

EXIT 72, N.J.:THE VIEW FROM FORT LEE [FINAL Edition]

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In a hurry but don't want to miss an opportunity to glimpse one of the greatest cities in the world? Fort Lee Historic Park (201-461- 1776), a gem of a stop for those on their way farther north, lets you marvel at Manhattan from a stress-free distance.

On the west bank of the Hudson River above the George Washington Bridge, Fort Lee marks the spot where George Washington tried to take back Manhattan from the British in 1776. Outside, along several pathways in this small wooded park, you'll find some reconstructed fort walls, rustic tables, wagons, tools from the era and terrific, magical views of the bridge, Harlem and the midtown Manhattan skyline. There are also exhibits for kids. You can bring a picnic and eat at several benches along the path, but grilling is not allowed. An entrance sign says no pets, but we saw four people with dogs. As they say in these parts, "Fuhgeddaboutit!"

Exhibits inside the museum, including a to-scale miniature battleground with little lights representing men, help you imagine the Big Apple as a rural battleground. After the siege of Boston, Washington moved south to defend New York and the Hudson Valley. The British planned to take over the area, splitting the Colonies in two and bringing an early end to the revolution. At one point, the British assembled 31,000 troops on Staten Island. Later, Washington ordered a hectic retreat, leaving behind all the supplies at Fort Lee, events that prompted Thomas Paine's famous words: "These are the times that try men's souls."

Getting there: There's some crazy congestion around the bridge entrance. Take local lanes on I-95 as you approach the bridge. Exit 72 is the last exit before the bridge. Follow signs for Fort Lee. Go straight through five lights. When you come to a T in the road, go right on Hudson Terrace and make a quick left into the park.

Afterward, if you want to grab a bite before getting back on the road, make a left on Hudson Terrace outside the park. There are several restaurants going south along the road that runs parallel to the Hudson River.

[Illustration]

PHOTO; PAMELA GERHARDT