



Above: a common yellowthroat perched in Malvern Hill grassland, cannon on Malvern Hill battlefield, Western Run Wetland, the Willis Church Parsonage (NPS/Charles Cantrell)

Introduction

The trail system at Malvern Hill enables visitors to see almost every corner of the battlefield. The main (White) trail is 1.5 miles long and can be accessed at the primary parking lot on Carters Mill Road, or from the parking lot opposite The Parsonage on Willis Church Road to the north. Numerous exhibits along the way help explain the events of the Malvern Hill battle and the surrounding historic landscape.

The Carter's Farm (Blue) trail branches off from the main loop and is 1.5 miles long. It begins not far west of The Parsonage and ties back into the main trail at the location of the Confederate artillery. This loop intersects the woods and streams where Confederate soldiers traveled and gathered to await orders to attack Union troops at Malvern Hill. It also guides hikers through forests and grassland habitats that are ideal for bird watching and wildlife observation.

Tour Stops

Numbered posts along that trail conform to written descriptions within this brochure describing the history and biology of the landscape.

1 On the afternoon of July 1, 1862, much of the Confederate division led by Gen. D. H. Hill crowded into this forest, which offered a cloak of invisibility from the searching shells of Union artillery. Hill believed there would be no attack at Malvern Hill. He was in the midst of a council with his brigade commanders when it became evident, to his surprise, that an attack was starting. Hill felt duty-bound to join it. His division formed lines of battle in these woods, a process hampered by what Col. John B. Gordon called the "exceedingly rough" terrain. The division soon stepped out of the woods and into the deadly fields, a mere 700 yards in front of the roaring line of artillery atop the hill.

2 The swampy stream visible to the east is Western Run. It joins Turkey Island Creek before emptying into the James River several miles to the south. As a result of the broad, flat riverbed and extensive beaver activity, Western Run consists of multiple channels as well as an associated 200+ acres of non-tidal, forested wetlands.

Wetlands such as this are valuable to humans for groundwater recharge, filtration of pollutants, and flood control. However, their importance to fisheries

and wildlife cannot be overstated. Considered the "nurseries of life," wetlands' ecological productivity is comparable to that of coral reefs and tropical rainforests. Western Run provides habitat for a diverse array of animals such as beaver, river otter, American eel, pirate perch, warmouth and bluegill, in addition to countless bird species. It also hosts at least seven species of turtles including painted, snapping and eastern mud turtles; and ten species of frogs including eastern cricket frog, Cope's gray treefrog, American bullfrog and southern leopard frog. Common tree and plant species seen in the stream and wetland include red maple, river birch, black willow, smooth alder and swamp rose.

3 Somewhere in these woods, late in the battle, two Confederate officers collided in an episode that almost ended in a duel. Generals D. H. Hill

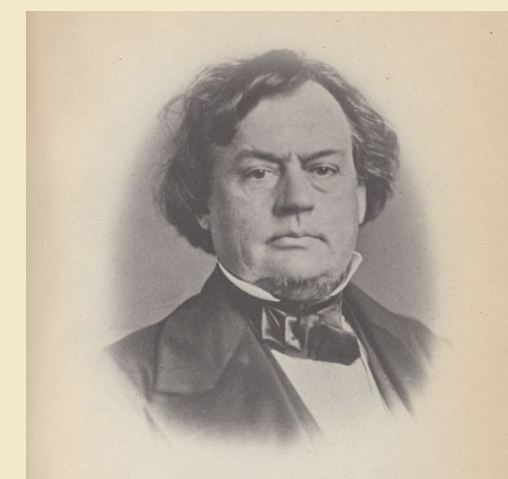


A cricket frog in Western Run

and Robert Toombs were two of the most intemperate officers in the army, each with a combustible personality. Toombs was a politician-turned-general notable for his loud declarations. Hill had a sarcastic manner. They met while Toombs was trying to rally the remnants of his badly beaten Georgia brigade and Hill was investigating the condition of his own shattered division, the survivors of which milled around in the woods.

