



## Exploring Andersonville: Self-guided Prison Site Walking Tour



*Saturday, 2 July 1864*

*On account of moving last night we got no rations, consequently had to turn in hungry. Hard place for a fellow with no money. When hunger stares him in the face he can sit and look at it and think of home.*

*If I ever get there again I think I'll stay there.*

*~ James Burton, Company F, 122 New York Infantry*

There is a whole different side to Civil War history besides the study of tactics and politics; the consequences of the war were wide and complex and affected the lives of millions of Americans. What happened to prisoners confined behind the stockades of military prisons during the Civil War tells us something about just how uncivil the Civil War truly was. Nowhere is this harrowing story told more completely than during a field trip to Andersonville National Historic Site.

The site of the Camp Sumter Military Prison, commonly known as Andersonville, is preserved as part of the Andersonville National Historic Site. Today a grassy field punctuated with stakes to mark the location of the deadline and stockade wall, the prison site provides a unique opportunity to explore the experiences of the 45,000 prisoners of war held here in 1864-65. This document provides a guide for teachers leading students around the prison site with information about prison site features, prisoner experiences, and questions for students.

<b>Time:</b>	Allow at least two hours
<b>Setting:</b>	Andersonville Prison Site
<b>Suggested Age:</b>	5th-11th Grade
<b>Group Size:</b>	Groups of 30 at each location
<b>Objectives:</b>	At the end of the activity, the students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with a basic overview of the historical features surrounding the Andersonville Prison site.</li> <li>• Help students understand the challenges faced by both prisoners and Confederate staff at Andersonville.</li> <li>• Provide students with a sense of place for the daily operation of Andersonville Prison.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials:</b>	Provided by Teacher – copies of the station texts for leaders. A limited number of copies are available at the museum for use on-site.

### **Applicable Georgia Performance Standards**

#### *High School (United States History)*

SSUSH9 The student will identify key events, issues, and individuals relating to the causes, course, and consequences of the Civil War.  
f. Explain the importance of the growing economic disparity between the North and the South through an examination of population, functioning railroads, and industrial output.

#### *Middle School (8th Grade GA Studies)*

SS8H6 The student will analyze the impact of Civil War and Reconstruction on Georgia  
b. State the importance of key events of the Civil War, include Antietam, the Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, the Union blockade of Georgia's coast, Sherman's Atlanta Campaign, Sherman's March to the Sea, and Andersonville.

#### *Elementary School (5th Grade Social Studies – American History)*

SS5H1 The student will explain the causes, major events, and consequences of the Civil War  
c. Identify major battles and campaigns: Fort Sumter, Gettysburg, the Atlanta Campaign, Sherman's March to the Sea, and Appomattox Courthouse  
e. Describe the effects of war on the North and South.

## **Safety Considerations**

### **This is an outdoor Program**

For safety and comfort, students should wear close-toed shoes and be appropriately dressed for the weather. The prison site is a large field, and may have uneven surfaces, long grass or insects. Participants should be prepared to walk at least one mile

### **Please keep in mind the following**

- Be aware of the weather. In the event of thunder and lightning seek shelter immediately.
- Have your students wear comfortable walking shoes
- In the event of hot weather it is a good idea to have water bottles with you
- The only restrooms and water fountains are at the National Prisoner of War Museum.
- Watch out for vehicles driving along the tour road, move aside to let them pass.
- Much of the terrain is uneven. The roads are paved, but the actual prison site is not. Plan accordingly, especially in the event that you have students or chaperones in wheelchairs.
- Please review the Field Trip Policies and Expectations on page two of the park's field trip planner. Ensure that your students understand the rules of park etiquette.

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## Procedure

The purpose of this self-guided program is to allow you, the teacher, to provide your students with a meaningful experience while here and to hopefully engage in higher order critical thinking. We have developed six “stations” around the prison site for your students to explore. As part of this packet you are provided with overview text, potential questions students may ask you, and safety considerations for each of the six stations. You are strongly encouraged to review these materials before you arrive and clarify any questions you may have before you get out on the site. Plan on 10-15 minutes per station at minimum.

