



## Discover Portage Road Lesson Plan

### Devil's Hole Massacre

Subject Area: Social Studies

**Grades 6-8**

### New York State Social Studies Learning Standards

#### **Standard 1**

#### **History of the United States and New York**

#### **Students will:**

- Use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York
- Distinguish between near and distant past and interpret simple timelines.
- Investigate key turning points in New York State and United States history and explain why these events or developments are significant.
- Gather and organize information about the important achievements and contributions of individuals and groups living in New York State and the United States,
- Prepare essays and oral reports about the important social, political, economic, scientific, technological, and cultural developments, issues, and events from New York State and United States history.

#### **Overview**

Located along the American shoreline of the Niagara River Gorge, the Devil's Hole Ravine is a deep, bowl shaped basin of the Bloody Run tributary from Glacial Lake Tonawanda. After the Niagara River eroded the Niagara Gorge, the waters of Lake Tonawanda still drained. Devil's Hole was the site of one of the secondary outlets. This was where a water falls created a ravine adjacent to the wall of the Niagara Gorge. The name "Bloody Run" is a reminder of the massacre of British soldiers by the Seneca Indians in 1763.

The attack on the British soldiers resulted from the shift of control from the French to the British following the French and Indian War. Under the French, the local Seneca Indians were employed along the portage carrying supplies and cargo. Because it was such a difficult job to carry supplies up and down the escarpment; the Seneca Indians called the escarpment "Crawl on all Fours". In 1762, John Stedman improved the portage so that it would be more accessible to horses and carts. The Seneca porters objected to the arrival of the covered wagons because it deprived them of employment. The forts throughout the Upper Great Lakes depended on the supplies that were transported on the

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Niagara Portage. After the end of the French and Indian War, the Indians resented the British who threatened to decrease the Seneca's territory. The Seneca Indian Chief regarded the British as a more serious threat to Seneca sovereignty than the French.

Chief Pontiac claimed to have met with the "Master of Life". According to Chief Pontiac, the Master of Life criticized the Indians dependence upon the white man and encouraged the Seneca Indians to remove the white man from the Seneca territory. Pontiac's followers, during the summer of 1763, attacked many British outposts in the Upper Great Lakes region. Because it was important as a troop and supply line, the British guarded the Niagara Portage. During the summer and autumn of 1763, the Seneca Indians frequently harassed the supply convoys as they moved along the Niagara portage.

On September 14th 1763, John Stedman, the commander of a supply convoy, led a group of wagons filled with supplies from

On the return trip, Stedman was attacked by Seneca Indians along the overhanging ledge along the Niagara Gorge that the Seneca Indians called Devil's Hole. Actually the roof of a cave below, Devil's Hole was located approximately 4 miles downriver from the fall. As Stedman reached this steep incline along the portage route, he heard the cries of Seneca Indians from his left. Simultaneously, a volley of flaming arrows attacked the convoy of wagons. .

Stedman rode away from the supply wagons to get help from the troops at Fort Schlosser near the Falls. He barely escaped with his life. Stedman was one of three persons to survive. Another survivor was a boy who hid amongst a clump of bushes after he was thrown from an overturned supply wagon.

Hearing the war cries, a rescue party from the British 80th Regiment of Light Armed Foot responded from Fort Gray at nearby Lewis Town. Commanded by George Campbell and William Fraser, two companies rushed to the site of the attack. Upon the arrival of the reinforcements, the Seneca Indians ambushed the soldiers about one mile from the wagon train. As the British retreated, the Seneca cut them off, killing more than 80 soldiers. The British suffered a loss of 81 dead and 8 wounded. Later, the warrior Dekanandi told Sir William Johnson that 309 warriors attacked the British with the loss of only one wounded warrior. When the troops arrived from Fort Schlosser, they found no survivors. Afraid of an additional attack, the British quickly withdrew to Fort Schlosser. Several days later, British troops returned to the site of the Devil's Hole Massacre where they counted 80 dead bodies. Many of the bodies, following the attack, had been flung into the gorge. When informed of the attack, Sir William Johnson speculated the ambush was arranged by "Farmer's Brother", a young Seneca Indian who sympathized with Pontiac's ideology. The Devil's Hole Massacre was the single largest defeat suffered by the British during Pontiac's Rebellion.

By ambushing the British at Devil's Hole, the Seneca Indians did not chase the British from Niagara. In retaliation, the British entrenched and reinforced their troops.

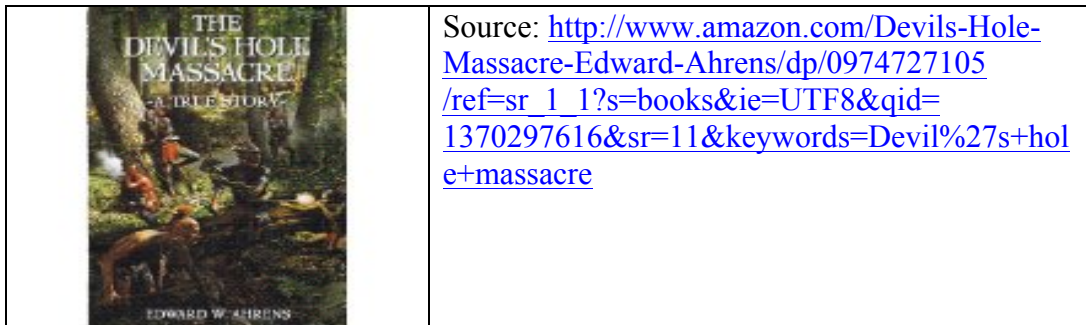
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.In August, 1764, the Seneca decided to make amends with the British. They ceded to the British a four mile wide strip of land along the east side of the Niagara River from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. Additionally, the Seneca Indians ceded all the islands upstream of the Falls to Sir William Johnson.

### Activity

Students will:

- Read *The Devil's Hole Massacre: A True Story* (Rissa Productions, 2004) by Edward W. Ahrens,



### Enrichment Activity 1:

Students will:

- Access the watercolor painting entitled *Devil's Hole Massacre* by Carole Breton at <http://www.nflibrary.ca/nfplindex/show.asp?id=102826&b=1>,
- Describe, in a short essay, the events depicted in the painting.

### References

Ahrens, Edward. *The Devil's Hole Massacre*. Rissa Productions, 2004.

“Devils Hole and the Devil’s Hole Massacre”. (2012). *Niagara Falls Thunder Alley* at <http://www.niagarafontier.com/devilhole.htm>

*Devil's Hole Massacre* at <http://www.nflibrary.ca/nfplindex/show.asp?id=102826&b=1>,