



# Foundation Document Overview

## Gettysburg National Military Park

Pennsylvania



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK is to preserve, protect, and interpret for this and future generations the resources associated with the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War, the Soldiers' National Cemetery, and their commemorations.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Gettysburg National Military Park 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.

- Upon the fields and rolling hills and in the streets of town, more soldiers fell at the Battle of Gettysburg than in any other battle fought in North America before or since. The culmination of the Gettysburg Campaign, this three-day battle fought on July 1–3, 1863, thwarted the political and military aims of the Confederacy and its second invasion of the North during the American Civil War.
- In dedicating the Soldiers' National Cemetery on November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address, which gave meaning to the sacrifices of the dead at the Battle of Gettysburg and inspired the living to continue the “unfinished work” of the war to affirm “a new birth of freedom” for the nation.
- The Battle of Gettysburg was quickly recognized as a defining event in the nation’s history, which led to early and ongoing efforts to preserve the battlefield landscape, including its topography and terrain.
- Commemorating the events of the Battle of Gettysburg, a National Military Park was established, resulting in a landscape of monuments, memorials, and markers that record the history and emotions of Civil War veterans and others who wanted to leave this legacy for future generations.
- The momentous nature of what occurred at the Battle of Gettysburg, along with the high level of preservation and accurate marking of the battlefield landscape, continues to draw people to Gettysburg National Military Park, a place of national consciousness where individuals can consider the far-reaching implications of the battle, the Gettysburg Address, and the American Civil War.
- The massive 377-foot cyclorama painting, the Battle of Gettysburg, depicting Pickett’s Charge, the final Confederate attack, is the largest oil-on-canvas painting in North America and is among the last 19th-century cyclorama paintings in existence.

## 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.

- **Battlefield Landscape**
- **Commemorative Landscape**
- **Soldiers' National Cemetery**
- **Museum Collections**
- ***Battle of Gettysburg* Cyclorama Painting**
- **Historic Structures**
- **Hallowed Ground**
- **Legacy of the Gettysburg Address**
- **Archeological Resources Associated with the Battle of Gettysburg**

Gettysburg National Military Park 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.

- **Natural Communities**
- **Nonbattle-Related Archeological Resources**
- **Appropriate Recreation**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The Civil War was the result of decades of increasing divisiveness caused primarily by the issue of slavery that pulled the nation apart economically, socially, and politically.
- The Gettysburg Campaign was directly influenced and shaped by the 1863 strategic military / political situation of the nation. The evolution, conduct, and eventual outcome of the campaign and battle were directly related to the geography, topography, and landscape features of the region, as well as to the tactics, leadership, and organization of the respective armies.
- The soldiers who fought at Gettysburg were, for the most part, battle-hardened veterans. Their backgrounds varied as much as their reasons for being there. Their experience in combat and the aftermath of battle were both uniquely individual and universal.
- The Battle of Gettysburg touched the lives of civilians both near and far. Farmers whose land became battlegrounds, citizens in town, those who tended the wounded, buried the dead, or came to locate a friend or loved one were forever changed by their experience here. The tremendous human cost of Gettysburg touched and changed the lives of families, neighbors, and the general population in small towns and large cities of both the North and the South.
- In his Gettysburg Address, President Abraham Lincoln focused the nation's attention on the Union sacrifices, as well as its evolving meanings and consequences, when he stated that it would lead to a "new birth of freedom" for the nation; a charge that still challenges us today.
- The hundreds of monuments, markers, and memorials, many created by the veterans themselves, continue to bear witness to the experiences of individuals associated with the Battle of Gettysburg and are a testament to how the battlefield has become a stage for the reconciliation of a once divided nation, national commemoration of the Civil War, and a place of personal connection for Civil War veterans, their families, and visitors who continue to be drawn to this park.

## Description

Gettysburg National Military Park is the site of the American Civil War Battle of Gettysburg. In the summer of 1863, General Robert E. Lee led his Confederate Army of Northern Virginia north into Maryland and Pennsylvania. The Union Army of the Potomac, commanded by Major General George Gordon Meade, met the Confederate invasion near the Pennsylvania crossroads town of Gettysburg, and what began as a chance encounter quickly turned into a desperate, ferocious battle. Fought during the first three days of July 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg was a crucial turning point in the Civil War. The Union victory, often referred to as the “High Water Mark of the Rebellion,” resulted not only in Lee’s retreat to Virginia, but contributed to ending the hopes of the Confederate States of America for independence. Gettysburg was the Civil War’s bloodiest battle and brought devastation to the residents of Gettysburg. The battlefield was also the inspiration for President Abraham Lincoln’s immortal Gettysburg Address, delivered at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery on November 19, 1863. Although the official cemetery name is the Gettysburg National Cemetery, since its establishment it has been known as Soldiers’ National Cemetery.

In addition to the battlefield, Gettysburg National Military Park includes the Soldiers’ National Cemetery and numerous memorials and markers placed in commemoration of the battle by Civil War veterans. Administered by the National Park Service, the park includes over 6,000 acres of land, more than 1,300 monuments, 400 cannons, 31 miles of historic avenues, and 147 historic buildings. The majority of parklands are agricultural or pastoral in nature, with woodlots and woodlands accounting for a total of 1,258 acres, 160 acres of orchards, and 80-to-100-miles of fencing and walls.

In 2008, Gettysburg National Military Park, in partnership with the Gettysburg Foundation, opened the current park museum and visitor center. The 22,000-square-foot Gettysburg Museum of the Civil War houses one of the largest collections of American Civil War artifacts and archives in the world.

The *Battle of Gettysburg* cyclorama painting is also on display at the park visitor center. Through this collaborative public-private partnership, visitors are provided with a venue for reflecting on and understanding the causes and consequences of the Civil War.

Gettysburg National Military Park attracts just over 1 million visitors per year and is open year-round. Visitors primarily experience the battlefield by driving the scenic auto tour routes on more than 40 miles of roads, and enjoying beautiful vistas overlooking the battlefield landscape and nearby town of Gettysburg. Visitors can also immerse themselves in the battlefield on numerous hiking trails, by bicycle riding on park roads, and by horseback riding on designated trails. Several ways to tour the battlefield and connect to its historic significance are offered, including ranger-guided programs, a licensed battlefield guide service, self-guiding auto tour, bus tour, and audio tours. The park connects visitors to a battlefield landscape that reflects the events of those historic three days in July 1863.

