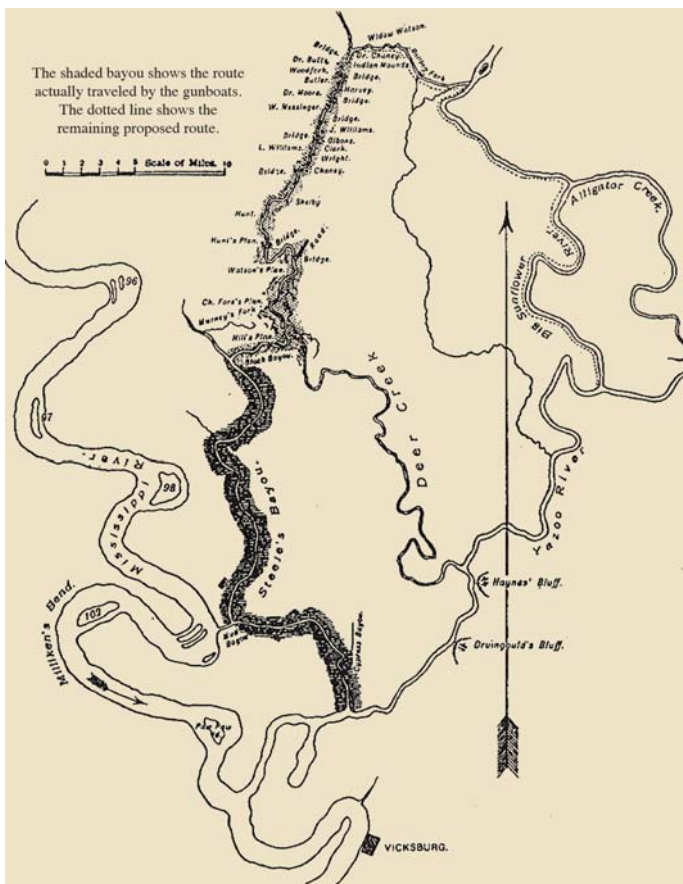


# Steele's Bayou Expedition

driving tour guide





## The Steele's Bayou Expedition March 1863

The Steele's Bayou Expedition, winding through 100 miles of narrow, twisting Mississippi Delta waterways, was the last and most extraordinary of Major General Ulysses Grant's unsuccessful attempts aimed at taking the strategic city of Vicksburg during the American Civil War.

Rear Admiral David D. Porter of the U.S. Navy commanded the squadron that entered Steele's Bayou from the Yazoo River in March of 1863. The route went nearly 30 miles up Steele's Bayou to Black Bayou, four miles through Black Bayou to Deer Creek, and then north 30 more miles to Rolling Fork Creek. From there, Porter's gunboats would follow Rolling Fork Creek to the Big Sunflower River, and then into the Yazoo, a total distance of approximately 100 miles. Major General William T. Sherman coordinated and led a division of Union infantry which marched in support of the gunboats.

The plan for gaining control of the Mississippi River was to isolate Vicksburg by outflanking Confederate batteries at Snyder's Bluff and gaining control of the Yazoo River and Mississippi Delta.

Although the expedition ultimately failed, the willingness of Union officers to risk failure at the expense of reputation and career was a clear illustration of courage and determination. The Steele's Bayou Expedition typified the impact of environment on military operations and exemplified the traits of cooperation and the tenacity of Union leadership.

## A Risky Mission

The expedition was considered especially risky because the bayous and creeks of the lower Mississippi Delta had never been navigated by vessels as large as the Union gunboats. Admiral Porter had determined that his ironclads could navigate these smaller waterways, but he knew it would not be easy. Obstacles such as cypresses and willows would have to be removed by the crews as the gunboats moved upstream.

The five “City Series” ironclads that participated in this expedition – *Carondelet*, *Cincinnati*, *Pittsburg*, *Mound City* and *Louisville* – were attempting what had never been attempted before. *Carondelet* and accompanying vessels were the advance element of what Porter would later call “perhaps the most remarkable expedition ever undertaken.” His scouting trip on March 13 up Steele’s Bayou confirmed his belief that it was possible to move large gunboats like *Carondelet* through the waterways of the lower Mississippi Delta, eventually re-entering the Yazoo River between Yazoo City and Snyder’s Bluff.

The timing of this expedition was not coincidental, as Porter was well aware of the normal flood cycle of the Mississippi and its related bayous. Prior to 1928, most Delta waterways would naturally flood and overrun their banks each spring. The annual spring flood begins in late February or early March and continues to rise to a normal crest sometime in early April, although it sometimes does not occur until late April or even early June.

In addition to the annual flood, the water level in Deer Creek was augmented by water pouring through a gap blown in the levee at Yazoo Pass on February 3, 1863, as a part of an earlier failed expedition. The high and rising water was tough on Sherman and his infantry, but it was ideal for Porter and his gunboats.

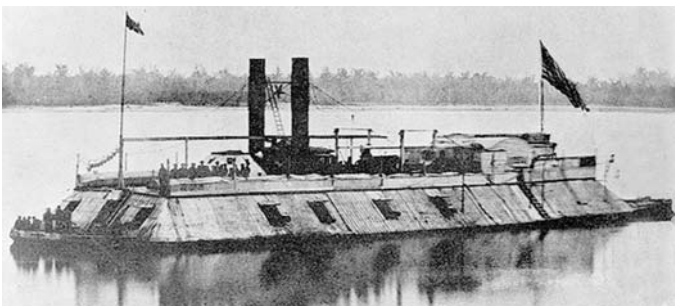
In many of the narrow, tree-clogged confines of the lower Delta waterways, Porter’s ironclads would have to proceed in single file, with no room to maneuver or even turn around. A small Confederate force could easily obstruct the progress of the gunboats by felling trees across the stream. If that happened, the expedition would be doomed.

