

**Using Primary Historical Resources to Discover the Location of an Archaeological Site:
The Search for the French Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs**

Modified From 2003 PA Archaeology Month Lesson Plan by:

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Content Area

George Washington's visit to the French Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs (Fort LeBoeuf).

Core Concept

Archaeologists must interpret primary and secondary historical documents to solve their research problems.

Objective

The student will be able to read a primary historical document, interpret historical and current maps, apply critical thinking to a research problem, and understand the limitations of primary and secondary historical sources.

Materials

- Maps of Pennsylvania and North America
- United States Geological Survey maps (included)
- Washington's Journal entry (included)
- Lieutenant Hutchins' map (included)

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Standards Addressed:

Grades 1-3 8.1.3.B & D, 8.2.3.B, and 8.3.3.A

Grades 4-6 8.1.6.B & D, 8.2.6.B, and 8.3.6.A

Grades 1-3 History

8.1.3.B

Develop an understanding of historical sources.

- Date in historical maps
- Visual data from maps and tables
- Mathematical data from graphs and tables
- Author or historical source

8.1.3.B

Develop an understanding of historical sources.

- Date in historical maps
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- Mathematical data from graphs and tables
- Author or historical source

8.2.3.B

Identify and describe primary documents, material artifacts and historic sites important in Pennsylvania history.

- Documents, Writings and Oral Traditions
- Artifacts, Architecture and Historic Places
- Liberty Bell
- Official Commonwealth symbols

8.3.3.A

Identify contributions of individuals and groups to United States History such as

- George Washington
- Individuals who are role models

Grades 4-6 History

8.1.6.B

Explain and analyze historical sources

- Literal meaning of a historical passage
- Data in historical and contemporary maps, graphs and tables
- Author or historical source
- Multiple historical perspectives
- Visual evidence
- Mathematical data from graphs and tables

8.1.6.D

Describe and explain historical research.

- Historical events (time and place)
- Facts, folklore and fiction
- Historical questions
- Primary sources
- Secondary sources
- Conclusions

8.2.6.B

Identify and explain primary documents, material artifacts and historic sites important in Pennsylvania history from Beginnings to 1824.

- Documents, Writings and Oral Traditions
- Artifacts, Architecture and Historic Places

8.3.6.A

Identify and explain conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations in United States history from Beginnings to 1824

Anticipatory Set

1. Inform students they will answer a real archaeological question using some of the procedures and materials used by archaeologists.
2. Ask students about the kinds of historical information they would use to discover the location of a fort site in their area (maps, journals, diaries, military records, local historical society, county histories, past archaeological excavations, oral history, etc.) and write these answers on the blackboard or overhead transparency.
3. Tell students that there are two kinds of important sources of historical information which archaeologists use: (1) primary sources and (2) secondary sources. Primary sources are made by people who actually saw and wrote about a historical place or activity at the time when that activity happened. Secondary sources are made by people who learned about the place or events from someone else.
4. Tell students they will use actual historical documents to discover the location of the French Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs.

Procedure

1. Share information about the location and importance of the Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs with the students.

The Fort LeBoeuf Site (36ER65) is located in Waterford, Pennsylvania, 13 miles or so, south of Erie, Pennsylvania. The site is the location of three different forts, at three different times. The French built the first fort in 1753. It was called Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs. It was built at the end of an early Native American portage path that connected Lake Erie with LeBoeuf Creek. Although this fort was probably used as a trading post for beaver furs, it had a more important purpose. Its location was important in the struggle for control of the wilderness between the French and English. Control of the Ohio Valley was necessary to the French in connecting their lands in Canada with those in Louisiana.

The French could move men and supplies from Canada, up the Great Lakes, land at what is now Erie, Pennsylvania (Fort Presqu'île), walk over a prepared wooden road, about thirteen miles, to the Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs, put their canoes in the water and be on their way to the Ohio Valley. This was very efficient because the fort was on LeBoeuf Creek, which flows into French Creek, which flows into the Allegheny River, which flows into the Ohio River, which flows into the Mississippi River, which flows into the Gulf of Mexico. When the English traders began to move into the Ohio Valley, the French planned to build a series of forts southward from Canada, to be sure that they and not the English would control this important land. The English also claimed this part of Pennsylvania.

