

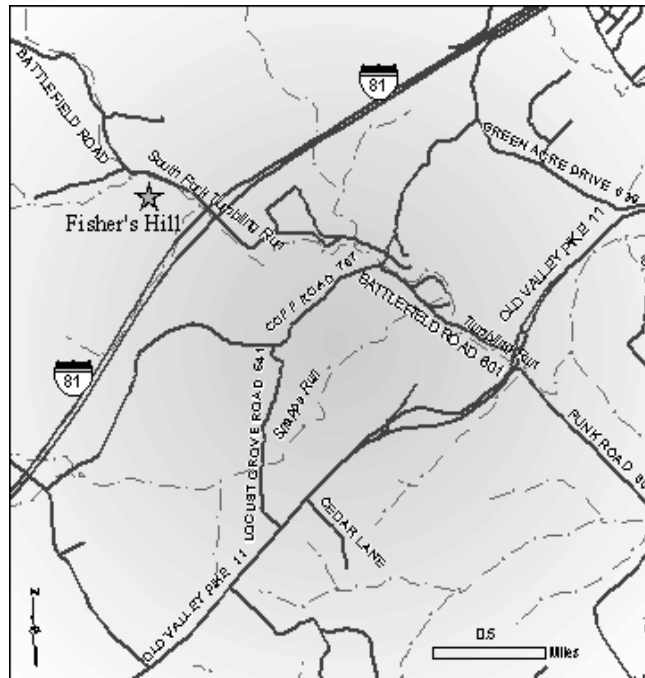
Battle's Brigade continued

Cox's blunder left Battle without support on his left. Soon Crook's Union regiments unleashed a scathing fire against the Alabamians' unprotected flank. That pressure, combined with Ricketts' attack from the ridgeline to the north, proved too much for the Southerners. The left of the Confederate line on Fisher's Hill collapsed.

Stop 6—Confederate Collapse

The Union attack plan worked perfectly. Crook's attack caught the Confederates unaware, and as Crook swept forward, other Union units on his left also joined the attack. "With wild and victorious shouts," Ricketts' division swept down the hill behind you and drove southeastward along the swale in front of you. Union divisions farther to the east attacked Brig. Gen. John Pegram's division, on the high ground across Interstate 81, and Maj. Gen. John B. Gordon's still farther east. Early himself arrived on the field and tried to stem the rearward flow of men, but the hemorrhage was complete. The entire Confederate line west of the Valley Pike collapsed. Fourteen cannon fell into Union hands.

By nightfall Early's army was in full flight. Wrote Confederate mapmaker Jedediah Hotchkiss, "The route of wagons, caissons, limbers, artillery, and flying men was fearful as the stream swept down the (Valley) pike toward Woodstock." Here and there the Confederates managed to establish pockets of resistance. In one of these clashes, Lt. Col. Alexander S. "Sandie" Pendleton (formerly Jackson's and now Early's chief of staff) fell mortally wounded, but nothing stopped the Confederate retreat and Union pursuit. By September 25—three days after the battle—the remnants of Early's army huddled in the Blue Ridge Mountains at Brown's Gap, 60 miles south. The Confederates would not emerge to do battle again for nearly a month. Their last dramatic gasp in the Shenandoah Valley was launched from the heights of Fisher's Hill; it died on the banks of Cedar Creek on October 19, 1864.



Directions

I-81, Exit 291 (Toms Brook), to Route 11 North for three miles. Battlefield Road on left.

WARNING

The terrain at Fisher's Hill is steep and sometimes rough. Because of the terrain, wheelchair use may be difficult or impossible. You should not attempt this trail unless you are in good physical condition and accustomed to strenuous walking. Please know and be aware of your limitations.

Relic hunting is prohibited. The use of motor vehicles off of the driveway or parking area is prohibited. Special use of the land may be allowed, but written permission must be obtained from Shenandoah County. Please walk carefully and respect the property line of our neighbors. Dogs are permitted on leash.

Shenandoah County Tourism

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The Battle of Fisher's Hill



"It was the only place where a stand could be made."

—Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early, CSA



Strasburg Guards

Confederate Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early occupied the Shenandoah Valley for two reasons: to cause as much mischief as possible and to force his Federal opponents to withdraw troops from Petersburg to deal with him. In June and July 1864 Early's small army succeeded masterfully, marching to the very city limits of Washington D.C.

The demolition began on September 19 at Winchester, where Sheridan's 37,000 men routed Early's overmatched army of 12,000. The next day Early retreated here, to Fisher's Hill—"The Gibraltar of the Valley." This location provided, said Early, "the only place where a stand could be made."

