

Fort Dewart - 1758

In 1758, during the French and Indian War, British Brigadier General John Forbes was ordered to capture the French Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio. He constructed a road from Carlisle across the Alleghenies, protecting it with a series of small fortifications.



The Structure

The “redoubt” was a well-established type of military fortification in 1758. It was a regularly shaped earth and wood structure, entirely enclosed, designed to be defended by infantryman alone or with infantry and artillery.

Fort Dewart is a distinctive “star shaped redoubt.” It is the only redoubt of this configuration that has not been altered in North America. It is also the oldest surviving British designed and constructed field fortification & the second oldest military field fortification, on the continent.

The Purpose

General Forbes establishment of small intermediate posts such as Fort Dewart ensured the security of his line of communications. By stationing parties at key points, he facilitated the repair of the road, provided overnight protection to convoys & work parties, and secure stops for his convoys. Construction of these relatively small posts did not require much time or effort, and locally available materials such as timber, earth & sod were used. The small garrisons did not absorb much of Forbes’ strength & the advantage gained for the operation of the road was well worth the expenditure.

The post offered convoys a protected encampment where they could rest their soldiers and animals, while repairing damage to men’s shoes and accouterments,

horseshoes, harness and wagons incurred on the rigorous ascent up and down Rhor’s Gap.

The strategic location of this fortification is atop Allegheny Mountain (then known as Laurel Ridge), at the western end of Rhor’s Gap. It is located immediately adjacent to Breastwork Run, to safeguard access to and provide a safe encampment at the first good water source at the top of Rhor’s Gap. This small post is the only surviving structure from Forbes’ campaign.

Following the establishment of the Loyalhanna Encampment (Fort Ligonier), on September 13th the garrison here was withdrawn, although it continued to be used as a rest stop or overnight camp ground by travelers on the Forbes Road through at least 1764.

Built by Captain Sir Allan Maclean of Montgomery’s Highlanders, he named it for “Duart Castle”, the ancestral home of Clan Maclean overlooking the Sound of Mull, Scotland. Fort Dewart was constructed by Maclean clansmen raised by Sir Allan, their Chief, and was completed between August 16th-17th, 1758. Captain Maclean’s small post contained a hospital, a bake oven, & campground. A small garrison was maintained here throughout August & into mid-September of the Forbes Campaign, to perform maintenance on this critical segment of the road.