Late on March 13, *Carondelet* entered Steele’s Bayou. She was joined on March 14, by the remaining ironclads. The next day, General Grant accompanied Porter aboard the ram *General Price* to examine the route for himself. The going was very difficult, with the high superstructure of the boat suffering damage. Nevertheless, by sunset Grant was convinced that the expedition had a real chance of success. The morning of March 16, he issued orders which set Sherman’s infantry in motion.

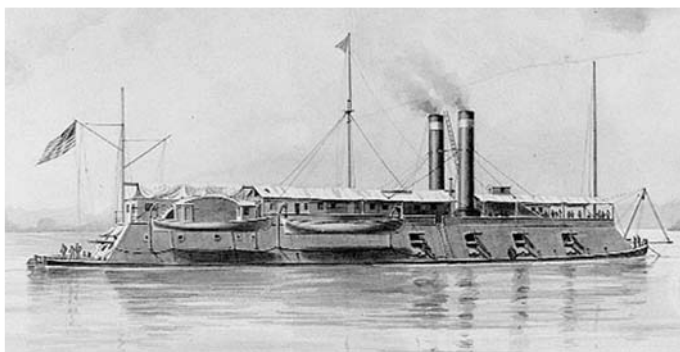
Before any major infantry force could enter the bayous, the channel had to be cleared for transport steamers. On March 16, two detachments of



R. Adm. David Dixon Porter



USS Carondelet



*USS Louisville*

50 men each boarded the transports *Silver Wave* and *Diligent*. These specialist pioneer troops, equipped with axes, saws, large spikes, and coils of heavy rope, were to clear trees and limbs from the channels of Steele's and Black Bayous. For both groups, the work would be grueling, and the transports would suffer heavy damage.

Troops disembarked at Eagle Bend on the Mississippi River and hiked along Muddy Bayou to Steele's Bayou where they were picked up by transports to make the journey to Hill's plantation, a staging ground for infantry.

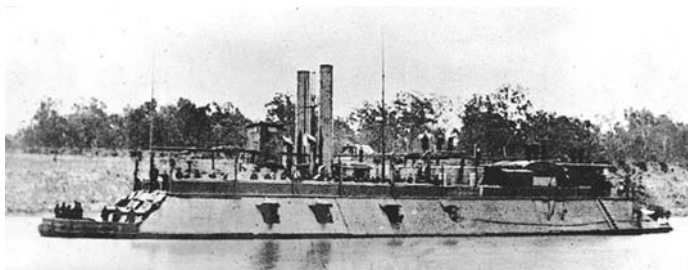
One of the most difficult parts of the journey for Porter's gunboats was the short trip through Black Bayou which connects Steele's Bayou and Deer Creek. This narrow waterway was surrounded by thick vegetation making that stretch of the expedition difficult.

With great skill, *Carondelet*, *Cincinnati*, *Pittsburg*, *Mound City*, and *Louisville* finally made it to Hill's plantation at the confluence of Black Bayou and Deer Creek on March 16. At Hill's Sherman met Porter and the admiral accompanied him about three miles up Deer Creek, as far as Fore's plantation.

Sherman was not convinced that large numbers of troops could march through the flooded land along the bayous and Deer Creek. Despite his doubts, Sherman was determined to cooperate with Porter, and hold the position at Hill's plantation. While awaiting the arrival of more troops, Sherman's men were hard at work fortifying the encampment there.

After leaving Hill's plantation and moving up Deer Creek on March 17, Porter's ironclads made steady progress. An advance scouting party reported the countryside free of Confederate troops. However, on the afternoon of March 18, *Carondelet* ran upon a log. Somewhere north of Clark's plantation in the present town of Cary, Union forces began to encounter Confederate resistance in the form of trees dropped across the creek. Every tree could mean hours of delay to Porter's gunboats – hours the Confederates could use to strengthen their resistance.

From this point on, the expedition would be in a race to see if Porter's fleet, still unsupported by Sherman's infantry, could force its way through to the Yazoo before Confederate troops could surround and capture or destroy the gunboats.



*USS Mound City*

The Confederates had been slow to learn of the presence of the expedition. Not until the night of March 17 did Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, in overall command of Confederate forces in Mississippi, receive a coded telegram at his headquarters in Jackson from Major General Carter Stevenson, commander of the Vicksburg garrison. In it, Stevenson informed Pemberton that Union gunboats had gone up Steele's Bayou and were in Deer Creek. Stevenson also reported that he was dispatching a force to Rolling Fork immediately and would emplace a battery of artillery at the mouth of Deer Creek. Pemberton cabled that information to Confederate President Jefferson Davis the following day.

