

# GEORGIA

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# BATTLEFIELDS

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## Preserving and interpreting the Allatoona Pass Battlefield

The Allatoona Pass site provides an example of cooperative efforts to preserve and interpret a battlefield. <https://gastateparks.org/AllatoonaPassBattlefield>

The Allatoona Pass railroad cut was dug in the 1840s so a railroad connecting Chattanooga and Atlanta could get through the Allatoona Mountain Range. Once the Civil War began, the railroad was an important supply line for Confederate forces in Chattanooga and farther north in Tennessee and Kentucky. In 1862, the pass was transited by Federal saboteurs who had stolen the locomotive *General* during the Andrews Raid. The railroad was a line of communication for both the Confederate and U.S. forces during the May to September 1864 Atlanta Campaign. Once Confederates withdrew from the Allatoona range in early June 1864, Federal forces built and garrisoned forts along the railroad to guard against Confederate raids intended to break the supply line. After the fall of Atlanta, Confederate General Hood tried to evict Federal forces from the city by cutting off their supplies. To this end, he sent infantry to cut the railroad at several points north of Atlanta in early October 1864. The mission given to Major General Samuel French, commanding the division sent against Allatoona, was to not only destroy the railroad but also to fill the pass with cut trees, dirt, boulders, and whatever else was available. Further, he was to destroy supplies stored in warehouses immediately south of the pass. This resulted in a fierce fight on 5 October 1864 that pitted about 3,000 Confederates against 2,000 Federals and an overall casualty rate around 30%, one of the highest for any Civil War battle. French withdrew when informed U.S. reinforcements were approaching, his mission a failure.

In the 1940s, the rail line was straightened so it went west of the 1840s cut, in part for construction of an Etowah River dam that would create a lake to supply drinking water and electric power to the area. The U.S. government acquired the land that would be flooded and the adjoining shoreline, including Allatoona Pass; but it did not include part of the main fort, often referred to as the star fort, on the western side of the pass, nor did it include Federal positions farther west and a Confederate fort from the May 1864 defense line, all of which are still privately owned. The dam began operation in January 1950, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) operating the lake and controlling adjacent properties.

In the 1950s, the Georgia Historical Commission erected markers on the battlefield. A 1952 marker concerns the battle, while a 1956 marker relates the site's significance as a road passage across the Allatoona range before construction of the railroad cut.

A 1995 newspaper article criticized the Bartow County government for allowing the battlefield to become neglected. Consequently, the Etowah Valley Historical Society (EVHS) approached USACE and the county commissioner and sheriff, all of which approved an agreement allowing EVHS to clear trails and add interpretive signs on the battlefield. USACE and county government cooperated to build a parking lot.

In 2000, volunteer Gary Wehner began the Allatoona Pass State Historic Site Monument Project, an effort to have all eleven states that had troops present at the battle install a monument on the site. Originally from Missouri, Wehner had a Missouri monument in place by 2001. With EVHS handling the donations for the monuments and the help of Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and Sons of Confederate Veterans, Wehner lived to see all eleven monuments in place. A bench in his honor is by the monuments.

In 2007, USACE leased the land to the State of Georgia, which put the site under the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) State Parks and Historic Sites division, assigning the site as an adjunct of Red Top Mountain State Park. DNR replaced and updated the interpretive markers.

EVHS and especially Society members Guy Parmenter, Diane Mooney, and the late Ed Hill aided and advised Red Top Mountain Park staff. The continuing efforts are enhanced by Diane's presence since she lives in the historic Clayton house on the battlefield. Diane and her late husband Dennis hosted many commemorations of the battle, often with help from the Georgia Division Reenactors Association. Diane walks at least part of the site almost every day, reporting fallen trees or other maintenance needs to Red Top Mountain Park staff.

Today, the site contains state of Georgia markers, State Parks interpretive signs, a Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails marker, and stone monuments from each state that had a unit at the battle. It serves not only to illustrate the several types of battlefield markers and monuments, but also as an example of cooperation among local volunteers and county, state, and federal governments.



September 1864 photo. Clayton house is at left, with Star Fort on ridge above.



Inside the Star Fort today.



Vince Dooley, Diane Mooney, and Ed Bearss share a laugh in front of the Clayton House in March 2010.



State monuments at Memorial Field. Gary Wehner bench is at right.



The eastern redoubt is easily discernible today.



Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails marker.



Ed Bearss uses a DNR marker to help with his battlefield tour in 2010.



The Tennessee Wagon Road made the pass important before the railroad came.

**Georgia Battlefields Association**  
**PO Box 669953**  
**Marietta GA 30066**

[www.georgiabattlefields.org](http://www.georgiabattlefields.org)

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