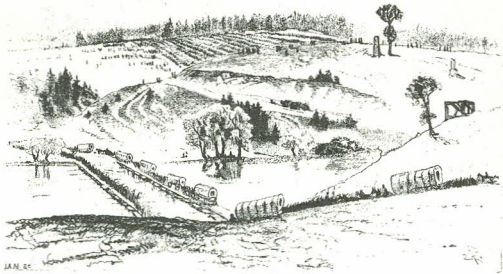


WILMINGTON & SPOTSWAN

battlefield self guided tour





INTO THE WILDERNESS

At the end of 1863, despite three years of hard warfare in Virginia, the Rapidan River still remained the military frontier of the Civil War in the East. In the spring of 1864, General Ulysses S. Grant was made Commander-in-Chief of all Union armies, and attached himself to General Meade's Army of the Potomac, which had been in this part of Virginia since shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg.

At midnight on May 3, 1864, the Federals moved out of their camps around Culpeper and headed south, crossing the Rapidan at several points. Their purpose was to interpose between General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and Richmond. Once south of the river, they entered the tangled forest known as the Wilderness. Lee observed the Federal movement on the morning of the 4th, and set his army in motion eastward from Orange, toward the Union Army, along two parallel roads — the Orange Turnpike (now Route 20), and the Orange Plank Road (now Route 621), several miles to the south.

The armies battled in the Wilderness for the next two days; the result was an apparent stalemate.

If you are at Fredericksburg, drive west on Route 3 for approximately 15 miles until you reach the intersection with Route 20 at Wilderness. Turn left on Route 20 and drive 1.3 miles to the Wilderness Battlefield Exhibit Shelter.

If you are at Chancellorsville Visitor Center, drive west on Route 3 for about 4 miles to reach the intersection with Route 20.

9

EXHIBIT SHELTER —The displays here will give you an understanding of the opposing armies and of the fighting in the Wilderness. These dense woods were the scene of bitter and confused fighting during the Battle of the Wilderness.

Proceed westward on Route 20 for 0.3 mile to Hill-Ewell Drive. Turn left onto the Drive and continue for 3.4 miles to the intersection of Hill-Ewell Drive with the Orange Plank Road (Route 621).

As you proceed along Hill-Ewell Drive, notice the trenches beside the road. These were thrown up by the Confederates during the heavy fighting on May 5th.

Units lost all semblance of order in the woods. Many times troops were shot by their own comrades, or surrounded by the enemy without knowing it. Deadly ambushes were frequent, which led one veteran to call the battle “bushwhacking on a grand scale.” To add to the horror, the dry woods were set on fire by muzzle flashes from the guns. The flames roared out of control and the soldiers of both sides tried to drag the screaming wounded to safety. But they could not reach them all, and by dark the Wilderness was filled with blackened corpses.

There are interpretive signs along the route of this tour you may wish to read.

Turn right at the intersection of Hill-Ewell Drive with Route 621, and continue for 0.2 mile to the pull-off on the right side of the road at Stop 10.

10

THE TAPP FARM —In this clearing, on May 6th, occurred one of the most dramatic incidents of the War. One Confederate corps had just been roughly handled, and reinforcements were hurrying to the front. When they reached this crucial point, Lee, with the fire of battle in his eyes, rode ahead to lead them in a counterattack. The soldiers, realizing the danger to their beloved commander, shouted him back with the cry, “Lee to the rear!”

Turn around and follow the Plank Road for 1.1 miles to the Brock Road-Plank Road intersection.

11

BROCK-PLANK ROAD JUNCTION—Federal infantry occupied this intersection at noon on May 5th, just ahead of the Confederates. Union troops held their positions despite repeated assaults.

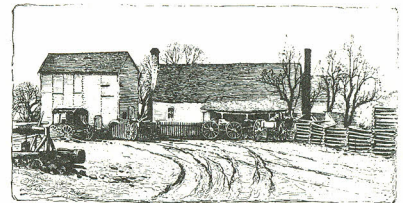
On the next day, they launched an attack from this area down the Plank Road and routed the Confederate 3rd Corps.