Hill imprudently accused Toombs and his brigade of a poor showing in their recent attack up Malvern Hill. Toombs had been complaining all spring about generals who retreated. Here was an opportunity for action, and instead of fighting, Hill said, Toombs was hiding in the woods. After an unseemly argument, the two generals traded a series of insulting notes in the following weeks. Toombs possibly demanded a duel; Hill insisted he would neither apologize nor fight. The episode blew over, but the stress of a comprehensive defeat like Malvern Hill made encounters like this more likely.

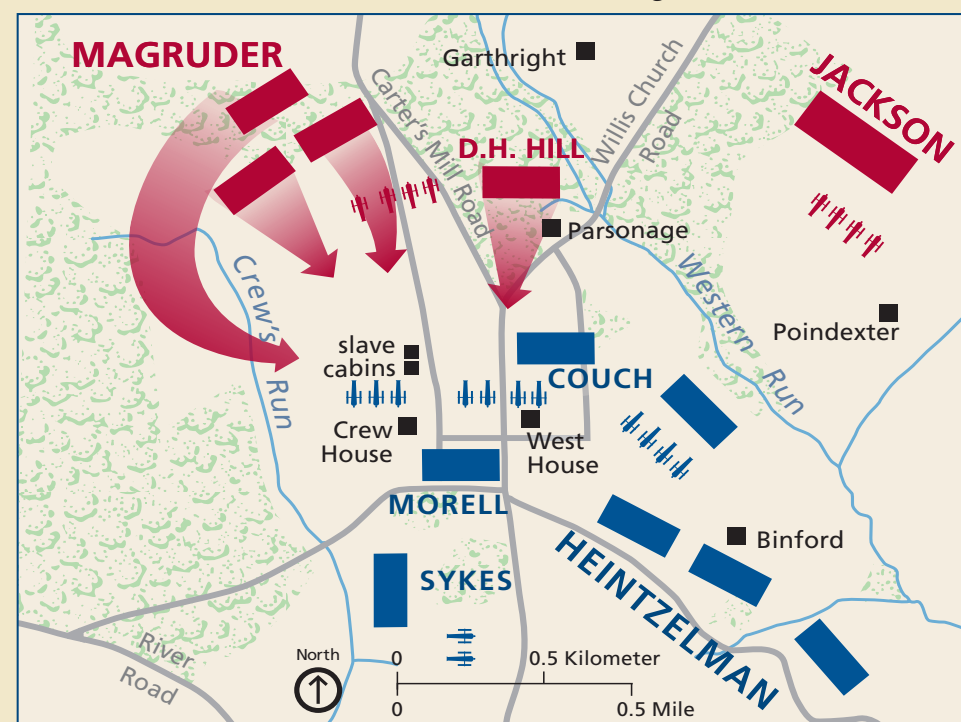
4 The forest community you see around you today is classified as a Mesic Mixed Hardwood forest, and is common in or near ravines throughout the park. It is characterized by such tree dominants as American beech, red and white oak and tulip poplar. American holly and flowering dogwood



