

THE BATTLE OF CRAMPTON'S GAP

SEPTEMBER 14, 1862

MARYLAND PARK SERVICE DRIVING TOUR



Welcome to South Mountain State Battlefield! You have an opportunity to explore several sites upon which approximately thirty thousand men fought a series of battles and in which five to six thousand American fighting men were killed or wounded.

Before we begin, we would like to remind you that much of the battlefield area is private property and there is no "tour road" as is the case with many battlefields; the roads you will be driving are public thoroughfares. Also please note that the tour winds its way over twisting mountain roads which existed at the time of the battle, and some of which are not much wider than a single vehicle. Please drive carefully and, above all, ***do not try to read this narrative while driving your vehicle!*** Please read the text only while your vehicle is not in motion.

The Crampton's Gap portion of the South Mountain Battlefield tour should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

The tour begins at the park museum in Gathland State Park, which is open 9 AM to 5 PM weekends from April through October.

Driving directions from Washington Monument Museum: Take the tour road to the park exit, then drive straight ahead approximately one mile to Alt. US Rt. 40. Make a right and continue down the mountain, making a left onto MD Rt. 67 just after crossing the Boonsboro town limit. Drive seven miles south on Rt. 67 to Gapland Road. Make a left onto Gapland Road and drive one mile to Gathland State Park. The museum is the upper building on the right.

Driving directions from Fox's Gap: leave the parking area and make a left onto Lamb's Knoll Road, then stop at the intersection. Make a left onto Reno Monument Road; **please exercise extreme caution when pulling out onto this road.** Continue down the mountainside to the intersection with MD Rt. 67, then make a left. Drive approximately 5.25 miles to Gapland Road, then turn left. Drive one mile to Gathland State Park, The museum is the upper building on the right.

STOP #1 - GAPLAND HALL

The buildings in the park were not here at the time of the battle in 1862. The present-day museum is all that remains of the home of George A. Townsend, Civil War journalist and novelist. Townsend purchased the property in 1884, building Gapland Hall (the upper building) and a summer

house (the lower building) the following year. He made numerous other improvements to the property including the large arch built in 1896 to honor Civil War journalists and artists.

Other than the short park road leading to the museum, the road network here does follow the original one which existed at the time of the battle. As you look downhill from the museum you are looking at Crampton's Gap. Two roads coming from the east (your right) joined for a short distance before splitting again into two roads to the west (your left). The area surrounding that short central stretch of road is called Crampton's Gap.

Before proceeding further on the auto tour, we invite you to peruse the displays in the Townsend Museum. We also strongly encourage you to walk down the hill (to just beyond the lower "summer" house) to read the full-color interpretive signs beside the stone wall; these will give you a better understanding of the next few stops on this tour.

Driving directions: Return to your vehicle and drive to the park entrance. Turn right and take the right-hand fork at the split in front of the arch. Continue down this road and into the small town of Burkittsville. Check your vehicle's odometer at the four-way intersection with MD Rt. 17. Continue straight through Burkittsville for 1.3 miles, turn left at the four-way intersection, and immediately pull off to the right of the road (alongside the back yard of the house). Exit your vehicle and face back toward the intersection.

STOP #2 - FRANKLIN'S HEADQUARTERS

The house beside which you are parked was owned by Martin Shafer at the time of the battle. The Union Sixth Corps, 12,500 men strong, passed on the road in front of the house (marching from your left to right on the road you just traveled) on their way to Burkittsville during the late morning of September 14th.

Turn and face west, toward the mountains to your right. Upon reaching the outskirts of Burkittsville, the lead elements of the Union column came under fire from long-range Confederate artillery located in Brownsville Pass (atop the mountain in the middle distance diagonally to your left). Major General William Franklin, in command of the Sixth Corps, ordered his men off of the road to take cover behind the hills and ridges just north of Burkittsville. Franklin established his headquarters in the house beside you, then called a council of his subordinates to decide on their next move. During this two hour lull, the men in the ranks fell out and cooked rations; their commanders also had lunch in the backyard beside which you now stand. It was during this period that Franklin passed all decisions concerning the upcoming battle down the chain of command to a division commander, Maj. Gen. Henry Slocum, who in turn "passed the buck" down to one of his brigade commanders, Col. Joseph Bartlett. Thus it was a brigade commander who would devise the Union plan of attack for an entire corps' assault upon Crampton's Gap.

