

Antietam Battlefield

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Antietam National Battlefield
P. O. Box 158
Sharpsburg, MD 21782



The Bloodiest Day of the Civil War

September 17, 1862, climaxed the first of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's two attempts to carry the war into the North. About 40,000 Southerners were pitted against the 85,000-man Federal Army of the Potomac under Gen. George B. McClellan. And when the fighting ended, the course of the American Civil War had been greatly altered.

After his great victory at Manassas in August, Lee had marched his Army of Northern Virginia into Maryland, hoping to find vitally needed men and supplies. McClellan followed, first to Frederick (where through rare good fortune a copy of the Confederate battle plan, Lee's Special Order No. 191, fell into his hands), then westward 12 miles to the passes of South Mountain. There on September 14, at Turners, Fox, and Cramptons Gaps, Lee tried to block the Federals. Because he had split his army to send troops under Sen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson to capture Harpers Ferry, Lee could only hope to delay the Northerners. McClellan forced his way through, and by the afternoon of September 15 both armies had established new battle lines west and east of Antietam Creek near the town of Sharpsburg. When Jackson's troops reached Sharpsburg on the 16th, Harpers Ferry having surrendered the day before, Lee consolidated his position along the low ridge that runs north and south of the town.

The battle opened at dawn on the 17th when Union Gen. Joseph Hooker's artillery began a murderous fire on Jackson's men in the Miller cornfield

north of town. "In the time I am writing," Hooker reported, "every stalk of corn in the northern and greater part of the field was cut as closely as could have been done with a knife, and the slain lay in rows precisely as they had stood in their ranks a few moments before." Hooker's troops advanced, driving the Confederates before them, and Jackson reported that his men were "exposed for near an hour to a terrific storm of shell, canister, and musketry."

About 7 a.m. Jackson was reinforced and succeeded in driving the Federals back. An hour later Union troops under Gen. Joseph Mansfield counterattacked and by 9 o'clock had regained some of the lost ground. Then, in an effort to extricate some of Mansfield's men from their isolated position near the Dunker Church, Gen. John Sedgwick's division of Edwin V. Sumner's corps advanced into the West Woods. There Confederate troops struck Sedgwick's men on both flanks, inflicting appalling casualties.

Meanwhile, Gen. William H. French's division of Sumner's corps moved up to support Sedgwick but veered south into Confederates under Gen. D. H. Hill posted along an old sunken road separating the Roulette and Piper farms. For nearly 4 hours, from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., bitter fighting raged along this road (afterwards known as Bloody Lane) as French, supported by Gen. Israel B. Richardson's division, also of Sumner's corps, sought to drive the southerners back. Confusion and sheer exhaustion finally ended the battle here and in the northern part of the field generally.

Gen. Ambrose Burnside's troops had been trying to cross a bridge over Antietam Creek since 9:30 a.m. Some 500 Georgians had driven them back each time. At 1 p.m. the Federals finally crossed the bridge (now known as Burnside Bridge) and, after a 2-hour delay to reform their lines, advanced up the slope beyond. By late afternoon, they had driven the Confederates back almost to Sharpsburg, threatening to cut off the line of retreat for Lee's decimated army. Then about 4 p.m. Gen. A. P. Hill's division, left behind by Jackson at Harpers Ferry to salvage the captured Federal property, arrived on the field and immediately entered the fight. Burnside's troops were driven back to the heights near the bridge they had earlier taken. The Battle of Antietam was over. The next day Lee began withdrawing his army across the Potomac River.

It has been said that more men were killed or wounded at Antietam on September 17, 1862, than on any other single day of the Civil War. Federal losses were 12,410, Confederate losses 10,700. Although neither side gained a decisive victory, Lee's failure to carry the war effort effectively into the North caused Great Britain to postpone recognition of the Confederate government. The battle also gave President Abraham Lincoln the opportunity to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which, on January 1, 1863, declared free all slaves in States still in rebellion against the United States. Now the war had a dual purpose: to preserve the Union and end slavery.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Visitor Center:

The visitor center houses a museum, a 134-seat theater, museum store and restrooms. The Visitor Center is open every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Visitor Center hours are: June through August, 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; September through May, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There is an all inclusive park entrance fee of \$4.00 per adult, \$6.00 per family. Children 16 and under are free.

