

Hiking The Trail

The Spotsylvania Battlefield History Trail connects several major sites associated with the May 1864 fighting. The trail is seven miles long, but you can choose any number of shorter options. The map on the inside of the pamphlet will help you select your route. The trail begins at the exhibit shelter (tour stop 13) and is marked by blazed trees and by mowed paths. Foot bridges are available at points where the trail crosses Civil War trenches. Please help the National Park Service preserve these historic features by using the bridges.

Before you begin your walk, take a few moments to read the exhibits and study the large battle painting at the exhibit shelter. Interpretive signs, paintings, and monuments along the trail will supplement the exhibit shelter information.



Information and Safety

- Federal law prohibits the possession of metal detectors or the collection of relics within the park.
- Walking on earthworks is prohibited. Please help the National Park Service preserve these fragile features by using the pedestrian bridges.
- Drinking water and rest rooms may be available at the exhibit shelter. Do not drink from streams or springs.
- Beware of poison ivy and ticks.
- Picnicking is allowed only at the established area adjacent to the exhibit shelter parking lot.
- Bicycles and motorized vehicles are prohibited on the trails. Horses must stay on designated trails.
- Although hunting inside the park is illegal, it is wise to exercise caution and wear bright colors when walking the trail during hunting season.
- Be aware of trail hazards and uneven surfaces. Wear sturdy shoes or boots.
- Road traces and animal trails crisscross the area. To stay on the hiking trail, follow the map carefully and look for blue blazes on the trees.
- Be careful while hiking along roadsides and use crosswalks. Route 613 is particularly hazardous. Use extreme care when crossing it.
- Pets must be kept on a leash at all times.



Spotsylvania History Trail

A Walking Tour

In March 1864 President Abraham Lincoln appointed Ulysses S. Grant general-in-chief of the Union army. Earlier in the Civil War, Grant had won victories at Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga. By appointing him to the country's top military post, Lincoln hoped to bring a speedy end to the three-year-old war. Grant took an important, if costly, step in that direction here at Spotsylvania Court House.

Grant led the Army of the Potomac across the Rapidan River on May 4, 1864. For two days he struggled with General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in the tangled thickets of the Wilderness. Unable to break Lee's lines there, Grant moved south toward Spotsylvania in an effort to get between the Confederate army and Richmond. Lee was too quick for him, however, and reached Spotsylvania ahead of the Union army. For several days Grant battered and probed the Confederate defensive line, looking for a place to strike. When his officers reported a huge bulge, or salient, in the center of the Confederate line, Grant saw his chance. On May 12 he ordered two of his four infantry corps to attack the salient (known, because of its shape, as "the Muleshoe") head-on while his remaining two corps pinned the Confederates to their trenches elsewhere along the line.

Advancing through an early morning mist, Union troops overran the position around 5 a.m., capturing 3,000 prisoners and 20 cannon. Lee lashed back, sending brigade after brigade into the maelstrom in an effort to repair his shattered line. For more than twenty hours the two sides battled across a turn in the logworks known as the "Bloody Angle," jabbing one another with bayonets and filling the air with leaden bullets.

Exhausted, the outnumbered Confederates eventually relinquished the Muleshoe and fell back to a new line one-quarter mile to the rear. Grant attacked Lee's new line a few days later, on May 18, but found it too strong to take. Three days later, the armies left Spotsylvania and headed south, leaving behind 30,000 casualties, miles of trenches, and a community devastated by war.