The force which Stevenson dispatched to Rolling Fork was a small team led by Lieutenant Colonel Samuel W. Ferguson consisting of a battalion of sharpshooters, a company of cavalry, and a six-gun detachment of light artillery. The force had been operating in the Delta for some time and was the only effective Confederate resistance to the expedition as of March 18. Ferguson dispatched his cavalry to the community of Rolling Fork to oppose the expedition



*Lt. Colonel  
Samuel W. Ferguson*

On March 19, Ferguson's remaining force arrived at the junction of Rolling Fork Creek and the Big Sunflower River. Ferguson was determined to slow the Union advance long enough for reinforcements to arrive. However, high water impeded Ferguson's progress.

Meanwhile, Ferguson's troops in Rolling Fork were busily felling trees to block Rolling Fork Creek. On the morning of March 20, he reported that he had been able to get three pieces of artillery to Rolling Fork, and that enough trees had been felled to detain the boats two or three days, if unopposed. However, Ferguson admitted that he had no clear idea of the Union force opposing him.

Sometime later that morning, Ferguson's small force attacked the advance guard of Porter's expedition, led by Lieutenant John M. Murphy, commander of *Carondelet*. Murphy had been dispatched by Porter with 300 men and two boat howitzers – small bronze guns often used by landing parties – to hold Rolling Fork by occupying the nearby Indian mounds.

Three of Ferguson's guns were emplaced at a homestead, known locally as the Widow Watson's, on the south bank of Rolling Fork Creek, about a mile east of Deer Creek. From there, they could easily support the infantry. However, the artillery soon depleted its ammunition and Ferguson had to withdraw his troops beyond the range of the fleet's large guns.

Undaunted, Ferguson's men soon brought up their remaining three pieces of artillery to Widow Watson's farm, replenished ammunition supplies, and prepared to renew the attack. Ferguson's infantry again surged forward, supported by the artillery, and again drove the Federal troops away. However, just as earlier in the day, the artillery ran out of ammunition, and a frustrated Ferguson had to call off the attack.



*Brig. General  
Winfield S. Featherston*

Shortly before 5 p.m., Brigadier General Winfield S. Featherston arrived in Rolling Fork with much-needed reinforcements, including infantry, ammunition, and additional artillery pieces. Upon his arrival, Featherston, who had assumed command from Ferguson, positioned his troops and artillery for another attack.

Featherston's two artillery pieces were placed at Widow Watson's alongside four of Ferguson's guns. Ferguson's other two guns were moved

across Rolling Fork Creek and placed on the east bank of Deer Creek. Confederate sharpshooters were placed on the south bank of Rolling Fork Creek, extending to Deer Creek, with two infantry regiments in the woods on the left of the Confederate line, extending south of the gunboats.

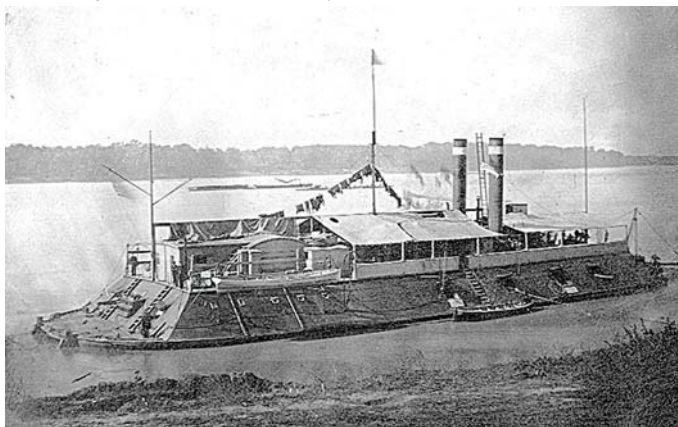
Shortly before sunset, the Confederate artillery opened fire. With the two guns placed on Deer Creek, Union forces were caught in a crossfire. Their fatigue parties were quickly driven back to the gunboats, and the boat howitzers and men atop the Indian mound were forced to withdraw in confusion. However, the Confederate infantry never emerged from the woods to rush the fleet.

Once Union troops were safely out of the line of fire, Porter's big guns roared into action and soon silenced the Confederate artillery. By nightfall, the battle was over. The third attack against Porter's fleet had failed, but the gunboats were halted and would advance no farther.

While Porter's leading boats were battling Ferguson's troops, *Louisville*, last in line, had fired upon Confederate troops on the east bank of Deer Creek. These troops were Captain George Barnes's cavalry, who had been sent down Deer Creek to fell trees in an attempt to block the fleet's withdrawal. Porter spoke with local blacks who had been ordered by Confederate troops to fell trees across Deer Creek.

That night, Porter finally accepted the danger facing his fleet. He had pleaded with Sherman to send troops as quickly as possible, sending a message hidden in a tobacco plug and carried by a slave, Sam Tuberville. Sherman replied that he would do everything possible to push troops through to Hill's, but that providing the number of requested men for Rolling Fork was impossible. Without Sherman's infantry reinforcement, Porter was forced to accept the inevitable and order retreat.

The gunboat fleet backed slowly down Deer Creek in the darkness.



*USS Cincinnati*

At daylight on March 21, Confederate artillery, which had occupied the Indian mound evacuated by Union forces the previous day, opened fire on *Carondelet* and *Cincinnati*. The gunboats returned fire, and the Confederate guns were silenced. Throughout the day, Confederate sharpshooters harassed the slowly withdrawing fleet, firing from behind trees along both banks of the creek.

Shortly before 3 p.m., the crew of *Louisville* saw the advance guard of Sherman's infantry, under the command of Colonel Giles A. Smith, approaching along the east bank of the creek. The 800 men with Colonel Smith were the only troops Sherman had available to respond to Porter's urgent plea for reinforcements. They had been on the march from Hill's plantation since daybreak.

