Park Continues Celebrating National Park Service Centennial

Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park has successfully conducted three centennial events in 2016, celebrating the 100th birthday of the National Park Service.

On June 11, the park, supported by the Friends of the Park and Outdoor Chattanooga, provided programs designed to engage new audiences about outdoor educational and recreational activities that can be enjoyed within Lookout Mountain Battlefield.

At the next event, on June 18, the park partnered with the Signal Mountain History Committee, Tennessee State Parks - Cumberland Trail State Scenic Trail, living historians from the 9th Kentucky, and the Friends of the Park, in order to provide another great National Park Service centennial event entitled “Signaling to the Next Generation” on Signal Mountain, Tennessee.

The third centennial event at Moccasin Bend, on July 30, began with a ranger-guided kayak tour on the Tennessee River around Moccasin Bend National Archeological District. While paddling, participants were also greeted by law enforcement rangers conducting a resource patrol on the river. Then, there were two ranger-led bike-hike programs, with participants biking across Moccasin Bend to explore the historic road traces and earthworks within the park boundaries. Later that evening, in a nearby public space, students from the arts department of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga celebrated Moccasin Bend with a nature and arts festival that included an original play about the importance of the “urban forest” on Moccasin Bend to the city of Chattanooga.

All of the centennial programs are free and open to the public and are supported by the Friends of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park and/or the Friends of Moccasin Bend National Park. In addition to the park’s Friends, a host of other partners have signed on to help with these events, and the park is excited to have them on board as we connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates.

Remaining Park Centennial Programs for 2016

August

Title: Take Me Out to the Park: Community Picnic and Civil War Baseball Game
Date: Saturday, August 27
Time: 11 am - 4 pm; Baseball games at 12 pm & 2:30 pm
Place: Chickamauga Battlefield
Fee: Free (Supported by Friends of the Park)

September

Title: Blues on the Knob
Date: Saturday, September 10
Time: 6 – 10 pm
Place: Orchard Knob Reservation
Fee: Free (Supported by Friends of the Park)

Title: Creating a Neighborhood Link: Glass Street and Sherman Reservation
Date: Saturday, September 24
Time: 11 am - 4 pm
Place: Sherman Reservation on Missionary Ridge
Fee: Free (Supported by Friends of the Park)
Superintendent’s Sidebar

By Superintendent Brad Bennett

The National Park Service depends upon many people and organizations to help protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources in this national park. During this unusually hot and dry summer, we witnessed a remarkable example of private-public teamwork to contain and control a wildland fire within the Lookout Mountain Battlefield portion of the park in Dade County, Georgia.

In July, a wildland fire was reported in the park on the steep slopes of Lookout Mountain, the result of a careless and illegal campfire which ultimately burned more than 20 acres. Fortunately, the Georgia Forestry Commission, the West Brow Fire & Rescue department, the U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service joined forces to stop the fire.

Park hiking trails in the vicinity of the wildfire were closed to protect the safety of the public, while dozens of firefighters created a defensible perimeter and doused flames with water hoses and a helicopter. Meanwhile, private landowners near the park boundary assisted by lending their property for equipment staging, generously feeding the firefighters, and agreeing to clear vegetation from their yards to decrease the danger of the fire spreading to their houses.

Please join me in recognizing the cooperation and support of park staff, community partners, and the multiple agencies who successfully responded to this challenge.

Chattanooga Area Youth Work at Park Units Over the Summer

By Park Ranger Christopher Young

This summer, two youth crews managed by the Southeast Conservation Corps totaling 17 crew members and leads worked in Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park on two very important tasks. One crew, the Urban Archeology Corps worked on the Blue Blazes Trail, located on Moccasin Bend National Archeology District, while the other crew, the Historic Preservation Crew, worked on cleaning and painting tablets at Chickamauga Battlefield.

Both the UAC & the HPC started their summer experience on June 6 by taking a tour of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. Their first encounter with the park was designed to not only introduce them to the important historical events that took place here but to show them how the various park units are interconnected.

