Cedar Creek and Belle Grove

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove
National Historical Park
Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



The fine lime stone valley of Shenandoah . . . the most beautiful, and most bountiful portion of our country.

John S. Skinner, founding editor, *American Farmer,* 1820

From Backcountry to Breadbasket to Battlefield and Beyond

Sweeping from east to west, the landscape above, from the porch of the Belle Grove manor house, holds stories of the Shenandoah Valley reaching from present time deep into Earth's history. These stories of geology, people, and place enrich this national historical park, set aside by Congress in 2002.

The valley's geologic story includes an ancient ocean that laid down vast limestone beds, the basis of fertile soil. Geologic forces built mountains that shelter the valley. Erosion created ravines, rolling hills, and fast-flowing water. All these features created a "breadbasket" that made this valley a battleground in America's Civil War.



Limestone (the rock behind these words) underlies most of the valley. It juts out of fields and along streams and is used in a variety of ways, including for roads and buildings.

NPS / BETSY EHRLICH



Early Times in the Valley

The first people arrived in the Shenandoah Valley around 10,000 years ago and lived well on wildlife and plants. Eventually, they cultivated the land, growing various crops.

Tribal warfare over this bounty pushed out most Native Americans before European settlers arrived. One of the first, Jost Hite arrived in 1731 with 16 families from Pennsylvania. They found what they were looking for: fertile soil and abundant water.



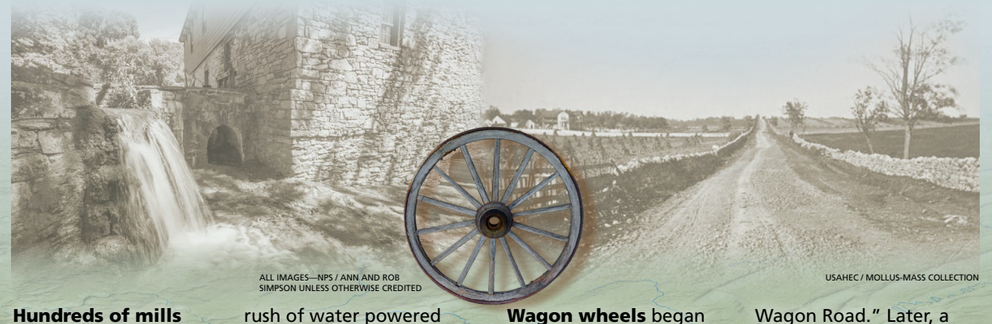
ELOISE PHIPPS / CIMMYT

Native Americans began growing maize (*above*), squash, and beans in the valley over 1,000 years ago.



Belle Grove and the Age of Grain

The new settlers found that wheat grew very well in the Shenandoah Valley and made high quality flour. By the late 1700s, they began growing wheat to sell commercially. It soon was in demand throughout the colonies and Europe. During this Age of Grain, a few plantations were established in the valley. Belle Grove (*above*) was developed by Isaac Hite Jr. and his wife Nelly, sister of US President James Madison. In the 70 years the Hite family was at Belle Grove, 276 enslaved laborers worked in the fields and industries. Other valley farms, even small ones, and enterprises also used enslaved labor. Eventually, the conflict over slavery would ignite the American Civil War.