Along the way, Smith's men had encountered numerous trees cut



*USS Pittsburg*

down across Deer Creek, beginning about six miles above Hill's. To prevent further enemy work in that area, Smith detached three companies of infantry to occupy a position near some Indian mounds on the east bank of Deer Creek, in the present-day community of Cary.

Porter was glad to see Colonel Smith, but he was still not convinced that the gunboats could proceed without more infantry support. He knew from smoke on the eastern horizon that Confederate reinforcements were near, and he had no way to know when or if Sherman's two additional brigades would arrive.

Sometime that afternoon, the gunboats' withdrawal was brought to a halt by a sunken coal barge that blocked the channel of Deer Creek, this presented a more serious obstacle than the felled trees. Work to clear the wreckage began immediately but took several hours. Meanwhile, Confederate sharpshooters kept up a constant fire upon the gunboats, making any removal of obstacles extremely dangerous.

Throughout the evening and well into the night, fatigue parties from *Louisville*, aided by an officer from *Carondelet*, worked to remove the sunken coal barge. While the sailors worked on the sunken barge, Colonel



*A Typical Gunboat Crew*

Smith's troops fanned out along the bank of Deer Creek for several miles, keeping Confederate sharpshooters at bay and capturing three prisoners. At 10 p.m., the barge was blown up, and *Louisville* began backing down the creek at 10:30. By 4 a.m. on March 22, *Carondelet*, at the northern end of the fleet, had also begun to back down the creek.

While Porter's force was bottled up in Deer Creek, General Sherman was trying to speed reinforcements north. By nightfall on March 21, the remainder of First Brigade, along with Second Brigade, had arrived in Black Bayou about two and one-half miles from Hill's plantation. Sherman met them there, on the south bank of the bayou, distributed candles to the troops, and led them through the dark canebrake to Hill's. At 8 a.m. the next morning, Sherman put the troops on the road leading up the east bank of Deer Creek.

By the morning of March 22, the Confederates had been reinforced by troops which had arrived during the night, bringing much-needed artillery ammunition. Featherston ordered Ferguson's sharpshooters to work from the west bank of Deer Creek while infantry moved down the east bank to get below the fleet.

Some infantry and the artillery were to open fire upon the fleet and keep them occupied. At about 10 a.m., one Alabama regiment made contact with Union troops at the ruins of Dr. Moore's plantation. Soon thereafter, the Alabamans skirmished with Union troops and were heavily shelled

in return by the gunboats. At 2:25 p.m., the Confederate artillery opened fire on *Louisville*.

Meanwhile, Sherman's troops were traveling up Deer Creek to join the fleet. Sherman pressed the men forward, and at about 3 p.m., the head of the column was fired upon by Confederates from the woods along Deer Creek. Union troops quickly responded and drove them away to the north, keeping up the pursuit for nearly two miles. While this skirmish was occurring, the fleet was near Egremont Plantation with the crew of *Louisville* hard at work removing a huge, intertwined obstacle of trees blocking the creek.

On March 22, Sherman and Porter met again. Porter's fleet had taken a beating, and the men were near exhaustion. With the coal barge sunk, fuel would soon run short, and *General Price*, the fleet's provision vessel, could not make it through Black Bayou. Porter considered all of these factors, and despite Sherman's arrival and the anticipated arrival of the remaining brigade of the division, decided not to try to continue the expedition. Besides, *Carondelet*, at the north end of the fleet, was still firing at Confederate troops from time to time.

During the evening of March 22, through heavy rain, the Union withdrawal continued. Troops of Second Brigade escorted the gunboats along the east bank of Deer Creek as far as Wright's plantation, where they encamped for the night. The fleet, however, continued its slow progress downstream.

At 9 p.m., *Louisville* passed the camp at Wright's, paused for two hours, and then continued on her way until 4 a.m. on March 23. *Carondelet* made it as far as Shelby's plantation at 3:45 a.m., after breaking her smokestacks during the night.

The retreat continued at dawn as soldiers emerged from their sodden bivouacs and resumed their march south. Hampered by rain and a muddy quagmire of a road, the troops covered only five miles before stopping for the night. The gunboats continued backing downstream. Porter came aboard *Louisville* at 9:30 a.m., and at noon, two companies of infantry boarded the boat. At the north end of the fleet, *Carondelet* passed Hunt's plantation at noon, and continued downstream until midnight, when she tied up to the bank until morning.

March 23 was hard on the Confederates as well. Featherston's troops were exhausted from three days of fighting, rations were short, and the artillery was out of ammunition again. As a result, the Confederate troops remained in camp all day, suffering through the rain, and hoping for more supplies to arrive.

When dawn came on March 24, it was still raining. Union troops awoke and prepared to resume the march. The gunboat fleet got an early start, with *Louisville* getting underway at 5:40 a.m. At 8 a.m., just before the Union infantry moved out, *Carondelet* stopped and took aboard 125 sick and feeble men.

The looting and destruction of plantations along the creek was ongoing as the gunboats retreated. At 11:30 a.m., the log of *Louisville* recorded that



*Bayou Navigation in Dixie*  
This April 11, 1863 cover of *Harper's Weekly* illustrating the difficulties of bayou navigation encountered by the Union fleet (note the collapsed smokestack) exhibited for General Grant's army.