The Battle of the Wilderness resulted in an apparent draw. On the night of May 7th, Federal troops began pulling out of their lines. As the head of the column approached this intersection from the north (your left), the men wondered which way they would turn. The Army of the Potomac had always withdrawn after an engagement with Lee. If they turned left onto the Plank Road it meant going back across the river. But the column drove on straight through the crossroads, which meant heading further south and more fighting. When the men caught sight of Grant, they cheered him for his decision not to turn back.

Federal casualties in the Wilderness were about 18,000. Exact figures for the Confederates are not known, but have been estimated at 8,000.

Turn right onto the Brock Road (Route 613) and drive for 8.5 miles to the entrance to Spotsylvania Court House Battlefield. Turn left onto the Drive and proceed to the Spotsylvania Exhibit Shelter, located about 100 yards from the intersection. (there are also rest rooms located at the Shelter.)

As you drive down the Brock Road, you are following the route taken by many Federal troops in the race for the strategic crossroads village of Spotsylvania Court House. Lee’s troops were also pushing to Spotsylvania on roads further west, paralleling the Federal line of march. You will pass the site of Todd’s Tavern, where heavy infantry and cavalry action occurred during the march.



TODD'S TAVERN — 1860's

12

EXHIBIT SHELTER —The displays here will help you to understand the complex maneuvers of the two-week long Battle of Spotsylvania, the second step in Grant’s drive south. Also told is the story of the death of the Federal 6th Corps com-

mander, the beloved "Uncle John" Sedgwick, by a sharpshooter's bullet on May 9th near this spot. A monument to Sedgwick is situated near the intersection.

Continue along Grant Drive for 0.9 mile to the intersection with Anderson Drive. Do not park here. Turn right on Anderson Drive and go 0.4 mile to the intersection with Gordon Drive. Turn left on Gordon and proceed to the T intersection with Bloody Angle Drive. Turn left and go ¼ mile to the parking area at Stop 13. From here a 30-minute loop trail covers the Bloody Angle Battlefield or you may walk through the fence and down the road 200 yards directly to the Bloody Angle.

13

THE BLOODY ANGLE —At about 4:30 a.m. on May 12th the Federals launched a massive assault on the "Mule Shoe" salient, a mile-long protrusion from the Southern line, and captured most of a Confederate division and 20 cannon. Another assault, launched at 6:00 a.m. in support of the earlier one, was aimed at the west face of the salient, in this area. What resulted was some of the most savage fighting in American history. For twenty-four hours there was continuous hand-to-hand combat as wave after wave of Union troops tried to take the trenches. Men fired at each other at point-blank range and then bayoneted and clubbed one another across the logs of the parapet. Several yards behind the Confederate line a living

oak tree 22 inches in diameter was cut down by the intense small arms fire. (A section of this tree is on exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.) At about 3:00 a.m. on the 13th the Southerners, dazed and exhausted but still defiant, retired to a new line constructed across the base of the old salient.

Retrace your route to Gordon Drive and turn right. Proceed 0.6 mile to the gravel road. Turn right and go down the gravel road to the McCoull House site.

14

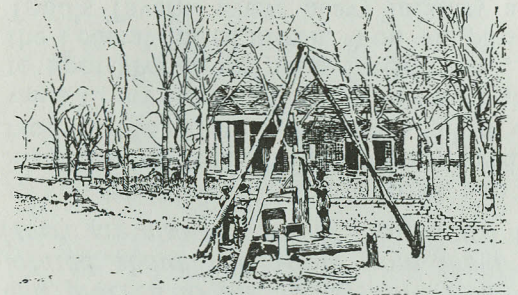
MCCOULL HOUSE SITE —The McCoull House stood within the center of the Confederate salient, and served as the headquarters for Confederate General Edward "Allegheny" Johnson. There was heavy fighting around the house during a Federal assault on May 10th. Two days later, when the Northerners had broken through at the tip of the salient, their great massed attack was blunted here. In the confusion following the initial Federal onslaught, Lee came up to the McCoull House area to lead his troops in a countercharge. He was met by General John B. Gordon's Georgians and Virginians, who sent Lee back to safety and threw themselves into the path of the assault.