1. **The North Gate** – the students will learn about the process of becoming a prisoner and arriving at Andersonville. What challenges faced prisoners when they first entered these gates?
2. **Providence Spring** – How did the desire for clean water affect prisoners’ behaviors and beliefs?
3. **The South Gate Area** – Along the walk from Providence Spring to the Star Fort students will explore the preservation of Andersonville by the Civilian Conservation Corps before moving into the South Gate Area. At the South Gate itself students will learn about the role of African Americans at Andersonville Prison as well as how the dead were removed, documented, and buried.
4. **The Star Fort** – How did Captain Wirz and the Confederate guard force attempt to maintain order and control over a growing prison population?
5. **The Reconstructed Corner** – Students will explore how prisoners lived and died on a day to day basis in Andersonville Prison
6. **The Monuments** – How was Andersonville Remembered? Students will consider how the experience affected prisoners long after they left Andersonville and how they chose to memorialize their lost friends.

If possible you will should visit these locations in order. Bear in mind that this will require walking. Your bus will drop you off at station 1 and pick you up at stop 4 for the drive back up to the reconstructed corner, where you’ll walk from station 5 to station 6. It is important that you convey to your students that they need to wear comfortable walking shoes – sandals and flip flops are strongly discouraged.

If you have a very large group it may be necessary to divide your group among the different locations and rotate them from station to station. In the event of this your students will need to walk almost the entire site, as there is very limited parking around the perimeter of the site. The total walking distance around the perimeter is approximately 1 mile.

While the tour is structured with some bus transportation around the prison site, as an alternative, you may park all buses at the museum parking lot; this will result in a much longer walk, at least 1 mile in distance to complete the tour.

Visiting all six stations may take as long as 2 hours. If necessary, limit the number of stations you visit. Plan ahead on this and remember that bus parking is severely limited around the prison site.

**Park Map Detail  
Showing Prison Site**



**Tour Stops**

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# The North Gate



- Due to inadequate parking in this area have your bus drop the students off here and then drive around the prison site and park along the road near the Star Fort. Students will reload on the buses at this location.

Remind your students to be aware of fire ants in the area

## *Stop 1 – Gather your students immediately outside the North Gate*

In the early years of the Civil War, both the Union and Confederate armies routinely paroled and exchanged prisoners of war. However, as the Union forces began to employ African American soldiers, these exchanges broke down over the Confederacy's refusal to recognize captured African Americans as soldiers instead of escaped slaves. This breakdown led to the need for both sides to create large prisoner of war camps, like Camp Sumter here at Andersonville.

Construction began in the late fall of 1863 and was not quite finished when the first prisoners arrived here in late February 1864. The first prisoners to arrive here were transferred in from overcrowded prisons in Richmond, Virginia. Brought in on trains to the depot at Andersonville immediately behind you (the park exit road that you see leads directly to these tracks), then men were marched to this area. Throughout the prison's operation the North Gate served as the primary entrance for new prisoners, and over the 14 months that Andersonville was in operation, some 45,000 men stood where you are now gathered.

From this spot, outside the gates, the recently arrived prisoners would be organized into smaller groups for the purpose of ration distribution. Often, the prison commandant, Capt Henry Wirz would address groups of prisoners before they entered through these gates.

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***Stop 2 - Walk inside the enclosed prison gate.***

*Carefully close the doors. Encourage your students to consider what it must have felt like to be completely enclosed like this. What fears or apprehensions might they have?*

The North Gate actually consists of two gates – this was for basic security. The prisoners would be brought into the enclosed area and the outside gate would close. Only then would the inside gate open and the prisoners could enter the prison grounds.

***Stop 3 - Have your students walk through the interior gate and inside the main prison grounds.***

“The prisoners had made fires . . . which would flicker a moment and disappear, there being so many of them they kept up . . . a waving motion of light.”  
George Tibbles, Company F, 4th Iowa Infantry

From this spot try to imagine what this place must have looked like - the grassy hillsides replaced with bright red clay and the ground teeming with people. For visual reference think about a large ant hill that has been stirred up – that’s essentially what this place would have looked like. At one point around 33,000 men were living inside this space – that’s equivalent to the modern day population of Sumter County. Look out across the hillside and into the valley to the stream that runs through the middle of the site. This stream served as the prisoners’ drinking water and sinks (the Civil War term for restrooms). The entire bottom of this valley turned into an uninhabitable swamp of human waste. The poor sanitation from this lack of clean water led to deadly diseases such as dysentery & diarrhea (*Civil War doctors considered diarrhea a disease – not as a symptom of intestinal ailments*).