General Robert Toombs

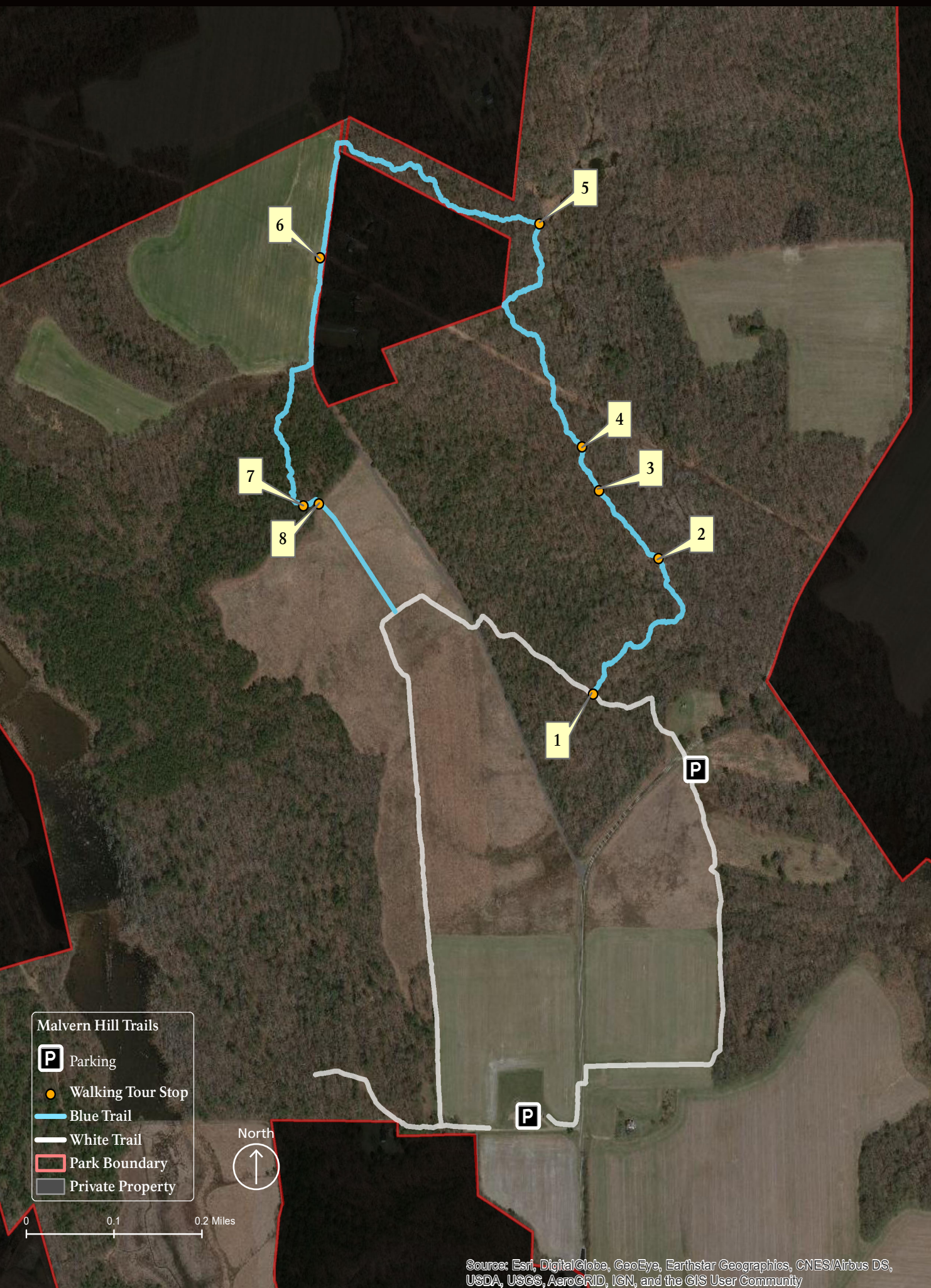
are common in the understory, and the ground layer is characteristically sparse, with some ferns, sedges and vines.

Large, contiguous blocks of forest such as this have become increasingly rare due to development and fragmentation, and many of the birds that depend on such forests have therefore declined. As a result, this piece of forest is quite valuable as it creates needed habitat for a diverse community of birds, many of which are now classified as Species of Concern. Known inhabitants include the acadian flycatcher, Carolina wren, Carolina chickadee, red-eyed vireo, tufted titmouse and red bellied woodpecker. Birds can be excellent indicators of ecosystem health because many species require specific habitat characteristics and lack resiliency if their habitats



Map of the Battle of Malvern Hill

Following the Trails



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

are degraded. Therefore, by knowing what species are present or absent, the National Park Service is able to monitor the ecological integrity of its forests. Other notable wildlife sightings here include box turtles, eastern kingsnake, eastern fence lizard, mink, gray fox and coyote.