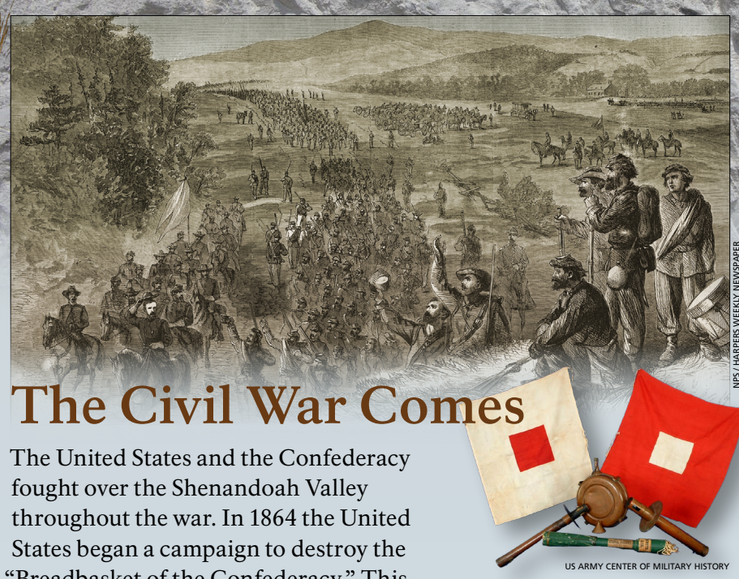


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USAHEC / MOLLUS-MASS COLLECTION

Hundreds of mills (*above*) sprang up along the miles of fast-flowing streams in the valley. The rush of water powered wheels to turn heavy millstones that ground the grain into flour.

Wagon wheels began rolling along the Native Americans' ancient path in the 1700s. Soon, the "Warrior Road" was known as the "Great Wagon Road." Later, a hardened limestone surface (*above*) created a faster road for those who could afford to pay the toll on the "Valley Pike."



NPS / HARPERS WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

The Civil War Comes

The United States and the Confederacy fought over the Shenandoah Valley throughout the war. In 1864 the United States began a campaign to destroy the "Breadbasket of the Confederacy." This plan, called "The Burning," systematically burned farms the length of the valley, leaving residents with no food for themselves, let alone for soldiers of either side. Despite the immense destruction, the resilient valley and its residents recovered quickly after the war.

US ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

Signal Knob (*top*) looks over the park. From its summit soldiers could spy on the enemy below. They sent messages using a signaling kit (*above*)—two flags, two torches fueled from a canteen, and a signal rocket.

The Valley seems to be designed as the great thoroughfare between the west and southwest to the northern cities.

1838 petition to obtain state support for building the Valley Turnpike

Fields of wheat spread far and wide, interspersed with woodlands . . . quaint old mills, with turning wheels, were busily grinding the previous year's harvest . . . Brig. Gen. Richard Taylor, CSA, 1862



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / ALFRED R. WAUD

"The Burning" was ordered by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant to destroy the "Breadbasket of the Confederacy." The plan succeeded militarily but burned horror and anger into the memories of generations to come.

Allegheny Mountains marked the 1700s boundary of the British colonies to the east and the French-held Ohio Valley to the west.

To protect its side, Great Britain encouraged colonists to populate the Shenandoah Valley.

Early colonial settlers in Pennsylvania heard of a valley that was like the rich farmland they had known in Europe. They followed the Native Americans' trail west and south into this valley, today called Shenandoah.

The Blue Ridge forms a barrier between the Shenandoah Valley and eastern Virginia. The valley's products were sent northeast to Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Washington, DC, was a long day's horse ride from the valley—too close for comfort during the Civil War. The United States waged two campaigns here to protect the capital.

The Shenandoah Valley

This historic valley continues to attract travelers. You can still follow the old Native American trail, now US 11, up and down hills and across rivers. You pass mills, barns, fields, cemeteries, and battlefields that speak of early European settlers, the Age of Grain, and civil war.

Quarries continue to yield limestone, which is still used for buildings and roads, among hundreds of other things. This durable rock serves as a reminder of the geologic forces that formed the valley and its landscape—one that continues to inspire and challenge us.

The Battle of Cedar Creek

OCTOBER 19, 1864 In the foggy dawn Confederate soldiers crossed Cedar Creek and the North Fork of the Shenandoah River to surprise sleeping US soldiers. Fighting raged as the Confederates chased them north. By late morning Confederate Gen. Jubal Early thought he had won, but US Gen. Philip Sheridan was racing south from Winchester, Virginia, determined to rally his stunned troops.

By sunset, in an epic reversal of fortune, Early was defeated. Over 8,600 US and Confederate soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured that day—one of the bloodiest battles in the Shenandoah Valley.





