

HISTORIC HIKE

George, cherry pie and nature

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During a history hike at Jennings Environmental Education Center, these three men reenacted an attempt on a young George Washington's life. David Crispin, left, and Eric Forster, right, played guide Christopher Gist and George Washington, respectively.

Behind them, Robin Herne readies a rifle to fire at the men.
TANNER COLE/BUTLER EAGLE

BRADY TWP — According to his journal, George Washington wandered through this region at the age of 21 in 1753. Saturday, several groups of people went marching right into the woods after him.

History and conservation groups converged over the weekend for a joint appreciation of French and Indian War history and the woods around Jennings Environmental Education Center. The event combined the annual Cherry Pie Hike and a Washington Trail hike into one event featuring three different types of nature walks.

Rodney Gasch, president of Historic Harmony, was happy as he worked around the center Saturday morning. This year's event enjoyed above freezing temperatures and was predominantly free of rain.

"It looks like we're getting lucky," he said looking outside, waiting for the first history tour to begin.

Tour groups of about 30 people left the center every half-hour. During the history tour, groups learned about Washington's travels. Halfway through, a group of period reenactors acted out the time a Native American tried to shoot Washington, but luckily for the eventual president, missed.

The shot, according to tour guide Colleen Chamberlain, could've changed history. Chamberlain is a member of the North Country Trail Association.

“We want everyone to experience as much as possible what Washington experienced when he walked here,” Chamberlain said. “We can't do it all. When he came through, it was about zero degrees.”



A tour group marches along a trail at Jennings Environmental Education Center Saturday morning while learning the story of how a young George Washington journeyed through the area in 1753. Tanner Cole/Butler Eagle
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The other hikes were more nature-focused. One was a fairly short jaunt, and the other was a seven-mile long trek.

About 250 people registered for the short walks, and 67 signed up for the long hike, according to Kati Edmiston, the center's environmental education specialist.

“We're educators, and part of what we do is to make the connection to history,” Edmiston said. “And the history of this area is very important.”

Inside the center, historical reenactors demonstrated old muskets and equipment people would've used during the French and Indian War.

Mike Homza, a reenactor, explained that he tries to live with the old tools so he can understand exactly how life once was.

“If you do this in college, it's called experimental archaeology,” Homza said. “We call it fun.”

Jason Cherry, another reenactor who brought along a book he wrote about Washington's experiences, said the story of the trip was growing more commonly known.

“Definitely more people know than they used to,” he said. “But there's still people who don't realize what a big role Washington had in the area.”

Washington was sent to the area to deliver a message to the French troops from his British superiors.

The day's many hikes ended with one of Washington's favorite treats — cherry pie.

Diane Meyers of Greensburg said both the pie and event were excellent.

“This was really impressive,” she said.