Audio-visual Programs:

"Antietam Visit," an award winning film, is shown every half-hour from 9:00 a.m. through 11:30 a.m. and from 1:00 p.m. through 4:00 p.m. This 26-minute movie is an overview the battle and tells about President Abraham Lincoln's visit to the Union commander, General George B. McClellan.

"Antietam," a one-hour documentary is shown daily at 12:00 noon. This film, narrated by James Earl Jones and filmed on the battlefield, follows Robert E. Lee's entire Maryland Campaign.

Tours:

The best way to view the battlefield is to take the self-guided driving tour. The tour road is 8½ miles long with 11 stops. Most visitors drive the route, but walking and biking are encouraged. A CD or audio tape is available and enhances the driving tour and may be purchased from the museum store. A park map and tour stop information are included. A private guide can be arranged through the park's museum store for a fee. Call toll-free on 800-417-9596 or visit www.virtualantietam.com/guides to make arrangements.

Interpretive Programs:

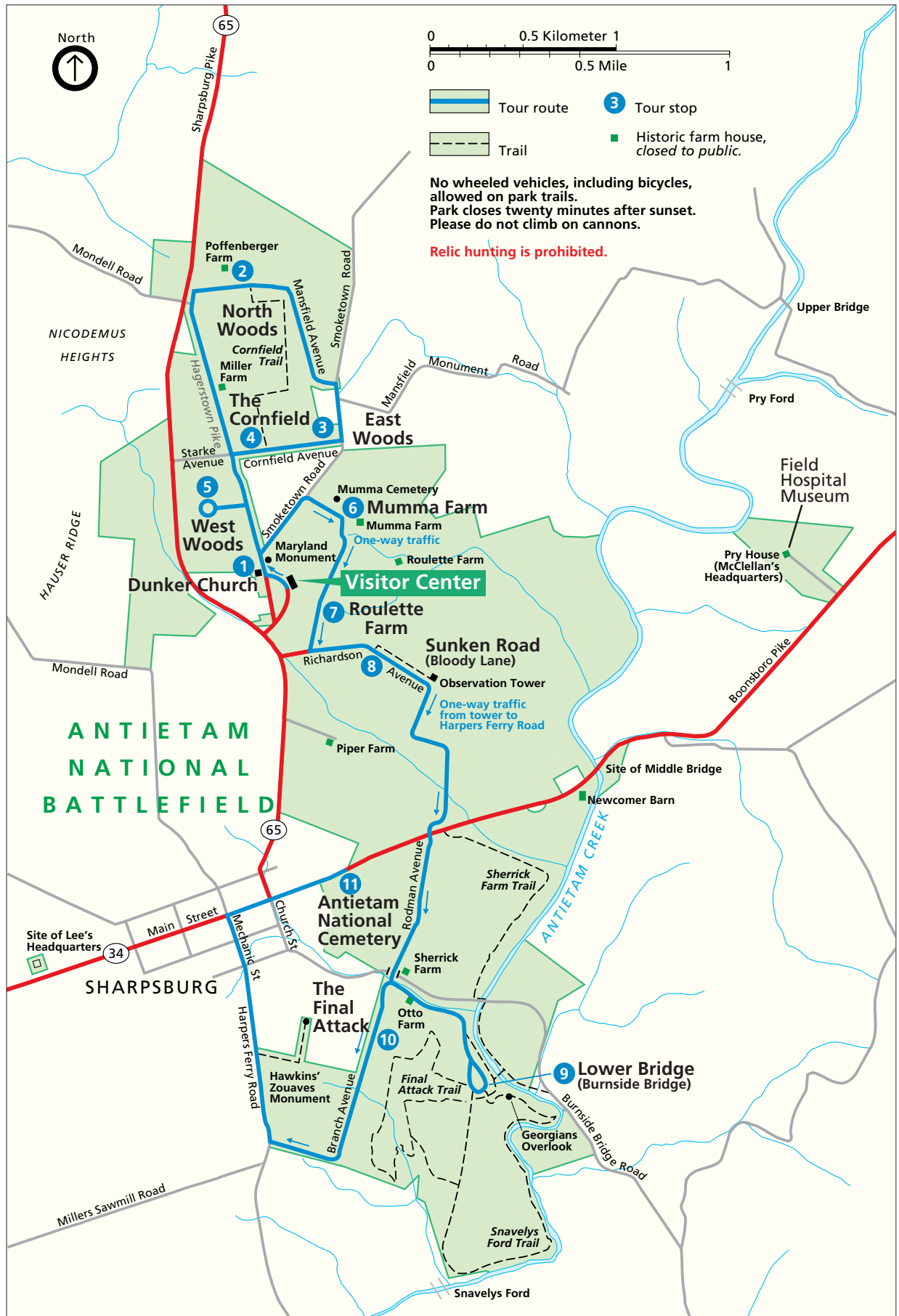
Battlefield Orientation Talks are offered every day. During the summer season more scheduled talks, walks and tours are conducted by National Park Rangers. Check at the visitor center for a daily schedule.