From June 9 to July 15, both crews worked four days a week, Monday through Friday, at their respective sites. The UAC crew focused on rehabilitating the Blue Blazes Trail on Moccasin Bend by installing bog bridges in areas that are normally flooded. Even as they worked, visitors stopped by from time to time to thank them for their ongoing work. South of Chattanooga, the members of the HPC worked at Chickamauga Battlefield, focusing on not only cleaning and clearing around the informational tablets within the park but also painting many of them as well.

Friday was typically reserved for professional development/educational outings, such as CPR/First Aid, biking/paddling classes from Outdoor Chattanooga, as well as other exciting opportunities. One very special educational encounter occurred when two archeologists from the National Park Service Southeast Archeological Center arrived to show the crew members and leads how to conduct archeology in the park.

As the summer came to an end, both crews spent their final two days camping at Chickamauga Battlefield and learning the rigors of loading and firing a reproduction Civil War cannon.

It is important to note that without the assistance of these youth crews, the park could not have accomplished these tasks in such a timely manner.

Crew members and leads of the Urban Archeology Corps (UAC) and the Historic Preservation Crew (HPC) pose for a quick photo after learning about the importance of teamwork as it relates to safely loading and firing a Civil War reproduction cannon. (NPS Image)
Against All Odds: The 2016 Anniversary of the Battle of Chickamauga

By Park Ranger Chris Barr

Between September 18 and 20, 1863, some 125,000 men fought and died in the fields and woods along the banks of the West Chickamauga Creek. 153 years later, from September 17-18, 2016, the staff at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park will tell the story of how these soldiers fought against seemingly insurmountable odds.

During the final day of battle, Union Captain John Mendenhall tried to stem the Confederate advance by forming an artillery line overlooking Dyer Field. The routed Union infantry offered little assistance, with only two regiments, the 26th Ohio and the 13th Michigan, rallying to support the artillery. Without adequate infantry support, Mendenhall’s line was overwhelmed, and the Confederates captured many of his artillerists and cannon. Meanwhile, Confederate forces relentlessly assaulted the Union defenses on Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge where General George Thomas and the XIV Corps awaited. Despite their earlier success, the Confederates were unable to break Thomas’s defenses.

Throughout the weekend of September 17-18, the park will conduct a series of programs sharing the story of how these men fought against all odds. Programs will include a battery of artillery located at Dyer Field as well as ranger-guided tours around the battlefield. For more detailed information about the anniversary programs, visit www.nps.gov/chch

Living historians portraying Union soldiers fire an artillery piece at Chickamauga Battlefield. This year, portions of Mendenhall’s line will be re-created for visitors to experience. (NPS Image)

Details Tell the Tale

By Park Historian Jim Ogden

Often as I take a tour group through the action of late morning September 20, 1863, along Poe Road, I am asked about the several cannon out in front of the Union line that seem to point in the “wrong” direction. The action I’ve been discussing is oriented east and west, the Confederates attacking from the woods on the other side of the LaFayette Road against the Union line along Poe Road. The cannon in question about point north, up the LaFayette Road. The answer illustrates several things about the Battle of Chickamauga, the changing nature of the larger war, and the veterans’ vision of the national military park.

The quick answer to why those Poe Road guns face north is that they represent an afternoon phase of the battle after the Confederate breakthrough and the collapse of the Union right; they represent Confederate batteries that came up and fired from that ground after the Union troops had been driven from their position on the western edge of the Poe farm.