Fighting continued at Spotsylvania until May 21st, when Grant pulled his army off the lines and started southward again, by the left flank. Union losses

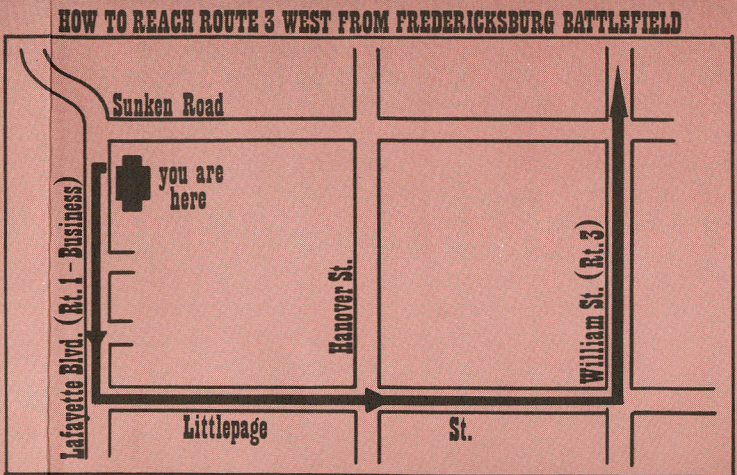
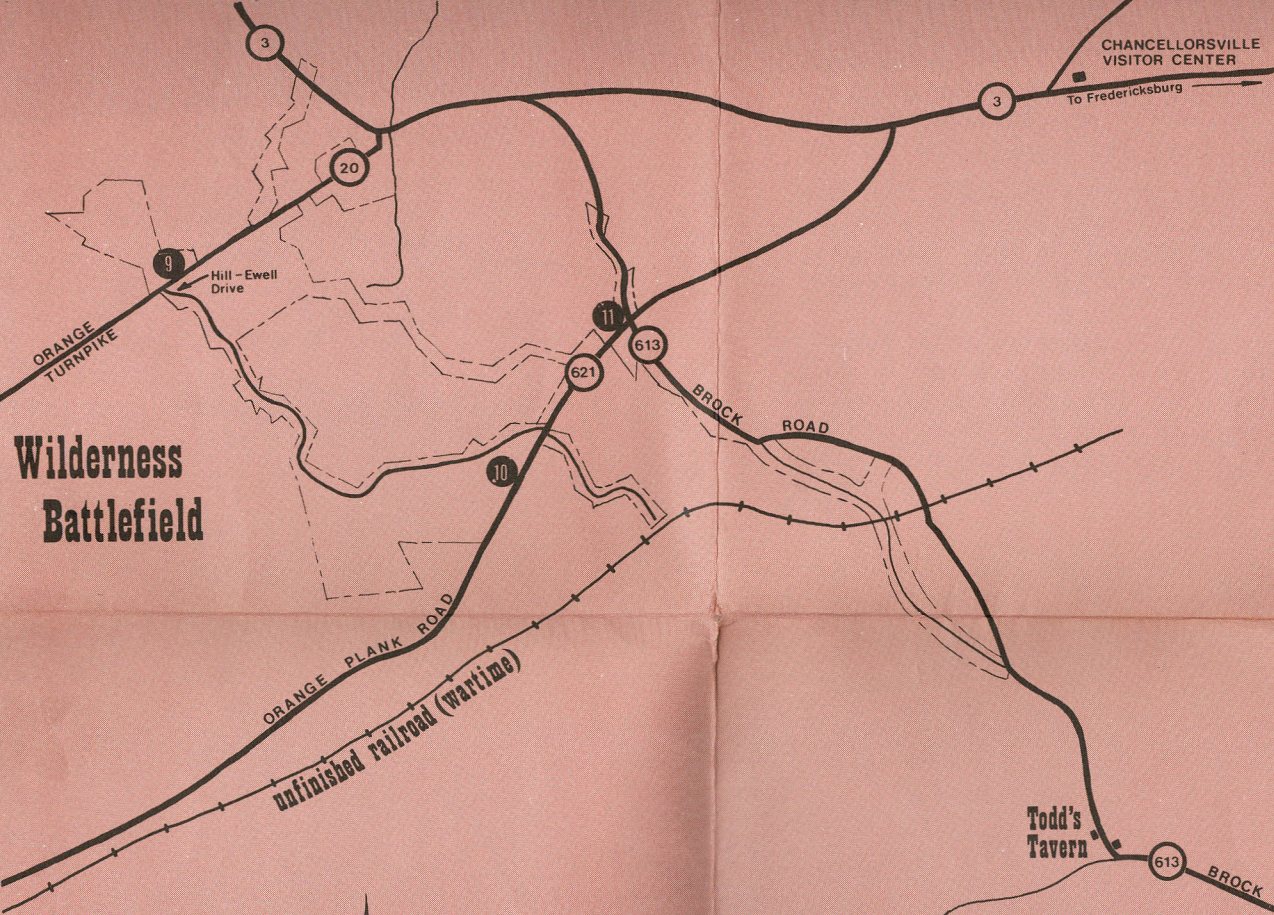
at Spotsylvania were about 18,000; Confederate losses are unknown.