2. Show students the location of Waterford, Pennsylvania on the Pennsylvania map. Show students the French route from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico on the US map (e.g. Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, portage between Erie and Waterford, LeBoeuf Creek, French Creek, Allegheny River, Ohio River, Mississippi River, and Gulf of Mexico).
3. Continue the narrative.

In 1753, the Governor of the Colony of Virginia, Governor Dinwiddie, sent a letter to the commander at the French fort, demanding that the French leave the area. The letter was delivered by a young man, only twenty-one years old, named George Washington. Washington and his guide Christopher Gist each kept a journal of the trip. The French answered the letter by saying that they did not take orders from anyone but the French king, and therefore, they would not leave. Several months later, the French and English were involved in the first battle of the French and Indian war. George Washington fought in this battle as well. The French lost the war and had to leave their forts. Since they were not happy about this, they took everything they could with them and what they could not take they destroyed. Therefore, the French burned their own Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs in 1759.

An English surveying party consisting of Lieutenant Hutchins and Captain Price found the fort in its burned condition and made a map of the fort showing the location of the different buildings and activity areas. The English built a much smaller fort on the site in 1760. They called this fort, Fort LeBoeuf. This fort was burned down during Pontiac's Rebellion in an attempt by Native Americans to get their lands back from the Europeans. In the 1790s, the United States of America built a block house nearby, which was burned down in the middle 1800s.

4. Ask students, “According to the narrative, what important sources of information might be available to the archaeologists if they wanted to discover the location of the French fort (e. g. George Washington’s Journal, Christopher Gist’s Journal, and Lieutenant Hutchins’ Map.)? What other sources of information could be used by archaeologists to confirm the location (e. g. actual excavation of the site)?”
5. Divide students into groups of no more than three.
6. Distribute one copy of George Washington’s Journal description of the fort to each group.
7. Tell students to read the paragraph segment together and out loud (choral reading).
8. Ask the students, “Where was the fort located?” (It is situated on the south, or west fork of French Creek, near the water, and is almost surrounded by the creek, and a small branch of it which forms a kind of an island…)”)
9. Tell students that there is no such place in Waterford, PA today, because the people of Waterford have filled in low areas and leveled high areas as the town grew.
10. Tell students that we cannot be sure how George Washington knew it was French Creek. Maybe it was really today’s LeBoeuf Creek.
11. Ask the students if the text was easy to read? If not, ask why not? (Students will say that “f” occurred instead of “s.” Tell students that archaeologists have to learn to read the language of the time in which the historical resource was created. This could be an old form of English or French.)
12. Distribute a copy of Lieutenant Hutchins’ Map to each group.

13. Ask students to identify the major features of the map. (This can include a north arrow, a stream, a lake, the fort, a road, description of activities, etc. Guide the students to identify the scale, which unfortunately has no numbers and units of measure and therefore is of no use in discovering the size of the fort unless the archaeologists can discover which units of measure were used at the time. Discuss the fact that names of streams and communities may differ today. LeBoeuf Creek now identifies an old fork of French Creek. The community of Venango, PA is not the location of the Fort at Venango, which was located where Franklin, PA is today.)
14. Tell students to look at the creek and observe the bends in the creek. Tell students that the creek still has this shape today in one location. Archaeologists have used the location of this bend to identify the location of the French fort.
15. Distribute an **Unmarked USGS Map Segment** to each group. Tell each group to find Lake LeBoeuf, the town of Waterford, and LeBoeuf Creek. Using **Hutchins' Map**, ask them to locate the French fort. (Alternatively, ask students to find the fort without first identifying the lake, town, and creek, thereby forcing them to make decisions about which features may be useful for the activity.) Give students no more than five minutes to discuss and determine the possible answer.
16. Distribute the **Marked Answer USGS Map Segment** to each group. Let each group determine how close they were to the answer. The value of the exercise is in the activity and not in necessarily finding the correct location. Students are simulating a very real activity conducted by Edinboro University of Pennsylvania archaeologists.
17. Tell students that they were thinking like archaeologists by trying to discover the location of the fort.