***Possible questions your students may ask at the North Gate:***

Q: What are these white stakes?

A: The white stakes mark the perimeter of the prison site. The outside set marks where the stockade walls stood and the inside stakes mark the location of the deadline – over which men were not allowed to cross under penalty of death. Point out the example of the deadline along the stockade wall reconstruction – it’s the low rail that’s inside the wall about 20 feet.

Q: What’s that one white stake in the middle of the field?

A: That stake marks the approximate location of where six prisoners were hung in July of 1864. These men, known as the raiders, often robbed or even killed their fellow prisoners.

Q: Is this gate original?

A: No. The gate and stockade walls are reconstructions. However, they are built on the exact location of the original gate.

Q: What happened to the original walls of the prison?

A: Constructed of pine logs, the original walls were not built to last. Within twenty years the walls were almost completely gone, having either been torn down or fallen down.

***Once you are ready, begin to walk down the hillside towards the Providence Spring Monument. In is a small gray building at the bottom of the hill.***

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# Providence Spring



- Remind your students to watch out for fire ants.
- It is important that we preserve the location by not climbing on monuments or resources – including trees or the stone drainage channels.
- The water from the spring and fountain is untreated and therefore not safe for human consumption.
- Please do not throw coins in the fountain or pool, even if you see other people have done the same.

## *Stop 1 – Gather immediately outside of the spring house*

Remember that the stream that you see (crossing under the driving bridge) was the only source of drinking water for prisoners, but it also served as the bathroom as well. Thousands of men, many of whom had diarrhea and dysentery were using the stream to relieve themselves. Inadequate drinking water was literally killing thousands of men. Imagine living in this hot climate and not having clean water to drink. Diseases and sanitary problems that come from poor drinking water are issues we most often associate with poorer parts of the world. But these problems were commonplace at Andersonville. They had to have water to drink, but the water they had was filled with bacteria and parasites from the sinks (restroom).

In Mid-August of 1864 a large storm came through the area. Some prisoners claimed that during this storm lightning struck inside the prison and from this spot a spring of fresh water appeared. Believing the God had answered their prayers for clean water, they called this Providence Spring. Countless men's lives were saved by the clean water that the spring provided.

Providence Spring still flows today. For former prisoners who came back to the site, Providence Spring was a highlight of their visit, and they often drank from its waters. You can see a photograph of this in the exhibit panel.



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Around the year 1900 former prisoners and a group called the Woman's Relief Corps raised the money to build the monument, fountain, and reflecting pool to commemorate Providence Spring. This monument was dedicated in 1901 and was one of the first monuments built here.

*Stop 2 – If your group size permits allow the students to walk into the spring house and around to the fountain on the side.*

The water is still cool to the touch, but is unsafe to drink today. Please be respectful of the site, the men who suffered here, and the survivors who built this monument by not splashing water.

*Possible questions your students may ask at Providence Spring:*

Q: I thought you said the water was unsafe for us to drink. How did it save prisoners' lives?

A: Following the appearance of the spring in August 1864, the water flowed directly from the ground, providing a source for clean drinking water. The water from the spring and fountain is untreated and does not meet modern standards for drinking water.

Q: This looks like it was inside the deadline. How did prisoners get the water?

A: At first they hung sticks with cups out over the deadline to collect the water, but eventually the prison staff allowed a trough to be built that funneled the water into the interior of the stockade.

Q: Come on, did lightning REALLY strike inside the prison?

A: Some former prisoners said that lightning struck inside the prison and opened the spring, while others said the spring simply appeared during the storm. Either way, we know that the spring appeared during a thunderstorm on August, 14, 1864.

Q: I'm looking at this exhibit panel and it looks like a tree stump with a lot of African Americans in the photo. What's going on here?