Driving directions: Return to your vehicle and carefully turn around to return to the four-way intersection. Turn right and drive approximately 1.3 miles, turning into the church parking lot on your right (just before the intersection with MD Rt. 17). Park here and exit your vehicle, walking north into the Union Cemetery behind the parking lot.

STOP #3 - BURKITTSVILLE

You are in the town of Burkittsville, which appears very much the same as it did on the day of

battle; more than two-thirds of the buildings here date back to the 1860's. This cemetery was used jointly by both churches which also share the parking lot, hence the name "Union Cemetery".

Walk directly across the cemetery to a spot where you can easily see the open ground to the north. Note the rolling nature of the ground; the Union Sixth Corps used these depressions and defiles to conceal themselves from Confederate artillery located both in Brownsville Pass and the mountainside below Crampton's Gap.

Next walk to the west side of the cemetery (toward the mountain). Ahead you can see Crampton's Gap, appearing as a "dip" between two higher mountain elevations. The Confederates chose not to occupy the gap height but instead established a loose defensive line of four infantry regiments and one dismounted cavalry regiment at the base of the mountain. Around 3 PM, the Union forces began their advance, moving in column from the fields north of town, crossing the road diagonally to your right front, and marching into the fields far ahead of you across the road. In these fields, under Col. Bartlett's direction, they formed into a series of six battlelines in preparation for their assault on the mountain.

Walk back to the parking lot. Before leaving, you may wish to walk down to Main Street to view a Maryland Civil War Trails display in front of one of the churches; it vividly describes the aftermath of battle here.

Driving directions: Exit the parking lot, turning right onto Main Street. Drive approximately 0.5 mile and turn right onto Mountain Church Road. This road's left side (now a series of modern-day homes) was the location of the Confederate battle line. After driving about 0.8 miles, pull to the right of the road in a flat area between two farm lanes. Exit and walk to the rear of your vehicle to face back the way you came.

STOP #4 - THE FIRST ASSAULT

The two farms to your left were present at the time of the battle. The vine-covered stone wall immediately across the road to your right is all that remains of the wall which was used to aid in the Confederate defense. You are standing at or quite near the Confederate left flank; their loose defensive formation of about eight hundred men ran along the base of the mountain the whole length of the road you just traveled.

Three brigades of Slocum's Union division advanced across the fields to your left front, while a brigade of Smith's division advanced on the far (south) side of Burkittsville; the total force was about eight thousand men. Upon reaching the top of the small hill (also to your left front) Bartlett's lead brigade stopped and began to exchange fire with the Confederate defenders along the road about 250 yards to their front; this action began between 4 and 4:30 PM. The Confederates took full advantage of the terrain, utilizing cover and concealment to hold off nearly ten times their number of Union attackers for over an hour.

Around 5:30, and with about an hour of daylight remaining, a rebel yell was heard coming from the top of the gap (Stop #5). Realizing that Confederate reinforcements had arrived (and would likely soon be descending the mountainside), Bartlett ordered his troops to charge. The three brigades rushed forward and easily broke the Confederate line. Low on ammunition, the defenders fled up the mountain with Union forces in pursuit; firsthand accounts describe many of the Union infantrymen climbing up the mountainside on all fours due to the steep and rugged terrain.

Driving directions: Return to your vehicle and drive for 0.2 mile, then turn left on Arnoldtown Rd. Drive 0.6 mile and turn right into the Gathland lower parking area. Exit your vehicle and carefully cross the road to stand at the base of the War Correspondents' Arch. Walk under the arch to stand near the vintage (circa 1960) metal National Park Service map. Face downhill into the triangular grassy area below.