Closure

1. Ask students if George Washington's Journal is a primary or secondary source of historical information; if Lieutenant Hutchins' Map is a primary or secondary source of information. (A **primary** historical source was created by an eyewitness to an event. A **secondary** historical source is someone's idea of what happened. George Washington was an eyewitness to the fort. He actually visited there. Lieutenant Hutchins was an eyewitness to the location of the burned fort but he made good guesses about the activities which took place there. Therefore, the map is both a primary and secondary source of information.)
2. Ask students to discuss the problems they encountered during this activity (e. g. the writing is different, trying to find LeBoeuf Creek, determining which Venango is listed on the map, etc.) and which source was most useful.
3. Ask students to discuss some problems archaeologists would have in using historical information.
 - Historical records have often been destroyed or are incomplete.
 - Historical records may be biased, that is they may have information about some people such as rulers or presidents but nothing about the ordinary citizens.
 - Photographs may be fuzzy or may be of the wrong side of the building being studied.
 - People do not always remember everything they have seen or heard.
 - Not everything that is written is true. Sometimes what is written is a lie, a guess, or incorrect knowledge.
 - Not everything is written down.
 - Some forms of writing may be unreadable until they are deciphered because there is no one alive today who can read the writing.
 - Words can change their meaning over time so that no one knows or remembers what a certain word meant even though the word can be read.
4. Ask students to discuss how American and world history might have changed if George Washington had been killed on this dangerous journey.

Suggested Reading List

Washington, George, 1754. *The Journal of Major George Washington, Sent by the Hon. Robert Dinwiddie, Esq; His Majesty's Lieutenant-Governor, and Commander in Chief of Virginia, to the Commandant of the French Forces on Ohio*, 1959, reprint. Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Acknowledgements

George Washington's Journal entry was reprinted with the permission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Lieutenant Hutchins' Map was reprinted with the permission of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

This lesson plan was modified from lesson plans created for use at the Fort LeBoeuf Museum, with permission of the Fort LeBoeuf Museum director, Renata B. Wolynech, Ph. D. Additional variations of this lesson plan have been printed in curricula and teacher materials developed by the Pennsylvania Archaeological Council, with permission of the Fort LeBoeuf Museum director. Variations of this lesson plan are found in curriculum projects funded by grants from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. For more information about *Project Archaeology: PA, An Educational Standards Based Curriculum for Grades Four Through Eight* (2003) and *Life at the French Fort sur la Rivière aux Boeufs: Curriculum Project, A Video Based Curriculum for Grades 4-6 (Adaptable to Grades 1-3)* (2004) please contact wolynech@edinboro.edu.

George Washington's Journal Entry (Page 17)