A: A large stump marked the site of Providence Spring before the spring house was built. In the late 1800s African Americans felt a strong connection to this place. For them, this prison symbolized the struggle of the Union soldiers to win their freedom. For much of the late 1800s and into the early 1900s most of the visitors to the site were either former prisoners or African Americans.

*Once you are ready, walk up the hillside towards the star fort where the buses should be parked. Have students walk back out to the main road and walk on the pavement, but be careful of vehicles driving.*

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# The South Gate Area



- Watch out for vehicles driving along the road, move aside to let them pass
- Stay together as much as possible.

## *The South Gate (The two stone columns alongside the road)*

These stone columns mark the approximate location of the South Gate. Almost identical to the North Gate, this South Gate served as a service entrance and exit. Prisoners going out on work details used this entrance, including the approximately 100 African American prisoners, who made their camp just inside the gate here. One of the major functions of this gate was to remove the dead from the prison site. As men died inside the prison they were taken out through the South Gate to the dead house, a rough shelter made of pine boughs that would have been located just outside of the gate. From the dead house, the deceased prisoners' information – name, rank, regiment, and home state - would be recorded by paroled prisoners, the most famous of these being a teenager named Dorence Atwater, and would then be taken by wagon to the cemetery about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away. Also near this location were the stocks – where prisoners would be punished for trying to escape.

## *Possible questions your students may ask at the South Gate:*

Q: What's the white stake in the middle?

A: It marks the site of where, on July 11, 1864, prisoners hung the six leaders of the "Raiders," a gang of prisoners that robbed and killed their comrades.

Q: I'm hot/cold. How much farther?

A: Weather conditions in this part of Georgia can be extreme. Summer temperatures can reach 100 degrees and in the winter it can get below freezing. Imagine living out here for several months as a prisoner in this weather with inadequate food, little clothing, no shelter, and not enough food or water.

*Once you are ready proceed up to the "star fort"*

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# The Star Fort



- Watch out for fire ants and snakes.
- The earthworks (large earth mounds) are original to this site. Help preserve them by not climbing on them.
- Help preserve the cannons that are on display in this area. Do not climb on them.

***Stop 1 - Have students unload from the bus and go up the wooden walkway to the inside of the Star Fort***

This area is called the “Star Fort.” It is a large earthwork structure that was designed to defend the prison site against attack by Union forces, and to serve as a command center for prison operations. Look out across the prison and imagine what the whole site would look like while full of people. Think about how you might prevent those prisoners from attempting an escape or rebellion. Look at the cannon you see. What direction are they facing? Why do you think they are facing this way? *Allow for answers.* The cannon face inside the prison, ready to sweep the site with devastating fire in the event of a prison uprising. The prisoners could see these cannons from inside the stockade and knew of this threat. If you were a prisoner would you consider rebelling or attempting escape?

The commander of the prison stockade, Captain Henry Wirz, had his headquarters set up in this area. Wirz, a Swiss immigrant, was in command of the prison stockade and was responsible for its security, order, and sanitation. He had to rely on others officers to provide guards and supplies. Think about how many students your teachers are responsible for, or how many students your school principal is responsible for. Now think about one person being responsible for the care of 30,000 people. What challenges do you think he faced? Allow time for student discussion. Should he be held responsible for what happened here?

After the war, Wirz was tried by a military court for the mistreatment and death of prisoners. Found guilty, he was executed in November 1865.

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*Stop 2 – Exit the star fort using the walkway, careful not to walk on the earthworks, and walk towards the large field along the right side of the road. You should see an exhibit panel on the hospital. Gather your students in this area.*

This large field marks the site of the third hospital at Andersonville Prison. The first hospital was located inside the prison, but was moved in the spring of 1864 to a location back in the trees directly ahead of you. Later that fall the hospital was moved to the area that you see immediately in front of you. When we think of hospitals today we think of nice buildings that are clean, where people go to get healthy. Andersonville's hospitals are the total opposite of that. Sick men lay on the ground under rotting tents or sometimes no shelter at all. There was almost no medicine to distribute and homemade remedies were relied upon. One prisoner named George Fechtner remembered this remedy for diarrhea that was "composed of [pepper], ginger, flour, and an egg, mixed with water or beer, as the case might be." Needless to say people did not generally get any better at the hospitals. Instead, the hospital at Andersonville was a place to go to die. Consider the case of former prisoner Dorence Atwater, who entered the hospital as a patient on May 18, 1864. Twenty-nine men were admitted to the hospital that day; within six weeks twenty-one of those men were dead.

