

## Restoring a Battlefield-Gettysburg

As Park Ranger at the Gettysburg National Military Park for the past twenty years, Eric Campbell has given plenty of battlefield tours: "I always had to say, 'See those trees over there? They were not there during the time of the battle. So imagine this area being wide open.'" Now 576 acres of trees the combatants would not have seen are being removed as part of a 15-year plan to rehabilitate the Gettysburg Battlefield. The entire 5,990-acre site is being returned to the way it was in 1863. "It really is a new battlefield, Campbell says. "The terrain hasn't changed. The hills and ridges are still there. But now we can see how they relate to each other and how close they are.

After two years of study to determine what was where in 1863, the park service approved a general management plan in November 1999. Since then it has spent \$1.2 million of both federal and private funds on the effort, which is expected to cost 2.5 million.

In a related project, the Park Service will open a new \$95 million Museum and Visitor Center in late 2007. Unlike the current center, the new one will not be sitting atop the Union battle line on Cemetery Ridge.

These ambitious plans are not without their opponents. The new center will require the destruction of the architect Richard Neutra's 1961 Cyclorama Center and will be located two-thirds of a mile from the existing site, putting it further away from town and the businesses that draw tourists. In addition to removing trees not there during the fighting, the Park Service is trimming 278 historic (that is to say, existing at the time) woodlots. They are replanting 115 acres of trees in historically significant areas, along with 65 acres of thickets and 160 acres of orchards.

The Park Service and volunteers are also rebuilding 39 miles of fences and restoring 16 miles of historic farm lanes. Finally, all the Non-historic structures are being removed from the battlefield and surrounding areas.

Fourteen decades of both natural and man-made development changed Gettysburg. Thickets and woodlots grew into heavy forests. Fences and farm lanes vanished while power lines appeared. And then there were the more obvious infringements on the park: a 393ft tall observation tower built behind Cemetery Ridge and the Home Sweet Home motel, sitting on the left flank of Pickett's Charge.

"This project is about two words: better understanding," says John Latschar, Superintendent of the park. "So much of what we wanted visitors to understand about what happened here was beyond their comprehension because they really couldn't see it."

The overhead power lines on the Emmitsburg Road were removed in the

Late 90s. The Management plan went into action with a bang, dropping the tower in July 2000. The motel disappeared soon after. This year the Park Service is removing a Ford dealership located near the first day's fighting.

Perhaps the most significant work completed so far, though, is the cutting and planting around Plum Run and the Codori-Trostle farms, the scene of heavy fighting on the battle's second day. Lost for generations, the shallow depression of the run is now visible. The thicket has been restored with the help of Penn State University's School of Forest Resources. Also the orchard next to the Trostle barn, where the Union major general Dan Sickles lost his leg, was replanted last year.

These changes have added new fuel to the eternal controversy over Sickles's decision to move his III Corps forward off Cemetery Ridge, hereby exposing Little Round Top.

"Just north of Little Round Top is Munshower Field," says Campbell. "Before the rehab, you couldn't see Little Round Top from there because of the trees. Now it stands out like a sore thumb. I used to tell people that Sickles didn't go to the top of the hill to see how important it was. But when we cut down the trees, I looked back at Little Round Top from his original position, and it is impossible to understand how Sickles missed the importance of that hill."

In order to get the history right, the Park Service used old photographs, soldier's accounts, and maps. It also relied on a technique that would have been familiar to those civil war generals who had attended West Point.

It was called military engineering then but now is called KOCO. It stands for: Key terrain, Observation and fields of fire, Cover and concealment, Obstacles and Avenues of approach. It evaluates land according to its military significance.

"By KOCO analysis, a woodlot could be an obstacle for troops fighting in it but also provide cover and concealment," Campbell says. "KOCO told us what features to rehabilitate so we could prioritize, and how to do it."

What will perhaps be most surprising is the new view of Pickett's Charge. For decades visitors have stood near the Virginia Monument and looked out at an open field trying to imagine the most famous assault in U.S. history.

But what the embattled Confederates actually saw that day were rows of fences dividing 12 small farm fields. Under fire and trying to keep battle formation, they had to get through all those fences before pushing towards Cemetery Ridge.

The volunteer group, Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg, is about 1/3 of the way through its project to build nine miles of those fences.

So far, volunteers have put in 6,330 hours working to make the battlefield look as it did to the men who fought there. Anyone interested in helping can call the Gettysburg National Military Park, 717-334-1124, extension 436.

Tom Callahan believes he may have stayed at the Home Sweet Home Motel during his first visit to the battlefield as a five-year-old in 1963. The visit, not the motel, spurred his lifelong fascination with the Civil War.

August/September 2005 issue American Heritage Magazine pg 43