Lee's surrender at Appomattox was less than a year away.

This marks the end of your self-guided tour of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Battlefields. To return to Fredericksburg, retrace your route from the McCoull House to Anderson Drive, turn left on Anderson Drive, and follow it to Route 613 (Brock Road). Turn left on 613 and proceed 1.6 miles to Spotsylvania Court House. At Spotsylvania, turn left onto Route 208, and continue for 12 miles to Fredericksburg.



SPOTSYLVANIA COURT HOUSE



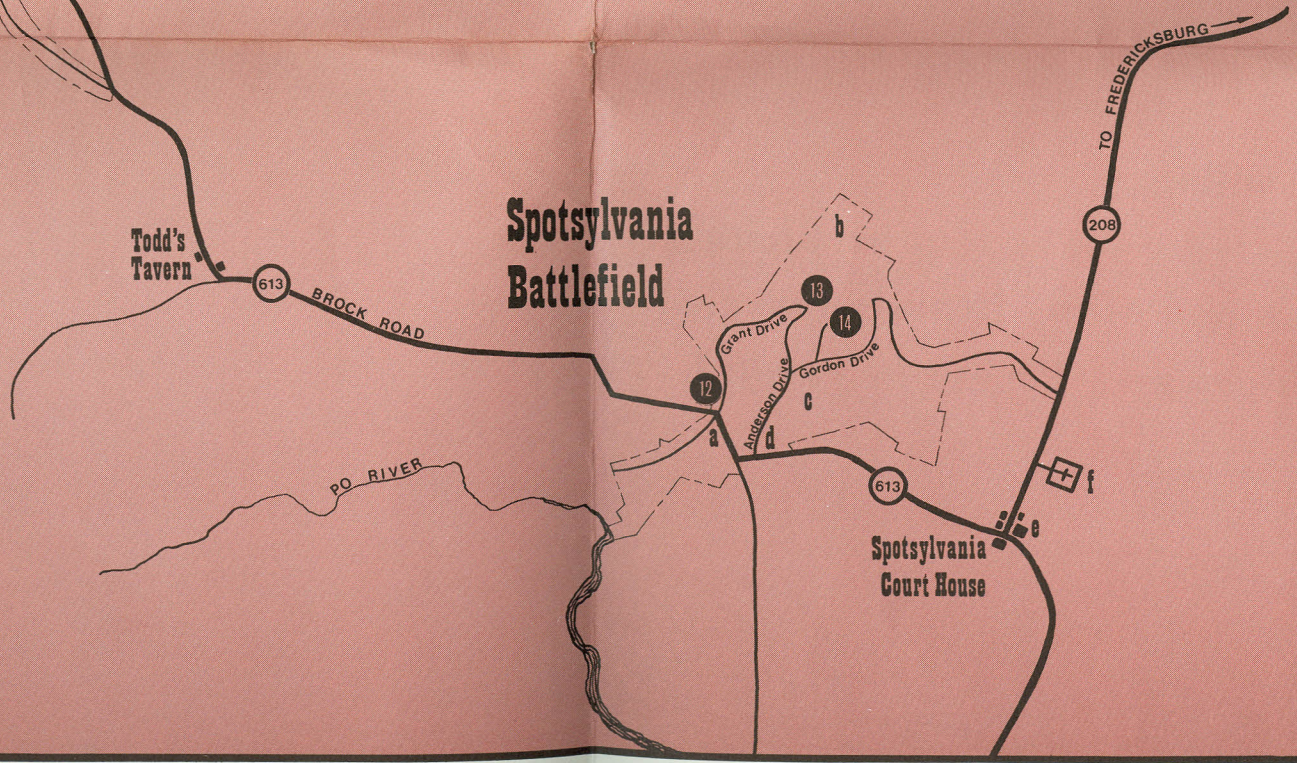
**Wilderness
Battlefield**



KEY

scale: $\frac{3}{4}$ in. = 1 mile

park boundary - - - -



**Spotsylvania
Battlefield**

**Spotsylvania
Court House**

OTHER BATTLEFIELD SITES AT SPOTSYLVANIA

A: Laurel Hill—Laurel Hill marks the opening scenes of the battle.

From the low ridge line here to a point about 600 yards south, across the open fields, the Laurel Hill engagement was fought on May 8, 1864. Dismounted Confederate cavalrymen fought a bitter holding action against thousands of Federals. They were reinforced by Confederate infantrymen who had raced across the fields and reached the battle line only seconds before the Federals did. The Confederate line held and the Federals were thrown back. Lee had won the race to Spotsylvania, but the war was moving inevitably toward Richmond.

B: Landrum House Ruins—The Landrum House served as the headquarters for Union General

Winfield S. Hancock, who directed the battle for the salient from here. The high ground around the house was used by Federal artillery to support the attacks.

C: Harrison House Site—About ¼ mile south of the junction of Anderson and Gordon Drives is the site of the Harrison House, near Lee's headquarters on May 11–12. Lee's final line runs a short distance behind the house.

D: Lee's Final Line—Located at the base of the salient, about half a mile in the rear of the first line, was the Confederate defense line, erected on May 12th. The line was laid out by General Martin L. Smith, who had constructed the defenses at Vicksburg, Mississippi. On May 18th the Federals assaulted this line in hopes of duplicating their earlier successes, but they were hurled back by thirty massed cannon.