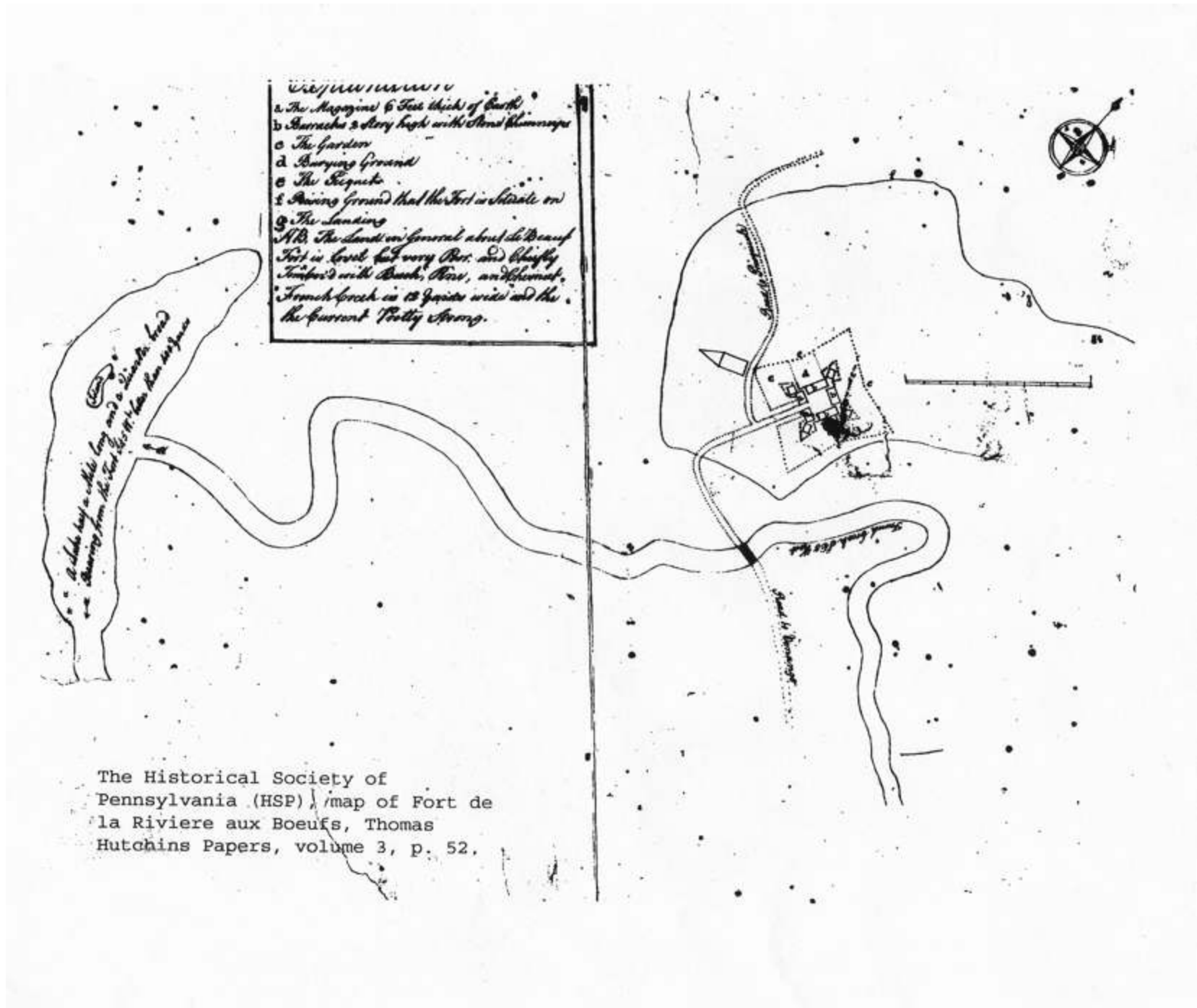
It is situated on the South, or West Fork of *French* Creek, near the Water, and is almost surrounded by the Creek, and a small Branch of it which forms a Kind of an Island; four Houses compose the Sides; the Bastions are

