

## Wilson's Creek National Battlefield

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The Battle of Wilson's Creek, named for the stream that crosses the area, was a bitter one fought between defending Union forces and invading Confederate forces for control of Missouri. The battle took place ten miles southwest of Springfield, Missouri, on August 10, 1861, the first year of the Civil War.

Although Union forces under the command of Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon did not win the battle, they succeeded in keeping Missouri under Union control. Their success helped strengthen the position of Kentucky Unionists, who also kept much of their state loyal to the Union. Historians believe secession by Missouri and Kentucky would have strengthened chances of a Confederate victory in the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

Brigadier General Lyon died in the Battle of Wilson's Creek. Public Law 86-434 established Wilson's Creek National Battlefield in 1960. Following the National Park Service's acquisition of 1,752 acres of the battlefield site, Public Law 91-554 provided \$2,285,000 in 1970 for development of the battlefield.

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield is located 200 miles southwest of St. Louis, Missouri, 180 miles southeast of Kansas City, Missouri, and ten miles southwest of Springfield, Missouri. (Figure 1) It is the only national historic landmark in the surrounding ten-county region. The 1,752 acres of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield are typical of the Ozarks—rolling, hilly, and rocky. The area had changed little since the 1861 battle, and land was used primarily for farming until it was acquired by the National Park Service.

The first changes in the park area were minor site improvements to meet initial and short-term visitor needs. The Visitors' Center and the Tour Road followed.

The Visitors' Center, with its displays and fiberoptic interpretation of the battle, sets the stage for the struggle that was the Battle of Wilson's Creek and conveys Missouri's 1861 political and social climate. For many years

before the Civil War, Missouri had been the scene of bitter conflict over the extension of slavery; the state was a microcosm of the nation. The Visitors' Center's interpretive program places the struggle in Missouri in the context of the Civil War as a whole and gives a sense of the conflict's fratricidal nature.

Interpretation of the Battle of Wilson's Creek takes place along the length of the 4.8-mile Tour Road. Using living history, recorded narrations, and the historic scene, interpretive areas help visitors understand not only what occurred on August 10, 1861, but also what it meant to the area and the nation.

The park has four major interpretive areas:

1. the hills and valley of Wilson's Creek,
2. the Ray House, from which John Ray observed the battle,
3. Sharp's Farm, which was Union Colonel Franz Sigel's third deployment of artillery, and
4. Bloody Hill, the scene of the fiercest fighting in the battle.

Our firm, Tuttle-Ayers-Woodward Co., which is a division of Shafer, Kline & Warren, P.A., was selected in 1978 to be a member of the consultant team that would design and develop the Visitor's Center and Tour Road according to the National Park Service Master Plan. (Figure 2) Our firm's planning and design responsibilities for the Visitors' Center were:

1. relocation of an intersection at the park entrance, plans for service drives, park access roads, and parking lot;
2. complete domestic water supply system including chlorinization from a deep-well source;
3. fire protection system with a 50,000-gallon underground reservoir;
4. physical/chemical sanitary treatment facility; and

