

# Civil War Defenses of Washington

## Hiking and Biking Trail Guide

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC



### Learn More & Plan Your Trip

This map is for illustrative purposes. Detailed route and planning information is available online. Most routes are in development and not signed, so use caution. The National Park Service in partnership with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, the City of Alexandria, Arlington County, and Fairfax County are developing this collection of trails to connect the historic ring of Civil War forts that once encircled Washington, D.C. Some trails are still in development, including the Virginia partnership trails to be completed in June 2013, and the final alignments may change.

Visit the National Park Service and partner websites for details on routes, trail tips and recommendations, and more about the history of the Civil War Defenses of Washington.

National Park Service (NPS)  
[www.nps.gov/ndcr](http://www.nps.gov/ndcr) or [www.nps.gov/pohe](http://www.nps.gov/pohe)

City of Alexandria  
[www.alexandriava.gov/CivilWarBikeTrail](http://www.alexandriava.gov/CivilWarBikeTrail)

Washington Area Bicyclist Association  
[www.waba.org](http://www.waba.org)

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*"The views from these points are impressive in proportion to their commanding military positions and they are well worth acquirement as future local parks, in addition to any claim their historical and military interest may afford".*

*Implementation of the Park Systems for the District of Columbia (Report of the Park Commission, 1902)*

View from Hiker-Biker Trail  
NPS

### Civil War Defenses of Washington

On forested hills surrounding the nation's capital are the remnants of a complex system of Civil War fortifications. Built by Union forces, these strategic earthwork forts transformed the young capital into one of the world's most fortified cities. Today, the remaining circle of forts and parkland are part of the local legacy of park planning. The Civil War Defenses of Washington hiking and biking trails are a wonderful way to explore D.C.'s Civil War history. Whether traveling by foot or by bicycle, visitors can experience many of the historic fort sites along with some of the District's neighborhoods, popular green spaces, and tremendous view of the city.



View of D.C. Skyline from Fort Stanton  
NPS

### Let's Explore Our Nation's Trails!

Along the Civil War Defenses of Washington (CWDW) trails there are a number of extraordinary views that highlight our nation's capital. The trails take hikers and cyclists through sections of D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Many sections of the trail travel through undisturbed forested areas where visitors can find indigenous plants and wildlife. Most routes are accessible to public transit, such as Metrorail or Metrobus (visit [www.wmata.com](http://www.wmata.com) for details).



Fort Foote  
NPS



Hiker-Biker Trail at Oxon Cove Park  
City of Alexandria

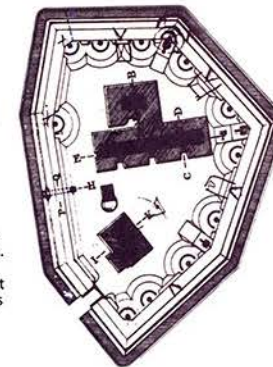
### Hiking Through History

In 1860, the Union capital of Washington, D.C. was home to approximately 62,000 residents. With the exception of Fort Washington, the city was completely unprotected from potential enemy attacks. At that time, Washington, D.C. was surrounded by rival forces; the Confederate state of Virginia to the west and the neutral, yet slave-owning, state of Maryland to the north, east, and south. Realizing Washington's overwhelming vulnerability, the Union army constructed more fortifications along the city's boundary.

By 1865, the defenses of Washington included 68 earthwork forts, 20 miles of rifle pits, 32 miles of military roads,

and 93 detached batteries for field guns. Additionally, within the circle of fortifications there were 1,501 field and siege guns in place. The once defenseless city was now one of the most heavily fortified locations in the world!

After the war was won, most of the fortifications were dismantled or abandoned. Decades later, in 1902, the McMillan plan proposed that the remaining fort sites be preserved. Today, remnants of the forts exist in parks and woodlands that occupy heights where heavy guns once scanned the horizon and courageous soldiers once stood guard over the nation's capital.



Plan of Fort Totten Earthworks  
NPS

### Safety and Stewardship

Please help protect the Civil War Defenses of Washington parks for future generations. For your safety and the preservation of the fort structures, please do not climb on the earthworks. Trees and other vegetation help keep the earthworks from eroding, please do not disturb them. All natural and cultural objects are protected by law; please leave rocks, animals, and wildflowers in their place. With the exception of the Hiker-Biker trail between Fort Mahan and Fort Stanton, bicycles are only permitted on paved trails and roads. Dogs are welcome, but please keep them on a leash and on the established trail. Before making your trip, learn to identify and avoid poison ivy. Dial 9-1-1 for emergencies.

The Civil War Defenses of Washington (CWDW) trails are presented in partnership between the National Park Service, the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, the City of Alexandria, Fairfax County and Arlington County. Supported with funds from the Connect Trails to Parks program. August 2010. The CWDW Hiking Trail is also a segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, a developing network of trails linking the mouth of the Potomac River to the Allegheny Highlands. For more information visit: [www.nps.gov/pohr](http://www.nps.gov/pohr). For itineraries and destination information visit: [www.potomacallegheny.org](http://www.potomacallegheny.org).