They also represent the veterans’ desires when they created the battlefield park to erect memorials and commemorative features that would allow future generations, including future generations of military professionals, to study the battle in great detail, on the ground where it occurred. There are several places on the Chickamauga Battlefield where there were actions on the same ground both in the morning and afternoon of one of the days, or even both days of the battle. The Poe Road/Poe Field area has features interpreting and commemorating the fighting of the afternoon of the 19th and both the morning and afternoon of the 20th. While there are monuments and commemorative features that have been inappropriately moved or had their facing changed (some not that long ago), most of the cannon, monuments, or tablets that seemingly face in an “odd” or “wrong” direction simply represent yet another phase of the battle. They represent how complex the actual battle was and how detailed the veterans’ commemorative interpretive scheme proved to be.
But that cluster of guns also represents more. They are another illustration of the many changing nature of our nation’s terrible internecine struggle over the meaning, direction, and existence of representative government. Both sides increasingly realized how committed the other side was to obtaining their vision of representative government and many of the most committed recognized the need to get a lot more proficient in killing their opponents on the battlefield (and thereby preserving the lives of their own soldiers). As the war lengthened from the initially expected few months, to a second year, and then into a third (and eventually a fourth), the armies of citizen-soldiers of both sides became increasingly professional, and even increasingly “modern.” For Southern artillerymen, with fewer guns, and fewer first-quality guns, and less reliable ammunition, this was even more paramount. Actions of 1861 and 1862 revealed many shortcomings of the practice of attaching one battery of artillery to each brigade of infantry; this brigade-battery organization made it difficult to achieve concentrations of guns at advantageous points or to bring the right kind of guns to bear at the right place; additionally, artilleryists maintained that infantry officers didn’t know how to employ artillery (artilleryists will still say that today). Battles such as Shiloh and Malvern Hill revealed these issues. So, beginning with the Confederate army in Virginia in the second half of 1862, Southern artillery batteries more and more began to be grouped into battalion organizations of several batteries, with a battalion assigned to each infantry division in addition to several reserve battalions. Each battalion was commanded by an artillery officer. The Army of Tennessee was slower to move to this new form of artillery organization and was still working to adopt it in practice (not just on paper) as the Campaign for Chattanooga unfolded in 1863. The cluster of guns in the south end of Poe Field marking several Confederate batteries also represents this coming new form of organization.

In late afternoon of September 20, while Confederate brigades made repeated assaults against Union troops rallied on Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge, Southerners in the Poe farm area observed Union units moving westward across the LaFayette Road at the Kelly Field; those Union troops, they believed, were going as re-enforcements to help stymie Confederate attacks against Snodgrass Hill. The fire of artillery might interdict this movement. And, for one of the few times in the mostly wooded Battle of Chickamauga, the more open corridor of the Poe and Kelly fields along the LaFayette Road would allow the Army of Tennessee’s long arm to play the role for which it was designed—inflict injury upon the enemy at a greater distance. Also, fortuitously, waiting nearby for just such an opportunity, were batteries of two of the new “battalions of artillery,” one, Major Samuel Williams’ Battalion of Buckner’s Corps, the other, the Reserve Artillery Battalion of the Army of Tennessee, under the command of Major Felix H. Robertson. Williams quickly brought eight and then 11 of his available 12 Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi guns (one had been disabled earlier and two more guns were positioned elsewhere on the battlefield) into position at Poe’s and opened fire. They were soon joined by eight or nine of the Alabama and Georgia guns of Robertson’s Battalion (Robertson had been briefly engaged on this ground earlier in the day; hence the time of “Noon” on a couple of the batteries’ commemorative features). For about an hour, Williams’ and Robertson’s guns fired north up the corridor of the LaFayette Road, expending most of the almost 400 rounds those batteries would fire in the battle. Corps commander Major General Simon Buckner said of Williams’ fire, “...[he] opened upon this re-enforcing column with destructive effect, dispersing it in every direction and silencing his (the enemy’s) artillery.” Buckner attributed the capture of 500–600 Federals a few minutes later in a final assault on Kelly field to the artillery too because they “dared not cross the stream of fire which Williams poured across their path.” The Federal retreat, final Confederate assault, and darkness closed the battle for Williams’ and Robertson’s artilleryists.

Cannon located at Poe Field. NPS Image

Poe Field represents several things—a later phase of the battle; a new organization; insights into the artillery’s experience on a mostly wooded battlefield. Asking the “why...” about them allows one to take another step in following Brigadier General Bushrod R. Johnson’s admonition to “investigate all the details of this battle.”