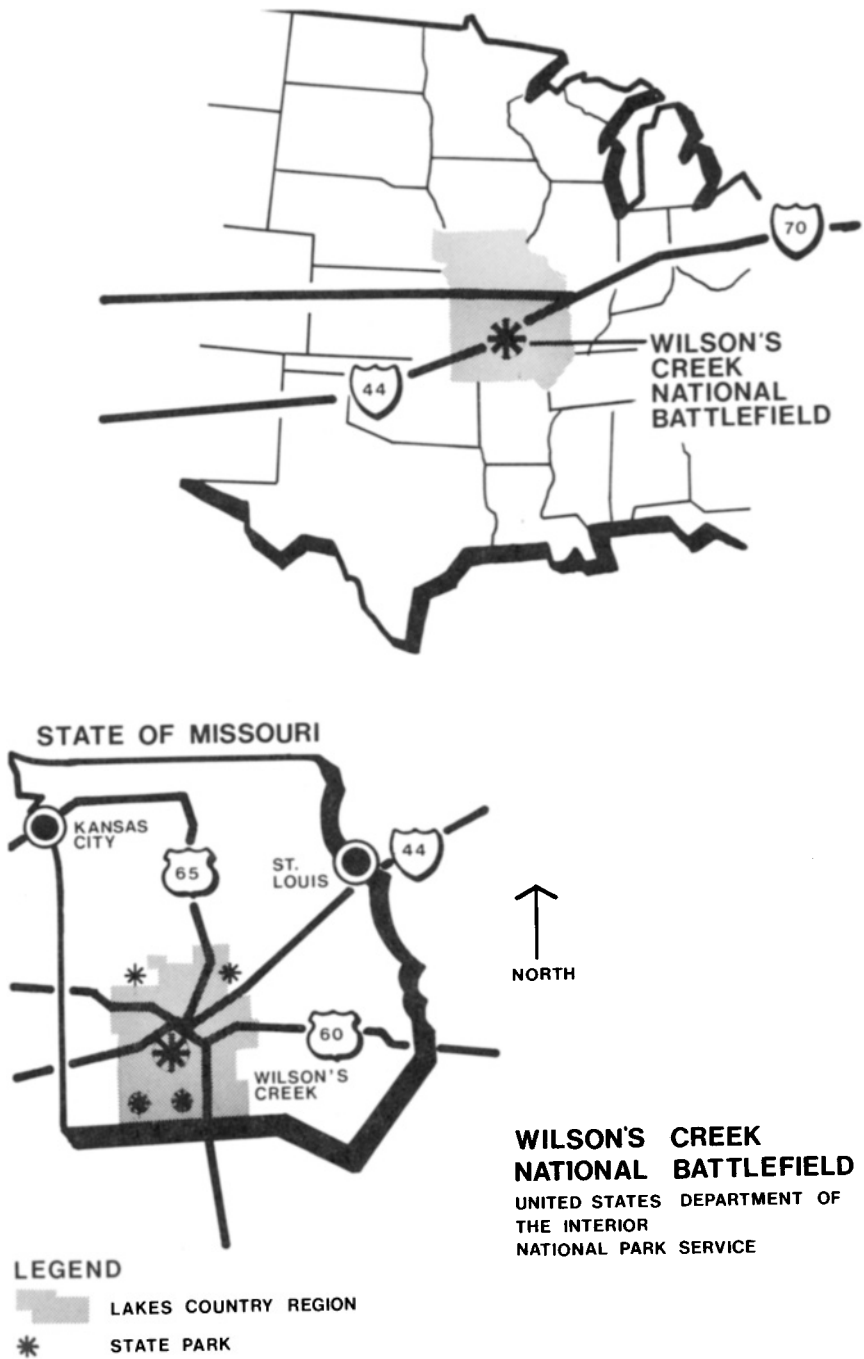


Fig. 1.

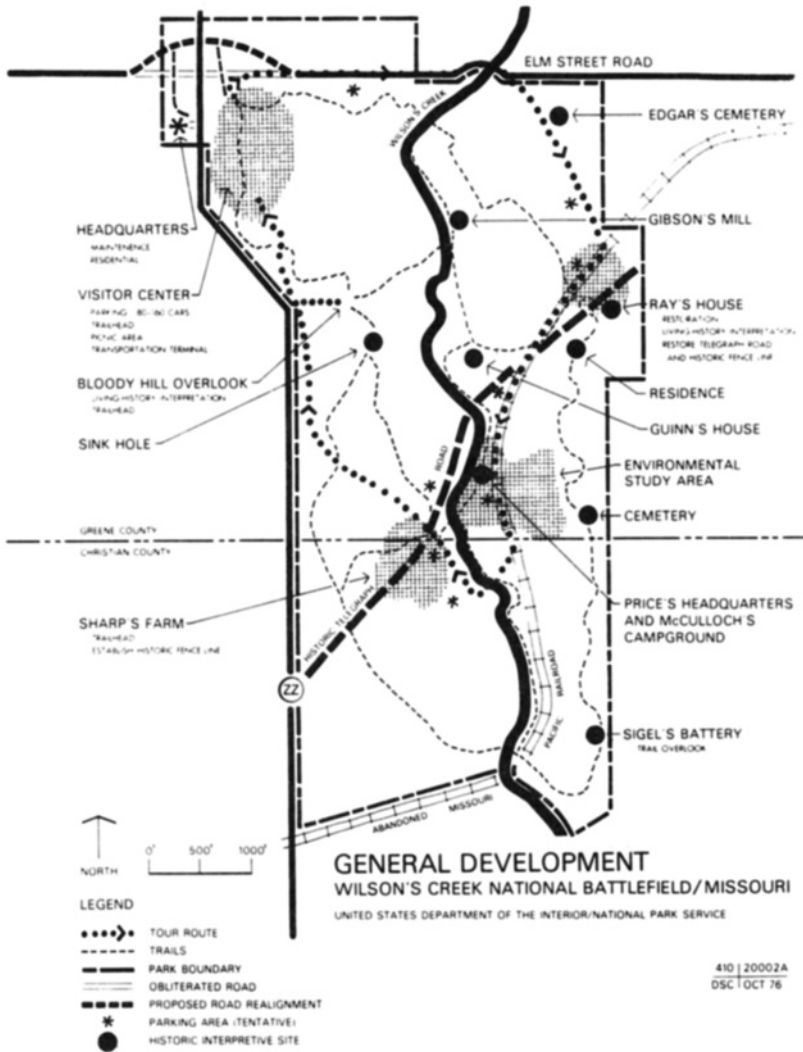


Fig. 2.