PUTNAM MUSEUM, DAVENPORT, IOWA

This wasn't the first time Sheridan had beaten Early's army, but it was the last. The Federals' "Burning" campaign destroyed the valley's irreplaceable food sources, making it impossible for the Confederacy to adequately feed its soldiers and for residents to feed themselves. The Federal victory at Cedar Creek helped ensure Abraham Lincoln's reelection as US president three weeks later. Within six months the Civil War was over.

The Battle of Cedar Creek by Julian Scott portrays a Vermont brigade during the Federals' afternoon counterattack.
VERMONT STATE CURATOR'S OFFICE

Plan Your Visit

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park, a partnership park, is being developed. Learn about the park at the visitor center, events, and ranger programs; on the self-guiding auto tour; and at sites operated by park partners.

Getting Here The park is in Middletown, Virginia, about 90 minutes west of downtown Washington, DC, and three hours north of Roanoke. Use I-81 exit 298 or 302 (US 11).

Auto Tour Follow the battle on a two-hour, self-guiding tour. Get the free guide at the visitor center and on the NPS App. Buses and RVs should not do this tour.

Activities Enjoy programs, walks, and guided tours May–October. Some partner programs have a fee.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information ask a ranger, call, or check the website.

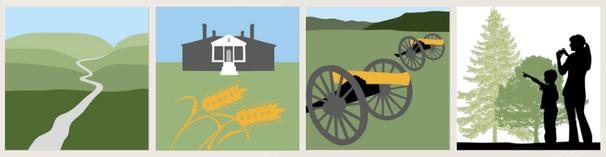
Emergencies call 911

Safety and Regulations Check road conditions before taking the auto tour. • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. • Private property in the park is closed to the public. • Firearms regulations are on the park website.

More Information
Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park
7712 Main St. (US 11)
Middletown, VA 22645
540-869-3051
www.nps.gov/cebe

Follow us on social media.
Use the NPS App to guide your visit.

This is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.



Park Partners The National Park Service works with partners to manage the park's battlefields, historic structures, and other points of interest. The signs above point out places you may visit. Most land within the park boundary is private and not open to the public.

Belle Grove, Inc.
Offers guided tours of the manor house April–December and other programs throughout the year.
540-869-2028
www.bellegrove.org

Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation
Free museum and visitor center, living history demonstrations, presentations, workshops, and other programs.
540-869-2064
www.ccbf.us

National Trust for Historic Preservation
Owns Belle Grove Plantation.
202-588-6000
www.savingplaces.org

Shenandoah County
Administers county parkland within the national park boundary.
540-459-6777
www.shenandoahcountyva.us/parks

Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation
Manages the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District to preserve and protect 20 Civil War battlefields.
540-740-4545
www.shenandoahatwar.org





NPS

Monuments In the decades after the Civil War, veterans returned to honor their lost comrades. The park's three veterans' monuments—to soldiers from New York (*above*) and Vermont and to Confederate Gen. Stephen Ramseur—were erected in this spirit.

☆GPO: 2022—419-059/82949 Last updated 2022


NATIONAL ARCHIVES / MATHEW BRADY

Afternoon Phase
Galloping to the rescue around 10:30 am, US Gen. Philip Sheridan rallied troops for an afternoon counterattack. The Confederates held their ground, then slowly began to retreat. They fled south to Strasburg, Virginia, when the US cavalry charged.


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Morning Phase
Confederate Gen. Jubal Early led troops in a three-pronged, dawn attack that pushed the Federals toward their US headquarters at Belle Grove. By 7 am, Federal leaders abandoned the post and retreated toward Middletown. After an hour-long fight at a cemetery above town, the Federals retreated farther north, eventually stopping to rest north of town.



Reenactments Every October, the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation holds reenactments of the battle. The National Park Service conducts special programs during this weekend.
NPS / RICK FOSTER



Belle Grove In the 1850s the plantation passed from the Hites to other families. Confederate or Federal troops occupied it during the Civil War. In the Battle of Cedar Creek, US Gen. Sheridan was using the manor house as headquarters; many of his 31,600 troops camped on the property. The grounds include a historic apple orchard, a garden, a burial ground for enslaved persons, and a renovated 1918 barn. Tour the 1797 manor house (fee).
NPS / ANN AND ROB SIMPSON
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