



SNAVELY FORD TRAIL



Antietam National Battlefield



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Antietam National Battlefield and the Snavely Ford Trail. The trail is about 2½ miles long and should take about 90 minutes to walk. If you wish to take a shorter trip (30-45 minutes), turn up the firelane at Marker #5. This will take you to the Georgian's Overlook where another trail will take you back to the parking lot. Whichever hike you take, be prepared for a moderately stressful climb uphill on the last third of the trail.

As you move down the path, step back in time. Try to imagine being here on September 17, 1862. Across the creek are General Ambrose Burnside's 13,000 troops. Above you are 450 Confederate Riflemen anxiously awaiting the attack. Seemingly, an easy victory for the North.

STOP #1

George McClellan in command of the Union troops planned simultaneous attacks on three separate fronts; the bridge being the southern most objective. At daybreak the artillery of both sides opened fire but Burnside failed to attack the Georgian's at the bridge as planned. Burnside's troops started the attack at about 10:00 a.m. and concentrated all efforts on crossing the creek with the central attack at the bridge. Time after time, the Federal troops were driven back by deadly fire from Confederate artillery and sharpshooters, hidden in rifle pits and behind barricades. Robert E. Lee had planned his strategy well, using the hillside at the bridge to its fullest advantage. Despite this advantage, Burnside should have carried the bridge easily but the Federals were hampered by a personal conflict between Burnside and McClellan and by habitual delays. There is little doubt that lives were lost unnecessarily.

Union Infantry charged and forced the bridge at the point of bayonet at about 1:00 p.m. with fearful loss. Union troops surged across the bridge forcing Brigadier General Toombs and his Georgian sharpshooters to retreat to the fields west of here.

STOP #2

Shortly after the bridge was taken, Colonel George Crook's Brigade found a ford just north of the bridge. The right flank of Burnside's attack was finally making progress.

Look up to the crest of the hill behind this marker. This was where some of those Confederate sharpshooters dug their rifle pits. Covered by brush and trees and shooting at the northern ranks who found little cover in open fields and roadway, their constant barrage of lead proved treacherous.

The Southerner's tenacity in the defense of the bridge was spurred on by General Toombs, their commander. Toombs "had written to his wife that enemies were trying to drive him from the army, but that he would not resign until he had distinguished himself in some great battle. ('The day after such an event,' he said, 'I will retire if I live through it.')

Perhaps he saw this as his opportunity.

STOP #3

"Nearly every tense moment in battle has a fleeting second of comical relief. The lower bridge action had several, not the least of which nearly caused panic among the charging forces. As the 9th New Hampshire was making its attempt at the bridge, a frightened sow and her litter of pigs came running up the creek bank, heading pell-mell for the ranks. Just as she reached the men, she made a sharp turn catching one man between the legs carrying him off astride her back, his musket waving frantically in the air and his lungs bursting with panic-stricken screams."

Under the command of Colonel Edward Ferrero were four regiments; 51st New York, 51st Pennsylvania; 35th and 21st Massachusetts.

"It is General Burnside's especial request that the two 51st's take that bridge. Will you do it?" called Ferrero to his men. "Will you give us our whiskey, Colonel, if we make it?" shouted someone from the Pennsylvania regiment. It was kind of a ticklish subject with Ferrero. This unit had gained quite a reputation from their drinking habits. "Yes, By God!" he said, and the boys cheered, "Charge with the bayonet!"

STOP #4

Historians question why the creek was not scouted and forded at the onset rather than concentrating all efforts on the bridge.

Henry Kyd Douglas, whose home was nearby and who had undoubtedly played or fished in the Antietam many times as a child, failed to understand why the creek itself was not checked out and used. "Go look at it and tell me if you don't think Burnside and his corps might have executed a hop, skip and a jump and landed on the other side," wrote Douglas. "One thing is certain, they might have waded it that day without getting their waist belts wet in any place."

As the attack on the bridge opened at 10:00, Brigadier General Isaac Rodman and his division were sent to seek out Snavelly's Ford to the south. He was accompanied by three regiments of the Kanawha Division. Rodman reached the ford at 1:00 p.m., at the same time as the capture of the bridge and the discovery of the ford north of the bridge.

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STOP #5

Antietam Creek has its origin in Pennsylvania and empties into the Potomac River 4 miles below Sharpsburg at the village of Antietam. The Delaware Indians named the creek and it is believed to mean swift water or swift stream.

During the Civil War it became traditional for the North to name the engagements after local or natural features such as Bull Run and Stones River. The South adopted the names of neighboring towns like Manassas and Gettysburg. Hence, the North named this battle Antietam and the South, Sharpsburg.

If you wish to shorten your hike, take the firelane behind this marker to the Georgian's Overlook. You can pick up a paved trail there which will take you back to the parking lot.

STOP #6

As is true whenever a country goes to war, her natural resources are drawn heavily upon. The Civil War was no different. Hulls from black walnuts were used to dye Confederate uniforms a butternut color. The American elm was used for wheel hubs on wagons and yielded a cough medicine. Rails made of black locust were used in the popular post and rail fences. The list could go on. As you continue down the trail try to imagine what needs the Civil War soldier had. Could he have satisfied those needs by using the resources along the banks of the Antietam?

STOP #7

While Rodman was leading his division across the Antietam nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile downstream, the three regiments (12th, 23rd, 30th Ohio) of the Kanawha Division crossed the creek at this bend. The steep hill beyond the floodplain turned back a supporting battery of Light Howitzers. It is interesting to note that two future presidents, William McKinley and Rutherford B. Hayes, served in the 23rd Ohio Infantry.

STOP #8

At 1:00 p.m. Rodman's division crossed the Antietam here at what is known as Snavelly's Ford. This occurred simultaneously with the storming of the bridge. The trail will now follow part of the route Rodman took toward the final action of the day.

STOP #9

Rodman moved his division up to the fields in front of you. The left and right flanks of the front were now prepared to press on but the regiments which had taken the bridge were without ammunition. Valuable time was lost in the confusion of bringing fresh troops to the front.

Lee was able to take advantage of this lost time and regrouped just outside of Sharpsburg. After two costly hours the Union Army began to press forward once again.

STOP #10

Lee's troops were being pressed back into Sharpsburg but the fighting was fierce. Once again, low on ammunition, the Federal troops were unable to reach the village of Sharpsburg and the Confederate artillery was devastating. Sometime between three and four o'clock that afternoon, A. P. Hill's men, dressed in blue, having just arrived from the Federal garrison at Harpers Ferry, pressed Burnside's corps back to the Antietam Creek. Shortly thereafter, the fighting ceased and the Battle of Antietam ended. Neither side renewed the attack the next day and at dark Lee's army escaped across Shepherdstown Ford back into Virginia.

CONCLUSION

We trust you have enjoyed your hike along the Antietam. If you are not interested in keeping this brochure, please place it in the box provided at the gate at the end of this road.

Have a pleasant and safe tour of the battlefield.

Quotations in this brochure have been taken from the following books:

The Gleam of Bayonets, James Murfin
September Echoes, John Schildt