5. site grading, utilities layout, pavement design, construction details, and specifications.

Construction of the Visitors' Center was completed in 1983, and the Tour Road was completed in 1986.

### THE TOUR ROAD

We included initial planning for the Tour Road in the Visitors' Center phase that began in 1978. Our responsibilities for the final design phase included civil engineering, landscape architecture, and land surveying for the 4.8-mile Road, which would include three bridges; seven historical turnouts with parking for cars,

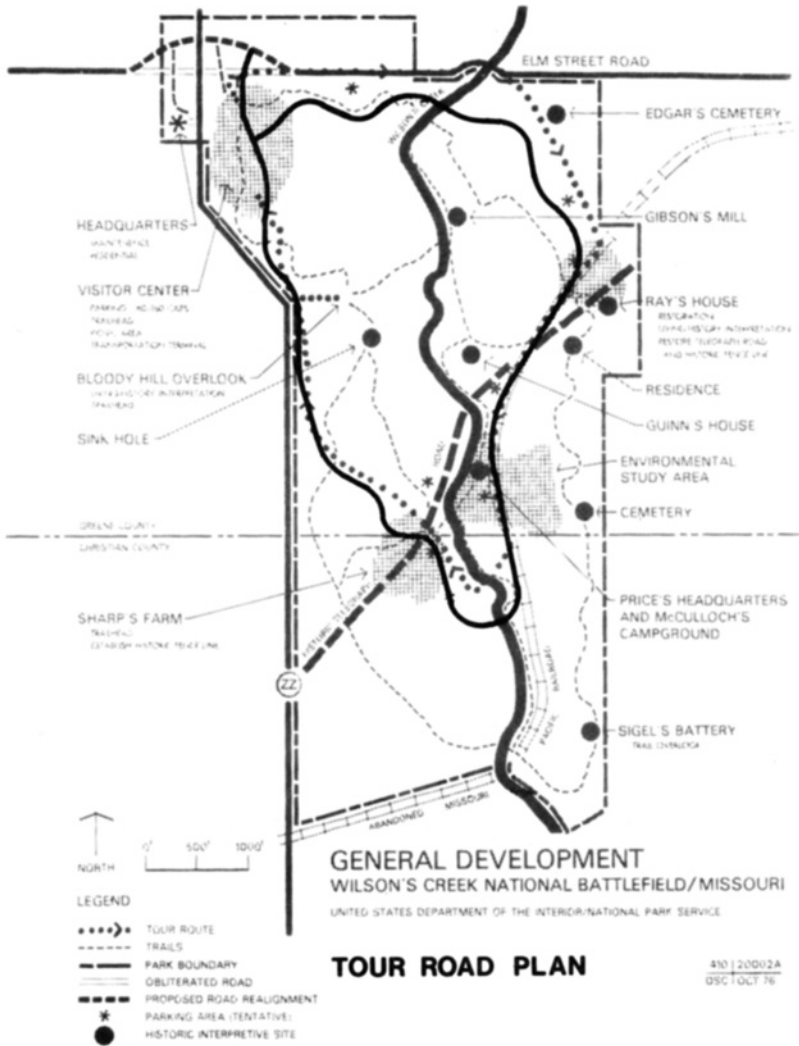
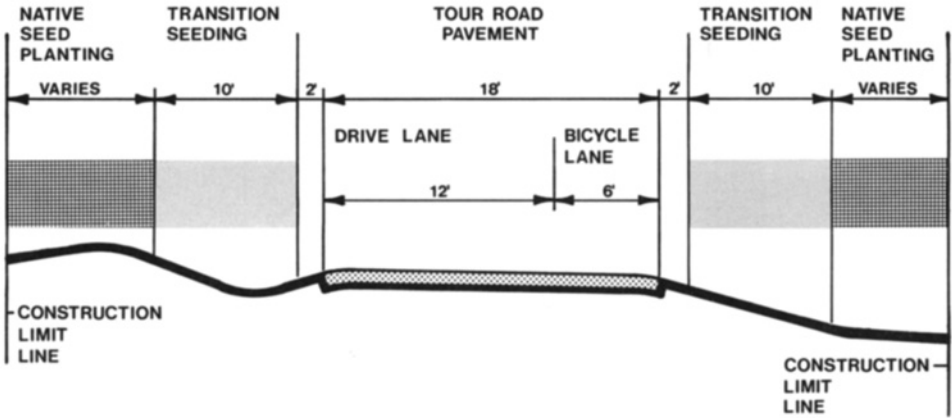