STOP #5 - WHIPP'S RAVINE

Confederate General Lafayette McLaws, engaged in the siege of Harper's Ferry, heard the noontime artillery fire from Brownsville Pass (described in the narrative for Stop #2). Correctly surmising that the two gaps to his rear would soon be under attack, McLaws sent a four regiment brigade of about 1200 men under Brig. Gen. Howell Cobb back to the gaps as reinforcements. Cobb's brigade arrived in Crampton's Gap around 5:30 and cheered wildly; their "rebel yell" was heard by Union Col. Bartlett and helped prompt his decision to charge the wall at the foot of the mountain (as recounted at Stop #4).

You are presently looking down into Whipp's Ravine. Cobb split his brigade with two regiments forming line in the roads on either side of the ravine (lining the stone walls to your front left and right); his other two regiments (all Georgians) advanced down Gapland Road to your right. About five hundred yards down the road the men heard firing to their left. The two regiments formed into battleline, descended about 150 yards down the mountainside (about a quarter mile away from your present position, off to your diagonal right front), and saw Confederate troops retreating toward them with Union infantry in hot pursuit. As the Georgians fired at these Union troops advancing up the slope toward them, they failed to notice that a brigade of New Jersey infantry had managed to get around their right flank and rear. Suddenly Cobb's two regiments began taking fire from three sides. The Georgians' line became a "V" as the line bent back upon itself. After the regiments stood fast for about fifteen minutes under a withering fire the order was given to withdraw, and both regiments routed from the field.

By this time the Union advance had become a tidal wave and Cobb's other two regiments were also forced to withdraw, but not before exacting a frightful toll on the Union troops who were caught in a deadly crossfire in the ravine directly in front of you.

Directions: Turn around and walk back under the arch, then carefully cross the road to the right. Pass through the gap in the stone wall, take a few steps into the field, and stop.

STOP #6 - PADGETT'S FIELD

This area was an open farm field at the time of battle. As his men retreated past him Howell Cobb, a regimental flag in hand, rode through this field and tried to rally his men. Cobb emerged from the battle miraculously unscathed, but the flagstaff he carried was shot in half.

Cobb was attempting to halt his men so that they might support two cannon which had arrived and unlimbered directly in the road (roughly in the vicinity of the present-day crosswalks). These cannon began firing canister (cans of about three dozen solid iron and lead shot, each shot about the size of a golf ball) from point-blank range directly in the faces of advancing Union infantrymen. Despite the carnage, the wave of blue was too much and, after less than a half-dozen rounds each, the cannon were forced to limber up and withdraw. One cannon, however, had a cracked carriage and had

to be abandoned a short distance down the mountainside to the west.

Cobb did manage to forge one last defensive line behind a stone wall a few yards to the west of your present location (the wall is gone now but stood just beyond the location of the present-day picnic shelter). This line, a mixed bag of men drawn from all of the routing regiments, fired a few last ragged volleys before themselves routing from the field. By 7 PM, darkness fell and put an end to the fighting at Crampton's Gap where Union infantrymen then built defensive breastworks in the darkness.

On the following day both forces built up their defenses as they faced each other across Pleasant Valley (bisected by present-day MD Rt. 67), but no major actions occurred there. Harper's Ferry fell to Jackson on that same day, which gave McLaws' men an escape route from the valley. Slipping away from Franklin's Union Sixth Corps, McLaws' men arrived at Sharpsburg on the morning of the 17th, just in time to participate in the massacre of Sedgwick's Union division in the West Woods at the Battle of Antietam.

This ends the Crampton's Gap portion of the tour, as well as the three-part "linked" South Mountain Battlefield Tour. If you wish, you may return to Washington Monument State Park. Turn right from the parking area and drive one mile to MD Rt. 67. Turn right and drive seven miles to US Alt. Rt. 40. Turn right and drive up the mountain to Washington Monument Road (directly across from the South Mountain Inn); turn left and drive one mile to the park.

To travel to MD Rt. 17, turn right from the parking area, then make the sharp left at the foot of the arch. Drive down the mountain to Burkittsville; Rt. 17 crosses your path at the four-way stop. Turning left at this intersection and driving for several miles will bring you to Interstate 70.



Ranger/interpreter guided tours of the battlefield are available to visitors by pre-arrangement. Please contact the South Mountain State Battlefield office during weekday business hours by calling 301-432-8065.

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