



Foundation Document Overview

Antietam National Battlefield

Maryland



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of ANTIETAM NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD is to preserve, protect, restore, and interpret for the benefit of the public the resources associated with the Battle of Antietam and its legacy.



Significance

Significance statements express why Antietam National Battlefield resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Antietam National Battlefield is the site where more than 23,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing—the bloodiest single-day battle in American history.
- The result of the Battle of Antietam provided President Abraham Lincoln with the opportunity to issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which elevated the purpose of the war to include abolishing slavery.
- The high level of landscape integrity at Antietam evokes a powerful sense of place that allows visitors to make personal connections to the battle and to its participants.
- The photographs taken at Antietam within days after the battle were the first to publicly display the carnage and horrors of the American Civil War.
- The Confederate retreat from Maryland following the Battle of Antietam ended the Army of Northern Virginia's first invasion of the North and had a significant impact on the momentum, morale, and politics of the American Civil War.
- Antietam National Cemetery, dedicated in 1867 as the final resting place for Union soldiers who fell at Antietam, continues to serve as a memorial to honor military sacrifice.
- The commemorative landscape at Antietam National Battlefield illustrates America's evolving values and views on the Civil War.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **1862 Battlefield Landscape.** The cultural landscape and its many contributing features are primarily significant because of the Civil War battle fought here. The park preserves these features and others related to the 1862 vernacular agricultural landscape.
- **Antietam National Cemetery.** Antietam National Cemetery is the final resting place for Union dead from the Civil War and for veterans of other conflicts. This designed landscape is a deliberate creation of the American response to mourning and remembrance in the 19th century.
- **Commemorative Landscape.** Commemorative features have been added to the Antietam National Battlefield landscape by succeeding generations since 1867. The veterans who fought here wanted these parks “to be reconciliatory items, object lessons, patriotic icons, and most of all, memorials to the living and dead that fought in the war” (in the words of Timothy B. Smith in *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation*), thereby, making the commemorative features at Antietam central to the park’s purpose.
- **Solemnity of the Site.** Antietam National Battlefield provides an opportunity to experience a solemn, peaceful, and reverent space, where one can reflect upon the sacrifices of the fallen and the implications of the battle.



Other Important Resources & Values

Antietam National Battlefield contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Museum Collections.** Museum collections associated with Antietam National Battlefield include archival materials, objects, and paintings that tell the story of the Battle of Antietam, its aftermath, and importance in American history.
- **Archeological Resources.** Archeological resources are the physical evidence of past human activity, including the impacts of the Battle of Antietam on the environment.
- **Witness Trees.** Living trees that were standing at the time of the Battle of Antietam. The sycamore tree immediately adjacent to the Burnside Bridge is the most well-known of the witness trees at Antietam National Battlefield.
- **Antietam Creek Watershed.** The Antietam Creek, associated aquatic resources, and karst limestone geology serve as key features of the battlefield landscape and the natural setting.



Description

Antietam National Battlefield was established in 1890 to commemorate the bloodiest single-day battle in American history. The battlefield was initially administered by the U.S. War Department. The Battle of Antietam, or Sharpsburg as it was referred to in the South, began at dawn on September 17, 1862. About 40,000 troops of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia under the command of General Robert E. Lee fought against 80,000 troops of the Federal Army of the Potomac commanded by General George McClellan. At day's end, more than 23,000 soldiers were dead, wounded, or missing. The commemorative landscape at Antietam National Battlefield includes monuments; roadways, fences, curbing, the observation tower, and other associated features established by the War Department; tablets documenting troop movements and artillery locations.

Antietam is considered one of the best-preserved Civil War areas in the national park system. The farms and farmlands in and near the battlefield appear much as they did on the eve of the battle in 1862.

The battlefield is in a rural area of south Washington County, Maryland; agriculture is the predominant land use. Antietam attracts approximately 350,000 visitors per year. The 11-stop automobile tour takes visitors through areas of historical interest, tracing troop movements, interpreting battle tactics and military strategy, and relating human interest stories. Additional interpretation is provided at the visitor center.

According to many historians, the Battle of Antietam was a major turning point in the American Civil War. Although neither side could claim victory at battle's end, Lee's failure to effectively carry the war into the North allowed President Lincoln to issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and caused Great Britain to postpone recognition of the Confederacy. From that time onward the American Civil War had a dual purpose—to preserve the Union and abolish slavery.