*...e, a sketch by Theodore R. Davis  
Weekly shows the problems Union boats were  
(okestacks) and the interest northern readers  
s operations in the Mississippi Delta*

she tied up to the bank and sent the port watch and all of the soldiers ashore to roll bales of cotton aboard.

Near the opposite end of the fleet, *Cincinnati* stopped at another plantation to take aboard 60 bales of cotton and a box of medicine. At 3 p.m., *Carondelet* arrived and took aboard 13 bales of cotton. What could not be carried was destroyed, and gins and other outbuildings were left burning.

By daybreak on March 25, all of the fleet and its escorting troops had returned to Hill's plantation, at the junction of Deer Creek and Black Bayou. As a precaution against surprise by the Confederates, an infantry regiment was ordered to take position on Fore's plantation, just north of Hill's plantation.

Early that evening, their advanced company encountered three regiments of Confederate infantry in line of battle, with one regiment forward as skirmishers. Two Union companies engaged the Confederates, who did not press their attack. The Union infantry withdrew, leaving a small picket force behind.

Thursday, March 26, dawned clear and colder. On the gun-

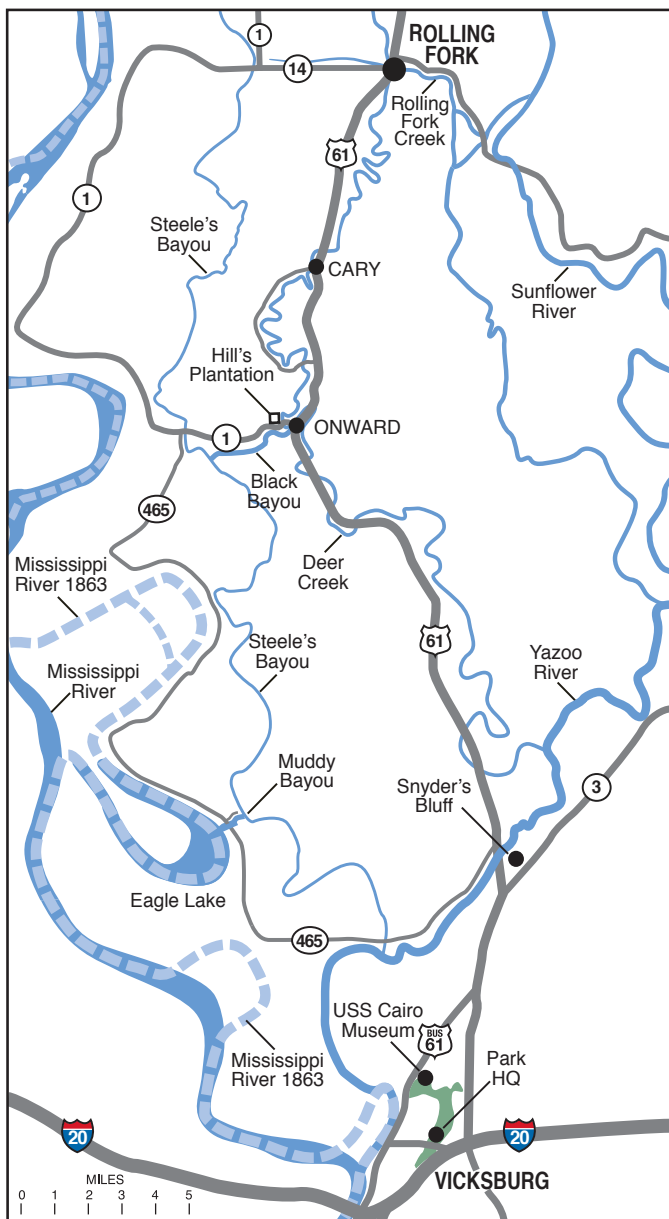
boats, many of the hands had slept at their duty stations, in the event of a Confederate rush. During the day, the fleet took aboard troops and ferried them back through Black Bayou into Steele's Bayou.

At 5:25 p.m., *Louisville* entered Steele's Bayou, carrying a regiment of infantry from Third Brigade and the artillery. At 6 p.m., *Carondelet* emerged into Steele's Bayou, carrying another Third Brigade regiment. With that, the expedition effectively ended. From the confluence of Steele's and Black Bayous, the gunboats, transports, tugs, and mortar boats made their way back to where the whole adventure had started – either to the fleet anchorage near the mouth of the Yazoo River or to camp at Young's Point, Louisiana.

## A Confederate Victory

The Steele's Bayou expedition was not a success for the Union; the Confederates were victorious in using the Delta terrain to their advantage. The combined efforts of Ferguson's and Featherston's soldiers successfully thwarted Porter's expedition. However, the expedition did illustrate the determination of Union officers to capture Vicksburg, the city President Abraham Lincoln had called the "key" to winning the war.

Grant did eventually capture Vicksburg, on July 4, 1863, after a month and half long siege of the city, in which he was supported by both Porter's flotilla and Sherman's infantry. This victory effectively split the Confederacy in two and gave the Union control of the Mississippi River. The Civil War, however, continued for almost two more years. Federal resolve, characterized by tenacity, cooperation and risk, like that shown in the Steele's Bayou Expedition, secured eventual victory for the Union.



## Driving Directions

The Steele's Bayou Expedition was considered especially risky because the bayous and creeks of the lower Mississippi Delta had never been navigated by vessels as large as the Union gunboats. Admiral Porter had determined that these ironclads could navigate these smaller waterways, but he knew it would not be easy. Obstacles such as cypresses and willows would have to be removed by the crews as the gunboats moved upstream.