5 The impressive remains of an antebellum mill complex survive in the thick woods approximately 250 yards in front, to the northeast. Often called French's Grist Mill on historic maps, the facility was in operation by the very early 1800s, and perhaps earlier. Although the site was far enough north to be beyond regular range of Union cannon, the milldam played a role in the battle. Toward sunset, as fresh Confederate troops hurried forward, the swampy valley of Western Run proved to be an obstacle. The brigade of Gen. Jubal A. Early waded across the stream, from east to west, somewhere close to this very spot. But the terrain was too bad for horses. General Early (accompanied by Gen. Richard S. Ewell and other mounted officers) was "directed to cross by a detour... over an old dam, as the only practicable way for horses." By the time they got across French's milldam and rejoined their men, it was too dark for further fighting.



The historic milldam as it appears today

6 The home of Dr. Carter stood on a knoll in this field in July 1862. Little is known about this building. The original Carter's Mill Road also passed through the field during the battle. Although the screen of trees ahead blocked the view of Malvern Hill, it did not prevent Union batteries there from regularly dropping shells into this field. For much of the battle Gen. John B. Magruder (sometimes called "Prince John" for his flamboyant style) conducted his portion of the fight from his headquarters here. He had some narrow escapes. One incoming shell blew up a Confederate limber chest. "All around the open field... were pieces of artillery," awaiting the call to the

front, remembered one Virginia soldier, and the road was full of "long lines of troops..." The "mounted and splendidly uniformed" Magruder dashed around issuing the orders that sent his men up Malvern Hill.

7 For the first Confederates to attack up Malvern Hill's gentle slope, this deep ravine represented a few final minutes of relative safety. While their generals reconnoitered the Union position, several thousand infantrymen gathered in the ravine and its tributaries. Just like today, a thin band of woods offered additional protection.

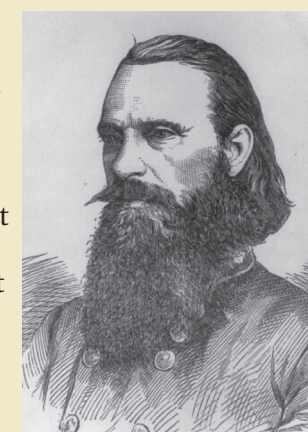
The men in the ravine belonged to Lewis A. Armistead's all-Virginia brigade, and to Ambrose R. Wright's mixed brigade, which included units from Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama. "Having no artillery with us," Gen. Wright wrote, "it was deemed prudent to keep our little force... concealed in the deep ravine... and to send to the rear for guns." The men sat "with their backs to the wall of the gully... seemingly secure from danger..."

Soon the horse-drawn Confederate cannon advanced through the woods and set up atop the first ridge to the southeast, a mere 250 yards distant. When Federal batteries replied with gusto, their shells crashed into the trees above this ravine. The men crouching in the stream bottom rapidly felt less protected. "How trying to hear the ponderous missiles whistling over the tops of the trees or crashing among the limbs," wrote one infantryman. "To be struck by a falling limb would have been as fatal as to be pierced by shot or shell."

Late afternoon, the men climbed out of

the ditch and formed into line of battle. General Wright led his brigade with his hat perched atop the tip of his sword.

They stepped out into the field, advanced through their own artillery, and were slaughtered just beyond. Of the men who spent the afternoon in this stream bottom, 780 were killed or wounded in those two brigades once the attack began.



General A. R. Wright

8 The grassland before you tells the tale of battle fought here years ago, but is also speaks to the ongoing fight to protect a threatened ecosystem.

Historically, pastures and fallow farm fields encouraged the growth of warm season native grasses, thus providing vital meadow habitat. However, the 20th century saw a decline in native grasslands due to a rise in suburban development and the conversion to non-native grass pastures. This decline was quickly followed by the decline in many of the bird and pollinator species that nest and forage in this habitat.

By maintaining this field in native warm season grasses, rather than in crops, lawn grass or cool season hay, the park can portray the historic appearance of a fallow field while providing critical habitat for grassland nesting birds. These birds require taller vegetation for shelter from predators, as well as bare ground among the grass to safely place their nests.

Common avian inhabitants of this field are known to include the northern bobwhite, field sparrow, prairie warbler, indigo bunting, common yellowthroat and northern harrier, many of which were identified as Species of Concern by the Partners in Flight Program.



A field sparrow holding a worm at Malvern Hill