



## The Story of the Straw Bundles—All Clear Ahead!

It was David Wagner’s painting, *Moving Across New Jersey*, (left) that first drew our attention to the use of straw bundles as road markers in 1781. Mr. Wagner had read in a colonist’s journal that the French placed poles with straw bundles along their march route, but that journal didn’t explain the purpose of the straw. Further research showed that French engineers preceded each day’s march, inspecting the road to make sure it was free of obstructions (and British activity), then putting up straw bundles to indicate the route was all clear. As the last of the marchers passed through, the straw markers were removed, leaving no clue to alert Tories. Had the British discovered this seemingly innocuous signal, surely they would have set up an ambush ahead of the French march. Interestingly, Napoleon’s army used the same marking method on its ill-fated march to Russia, several decades later.

A local farmer hand-cut full-length straw and hay at Mahwah’s Sun Valley Farm, and produced bundles for the W3R Committee to place on more than 20 signs along Ramapo Valley Road (Rte. 202), the W3R route through Mahwah and Oakland, New Jersey.

It will soon be two months since the “America’s March to Yorktown” re-enactors passed through Bergen County, but this time the straw bundles remain, along with the W3R signs—and residents driving along the route can still exclaim, “Hay! look at that!”

*Submitted by the Mahwah W3R and Beautification Committees, October 2006*

Route 202 - by Continental Army campsite



Route 202 - by entrance to 18th-century road segment



Route 202 - at Mahwah/Oakland boundary

