

The West Woods Trail

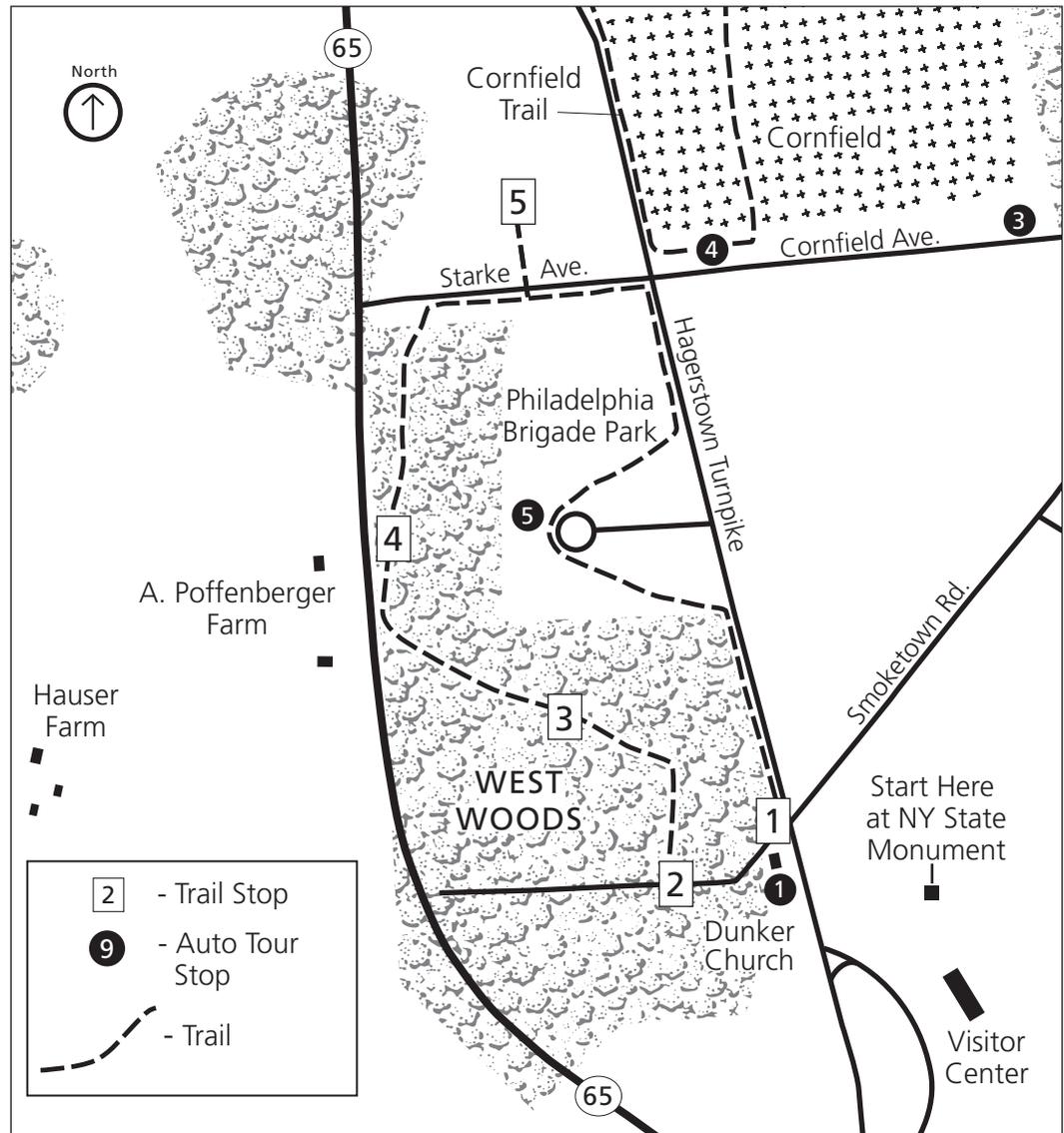
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Antietam National Battlefield
P. O. Box 158
Sharpsburg, MD 21782



Trail Map

This trail map shows the current roads and park features with the historic boundary of the West Woods.



Introduction

The West Woods Trail starts with an introduction at the New York State Monument just north of the visitor center. Please allow approximately sixty to ninety minutes to walk this 1.5 mile trail. When walking, please stay on the trail and watch out for groundhog holes, as well as poison ivy near the trail.

