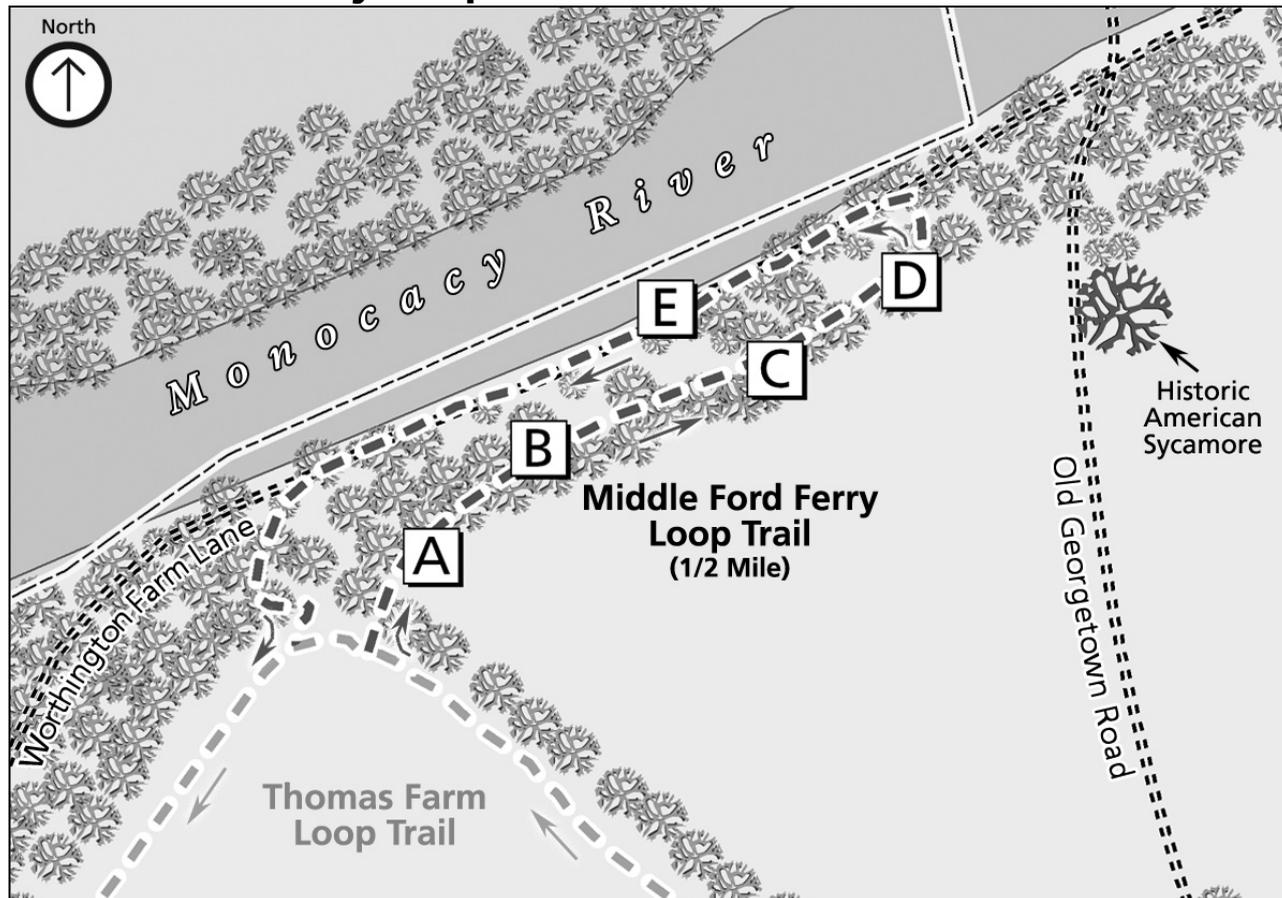


Middle Ford Ferry Loop Trail



Welcome to Monocacy National Battlefield and to the Middle Ford Ferry Loop trail. This self-guided, ½-mile-long loop trail explores early settlement of the Monocacy Region, and provides peaceful views of the Monocacy River and the surrounding landscape.

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Frederick County was transformed from a sparsely populated backwater into a bustling agricultural and industrial center. As population and commerce increased, a network of roads, ferries, and thoroughfares developed, connecting Frederick County with Baltimore, Georgetown, and a number of other commercial centers. As a result, by the mid-18th century, Frederick County began to emerge as the gateway to western expansion.

In the 1740s, the Georgetown Road was constructed to provide a direct route between Frederick and Georgetown. Beginning in 1748, the Middle Ford ferry carried passengers using the Georgetown Road over the Monocacy River, and by 1754, a tavern was established to provide travelers with food, drink, and lodging. In 1829, a covered wooden bridge replaced the Middle Ford ferry, and by 1831 the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad had reached Frederick. This confluence of roads, bridges, and railroads made the Monocacy area of strategic importance during the Civil War.

