

Washington wanted to get back to Virginia. The weather was getting worse, the horses were tired, and they had to carry their canoes. On the third day, his horses gave out and three of his men were so frost-bitten that they could scarcely walk. "As I was uneasy to get back, I determined to prosecute my journey the nearest way through the woods on foot," he wrote in his journal. Washington knew he could get fresh horses at Fraser's trading post in Turtle Creek. He left Van Braam in charge of his men, horses and baggage with orders to "take temporary shelter until the weather moderated." He set off on foot down the Venango Trail with Gist, his gun, and his pack on his back. They arrived at the Allegheny River three days later, after 40 miles of walking. Washington and Gist reached the north bank of the Allegheny on a bitter-cold day in late December (December 29).

Standing on the north shore of the Allegheny River, at the place where the Washington Crossing Bridge at 40th Street is today, they saw that the river was only partly frozen. They needed to build a raft to cross it. They had "one poor hatchet" between them. They spent all the next day chopping down trees and trimming them. They finished the raft by sundown. They slid it across the ice to unfrozen water, launched it, and stepped aboard with long poles to guide and push it. "Before we were half way over, we were jammed in the ice in such a manner that we expected every minute to perish..." Washington wrote in his journal. "I put out my setting pole to stop the raft, and the rapidity of the stream jerked me out into 10 feet of water, but I saved myself by catching hold of one of the raft logs. With all our efforts, we could not get to either shore, but I was obliged, as we were near an island, to quit our raft and make it." This was Wainright's Island.

They spent the night on the island without a fire. Gist's fingers were frostbitten. The next morning they found the Allegheny frozen solid. They crossed it and walked the 8 miles to Fraser's where they received food, drink, and warmth.

As he continued on to Virginia, he met a pack train of 17 horses carrying materials and stores for the fort that was to be built on the Ohio at his recommendation. They reached Williamsburg, Virginia on January 16, 1754, after eleven weeks and a journey of nearly 1000 miles