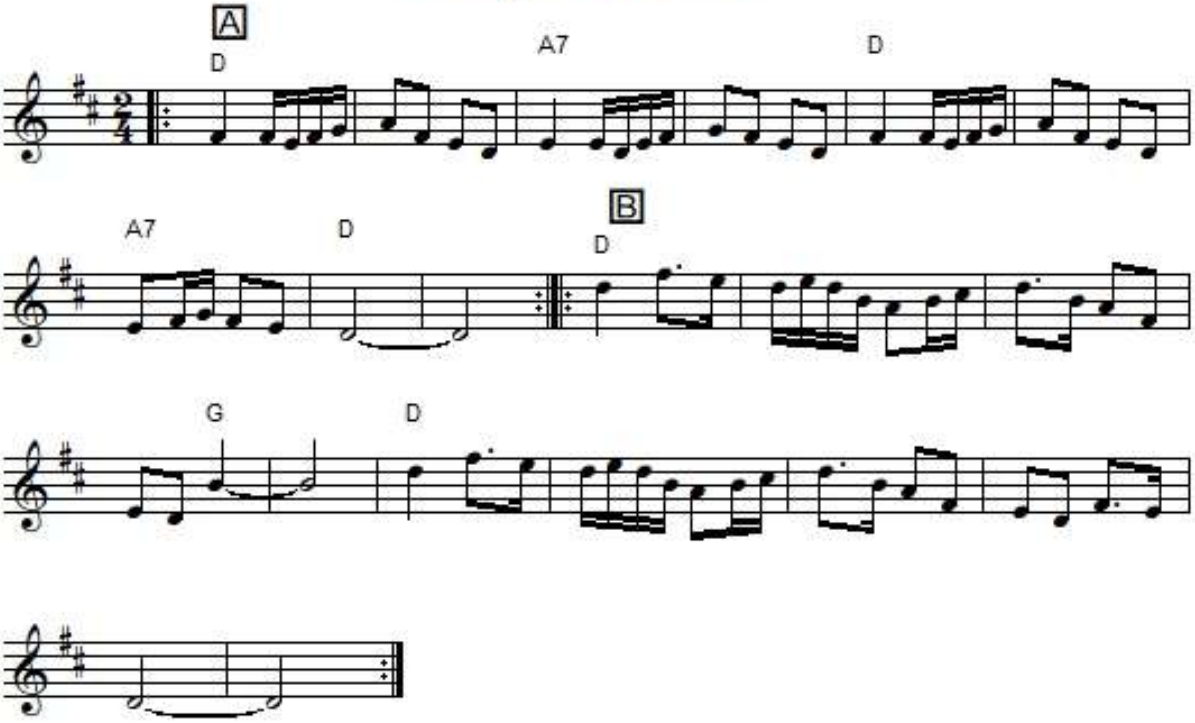
Bonaparte's Retreat



"Bonaparte's Retreat", also known as "Napoleon's Retreat" is an Irish air, march or reel in 2/4 or 4/4 time and D major. It is also wide spread in America.
One folklore anecdote regarding this melody has it that the original "Bonaparte's Retreat" was improvised on the bagpipe by a member of a Scots regiment that fought at Waterloo, in remembrance of the occasion.
Samuel Bayard (1944) concurs with assigning Irish origins for "Bonaparte's Retreat" and notes that it is an ancient Irish march tune with quite a varied traditional history. The 'ancient march' is called "The Eagle's Whistle" or "The Eagle's Tune" which P.W. Joyce (1909) said was formerly the marching tune of the once powerful O'Donovan family. Still, states Bayard, the evidence of Irish collections indicates that it has long been common property of traditional fiddlers and pipers and has undergone considerable alteration at various hands.
In Southwestern Pennsylvania the march origins were lost and instead "sets of the tune have been recast into the form, and given title, of 'Old Man and Old Woman a-Quarreling'".
This version was recorded by Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham on **The Ruby**.
I learned a different version for cross-tuned fiddle from a Mike Seeger recording but I haven't written it out yet.
This tune is not related to tune such as "Bonaparte's Advance", "Bonaparte's Grand March", "Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine" and "Bonaparte Over the Alps" except for the title.
It was printed in Bayard's **Hill Country Tunes** (1944) and **Dance to the Fiddle** (1981), Beisswenger & McCann's **Ozark Fiddle Music** (2008), Brody's **Fiddler's Fakebook** (1983), **Fiddler Magazine, vol. 8, No. 1**, Ford's **Traditional Music in America** (1940), Lomax's Our Singing Country (1941) (appears as "Bonyparte") and Thede's **The Fiddle Book** (1967).
It was recorded by many performers.