The following tour will allow you to follow the path of Union soldiers and sailors as they attempted a courageous and uncertain mission through the treacherous waters of the Mississippi Delta. Keep in mind that much of the land along the driving part of this tour was covered with several feet of water when the expedition was attempted.

While on the tour, drive carefully, signal before pulling over, and please respect private property. Distances given are approximate.

## 1. Begin – Cairo Museum – Wayside Panel

GPS coordinates N32° 22.538' W90° 52.024'

Begin your tour at the *U.S.S. Cairo* Museum where you may view *Cairo*, a City Class gunboat nearly identical in size and shape to her sisters that were used in the Steele's Bayou Expedition. Inside the museum is a boat howitzer from *USS Pittsburg*, one of the boats on this expedition. On the marker near *Cairo*, you will find a description of the gunboats and the vessels that accompanied them on the Steele's Bayou Expedition.



From the museum, exit the park on Fort Hill Road, which becomes Cherry Street, drive 1.6 miles then turn right onto First East Street which ends at Washington Street.

Turn right, drive 5.8 miles to U.S. Hwy. 61. Turn left onto U.S. Hwy. 61 North. Drive 4 miles to Mississippi Hwy. 3 and exit east toward Yazoo City for 1 mile. Snyder's Bluff is on the left side of the Highway (There is a pull in).

## 2. Snyder's Bluff – Wayside Panel

GPS coordinates

N 32°29.708' W90°47.946'

The Confederate defenses along the Walnut Hills, north of Vicksburg, were anchored here, at Snyder's Bluff. The powerful batteries erected at this site, overlooking the Yazoo River, prevented Union naval excursions upriver and served to protect the Confederate Navy Yard at Yazoo City. In the spring of 1863, the United States Navy sought to turn these defenses by ascending Steele's Bayou and, by navigating an interconnected chain of waterways, gain access to the mighty Yazoo north of Snyder's Bluff.



Return to U.S. Hwy. 61, turn right and drive north 1.2 miles to Mississippi Hwy. 465. Turn left toward Eagle Lake onto Mississippi Hwy. 465. (As you are driving, you will cross over Steele's Bayou and can see its confluence with the Yazoo River. This was the starting point for this entire campaign.) Travel for 14.1 miles to Messina Landing Boat Ramp on Eagle Lake. Turn left into the boat ramp parking lot to view Eagle Lake.

## 3. Eagle Lake – No Panel

GPS coordinates N32° 29.465' W90° 59.072'

Eagle Lake is an oxbow lake, one of many in the Delta that were cut off from the river as it changed its natural course over the years. In 1863, it was part of the Mississippi River, known as Eagle Bend.

Just after the Civil War, the river cut through the neck at the base of the Eagle Bend meander loop and converted it into the modern-day Eagle Lake.

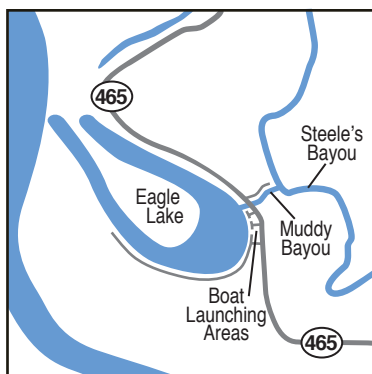
Infantry troops accompanying the expedition unloaded from transports at Eagle Bend with plans to march  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile along Muddy Bayou to Steele's Bayou where they would board transports heading up the bayou.

Return to Mississippi Hwy. 465 and turn left, travel for 1.8 miles. You cross over Muddy Bayou and there is a dirt road to the right, turn right, if the road is dry you may drive down it  $\frac{8}{10}$  of a mile close to Steele's Bayou. This is not recommended for large vehicles that are difficult to back up or if the ground is muddy.

#### 4. Muddy Bayou – No Panel

GPS coordinates N32° 30.804' W90° 59.583'

Muddy Bayou is a swamp drain that connects Steele's Bayou with the Mississippi River. When infantry troops accompanying the expedition disembarked from transports at Eagle Bend, they discovered there was no firm dry ground along Muddy Bayou. The soldiers had to construct a road and two temporary bridges to reach Steele's Bayou. This task delayed the Union infantry for nearly 36 hours.



Once the troops made their way to Steele's Bayou, they camped on the narrow strip of dry ground along the bank and waited to board transports. The first group of 950 men boarded *Silver Wave* on the evening of March 19. The last units did not reach Hill's plantation, a staging area for infantry approximately 35 miles from here, until the morning of March 23.

For many of the troops with the longest wait, food grew scarce. They had been issued only three days of rations when they disembarked at Eagle Bend.

Return to Mississippi Hwy. 465 and from here you may either turn left, back to U.S. Hwy. 61 the way you came, then take Hwy. 61 north to Onward, or you may turn right on Mississippi Hwy. 465 where you will drive along the Mississippi River levee. There are several cattle guards along the levee and cell service is spotty, if this concerns you, you should return to Hwy. 61.

If you return to U.S. Hwy. 61, turn left onto U.S. Hwy. 61 and drive north for 18.2 miles. At the Intersection of U.S. Hwy. 61 and Mississippi Hwy. 1, turn left onto Hwy. 1, Hill's plantation is  $\frac{7}{10}$  mile on the right.