Fig. 3.

buses, recreation vehicles, and bicycles; four pullovers; three concrete box culverts; many roadway culverts; and revegetation plans. During construction we provided construction-related services that included shop drawing review, field change orders, center line staking, grade staking, slope staking, and plant material location staking.

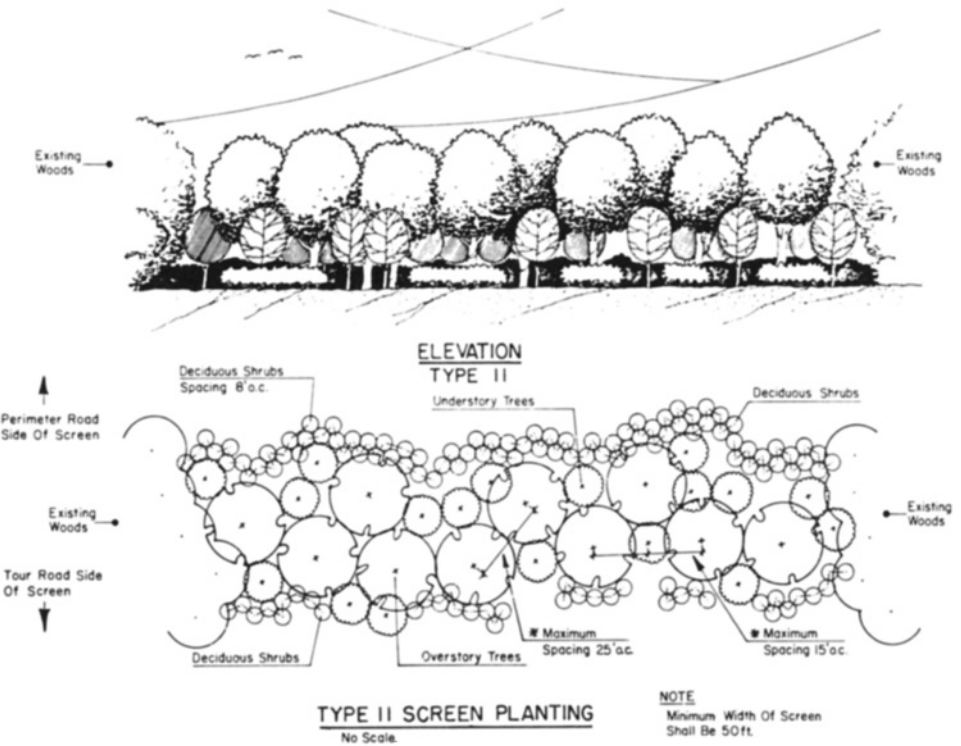
We designed the Tour Road in accordance with the master plan under the supervision of the National Park Service Denver Service Center. Design criteria included the following interpretive requirements.

1. Provide vehicular routing sequential to the battle in a clockwise direction from the Visitors' Center. (Figure 3)



**TYPICAL TOUR ROAD DETAIL - SECTION**

NO SCALE



**NOTE**  
Minimum Width Of Screen  
Shall Be 50ft.

Top: Fig. 4. Bottom: Fig. 5.

2. Design a one-way road 20+ feet wide with shoulders to accommodate a speed of 20 miles per hour. (Figure 4)
3. Minimize the physical and visual effect of the road on the park and maximize the park's use and accessibility to interpretive areas.
4. Restore previous areas of resource disturbance to conditions that existed at the time of the battle. (Figure 5)

The Tour Road was initially planned for two-phased construction but was constructed in a single phase under supervision of the Federal Highway Administration and directed by the National Park Service. As part of our plans for the Road, bridges, and parking areas, we were to obliterate 11,000 feet of roadway, restore the natural contours and vegetation, emplace 6,900 feet of stabilized turf for walking trails, and revegetate nearly 40 acres disturbed during construction.

National Park Service staff members conducted an environmental assessment of the selected Tour Road alignment to evaluate the natural system, cultural environment, socioeconomic environment, and visitor use.

