



Foundation Document Overview

Pea Ridge National Military Park

Arkansas



Contact Information

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Purpose



PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK was established to preserve and protect the landscapes and resources associated with the battle of Pea Ridge; to interpret the battle as an integral part of the social, political, and military history of the Civil War; to provide for historical education and professional study; and to provide roads, trails, markers, buildings, and other improvements and facilities for the care and accommodation of visitors as necessary.

Significance

Significance statements express why Pea Ridge National Military Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Union victory at Pea Ridge prevented the Confederacy from gaining physical and political control of Missouri. Union control of Missouri subsequently provided a secure logistical base to embark upon a campaign to control the lower Mississippi River Valley.
- Pea Ridge was the first major battle outside Indian Territory in which a large number of organized troops from the Cherokee Nations fought.
- Pea Ridge National Military Park is one of the best-preserved Civil War battlefields in the United States encompassing nearly 90% of the combat sites of the Battle of Pea Ridge.
- The Federal trenches above Little Sugar Creek, the first entrenchments dug in the Civil War's Trans-Mississippi theater of operations, are the only constructed features remaining from the battle.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Battlefield Landscape**
- **Archeological Resources**
- **Value of Providing Visitor Access**
- **Collections and Archives Related to the Battle**

Pea Ridge National Military Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Trail of Tears National Historic Trail**
- **Butterfield Overland Mail / Stage Route**
- **Mission 66 Buildings and Landscape Features**
- **Species of Concern**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Missouri (Why We Fight).** The Battle of Pea Ridge resulted partially from Missouri's position as a western border (slave) state where social, economic, ethnic, and political differences fueled animosities, conflict, and violence among groups and individuals.
- **Trans-Mississippi Theater.** During the Battle of Pea Ridge, both armies confronted difficult challenges in the physical terrain, a limited transportation network, lack of resources, mixed loyalties of civilians, and cultural diversity within the ranks not typically faced in other theaters of war.
- **Pea Ridge Campaign.** To achieve the goal of controlling the state of Missouri for the Union, General Curtis seized the strategic initiative by boldly launching a winter campaign to strike the Confederates when they were most vulnerable. His victory ultimately contributed to the larger Union objective of controlling the Mississippi River, vital to the movement of troops and supplies and severely crippled Confederate war efforts.
- **Leadership.** The course of the Battle of Pea Ridge turned on bold, decisive actions; rash, uninformed orders; and individual examples of bravery, heroism, and sacrifice; demonstrating how strategic and tactical decision making and initiative can overcome obstacles and setbacks to achieve ultimate success.
- **Civilian Life.** The experiences of local residents during and after the Battle of Pea Ridge revealed how to cope with the dramatic impacts of war, the tragedy of loss, and the disintegration of the rule of law.
- **Commemoration and Preservation.** The commemoration and preservation efforts of Civil War veterans in the late 1800s served as an impetus for memorializing those who fought at the Battle of Pea Ridge.
- **The Battle Continues.** Even though the Battle of Pea Ridge secured the slave state of Missouri for the Union, the battle continues today as we begin to realize the deeper significance of the Civil War's transformation of 4 million human beings from enslavement to freedom.

Description

Pea Ridge National Military Park was established on July 20, 1956 near Garfield, Arkansas. The park commemorates the Battle of Pea Ridge and preserves the site of the battle, one of the largest Civil War engagements west of the Mississippi River. Fought on March 6, 7, and 8, 1862, the Union Army of the Southwest defeated the Confederate Army of the West in a bloody battle. This decisive victory permanently turned the tide of the Civil War west of the Mississippi, ensured that Missouri would remain in the Union, and freed Union forces for the campaign to take control of the lower Mississippi River. Pea Ridge National Military Park covers approximately 4,300 acres, encompassing over 90% of the core battlefield.

Approximately 23,000 soldiers fought at Pea Ridge on March 7 and 8, 1862. Many of the soldiers were from small towns and had never traveled more than 20 miles away from home before they joined the army. They were farmers, merchants, teachers, mechanics, lawyers, and other occupations before they enlisted. At this early stage of the war every man was a volunteer. Many joined for patriotic reasons, to preserve the embattled Union, or to fight the “Second American Revolution,” while others sought to escape the boredom of life in a small town. Some went with their heads filled with dreams of glory, while others simply did not want to be thought of as cowards. No one thought that this was to be a long or bloody war. Throughout the years, the park has come into possession of diaries, letters, and notes from the soldiers who fought at Pea Ridge. Along with written works, the park’s museum collection also includes clothing, weapons, artillery, and other artifacts related to the battle.

Pea Ridge National Military Park also has the potential to reveal important information about the Civil War through the extensive archeological resources in the park.

A section of the northern route of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is within Pea Ridge National Military Park. The trail commemorates the forcible removal of 16,000 people of the Cherokee Nation from their homelands in Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, and Georgia to Indian Territory.

Pea Ridge National Military Park provides visitors with access to a tour road, wayside exhibits, hiking trails, restored battlefields, the Elkhorn Tavern and commemorative monuments, and a visitor center and museum. The park is in northwest Arkansas, a rapidly growing metropolitan area. Many visitors are interested in Civil War history; however, recreational use in the park is growing in popularity. Running on the trail road and horseback riding are common recreational activities.