When the battle unfolded on September 17, 1862 Union General Edwin Sumner's Second Corps was positioned at the Pry House, located 1.5 miles east of this point. It was not long before these men were sent

to aid the Union forces already engaged on the northern end of the battlefield. During their crossing of the Antietam Creek and subsequent march to the field, Sumner's three divisions became separated. As each division arrived on the field, they were sent into action. Gen. John Sedgwick's division arrived first and at 9:15 a.m. moved out of the East Woods toward the West Woods. When the other two divisions moved onto the field, they were sent south and they engaged Confederates positioned in the Sunken Road.

DIRECTIONS

Begin on the north side of the New York State Monument with the Dunker Church to your left (west).

Head towards the Dunker Church and the intersection of the Smoketown Rd. and Hagerstown Turnpike to Stop 1.

Continue west behind the church about 100 yards to the grouping of monuments and Stop 2.

Follow the trail north into the woods and proceed to Stop 3.

Walk along the trail west towards Rt. 65. Turn right at the road and follow the fence line to Stop 4.

Proceed north past the monument and back into the woods. Follow the signs to Stop 5.

Hike east to the Hagerstown Pike and follow the markers to Philadelphia Brigade Park. After stopping at the park continue south on the Pike back to the visitor center.

New York State Monument

By about 9:00 a.m. on the morning of September 17, 1862, the area between this high ground and the North Woods, one mile north of here, was covered with the wreckage of a titanic struggle. The Union First and Twelfth Corps battled Confederates commanded by Stonewall Jackson to a

standstill. The third Union attack started at 9:15 a.m. when General John Sedgwick led his division, 5,000 soldiers, from the Second Corps out of the East Woods, right to left across the fields in front of you, toward the West Woods.

Stop 1 - The West Woods

In 1995 this section of the West Woods was nothing more than an open field. With the help of thousands of volunteers, the park staff has replanted a large section of the woods. This point marks the southern end

of Sedgwick's line as his men moved into the West Woods. The impressive battle line extended from this spot up to modern day Starke Avenue.

Stop 2 - Confederate Success

At this point, Union soldiers from three different states attempted to hold the southern most point of Sedgwick's separated line. A collection of four different Confederate brigades flanked the Federals posted here and then drove them to the north and east out of the West Woods. This engagement precipitated the retreat of

Sedgwick's entire division back toward the East Woods. The 34th New York Monument was dedicated in 1902 and the 125th Pennsylvania was placed on the field in 1904. Even though these two regiments are from two different army corps, they fought side-by-side in the West Woods.

Stop 3 - Avenues of Attack

This low lying, tree covered terrain provided cover for Confederate soldiers from Mississippi and South Carolina and allowed them to slam into the unsuspecting flank of Federal soldiers that had taken up positions just north of this point. This Confederate

attack, led by General LaFayette McLaws's Division, inflicted over 2,000 casualties in about twenty minutes. The action in the West Woods was the only time on the field that Confederate forces outnumbered their opponent.

Stop 4 - The Wounded Lion

When the 15th Massachusetts reached this point, they were quickly caught in a devastating cross fire from three sides. Col Kimball, the regiment's commander remembered how, "the regiment stood

heroically to the work, the men falling rapidly, the color bearers and guards are all shot down." In twenty minutes, over 340 men in this regiment had been killed or wounded.

Stop 5 - The Rock Ledge

This rock ledge provided cover for both Confederate and Union soldiers on the morning of the battle, before the West Woods action started to unfold. The ledge changed

hands at least four times during the first three hours of battle. The confusing action around this area demonstrates the important role terrain played during this battle.

Conclusion - Philadelphia Brigade Park

The surviving members of the Philadelphia Brigade who fought in the West Woods secured a small parcel of land to place a monument and create a park to gather and remember their fallen comrades. As you

stroll through the park, make sure to find the three NPS waysides which will provide more history on the action in the West Woods and the Philadelphia Brigade Park.

As the battle ended in the West Woods, Federal troops shifted their assaults to the Sunken Road and the Confederates controlled the northern end of the woodlot. However, near the Dunker Church another Union division (Greene) of over 1,500 men advanced into the woods at around 11:00 a.m. They held for about an hour before being driven out, and by 1:00 p.m. Confederate forces controlled the West Woods for the rest of the day.