Antietam National Battlefield and Cemetery are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 158, Sharpsburg, MD 21782, is in charge. Phone:(301)432-5124. Antietam Battlefield web site is: www.nps.gov/anti.

Area Map:



PARK MAP



BATTLEFIELD AUTO TOUR STOPS

Before starting your tour, stop at the visitor center where exhibits and audio-visual programs provide an introduction to the battle and the Maryland Campaign. The numbered tour stops below are arranged according to the sequence of the battle.

1 Dunker Church

This was the focal point of repeated clashes as both armies sought to occupy and hold the high ground around it. Leveled by a storm in 1921, the church was rebuilt in 1962.

2 North Woods

General Hooker launched the initial Union attack from this point. It was stopped by Jackson's troops in The Cornfield, ½ mile south.

3 East Woods

Union Gen. Joseph Mansfield was fatally wounded here as he led his XII Corps into battle.

4 The Cornfield

More fighting took place here in the Miller cornfield than anywhere else at Antietam. The battle lines swept back and forth across the field for three hours.

5 West Woods

Union Gen. John Sedgwick's division lost more than 2,200 men in less than half an hour in ill-fated charge into these woods—against Jackson's and Longstreet's troops.

6 Mumma Farm

Burned by the Confederates to prevent their use by Union sharpshooters, the Mumma farm buildings were the only civilian property purposely destroyed during the battle.

7 Roulette Farm

Union troops under French and Richardson crossed these fields on their way to meet the Confederates posted in the Sunken Road.

8 Sunken Road (Bloody Lane)

For nearly 4 hours, Union and Confederate infantry contested this sunken country road, resulting in over 5,000 casualties—thus the name “Bloody Lane.”

9 Lower Bridge (Burnside Bridge)

The fighting here was a key factor in McClellan's failure at Antietam. Called Burnside Bridge after the Union general whose troops were held off most of the day by a few hundred Georgia riflemen, it is the battlefield's best-known landmark.

10 The Final Attack

After taking the Lower Bridge and reforming his corps, Burnside marched his men across these hills toward Sharpsburg, threatening to cut off Lee's line of retreat. Just as the Federals reached this area, A. P. Hill's Confederate division arrived from Harpers Ferry and drove them back.

11 Antietam National Cemetery

The remains of 4,776 Federal soldiers, including 1,836 unknowns, are buried in this hilltop cemetery near town. Most of the Confederate dead are buried in Hagerstown and Frederick, Md., Shepherdstown, W. Va., and in local church and family cemeteries.

Battle Maps

