

ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE

Following the Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge (March 7 and 8, 1862), the Southern Army was transferred east of the Mississippi River, leaving Arkansas almost defenseless. Help arrived in May, 1862, when Confederate General Thomas C. Hindman came to organize the defense of the Trans-Mississippi. In only a few months he raised and equipped a new Confederate Army. Union forces in Missouri and Kansas responded by forming the Army of the Frontier to meet this threat.

THE BATTLE OF PRAIRIE GROVE

Early on the morning of December 7, 1862, Confederate cavalry confronted and routed the advance units of Union General Francis J. Herron's force headed to Cane Hill to join General James G. Blunt's command. The Southern horsemen pursued the Union cavalry across the Illinois River, where they skirmished with Herron's men. Meanwhile, the main Confederate force took position on the ridge near Prairie Grove overlooking the river.

After forcing the Southern cavalry back to the ridge, the Union Army waded across the river under Confederate artillery fire. They placed their guns and returned fire at about 11 AM. The more accurate Federal rifled cannons soon silenced the Southern smoothbores. General Herron ordered two charges up the ridge which were repulsed with heavy casualties. The Confederates mounted counterattacks after each charge, but these were driven back by the superior Northern artillery.

General James G. Blunt's men arrived from the northwest at about 3 PM and immediately attacked the left flank of the Southern Army. Intense fighting

in the western woods continued for over an hour before the Federals fell back into the valley. As darkness began to descend upon the field, the Confederates launched one final attack to win the day, but Union artillery once again compelled them to return to the protected cover of the wooded ridge.

The battle ended with neither side gaining a clear advantage. Casualties were about equal, with over 2,700 men killed, wounded, and missing. Lacking ammunition and food, General Hindman ordered a Confederate withdrawal at midnight, leaving the bloody ground to the Union Army, which claimed a strategic victory.

AFTERMATH

The horrors of war were evident the next day as civilians and soldiers saw the carnage on the battlefield. A soldier from Kansas remembered one Southern woman finding the bodies of her husband and two brothers just a short distance from each other. It took over a week to bury the dead in trenches fifty to one hundred feet long.

While Prairie Grove was the last major battle in northwest Arkansas, the region continued to suffer as guerrilla warfare destroyed homes, businesses, and lives for the remainder of the war. The population of Washington County went from 15,600 in 1860 to just 5,800 in 1865.



NOTICE: To preserve scenic beauty and ecology, fences and warning signs have not been installed in some park locations. Caution and supervision of your children are required while visiting those areas.

Toward fulfillment of our conservation mission, we have printed this publication on recycled paper using soy ink.