To distinguish it from the main Thomas Farm Loop, the Middle Ford Ferry Loop trail is marked with white trail blazes. Detailed information about each trail stop is provided on the back of this brochure. Thank you. Enjoy your visit.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Monocacy National Battlefield
Frederick, Maryland

Middle Ford Ferry Loop Trail



Looking south down the Monocacy River toward the original Middle Ford Ferry crossing, ca. 1893.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Stop A

Prehistory

American Indians lived in the vicinity of Monocacy National Battlefield long before Europeans settled the area. The agricultural field adjacent to the Middle Ford Ferry Loop trail contains two prehistoric sites which were likely occupied as seasonal hunting camps, perhaps as early as 8000 B.C. A total of 12 prehistoric American Indian sites have been recorded at Monocacy National Battlefield.



Projectile points collected from the Thomas Farm.

Stop B

Dry-Laid Stone Culvert

The trail that you are currently walking on is a historic farm road that probably dates to the 19th century. It connects with a road trace that follows the Monocacy River to the west, and was the historic approach to the Worthington Farm.



Dry-laid stone culvert with an open passageway for drainage.

Early roads were difficult to establish and maintain. If you look down the hill toward the river, you will see a large stone culvert (below left). Constructed of dry-laid stone, the culvert prevented the road from being washed out during heavy rains by allowing runoff to flow through the open passageway into the Monocacy River. Improvements such as these helped the road remain passable year-round.

Stop C

Sycamore Tree / Georgetown Road

Look through the trees to your right to see a large American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) tree, which is easily distinguished by its flaky gray and white bark. The American Sycamore is native to the United States and is one of the largest of the Eastern hardwoods. With its six-foot-diameter trunk and a canopy spanning nearly 8,000 square feet, this tree is estimated to be approximately 300 years old. It is one of several trees at Monocacy National Battlefield that are believed to have been present at the time of the Battle of Monocacy.



The trace of the Georgetown Road (highlighted by the dotted line) passes to the west of the historic sycamore tree. (Photograph facing north.)

In front (west) of the sycamore tree, the trace of the original alignment of the Georgetown Road is visible. The Georgetown Road was first established in the 1740s to provide a direct route between the growing commercial centers of Frederick and Georgetown and was an important and well-traveled early thoroughfare. It

was realigned to the east in the 1820s, when a bridge was constructed over the Monocacy River.

Stop D

Middle Ford Ferry and Tavern

Colonial roads were generally poorly marked and maintained, and traveling on them was often hazardous and difficult. Natural barriers such as rivers presented a particular challenge, especially in inclement weather. By 1748, traffic had increased on the Georgetown Road sufficiently to warrant the establishment of a rope ferry, which carried travelers over the Monocacy River. The ferry was located slightly downstream (west) of the current Maryland Route 355 bridge, and is referred to in several historic references as the Middle Ford ferry.

In 1754, the Frederick County Court authorized the establishment of a tavern at the Middle Ford ferry to provide food and lodging for travelers on the Georgetown Road. Recent archeological excavations have located the primary tavern structure, which was likely a log building measuring approximately 15 by 20 feet.



The Middle Ford Ferry Tavern was probably a fairly modest structure. (Illustration courtesy of Curtis Brown, Ltd.)

The tavern was in operation from the 1740s until around 1830, when a covered wooden bridge was constructed to replace the rope ferry. Construction of the bridge necessitated

realignment of the Georgetown Road to the east, bypassing the tavern, which was subsequently abandoned.

Stop E

Monocacy River Navigation & The Historic Approach to Worthington Farm

Stop E provides views of the Monocacy River. By the close of the 18th century, Frederick was a bustling community and the second largest city in Maryland. Successful agricultural production, combined with Frederick County's abundant water power, facilitated the growth of a number of industries, including mills, ironworks, and distilleries.

As Maryland's largest non-tidal tributary of the Potomac, numerous attempts were made to make the Monocacy navigable during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The goal was to facilitate the transport of agricultural commodities and manufactured goods to Georgetown and other commercial centers on the Potomac. The most ambitious was an 1828 proposal to construct a "lateral canal" connecting Frederick County with Baltimore; however, completion of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1830 resulted in a faster, more economical way to transport goods, and plans for the canal were abandoned.

The lower road trace you are walking on likely dates at least to the mid-19th century and was the historic approach to the Worthington Farm. It extended west from the Georgetown Road, but was abandoned when Interstate 270 was constructed in the early 1950s. The original alignment of the road can be seen on Jedediah Hotchkiss's 1864 map of the Battle of Monocacy (below).

