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Dade Battle Reenactment in Bushnell

Photos by Martin Steele

4–5 minutes

The annual reenactment of an 1835 battle between the U.S. military and Florida Seminoles was held this past weekend at Dade Battlefield Historic State Park.

The war cry of the Seminoles echoed through the pines last Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 7-8, as Native American and military portrayers clashed in the reenactment of Major Francis Dade's infamous battle.

It's a dramatic presentation of a battle that took place nearly 200 years ago, deep in the pines of a Florida forest, where more than 100 U.S. military soldiers and nearly 200 Seminoles clashed in a battle for control of Florida land. The battle ended with more than 100 U.S. soldiers dead and sparked the Second Seminole War.

Visitors were able to watch soldiers in period military uniforms battle against a force of Seminole warriors who were waiting in ambush. The reenactment battle began at 2 p.m. each day. But, the grounds opened at 9 a.m., with plenty to see and do during the day. The event included period soldier, Seminole and civilian camps, a period vendor trade fair, historic arts and crafts demonstrations and full-scale cannon firing, plus 19th Century

games and activities for children.

Visitors were able to stroll among the Seminole and military camps, talk to the reenactors and become fully immersed in the “living history” event.

At the sutler trade fair, there always all sorts of period items for sale. A sutler was a person who followed the military and sold goods to them.

The event is hosted by the park and dozens of volunteers, coordinated by the Dade Battlefield Society – a volunteer-group of reenactors and park supporters.

According to the park history, after Florida became a U.S. territory in 1822, the slow influx of settlers created increasing friction with the Seminole Indians who had long called the area their home. The Seminole practice of giving refuge to fugitive slaves added to the tension.

By the 1830s, this conflict had risen to the boiling point. With the signing of the Treaty of Payne's Landing in 1832, several chiefs agreed to relocation of the Seminole people west of the Mississippi to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. But many Seminoles refused to go.

Faced with the prospect of being forced by the federal government to move, Seminoles opposed to the treaty decided to fight for their homes.

On Dec. 28, 1835, a column of 107 officers and men under the command of Brevet Major Francis Langhorne Dade, was traveling from Fort Brooke on Tampa Bay to reinforce the garrison at Fort King in present-day Ocala. About 50 miles short of their

destination, they were attacked by 180 Seminole warriors in a pine forest in present day Bushnell.

All but three of the soldiers were killed, while only six warriors fell in the battle. Known at the time as the Dade Massacre, Dade's Battle of 1835 sent shock waves across the nation. It marked the start of the Second Seminole War, the longest and most costly American Indian war in U.S. history.

In 1921, the Florida Legislature appropriated funds for the preservation of the battle site.

The cost is \$ 5 per person entrance and \$3/parking. Free admission for children five years and under.

Food vendors are also available. Dade Battlefield is located at 7200 C.R. 603, Bushnell. Parking will be available adjacent to the park entrance.

Park information is available at 352-793-4781 or visiting <https://www.floridastateparks.org/park/Dade-Battlefield>.

Information about the history, battle reenactment and the Dade Battlefield Society can be found at www.dadebattlefield