The Tour Road begins a few hundred feet southeast of the Visitors' Center and heads east. At its start, the Road descends gently through scattered woods with dense understory and passes the area at which Union forces entered the battlefield. The Road then skirts a small spring and breaks through the heavy vegetation. Continuing east, the Road crosses an intermittent Wilson's Creek tributary and passes an ancient Indian chipping area to the first of two bridges over Wilson's Creek.

The turnout for the Gibson's Mill trailhead is immediately past the bridge, and the interpretive display includes appurtenances we designed for all the turnouts—wheel stops, bicycle parking racks, and wooden bollards.

Leaving Gibson's Mill, the Tour Road undulates along the rolling terrain past Edgar Cemetery and through open meadows. As it approaches the Ray House from the north, the Tour Road passes over a large box culvert.

Although signs clearly mark the Ray House

turnout, the ample parking area is concealed from visitors who choose to drive past. A stairway and continuing walkway provide access to the Ray House; a series of ramps and walks provide access for visitors who have disabilities.

South from the Ray House for nearly two miles, the Tour Road is built upon an abandoned railroad right-of-way and passes through heavy timber with steep, rocky slopes. Taking advantage of the railroad bed eliminates the need for large cuts in the wooded limestone ridge that parallels the east side of Wilson's Creek. A mile south of the Ray House, visitors find the turnout and short walk that lead to the location of the major Confederate artillery position during the battle.

The Tour Road continues south turning 180° in a long, sweeping curve with a bridge that crosses Wilson's Creek and heads north toward Sharp's Farm. Discovery and evaluation of an archeological site prompted relocation of the Wilson's Creek crossing 1,500 feet south of the original crossing location.

Approaching the Sharp's Farm turnout across a wide meadow, visitors can visualize Colonel Sigel's final artillery placement on the brow of a steep hill that overlooked the Confederate encampment during the battle.

The Tour Road descends steeply (12 percent slope) from Sharp's Farm, crosses Skegg's branch at the bottom of the hill, and proceeds north toward Bloody Hill. The terrain is rolling and has heavy understory. Parking areas at the Bloody Hill turnout are concealed from both the interpretive display and the trailhead several hundred feet to the east.

Past Bloody Hill, the Tour Road parallels the Union forces' entry into and retreat from the battlefield, passes through heavy timber and steep slopes, and returns to the Road's beginning.

Along its route, the Tour Road passes close to the battlefield boundary and adjacent roads. In order to preserve the experience for visitors and to prevent unauthorized access from adjacent roads, we designed plantings of native species in selected natural locations. With time, the screens will absorb into existing vegetative communities.

We introduced native grasses and forbs (nearly 50 species) in disturbed areas along the Tour Road to provide a revegetated base comparable to that at the time of the battle. In addition, plantings will provide a continuing source of native seed that can be used to revegetate other areas of the battlefield.

## CONCLUSION

The development of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield is the result of the efforts of many dedicated individuals and organizations, ranging from local residents first concerned with the battle's significance to Missouri's state legislators to the U.S. Congress to the National Park Service and the Federal Highway Administration.

Our firm's multi-disciplined design team included professional engineers, landscape architects, and land surveyors with support staff in each area to prepare plans and specifications. During the design phase, we visited the site frequently to evaluate design plans in light of conditions at the battlefield. We walked the proposed sites, evaluated cut-and-fill needs, determined culvert locations and lengths, and examined the site effect and extent of revegetation required. We became intimately aware of site conditions and the need to minimize alterations of the resource.

An example of the care we took in our design is the relocation of a portion of the Tour Road. The center line was staked and evaluated when our design team walked the alignment with National Park Service personnel and decided to realign approximately three-fourths of a mile. We wanted to avoid disturbing the ancient Indian chipping area and removing a solitary red elm in the open meadow between the first two bridges. We redesigned the alignment of both bridges and their adjoining section of roadway.

In another instance, we lowered the Ray House turnout elevation two feet so that visitors to the Ray House would not have their view of the battlefield impeded by buses in the parking area. We realigned the Tour Road near the Sharp Farm to avoid affecting the location of

the long since removed Sharp cabin.

We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the development of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, to be a part of the effort to preserve our past in the present for the future.

## NOTES

1. Peter A. Oppermann, A.S.L.A., is land planning director for Shafer, Kline & Warren, P.A., Overland Park, Kansas; Allan B. Cooksey, A.S.L.A., is land planning director for the firm's division, Tuttle-Ayers-Woodward Co., Kansas City, Missouri.
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