If you choose to ride on the levee you will drive north on Mississippi Hwy. 465 for 5.5 miles and then ascend onto the levee following Hwy. 465 to the right (watch for cattle along the road). This is the Mississippi River levee which has held back Mississippi River floods in the Delta since the 1927 flood. Travel along the levee for 11 miles and then follow Mississippi Hwy. 465 down on the right. Continue to follow Hwy. 465 for 5.5 miles until you reach Mississippi Hwy 1.

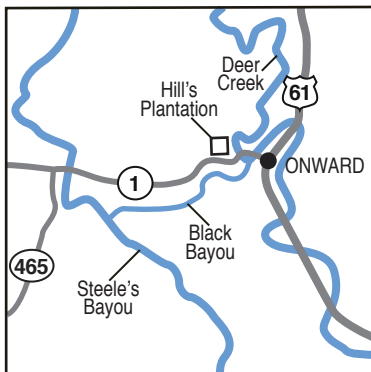
Turn right onto Mississippi Hwy. 1. After about 3 miles you will begin to see Black Bayou on the right. In 1863, Black Bayou was larger than it is today, but it was still much smaller than the two bodies of water it connects, Steele's Bayou and Deer Creek. This was an extremely difficult part of the journey for Porter's flotilla, not

only because the waterway was narrow, but also because it was surrounded by thick vegetation. Hill's plantation will be 4.2 miles on the left.

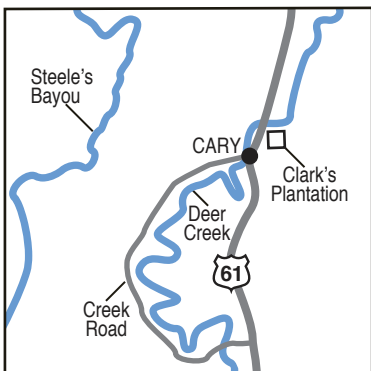
### 5. Hill's Plantation – Wayside Panel

GPS coordinates N32° 43.394'  
W90° 57.030'

Hill's plantation is located at the confluence of Black Bayou and Deer Creek. Making the turn into Deer Creek from Black Bayou was an arduous task for the men aboard the gunboats requiring great skill and patience. Hill's plantation also became a staging point for infantry troops and the headquarters for General Sherman during the expedition.



From here continue straight to U.S. Hwy 61 approximately 1/2 mile (if you came off of Hwy. 61 to get here, you must turn around). Turn left on U.S. Hwy. 61 and drive for 2 miles until you see Creek Road on your left, turn left. Follow Creek Road that travels beside Deer Creek for 6 miles until it meets U.S. Hwy. 61 again.



### 6. Clark's Plantation – No Panel

GPS coordinates N32°48.331'  
W90° 55.623'

When you reach U.S. Hwy. 61 you are in Cary near the location of Clark's plantation. It is here that the gunboats first began encountering Confederate resistance in the form of trees felled into the creek.

Turn left on Highway 61(north). Travel 6.5 miles, turn left at the South Rolling

Fork exit before the Red Barn. Reset your trip meter. At 3/10 mile and you will see a couple of Indian mounds on the right.

### 7. Rolling Fork Mounds

Wayside Panel

GPS coordinates N32 53.744 W90 52.836

These prehistoric Indian mounds were occupied first by Union troops, who dragged a couple of boat howitzer guns onto a mound, shooting at Confederate troops entrenched about 1 mile to the east. Later, after the Federal troops began to retreat, the mounds were occupied by Confederate soldiers firing at the boats as they attempted to back down the creek.

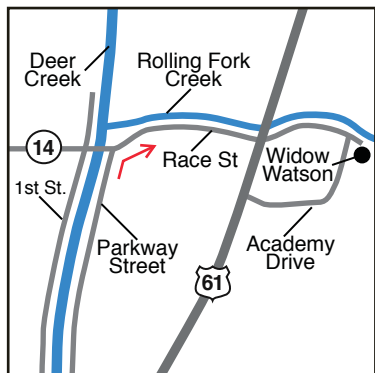


Continue straight on this street (Parkway) and you will come to the confluence of Deer Creek and Rolling Fork Creek at 1 mile on your trip meter. Veer right and follow this road along Rolling Fork Creek to the intersection of Race Street and U.S. Hwy. 61 (1.5 on trip meter). At the stop sign, where Race Street intersects with U.S. Hwy. 61 go straight across the highway; follow the road to the left along the creek (this may be heavily trafficked between 2:30 and 3:15 when school is in session) and continue to follow the road as it circles to the right going in front of the school's gym. Stop and look to the east at the fields behind the school.

### 8. Widow Watson's – No Panel

GPS coordinates: N32° 54.281 W90° 52.079

The Confederate cannons emplaced their artillery near the Widow Watson's homestead approximately 1 mile east of the junction of Rolling Fork and Deer



Creeks. This would be in the fields behind this school, located on the south bank of Rolling Fork Creek. From here Confederate artillery shot at Federal troops that were firing from the Indian mounds to the west.

Continue to follow the circle back to the Frontage Road. At the stop sign, turn right, return to U.S. Hwy. 61 (2.3 on trip meter). Turn right onto Hwy. 61, cross the

bridge over Rolling Fork Creek and turn left on McLaurin Ave (2.4). Follow this road until it ends and you must turn right. Park in one of the spaces here. (2.75 on trip meter).