PRAIRIE GROVE BATTLEFIELD STATE PARK

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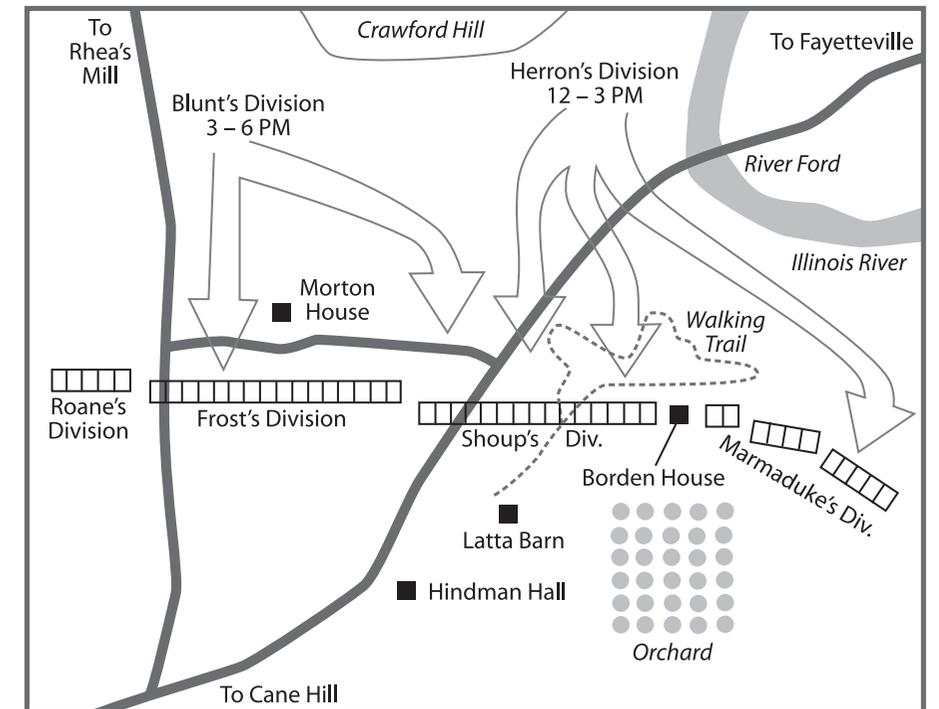
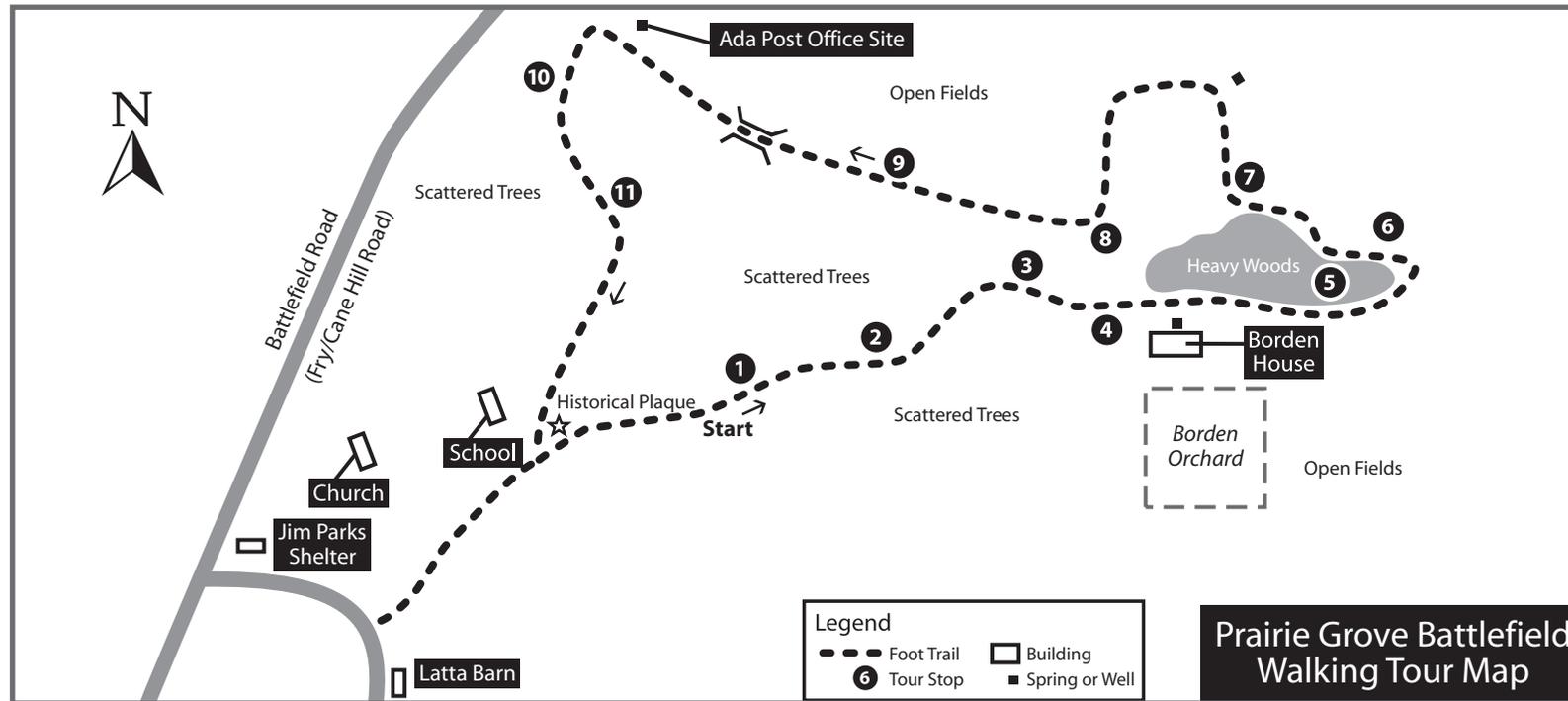