*Possible Questions your students may ask at the Star Fort:*

Q: Why was Henry Wirz hung? He couldn't control everything right?

A: This is one of the most challenging questions that is asked at Andersonville. You're right, Henry Wirz was not responsible for everything and he couldn't control everything. However, when people are in positions of leadership they are sometimes held responsible for the environment that they're in charge of. There were things that Capt. Wirz could have done to improve conditions, but didn't – such as building a dam across the stream or allowing prisoners to collect wood for cooking fires and building shelters. For the prisoners, he was the most visible of the Confederate officers. They remembered him as being very profane – he often yelled and cursed at prisoners – and after the war it was former prisoners that blamed Wirz. Their testimonies at his trial helped convict him.

Q: What did people die of at Andersonville?

A: The three most common diseases were scurvy (vitamin C deficiency from poor nutrition), dysentery, and diarrhea. In addition, cuts and injuries often became infected with diseases like gangrene, which usually resulted in death at Andersonville.

Q: I only see two cannons up here. How many were there originally?

A: Originally there were 9 cannons at the star fort, with five of them pointed inside the prison. In addition, several of the other earthworks that surround site had cannon facing inward as well.

Q: What is an "earthwork"?

A: An earthwork is a small fort made out of earth. These were very common in the Civil War and many Civil War sites around the country have earthworks remaining today. If you look around the prison site, you will see that earthworks surround the prison, located at every corner.

*When you are ready have your students board their buses to ride to the next stop.*

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- Watch for fire ants throughout the area, and be aware of spiders living in and among the reconstructed shelters
- While students may touch and explore the reconstructed shelters, deadline, and stockade wall, please advise them to be respectful at all times.

*Your students should disembark the buses at this point and have the buses continue around to the front of the museum. Walk students to the inside of the stockade corner.*

Daily life was a struggle at Andersonville Prison. Imagine this entire area filled with more than 30,000 men. It was so crowded that just walking down to the stream could take more than 30 minutes.

Prisoners held at Andersonville were not provided with any shelter at all. Instead, they had to get creative and build their own shelters from whatever materials or supplies that they had. For many prisoners, a shelter might consist simply of a shallow hole in the ground with a coat or shirt draped over it for shade. Look at the shelters around you – how many men do you think could live in one of these? *Allow for discussion* – In some cases as many as 8-10 men might share a shelter. These shelters provided almost no protection from the rain. Instead they served primarily as sources of shade from the hot summer sun.

In addition to unclear water and poor shelter, the rations (food) that prisoners were given was often not nearly enough to keep them healthy. A typical daily ration for each prisoner consisted of little more than a cup of corn meal and sometimes a few ounces of old meat. Sometimes the food was issued raw and prisoners had to cook their own food over fires – forcing prisoners to somehow acquire firewood. Sometimes they weren't given food at all. In addition to there not being enough food, the food that was issued did not meet the nutritional needs of the prisoners. Fruits or vegetables were never issued – leading to vitamin deficiencies and diseases like scurvy.

Even though prisoners were not issued healthy foods, sometimes they could acquire them by trade or purchase. One former prisoner remembered that eggs



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could be bought for \$3.60 a dozen; a sack of onions, potatoes, or apples could be purchased for \$60 a sack. However, these were not given to sick men or those who needed it most. You only got these things if you could afford to buy them – if you couldn't buy them then you did without.

As you explore this corner of the prison, think about what it must have been like to live here. Think about how hot/cold, or tired you are right now. You've been at this site for less than a day. Consider what it felt like to spend 6 weeks here, or six months, or a year. Prisoners of war, whether here at Andersonville, or at any prison in any war, don't know how long they'll be held. Think about living here and not know how long you might suffer.

Encourage your students to explore the reconstructed shelters. Remind them to be careful of ants and spiders, especially in the vegetation. As they explore remind them of the deadline and what it means.

*Possible questions your students may ask at the Reconstructed Corner:*

Q: Is all of this stuff original?