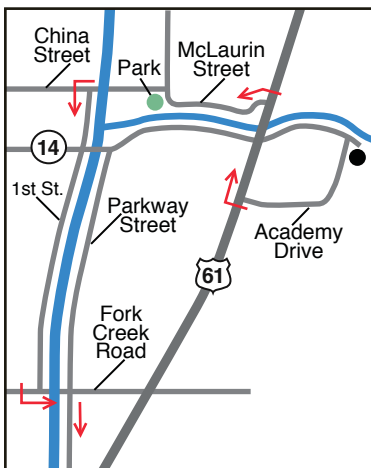
### 9. Rolling Fork Creek near junction of Deer Creek -

Wayside Panel

GPS coordinates: N32° 54.430 W 90° 52.582

You may park here, get out and walk over the foot bridge that spans Rolling Fork Creek; you can see the junction of Deer Creek to the west. Confederate troops were spread out along the creeks shooting at the Federals on the mounds and on the gunboats. Approximately ½ mile south of the junction of Deer and Rolling Fork Creeks marks the farthest point north that Union gunboats advanced in the Steele's Bayou Expedition. Rolling Fork Creek had been blocked by felled trees; Porter would not get his boats through to the Sunflower River.

Back out of the space heading north, and at the stop sign turn left onto China Street. Follow China Street to the 2nd stop sign (just after crossing Deer Creek) and turn left. This gives you a view of the creek and junction from the west side. Follow this road (First Street) until it ends, turn left, then right on Parkway, and you will be at U.S. Hwy. 61 again.



Turn right onto U.S. Hwy.61 heading south; travel 2.5 miles to Egremont Road. Turn left on Egremont Road. From here you can get a nice view of Deer Creek as you cross it and view a marker at the location of Egremont Plantation.

### 10. Egremont

**Plantation** – Wayside Panel  
 GPS coordinates N32° 51.600'  
 W90° 54.158'

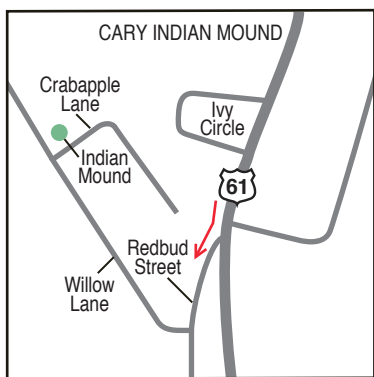
Confederates tried to keep the gunboats trapped in Deer Creek. It was around Egremont Plantation that the crew of *Louisville* had to remove a huge, intertwined obstacle of trees blocking its retreat.

Turn around and return to U.S. Hwy. 61, turn left and drive south 4.3 miles to Cary. Turn right on Red Bud Street then veer right onto Willow Lane. The mound, which is now property of the Archaeological Conservancy, sits on the corner of Crabapple and Willow.

### 11. Cary Mound – Wayside Panel

GPS N32° 48.212' W90° 55.883'

In 1863 there were several mounds in Cary; this is the only one remaining. These pre-historic Indian mounds were high, dry ground for observing troop movement and resistance in the area. Colonel



Giles Smith posted men on mounds in this vicinity to prevent Confederates from felling more trees in attempts to block the gunboats' movement down the creek.

Turn around and return to U.S. Hwy 61. From here you may return to Vicksburg by turning right and following U.S. Hwy. 61 South.

At the time of the Steele's Bayou Expedition, Deer Creek was fed by the

Mississippi River and it frequently flooded during high water. It was a major transportation route for Delta residents and merchants before the current highway system. Since the Mississippi River levee has been in place, that is no longer the case, which explains why the creek doesn't have the volume of water today it did then. In addition, various crossings, dumps and diversions have been built along the creek over the years impeding water flow. However, the creek's route has never been altered, so it followed the same meandering path in 1863 that you have seen today.

Your tour of the area traveled during the Steele's Bayou Expedition of the Civil War is now complete.



#### Acknowledgements:

Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership has developed this driving tour and booklet with a grant through the National Park Service as a part of the Lower Mississippi Delta Initiatives. Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership is a non-profit organization established with the mission of "promoting and enhancing the economic and environmental health of Mississippi's Lower Delta." [www.lowerdelta.org](http://www.lowerdelta.org).

Primary research was conducted by Peter Cash, PhD. Sincere thanks to Peter for all his work. The Vicksburg National Military Park provided assistance in the development of this booklet, special thanks to park employees, Robbie Smith and Terry Winschel. South Delta historians Ben Lamensdorf and Charles Weissinger and the Friends of the Vicksburg Campaign and Historic Trail, as well as Cavett Taff provided encouragement, support and advice - thank you.

The following professionals were extremely helpful with this project:

Maps, cover illustration and design by John M. Murphy.

Wayside panels designed and produced by Exhibits Etc.

Project coordinator, Meg Cooper

For further reading on the Steele's Bayou Expedition and the Vicksburg Campaign see:

The Vicksburg Campaign, Vol. 1,  
by Edwin C. Bearss

Memoirs of General William T. Sherman, Vol. 1,  
by William T. Sherman

"Gunboats in a Ditch:

The Steele's Bayou Expedition, 1863,"

by Myron J. Smith,

Journal of Mississippi History, Vol. XXXVII



Mississippi's  
**Lower Delta**  
Partnership