E: Spotsylvania Court House—The present Court House complex is on the site of the original wartime structure, which was heavily damaged in the fighting.

F: Spotsylvania Confederate Cemetery—This cemetery contains the remains of about 570 Confederate soldiers killed in the fighting around Spotsylvania. They were moved here after the War from temporary graves on the battlefield.

The great battles of Spotsylvania were now at an end. How many they had been and how desperate! Each year of the war, from the time Lee had taken command of the Army of Northern Virginia, the course of the conflict had brought him into Spotsylvania, and not once had he been defeated there. In Fredericksburg stood the wall from which incautious Burnside had been bloodily repulsed; across the county ran the narrow, mysterious roads over which the Second Corps had hurried to the flank of Hooker's host; in a shell-torn thicket, no stone marked the spot where Jackson had fallen. Still bare in the woods near Hamilton's Crossing was the site on which Lee had planned the invasion of Pennsylvania. But never again were the thickets to echo the wild rebel yell. To the thousands of shallow graves in the forest none were to be added. The barricades might rot and the trenches wash away. The trumpet vine might climb the gaunt, scarred trees, and the honeysuckle cover the ruin of the shell-swept homes. Spotsylvania's sacrifices were complete. No more was to be exacted of her. The fields and the forests that had witnessed the high noon of the Confederacy were to be spared the night of a waning cause.

—Douglas Southall Freeman
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Caution:

**Driving tours require turning
on and off of heavily traveled
highways. Please be careful.**

**National Park Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