A: No. The stockade wall and all of the shelters are replicas so that you can see what they would have looked like. However, it is built on the original location. The wall that you see has been rebuilt on the actual spot where the wall was. The deadline is rebuilt on the original spot for the deadline. Real men lived, and died, in the area you are standing.

Q: What are these stone markers?

A: The stone markers you see mark the location of tunnels and wells, where prisoners dug down as deep as 50 feet in an effort to find clean water.

Q: Why is that one shelter nicer than all the others?

A: The shelters are designed to represent different types of shelters that were here. When the prison was first constructed, tree stumps and limbs remained from where the prison was constructed. So the first prisoners to come into the prison were able to use these limbs to construct shelters like the one you see. However, most shelters would have been simple tents made out of army blankets or coats.

Q: People died where I'm standing?! Is there anybody buried here?

A: Yes, prisoners died in the area where you are standing; that's why it's so important to be respectful of this site. However, no one is buried in the prison site. All of the almost 13,000 men who died here were buried in the National Cemetery about ¼ mile away.

*Whenever you are ready to move on proceed to walk towards the monuments you see in the trees.*

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# The Monuments



- Most of these monuments are 100 years old and were erected by the former prisoners after the war. Respect these monuments, and help preserve them, by not climbing on them.

*Having walked from the reconstructed corner to the monument corner, you may the students sit in the grass in the shade.*

So far we have learned about the experience of prisoners of war here at Andersonville. We talked about how prisoners arrived through the north gate and what they must have felt. We talked about how the Confederate guards here managed the prison, and the challenges of daily life. This is a place where almost 13,000 men died of disease, starvation, and exposure. The story here does not stop in 1865 at the end of the Civil War. 13,000 men did not go home to their families, and in many cases the families didn't know what had happened to their loved one. Even for the survivors, their experience here at Andersonville affected them for the rest of their lives. Many remained in poor health for years afterward and some never recovered. Even for those without health problems, the memories of this place stayed with them as they continued with their lives.

Thirty years after the war, it was former prisoners who initially preserved the prison site. Around 1900 a movement began to commemorate this place. Former prisoners began to raise money to erect monuments dedicated to the memory of those men who suffered and died here. Many of the monuments you see here in the prison site and in the National Cemetery were erected by individual states as a testament to the men who entered Andersonville but never left. The dedication ceremonies for these monuments were usually attended by former prisoners. At the dedication of the Connecticut monument, former prisoner Robert H. Kellogg said that these monuments and this place would be an "object lesson in patriotism" for future generations. What do you think he meant by this and what lesson can we learn from this place? *Allow a few moments for student discussion.*

At this point—*being careful not to climb on them*—please explore around the monuments. Read the inscriptions and think about what it means. Some of the monuments have the phrase, "death before dishonor" inscribed on them. Think

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about what you think that means. That's a challenging expression, but for 13,000 men who died here it's more than a catch phrase – it is a meaning for their death.

Encourage students to explore the monuments. Remind them not to climb on any part of the monuments.

*Possible questions your students may ask at the Monuments:*

Q: This monument isn't put up by a state – but it's to a person. What's this about?

A: There are several monuments erected to individuals who are important to the preservation of Andersonville. For example the Clara Barton monument is dedicated to her work to identify missing soldiers after the war and the Lizzie Turner Monument is dedicated to Elizabeth Turner, who oversaw the grounds here for years after the war.

Q: Why are there fences around these trees and what are these holes?

A: These are the last remnants of wells that were dug by prisoners.

Q: Were these trees here back then?

A: No. When the prison was in operation almost all of the trees were cut down and used to build the prison. These large trees that you see here were planted in the early 1900s as part of the memorialization movement.

Q: Why is this monument bigger than the others?

A: There's not really a good answer for that. Individual states designed and raised the money for their own states – and some chose to build large monuments while some chose to build smaller monuments. Some states chose not to build a monument at all.

Q: Are these all of the monuments?

A: No. Some states chose to erect their monuments in the national cemetery.

*Once you are finished in this area proceed back towards the museum. Stay on the paved road and walkway as you walk – do not cut across the earthwork. Your buses are parked on the other side of the museum. If you have questions please let park staff know as you pass through.*

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