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PRAIRIE GROVE BATTLEFIELD TRAIL



A SELF-GUIDED WALK



BATTLEFIELD TRAIL

The Battlefield Trail gives you a close look at the eastern end of the battlefield, where some of the heaviest fighting took place. The trail is a one-mile loop which follows the ridge, crosses the valley, then returns to the top of the slope. You should allow one hour to leisurely walk and view the battlefield.

TRAIL MARKERS

1 As part of General James F. Fagan's Arkansas Infantry Brigade, the 34th Arkansas took position from the ravine west to the Fayetteville-Cane Hill Road. The men from companies B and K were from the Cane Hill and Prairie Grove areas.

2 The 29th Arkansas Infantry was next in line, occupying the ravine at the start of the battle. This regiment suffered 49% casualties—including its commander, Colonel Joseph Pleasants—who received a mortal wound and died ten days later.

3 The four bronze cannons in Blocher's Arkansas Battery attracted the attention of General Herron who ordered that they be taken. The 20th Wisconsin charged up the hill and captured them, before being driven back by a superior Confederate force.

4 The 19th Iowa Infantry advanced into the apple orchard behind the Borden House in support of the 20th Wisconsin. Both units quickly found themselves surrounded on three sides by a superior Confederate force which poured volley after volley into the blue ranks. Among the dead was Lieutenant Colonel Samuel McFarland, who took nine musket balls and died instantly.

5 Colonel Joseph Orville Shelby's dismounted Missouri cavalry protected the right flank of the Confederate Army. Armed mostly with shotguns, they waited until the Federals were within 40 yards before firing.

6 The 19th Iowa advanced through these woods during the first Union charge. When they returned from the ridge, they had lost 55% of their men.

7 The 20th Wisconsin advanced and then retreated across this ground. The thrill of capturing Blocher's cannons was replaced by the misery of loss. The entire color guard was killed in the charge up the hill.

The Borden cornfield extended from here north to the road. Confederates chased the retreating Federals through the field before being cut down by deadly canister fire from massed Union batteries to the north.

8 After stopping the Confederate counterattack, General Herron ordered a second charge by the 37th Illinois and 26th Indiana Infantry regiments. They advanced up the slope under heavy small arms fire.

9 Forced to fall back, the Union soldiers took a position behind the remnants of a fence at the foot of the ridge, where they rallied and faced another Confederate counterattack. Effective fire blunted the Southern assault which fell back up the ridge. This

ended the heavy fighting on the eastern end of the battlefield.

10 The Ada Post Office and several family homes were in the line of fire throughout the battle and sustained damage. The four families who lived on the ridge hid in the cellar on William Morton's farm.

11 The 20th Iowa Infantry was awaiting another Southern attack when two cannonballs landed amidst the regiment about 3 PM. Fearing the Confederates were behind them, two companies quickly turned to face the new threat, only to discover the shells were signals announcing the arrival of General Blunt's Union command.

The 20th Iowa joined the Federal attack on the western end of the ridge by protecting Blunt's left flank and lining up next to the loyal Cherokees, Creeks, and free Blacks in the Third Indian Home Guard.