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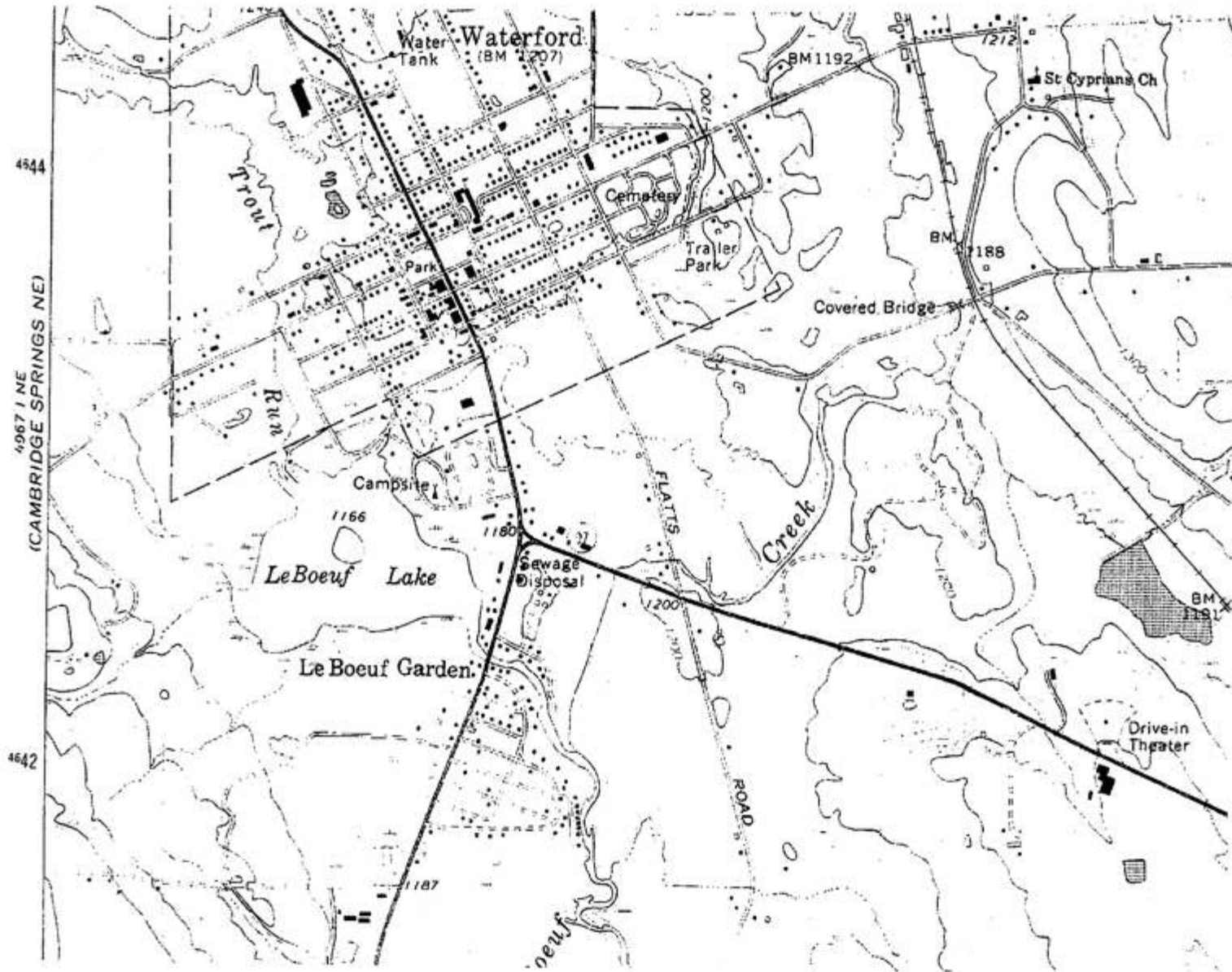
13th, It is situated on the South, or West Fork of *French* Creek, near the Water, and is almost surrounded by the Creek, and a small Branch of it which forms a Kind of an Island ; four Houses compose the Sides ; the Bastions are made of Piles driven into the Ground, and about 12 Feet above, and sharp at Top, with Port-Holes cut for Cannon and Loop-Holes for the small Arms to fire through ; there are eight 6 lb. Pieces mounted, two in each Bastion, and one Piece of four Pound before the Gate ; in the Bastions are a Guard-House, Chapel, Doctor's Lodging, and the Commander's private Store, round which are laid Plat-Forms for the Cannon and Men to stand on : There are several Barracks without the Fort, for the Soldiers Dwelling, covered, some with Bark, and some with Boards, made chiefly of Loggs : There are also several other Houses, such as Stables, Smiths Shop, &c.

I could get no certain Account of the Number of Men here ; but according to the best Judgment I could form, there are an Hundred exclusive of Officers, of which there are many. I also gave Orders to the People that were with me, to take an exact Account of the Canoes that were haled up to convey their Forces down in the Spring, which they did, and told 50 of Birch Bark, and 170 of Pine, besides many others that were block'd out, in Readiness to make.

Lieutenant Hutchins' Map



Unmarked USGS (United States Geological Survey) Map Segment



Marked Answer USGS Map Segment