He knew that if he lost Fisher's Hill, his only safe refuge would be in the mountains of the upper (southern) Valley, thus exposing the region to Sheridan's legions.

By September 22, Early's line extended along Fisher's Hill for three miles. It seemed like a strong position, but both Early and Sheridan quickly recognized its weakness: the Confederate left fell short of Little North Mountain. The unionists had room to maneuver to the west, where only a few hundred undisciplined cavalrymen shielded the Confederate flank. On the morning of September 22, Phil Sheridan had readied his attack.

Stop 1—Confederate Stand

The Confederates arrived here on September 20 to a prepared line of earthworks that extended along the slope above you. Early's men had built the works the previous month. Early recognized long before the Federals posed an actual threat to this part of the valley that Fisher's Hill might someday be a Confederate bastion. For the next two days, Early's men improved the fortifications, making their position almost impervious to frontal assault. Unfortunately for the Southerners, Sheridan had no intention of attacking the Confederates head-on.

Although the Confederate works here disappeared under the plow long ago, you will be able to see faint traces of them as you move along the trail.

Stop 2—The Funkhouser House

Below you is the Funkhouser farm, the only residence visible on this part of the battlefield in 1864. Settling here in the mid-1700's, the Funkhousers worked this farm for eight generations. The front door of the house still bears bullet holes from the battle.

In the early afternoon of September 22, Union troops under Brig. Gen. James B. Ricketts seized the high ground north of the Funkhouser House. For the next three hours Ricketts harassed Early's left-most division, commanded by young Maj. Gen. Stephen Dodson Ramseur. Union artillery and infantry rushed out upon the distant ridge and were challenged each time by Confederate artillery on Fisher's Hill. Early feared that these Federals might launch an all-out attack. It soon became apparent that the Bluecoats were coming not from the north, but from the west—off the slopes of Little North Mountain.

Stop 3—Union Flank March

While the Union Sixth Corps demonstrated on the high ground to the north (your right), Brig. Gen. George Crook secretly marched his Eighth Corps toward the left of the Confederate line. His route led him behind ridges and wood lines, across the Back Road to the lower slopes of Little North Mountain.

Throughout the afternoon of the 22nd, Crook's men struggled through briars and rock piles along the base of the mountain until they reached a position south of the power-line cut visible about a mile away to the west (in front of you). Finally, at about 4PM, Crook started forward toward the Confederate left.

The Federal flank march did not go unnoticed by the Southerners. A Confederate battery just yards up the slope from where you stand spotted the Unionists and fired a few shells in their direction. One of Ramseur's brigade commanders, Brig. Gen. Bryan Grimes, also reported the Union march, but the warnings went unheeded. Just after 4PM a blue tide swept off the slopes of Little North Mountain. NOTE: As you move from Stop 3 to Stop 4 you will cross the remnants of the Confederate earthworks and cannon emplacements. All that remains are slight ripples in the ground. Look closely for them while you walk.

Stop 4—Flank Attack

The Confederate cavalry posted on the low ground to your left offered little resistance as the first Union volleys rolled across the landscape. Poorly trained and equipped, the Virginia cavalrymen fled as Crook's assault landed on their flank and rear. The cavalry's flight left Ramseur's division to hold the Confederate left by itself. Gen. Ramseur hurried Brig. Gen. Cullen Battle's brigade into the works to your left, facing Little North Mountain.

In front of you, where the Confederate works bent back, Brig. Gen. Bryan Grimes' North Carolina regiments struggled not only to repulse Crook's assault, but to blunt a simultaneous advance by Ricketts' Federals from the north. Without reinforcements Ramseur stood little chance of holding his position for long. He needed time—time to shift men into his works to the south, where they could confront Crook's Federals head-on.

Local lore states the Confederates used one of these gnarled old chestnut oak trees, to your left, as a lookout post trimming branches and cutting the top of the trunk to erect an observation platform. If you look closely, you can see scars that suggest these Confederate modifications.

Stop 5—Battle's Brigade

Here and along the works to the south (left of you) occurred the heaviest fighting at the Battle of Fisher's Hill. As the Federals rolled forward, Ramseur pulled Brig. Gen. Cullen Battle's brigade of Alabamians out of line on his right and rushed them to the works on his left—they stood just a few steps in front of you. Along 300 yards of breastworks, Battle's men fought to arrest the Union tide, "making the ground hot for us," admitted Crook. Battle stalked his line with a cedar stick, threatening any man who ran. A Virginia battery lashed the Union ranks with canister. Ramseur tried to put troops further to the south by moving Brig. Gen. William R. Cox's brigade to Battle's left, but Cox went astray. His brigade of North Carolinians never engaged in the fight.